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"What truth are you telling me about?": Gender and political allegory in two Belarusian music videos

Libbie Katsev
UiT The Arctic University of Norway
L.katsev@uit.no

Abstract

This article discusses two Belarusian music videos from 2020, "Shchuchynshchyna" and "Ne Smeshno" ("Not Funny"), both of which were framed by their creators as commentary on the 2020 protests. In "Ne Smeshno," band Molchat Doma seemingly attempts to wake a city stricken by an epidemic of sleep—and fails, with one exception. The parody video "Shchuchynshchyna" debuted in a satirical web series, where Elena ZheludOk's performance of state-approved pop entrances a rebellious rock guitarist. I discuss these videos through Almira Ousmanova's work on defamiliarization in Belarusian art and politics and through Lauren Berlant's thought on the allegory. I argue that both videos engage with the idea that art's political potential is in its power to undermine the state's hegemonic version of reality. However, in both videos, this break in perception is a secondary effect of music, a consequence of the new gendered, intimate relations that music directly sets in motion. Thus, these videos function as a lens through which to think about the gendered dimensions of music's role in moments of political upheaval.

KEYWORDS: Belarus, music video, allegory, protest, gender

Introduction

On the day of the 2020 Belarusian elections, President Aliaksandr Lukashenka called Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Marya Kalesnikava, and Veranika Tsapkala—who had united to form a joint oppositional campaign—"our Belarusian VIA Gra" (Deutsche Welle 2020, cited in Grančayová and Kazharski 2022: 8). In dismissing his opponents' political viability by comparing them with a girl group (the name of which puns on Viagra), Lukashenka gave voice to gender's role as "a primary way of signifying relations of power" (Scott 1986, cited in ibid: 3). He also exemplified

the way music mediates gender by metonymically characterizing his opponents through pop, within a discourse where pop means sexualized mass appeal incapable of political substance. In this article, I explore where the political work done by music may meet that done by gender using two music videos from the 2020-2021 Belarusian protests.

Thinking about ways in which music mediates gender and experiences of political upheaval may contribute to understanding how gender, as a logic and a discursive power relation (Åhall 2018), is reproduced and/or disrupted in moments of political change. For Grančayová and Kazharski, Lukashenka's reference to VIA Gra exemplifies Joan Scott's argument that gender is not only a power relation, but also "a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated" (1986, cited in Grančayová and Kazharski 2022: 4). They argue that gendered iconography of the protests, the so-called "Revolution with a Woman's Face", acquired anti-regime meanings in the context of "authoritarian hegemonic masculinity," where Lukashenka is the exemplar of masculine authority/political legitimacy (2021: 1). Scott proposes that "[m]assive political upheavals that throw old orders into chaos and bring new ones into being may revise the terms (and so the organization) of gender in the search for new forms of legitimation (1986: 1074)." Past works on the music of the 2020 protests suggest both the revision of gendered logics and their persistence. Lizaveta Lysenka characterizes the songs she most frequently heard during the protests as sharing the traits of "electronicness, masculinity, and patience" (2021: 286). In contrast, protestors sang "Kupalinka" (the most popular protest song explicitly about a woman, usually sung by women) to emphasize their defenselessness and peacefulness in the face of the OMON/AMAP (militarized police). Consequently, Lysenka concurs with Belarusian feminist Irina Solomatina that the protests to some degree enacted patriarchal norms (ibid).

However, Pavel Niakhayeu (2021) wrote that "Kupalinka" helped singers (who included men) overcome fear and created "a magic circle." Music's use in emancipatory politics can act as a vehicle for reinvesting people in oppressive logics of gender—but it may also intervene in such logics by placing forms that are highly weighted with gendered expectations in new contexts where they act in ways that contradict those expectations. Political upheaval, inasmuch as it may set the scene for destabilizing entrenched social logics, resonates with Lauren Berlant's conceptualization of a "situation": "a genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos" (2011: 6). Approaching the subjective experience of politics as mediated through cultural forms is one way to think about how "upheaval" might precipitate, or not precipitate, change across Scott's multi-dimensional conceptualization of gender, which encompasses individual subjectivity, symbols, discursive norms, and socioeconomic institutions (1986: 1067-69).

In this article, I discuss two Belarusian music videos from 2020, "Ne Smeshno" and "Shchuchynshchyna". I draw on Berlant and on Almira Ousmanova's work on defamiliarization as a political strategy for art in Belarus to think about the role that intimate, gendered relationships play in these musical mediations of the protests. I explore the possibilities that upheaval, as mediated through these videos, presents

for intervening in gender, and the role music plays in creating or shutting off these potentialities.

This article cannot encompass all the possibilities presented by the scores of videos that emerged in response to the 2020 elections and protests, or even just the subset of videos that directly engage with gender to comment on the protests. In some of these, intimate partner violence merges with state violence (i.e. Zmitser Vaitsiushkevich's "Neveragodnost'" and Naka's "Iznutri"). Others show women adopting physically militant roles to combat violent patriarchs, whether agents of the state or men abusing other positions of power (Kaciaryna Vadanosova's "Akrestsina Waltz" and Relikt's "Tuman I Mora"). Some videos seem to depict the collective aspirations and/or struggle of Belarusian society, defining people to varying degrees by their roles within normative kinship relations: mother, father, child (J:MORS's "Byvai" and Anna Sharkunova's "Pesnia schastlivykh liudei"). Some depict the hypermasculine figures of the OMON as a little bit queer, as in RSP's "Karagod", which portrays state surveillance as homoerotic, or in Dai Darogu's "Baiu Bai", wherein the Russian "OMOH" on OMON uniforms has been reversed to read "HOMO". Some satirize the state through gendered performances, such as the parody videos by opera singer Margarita Liauchuk's and blogger Andrei Pavuk's duo "Krasnaia zelen'" ("Red Green"). Many videos belong to more than one of these loosely drawn categories, which do not cover the full variety of music videos that in some way responded to 2020, much less the possibilities these videos pose for thinking about relations between gender, music, and politics.

I chose "Shchuchynshchyna" and "Ne Smeshno" as case studies because they use gendered narratives as allegorical stand-ins for politics: these videos directly mediate political upheaval through gendered narratives. "Ne Smeshno" ("Not Funny") accompanies a song by Molchat Doma, who reached international fame largely through TikTok virality and the post punk/new wave revival (Lonkin 2021). "Ne Smeshno" contains no direct lyrical, musical, or visual reference to the protests, but the news outlet *Meduza*, which premiered it, presented it as a response to political events (2020). The second, "Shchuchynshchyna", (the name of a district in Belarus) is a parody pop video by Elena ZheludOk, a persona of actress Elena Zuy-Voytekhovskaya. "Shchuchynshchyna", too, lacks explicit political commentary (beyond a comically starry-eyed love of Belarus), but the satirical webisode where it first debuted frames it as a tool of state brainwashing (Chinchinchenel 2020a). Although these videos differ in their aesthetics, genres, and presumed audience, in both politics are not only a contest between the government and the opposition, but politics in a Rancierian sense—a question of what is and is not sensible within the hegemonic consensus that comprises collective reality (Ousmanova 2006). In both videos, music is entangled with this reality and functions as a plot device that brings characters together, through narratives that resonate with discursive logics of gender. The videos center on these intimate stories rather than stories of collective political action. Thus, framing these videos as political presumes the viewer-listener's ability to extrapolate the arc of an intimate relationship to a story about a collective in (what is mediated as) a moment of social and political change. I ask: In what ways do political readings of these videos affirm or interrupt the normative logics of gender? What role does music play in these narratives of gender and politics, both respectively and in relating these different levels of allegory?

Allegory, defamiliarization, and genre

Art curator and critic Antanina Stebur links allegory with defamiliarization to describe the poetics of the 2020 protests:

> Poetic and ironic language is an important part of the struggle in any protest. This sharp, allegorical language creates a gap between reality. What Viktor Shklovsky called the term "ostranenie" (defamiliarization), that is, to remove a thing or phenomenon from automatic perception, to look at it from a new angle, to experience it again (…) Poetic language makes it possible to redescribe reality (Klimašaukas 2020).

Stebur's argument that defamiliarization is central to protest echoes Almira Ousmanova's theorization of the absurdity and surrealism of Belarusian political life in the wake of the 2006 post-election protests. Ousmanova argues that these protests reintroduced politics, in a Rancierian and Badiouan sense, into Belarusian life (2006). Nevertheless, these protests were relatively small, and in response Ousmanova theorizes ways Belarusian opposition politics might move beyond their customary "corporate solidarity" (ibid: 95). Using critiques of post-democracy to conceptualize Belarus, Ousmanova characterizes Belarus's political crisis as one of "passivity and indifference" (2006: 91). She describes its politics as a simulation, where signs of the political persist but "the monotony of these signs is such that a certain automatic subject, cleansed of desires as if from rubbish, is capable of connecting himself with them" (Badiou 2005, cited in ibid: 92).

Following this critique, Ousmanova uses Anatoly Osmolovsky's concept of "antillectualism" to argue for a political program of "negative collectivity" (ibid: 116). Ousmanova approaches culture as the site of a battle for symbolic power, where government-sponsored mass media has excluded the opposition (indeed, any entity other than itself) from representation. She sees potential to jar masses out of what she describes as a lulled state in acts of public cultural protest that occurred on the streets of Minsk, such as flash mobs where people released balloons or clapped in unison. Crucially, rather than promoting a political program, these acts exposed the surrealism and absurdity of Belarusian life. Ousmanova describes these acts through the concepts of detournement and defamiliarization, advocating for political aesthetics that disrupt the state's hegemonic version of reality.

Where Stebur, in this vein, mentions allegory's potential to disrupt hegemonic versions of reality, Berlant's work suggests that where this rupture occurs through allegory, the rupture is dependent on allegory's normative force. Allegory, for Berlant, can serve as a ground of departure for reimagining the nation because it is,

> the scene of excess in which we live the failure of official/dominant archives, policies, and argots to grant the diverse conditions in which bodily practices, transcultural encounters, and national histories have met, meet, and might meet again, in the future. It is, indeed, an inheritance promising totality that needs to be split, to be simultaneously embraced and overcome (1994: 141).

Allegory here conceptualizes how the nation and the state operate on an intimate, subjective level and how cultural mediations entangle the personal and political. It is also, I argue, the means through which "Ne Smeshno" and "Shchuchynshchyna" tell stories about the 2020 protests.

Like Ousmanova, Berlant situates their understanding of politics in relation to those of Ranciere, for whom political dominance operates in daily life through the "distribution of the sensible", and politics is a question of who and what is perceivable (2011a: 5). Berlant similarly references Badiou, but they distinguish between Badiou's event and their own use of "situation":

> a state of things in which something that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life. It is a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness, that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event (ibid).

Badiou's event, in contrast, is "a drama that shocks being into radically open situations—the event constitutes the potential for a scene of ethical sociality" (ibid). The 2020 protests have been conceptualized as such an event—see Tatsiana Shchyttsova's (2021) characterization of the appearance of women in white as the political sublime, or Maksim Zhbankov's argument that 2020 was "a spontaneous zero stage" and "chaotic creative moment" for Belarusian culture (2021: 186; 195).

"Ne Smeshno" and "Shchunchynshchyna" similarly tell stories that culminate in what might be understood, in context, as such radical openness. However, through Ousmanova's and Berlant's work, I argue that these videos also attempt to describe, and thus take part in, a situation. A focus on "situation" rather than "event" historicizes mediations of moments that feel unprecedented through genealogies of the stories people tell about feeling unable to make sense of the world. Ousmanova works with the idea that an aesthetics of defamiliarization, by intervening in hegemonic reality, may help to precipitate a Badiouan event. However, her work also demonstrates that, in depicting subjective experiences of defamiliarization, these videos also engage in a tradition of political commentary. They are weighted with expectations set by other stories that use defamiliarization and its attendant affects, like absurdity and estrangement, to describe moving through a world whose rules no longer seem understandable. In this way, the videos' stories are about a situation. The videos' narratives also take on meaning through the logics of normative kinship and gender relations. Gendered allegories are used to depict an event, and as such, may limit the event's potential "radical openness" by making it sensible through normative power relations.

The videos I discuss in this article allow me to consider music's role in this political and gendered sense-making. Doing so involves "mapping the multiple affordances of musical codes and audiovisual aesthetics against the discursive structures that mediate impressions of gender" (Hansen 2022: 8). However, I think of these interactions between affordances and structures as genres in Berlant's sense: "loose affectively-invested zone[s] of expectations about the narrative shape a situation will take" (Berlant 2011b, cited in Cefai 2023: 273)". I think about the way these genres may be articulated through music with Sarah Ahmed's concept of stickiness (2014). Lila Ellen Gray makes a similar move in her discussion of Fado as a sticky musical genre (2013). However, while my use of genre in this article may

overlap with taxonomies of musical aesthetics, it more narrowly refers to these aesthetics inasmuch as they have become "stuck" to narratives implicating gender and politics. In particular, I engage with legacies of goth aesthetics posing an alternative to a binary system of gender and dominant liberal-bourgeois conceptions of the subject; of pop's association with government brainwashing; of rock as resistance; and the historical gendering of these musical practices. Thinking of these aesthetic genealogies as genres means that the expectations music carries can be contradictory and non-absolute, while nevertheless patterning people's understandings of their circumstances.

Musical entanglements of gendered genres may provide an entry point through which to think the particularities of post-Soviet national imaginaries. For example, Maria Sonevytsky has argued that during the Euromaidan protests, a filmed Dakh Daughters performance ambivalently comingled different archetypal Ukrainian femininities, and in doing so made visible a "third way" for Ukraine, neither Russian nor European (2016: 293). Representations of gender (not only those transgressing gender and sexual norms) might thus be considered as means of distinction within ongoing struggles for national determination, and thus potentially as operating in relation to other (perceived) gendered imaginaries of national identity in Russia, Ukraine, Western Europe, etc.

Method and positionality

Tia DeNora argues that the sense-making cognitive work of music listeners plays an essential role in creating musical meaning:

> music scholars possess the same "tools" or "folk methods" of sense-making as music listeners and perhaps the greatest of these tools is the assumption (and its retinue of implied sub-assumptions) that the locus of meaning is in the music when it seems more likely that it is not "received" but is achieved, the product of interactive work (2016: 25).

The interpretation in this article works with the "contextualization cues" (ibid: 26) that designate these videos as political and, within the stories the videos tell, mark songs as precipitating a change for the listeners. I attempt to find shared ground between the work music must do to relate the subjective and personal to the collective and political in the context of these videos, and the ways in which music has seemed to promise to accomplish such work in the past. Therefore, I largely base my reading of musical aesthetics and gendered narratives on theoretical works that trace where music has become sticky with gender and politics and on studies of gender in Belarus. However, my mode of interpretation, fundamentally based on perceiving gender in digital images and musical sounds, speaks to my own position within the heterosexual matrix (Butler 2015) as a U.S. American at a Northern European university, contra these locations' frequent construction, in and through discussions of Eastern European gender regimes, as "modernity," no longer marked by gender-based inequity (Gressgård and Husakouskaya 2020).

"Ne Smeshno"

"*Ne Smeshno*" ("Not Funny"), the first single from Molchat Doma's third album, Monument, was released in September 2020 (Hussey 2020). Molchat Doma, a Russian-speaking band, found their initial success outside of Belarus's borders in part due to their song "Sudno" going viral on TikTok (Zhang 2020). In "Ne Smeshno", gothic rock vocals meet prominent synths and a danceable mid-tempo rhythm. In the video, directed by Belarusian filmmaker Darya Zhuk, the band's lead vocalist, Egor Shkutko, rides a tram wearing a hazmat suit, surrounded by sleeping passengers. One of these passengers is played by Alina Nasibullina, the star of Zhuk's 2018 film *Crystal Swan*. Other hazmat suit wearers push Nasibullina's wheelchair through a city where they also guide other sleeping inhabitants through the motions of daily life, finally arriving at a concert where Molchat Doma performs. Nasibullina's character wakes up and pulls back a curtain, letting in daylight. The band falls asleep, and she catches Shkutko and kisses his forehead (Molchat Doma 2020b).

Meduza, which reported on the video's release, introduces the music video in connection with the protests: "The video was filmed after the protests already began…" (2020). The same article quotes Zhuk:

> From the first time I listened to "Ne Smeshno" in the beginning of July, I understood that it very accurately reflects the spirit of our times (…) I imagined our post-pandemic Belarusian society, which is waking up after a long sleep under this song, and these somnambulistic images came to me, which became more developed and complicated in the clip. I really hoped to capture the impression of ongoing events and rework it into universal, poetic images, to convey the feeling of absurdity going on in Belarus, and in other countries (…) (ibid).[1]

Unlike many contemporary music videos that framed their songs as political, "Ne Smeshno" contains no white-red-white flags, marching crowds, or police officers (except, perhaps, one ambiguous man in black) (Molchat Doma 2020b: 1.50-1.59). However, as Zhuk's statement suggests, the discourse of absurdity enables political readings of the personal lyrics:

> What truth are you telling me about
> If you haven't learned to be honest with yourself?
> Too many words, unnecessary like disasters
> there are more than enough stupid and strange faces here.
>
> It looks stupid, it looks strange
> but I don't care.
> Like a bad joke, loud laughter everywhere
> but it's not funny to me.
>
> No, it's not funny
> No, it's not funny to me.
> No.
>
> [Chorus repeats]
>
> [Hook repeats X 9]

> Who here thinks it's funny?
> No, it's not funny to me
> Funny
> No (Molchat Doma, 2020a).

The song's lyrics position the narrator at odds with his social environment, a holdout against an undefined other's false truth and laughter. The song's refusal, or failure, to develop through successive verses, imbue this lyrical struggle with a sense of futility.

The music itself has an ambivalent relationship to the lyrics' communication of verbal meaning. "Ne Smeshno" opens with a melodic bassline, a moderate tempo, and dreamy, reverberant guitar riffs that travel up and down the A minor scale, punctuated by a caesura. Drum machines and synth phasers enter. After the first verse, the guitar line transitions to sharper, monotonous eighth notes that align with the syllables Shkutko sings. Are they punctuating his vocals or drowning them out? These riffs also feature dissonant flattened fifths, as do the oscillating guitar riffs that accompany the chorus. There is no second verse. As the chorus repeats, Shkutko's previously sonorous vocals become interspersed with echoes, coming to sound more like distant shouts under the drums and the monotonous, hammering guitar line. In the song's coda, as "*smeshno*" ("funny") echoes, the drums fade, replaced by drawn-out, mournful notes on synth strings. The unchanged bass line sounds one last time, then fades out as Shkutko answers himself with one final echoed, crackling "*net*" ("no"). The song's structure, which begins with the familiar verse-refrain pattern, quickly falls apart, never reaching a second verse. As it does so, the lyrics turn into repetitive echoes (Molchat Doma 2020a). As Robin James has discussed, interventions into accepted structures of a song can be read as reflective of the song's relationship to hegemonic social structures. James argues that repetition (looping) and negation (cutting) within Afro-diasporic and queer musical traditions "are counterhegemonic responses to a specific white supremacist, heteronormative arche, one premised on teleological development, accumulation, and growth" (2015: 79). Unlike the music James describes, "Ne Smeshno" opens with the promise of standard "development" but fails to live up to this expectation. "Ne Smeshno's" narrative arc, to the extent that it suggests one, hovers between resistance and conscious failure.

"Ne Smeshno's" goth sounds entangle this failure to conform to musical, and perhaps social, norms with deviation from gender norms. "Ne Smeshno" evokes a range of musical styles, but Shkutko's vocal performance, at times hollow, at times tormented and distorted into echoes, establishes a strong link to goth (see Van Elferen 2018: 24). Isabella van Elferen has argued that sonically, goth is "defined first and foremost by its timbre", which is central to its "musical darkness" (ibid: 23). Indeed, reviewers described "Ne Smeshno" with gothic imagery: darkness, doom, and misty catacombs (Forrester 2020; Soulsby 2020). Lauren Goodlad writes that gothic and post-gothic narratives "obsessively rehearse a male desire for completion, dramatized by a male experience of pain" that suggests an underlying "desire for androgyny" (2007: 104, 117). These aesthetic projects of male completion via integration of the feminine rebel against the limits placed on male

subjectivity under an "ideology of incommensurable sexual difference [when it] coincided with an ideology of incommensurable ethical difference", in which "intimacy, nurture, and care" were undervalued and limited to the private/domestic sphere (ibid: 105-106). As Goodlad notes, rather than an "ethical responsibility to otherness", these narratives valorize men's transcendence as individuals (ibid: 108). However, these gothic narratives also allow Goodlad to see androgyny as a project of "ethical undividedness" (ibid: 117-118) that may be "developed as the frame through which we imagine what we require of subjects when we long for intersubjective competence, democratic possibility, and publicly elaborated social worlds" (ibid: 119).

In the context of works conceptualizing the protests as associated with feminine ethics, particularly care and empathy, within a gendered ethical divide, (Ousmanova 2021; Shparaga 2020), Goodlad's work provides one way to hear political potential in "Ne Smeshno". Goodlad's assertion that the gothic indexes non-normative masculinity, including through performances of pain, resonates with Molchat Doma's own association of androgyny with pain. Asked by an interviewer to personify Molchat Doma, Pavel Kozlov (bass and synths) answered:

> A person who would romanticize about everything… Partly an alcoholic. A heavy drinker - no doubt about that!
>
> [Interviewer:] Of male or female sex?
>
> Pavel: As you say here in Europe - somewhere in between, a "non-binary". Of an indefinite sex (Ahlman 2022).

However, the band's statements in this interview represent androgyny not as a move toward ethical completion, but rather as an expression of spiritual deficiency— a position echoed in "Ne Smeshno", which lapses prematurely into repetition and sonic decay. The song "Ne Smeshno", though positioning the narrator as outside the norms of and unable to reach the public, makes no move toward expressing a "feminine" ethics of nurture or care. Rather, it seems to express a masculine subjectivity Goodlad associates with Romantic attempts to reclaim the feminized private and construct "monadic subject[s] whose private selfhood was constituted in opposition to society" (Goodlad 2007:112). That the song's narrator seems doomed to failure may suggest that this manner of relation is hopeless, but it does not point to an alternative. Structurally, stylistically, and lyrically, "Ne Smeshno" makes audible a struggle against a normative state of affairs and is sticky with associations between normative masculinity and ethical impoverishment. The video makes use of these potential meanings—audible in the song depending on what personal archives frame individual listeners' cognitive work—by turning them into narrative elements.

The video for "Ne Smeshno" frames the stakes and scope of the singer's struggle as the fate of society. It opens on an apartment block at night. Windows light up and darken in sync with the music. Sonically and visually, these shots communicate building energy. As drum machines enter, the relationship between the lights and the music becomes increasingly forceful. In the next shot, a tram drives toward the camera, headlights aglow. But as the setting moves to the interior of a tram, the

video's mood turns. Periodic flashes of red suggest the lights on emergency vehicles. The yellow dominating the video's color palette begins to evoke warning: Molchat Doma's vocalist, Egor Shkutko, stands in a yellow hazmat suit, swaying slightly and surrounded by seated, sleeping passengers. Their nodding heads seem to bob up and down off the drum notes. Later, the figures wearing hazmat suits dance while puppeteering the sleeping people through activities of daily life. Carol Vernallis notes that "[m]usic video clips often intimate that music is the ultimate cause of their inner dynamics" (2023: 12), but the musical inner dynamics of this world are troubled. By linking nodding in sleep and bobbing along to music, dancing and sleepwalking, the video casts the music as hypnotic, even sedative, an impression reinforced in the video's culminating concert scene, where the music fails to wake the sleeping crowd that nods along to it.

In the video's narrative, the song structures the relationship between Shkutko's and Nasibullina's characters. The latter, distinguished from the background characters by her use of a wheelchair and the eyes painted on her closed eyelids, enters the video at the exact same moment as the lyrics, as Shkutko's gaze falls upon her in the tram. The perspective shifts to Nasibullina's as the hazmat-suited responders lift her out of the tram—the video pauses on a shot of her being held in a bridal carry—and push her, in her wheelchair, to the concert. This wheelchair acts as a "narrative prosthesis": disability as an "opportunistic metaphorical device" (Snyder and Mitchell 2000: 47). As I discuss below, this narrative prosthesis is inseparable from the video's representation of gender. The video's final, climactic scene is a concert where Molchat Doma performs. Narratively, the sound becomes embodied in the band's personas at the point when the vocals become echoes, despite the pained effort twisting across Shkutko's face and bending him forward as he sings. The camera cuts to Nasibullina, who has woken offscreen. She pulls back the curtain and lets in the white sunlight, which seems to come from outside of the yellow-tinted world of the video. As sunbeams touch the musicians' faces, they fall asleep. Nasibullina pulls herself from her wheelchair and across the stage to catch Shkutko as he falls, their pose resembling the Pietà. The crowd, lit by sunlight, continues to bob their heads in sleep. Nasibullina cradles Shkutko in her lap and leans down to kiss his forehead (Molchat Doma, 2020b). Thus, the video's narrative operates and resolves on an individual, intimate level.

However, the video's references to Covid and depictions of absurdity also make it a story about a *situation*. The hazmat suits resemble the PPE worn by Covid first responders, and so imply that the video in some way comments on the pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic undermined the government's authoritative version of reality: "Not only did Lukashenka's dismissive responses to the coronavirus attract global ridicule but they were at odds with the reality of the population's experience of the pandemic" (Gerry and Neumann 2023: 92). Yet it is sleep, not sickness, that afflicts the people in "Ne Smeshno", who thus embody Ousmanova's and Badiou's characterization of political subjectivity under the conditions of, respectively, Lukashenka's dictatorship and post-democracy— passive, automatic, "lulled" (2006: 93). With closed eyes, guided by the hazmat suited figures, the background characters talk on the phone, romance each other, and buy and sell and eat ice cream. The banal surrealism of these images resonates with Ousmanova's description of Belarusian life: "We got used to the surreal events taking place

around us—there is already little that can surprise us" (ibid: 119). In images that evoke the flash mobs Ousmanova describes, daily life in Minsk becomes surreal and absurd, a dance where the inhabitants' eerie partners choose their steps. Characters are largely defined by whether they are awake or asleep to their absurd circumstances. With this discourse, through which individual perception of absurdity becomes political, "Ne Smeshno" situates its present as part of a larger historical situation. The band's unique position as awake, their attempts to wake the sleepers, seemingly anticipate the promise of a "genre" that emerges in Ousmanova's and Stebur's philosophical discourse—that aesthetic and poetic practice can instigate political change by changing perception. However, Shkutko's conflicting roles as artist/would-be awakener and as emergency responder/puppeteer create a tension between what the musicians in the video aspire to do—wake the people—and what they actually do—keep them asleep.

The collective crisis is never resolved, and the background figures never awaken. Instead, the video concludes as Shkutko is released from his individual pain thanks to an embodiment of feminine ethics—not in an androgynous performance by the band, but in a feminine other. The video's symbolic imagery suggests that these individuals stand for more than themselves. Nasibullina resolves the video, and Shkutko's suffering, through what Ousmanova calls "behavior with feminine connotations" that defined the protests: caring, responsibility, empathy (2021: 23), or what Goodlad calls a feminine ethics. The Pietà pose reinforces the links between these behaviors and femininity, associating them through the figure of the mother. The image also contrasts with the care administered by the expressionless hazmat suited figures, calling back to an earlier image in the music video, where one of them (not Shkutko) carries Nasibullina through the tram. Where Shkutko fails to wake the sleepers, and falls asleep himself, Nasibullina moves from cared-for to caretaker. In doing so, she also typifies gendered metaphors of the nation. When the hazmat-suited man holds Nasibullina in a bridal carry, she embodies the feminine fragility imagined in discourses of the nation as an innocent young woman. When Nasibullina catches and holds Shkutko in a Pietà-like pose, she invokes the symbolism of the nation as mother. Both poses result from Nasibullina's wheelchair use, which shapes her possibilities for action along the same lines in which gender has shaped possibilities for women. Within this symbolic register, Nasibullina resolves the video by maturing in gendered embodiment and enacting a feminine ethics of care. One reading of this video, then, is as a political allegory wherein, when past political and artistic movements have exhausted any hope of making change, the nation-mother awakes[2]. Such a reading, of course, relies on, and repeats, gendered discourses of the nation as mother. More basically, a viewer's affective attachment to the music-*situation*, like the song in context of the video, is directed toward and culminates with normative gender relations—normative femininity—as the only remaining source of hope or solace.

"Shchuchynshchyna"

A different allegory of music, gender and the state accompanied the music video "Shchuchynshchyna". "Shchuchynshchyna" was directed by Andrei Kashperskii, performed by Elena Zuy-Voytekhovskaya (as her persona Elena ZheludOk) and written by Mikhail Zuy and Dmitry Esenevich. Actors who resigned from the Yanka

Kupala Theater after its director was fired for political reasons, Zuy and Esenevich started a Youtube series, ChinChinChenel, which satirizes official Belarusian media (Trefilov 2020). In it, they play government officials turned TV presenters Nikolai Sergeevich (Esenevich) and Sergei Nikolaevich (Zuy). "Shchuchynshchyna" went viral with over a million views after it was posted on 17 October 2020, but it premiered several days before in the ChinChinChenel episode "Officials in the Lair of the Next Generation" (henceforth "Officials").[3] A mid-tempo pop track that relies primarily on highly processed synth sounds and ZheludOk's impassioned vocal performance, "Shchuchynshchyna" is a parodic ode to the district of the same name in the Hrodna region of Belarus, which the song lauds though musical, lyrical, and visual references to Estrada, children's songs, Russian pop, folklorism, and heavy metal. Although narratively the song is a vessel for state ideology, it arouses in its listeners not political but heterosexual desires.

The song opens with a mid-tempo synth organ melody of unsustained, bleating notes, accompanied by buzzing accents reminiscent of a kazoo. Percussion enters momentarily, precipitating an abrupt beat drop and the entry of vocals, in Belarusian, but with Russian pronunciation:

> Where rivers are like *rushniki* [traditional decorative cloths]
> and young girls dance in *khorovodes* [traditional circle dances]
> through calloused hands,
> barley grows and rye gives birth
> the forests buzz, the fields buzz,
> inexhaustible wealth.
> Just paradise, neither more or less
> What is this happiness called?
>
> Shchuchynshchyna, Shchuchynshchyna,
> Shchuchynshchyna, Shchuchynshchyna, Shchuchynshchyna.
>
> [Refrain repeats]
>
> I don't need foreign lands
> To live here is the best reward
> The names of villages caress the ear:
> Gurnofel, ZheludOk, and Liady, Liady, Liady!
>
> [Refrain x 4] (Elena ZheludOk, 2020).

Harmonically, "Shchuchynshchyna" references Russian popular music traditions, opening in A minor—which Esenevich calls a reference to "chanson" (Pit Pawlaw 2020: 8.33-8-48)[4]. The musical "lightweightness" of "Shchuchynshchyna" is characteristic of Soviet-era Estrada (state-approved popular music), as are the lyrics' "crosspollination of the civic and the lyric" (Grabarchuk 2015: 34, 37). These civic elements include patriotism by way of Soviet rhetoric ("calloused hands") and folkloric lyrical references to traditional embroidery, dances, and rural settings. Folklorism, which was institutionalized practice in the Soviet era, refers to "'conscious use of folklore as a symbol of ethnic, regional or national culture' both for commercial and ideological purposes" (Šmidchens 1999, cited in Lysenka 2022:

755). Under Lukashenka, "official", state-sponsored Belarusian culture centered Russian language and Soviet heritage (Lysenka 2022; see also Bekus 2010). However, during the era of "soft-Belarusization"[5] following Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea, Belarusian official discourse began to incorporate identity practices previously linked to the political opposition (Posokhin 2019; see also Bekus 2019). These included promoting the Belarusian language and elements of folk culture, such as traditional embroidery (ibid). In its Soviet-tinged civic content, folkloric elements underwritten by Russian-sounding pop, and Belarusian lyrics pronounced by a Russian speaker, "Shchuchynshchyna" parodies the state's "soft-Belarusization" cultural politics. Suggesting an ideological agenda, the song is structured didactically. The first verse presents a question ("What is this happiness called?") that the refrain—musically reinforced by a key change—answers: Shchuchynshchyna! The first refrain is followed by an electric guitar break. Through this mishmash of styles "Shchuchynshchyna" amounts to pure pop in Simon Frith's definition (2001, cited in Eckstein 2010: 52), in that it is "about giving the people what they already know they want(…)music provided from on high (…)rather than being made from below". Here, "on high" has a distinctly state-sponsored sound.

In the video, ZheludOk performs against green-screen imagery that often refers to the lyrics hyper-literally. As "Shchuchynshchyna" opens, ZheludOk, back turned to the camera, is superimposed over a clip of a tractor driving across a field. She shimmies in sync with the plodding synth melody, then whirls around to face the camera. Her long-sleeved white blouse is tied at the waist and her floral dress hangs to just below her knees. Her hair is styled in partial pigtails. Over her breast pocket she wears the official flag of Belarus. This long shot is immediately followed by medium and close-up shots of the same whirling motion, exposing the tractor footage's low resolution. As more synth tracks enter, ZheludOk attentively nods along to the beat in studio headphones, mimes playing a toy melodica, and grins while giving the viewer a big thumbs up over backgrounds of fields and trees in blossom. At "[w]here rivers are like *rushniki*", she smiles and wiggles her arm in imitation of flowing water. At "and young girls dance in *khorovodes*", three miniature versions of ZheludOk appear superimposed over a background of women in folk costume dancing in a circle. One mini-ZheludOk shimmies, one turns in a circle, and one shakes with her hands on her hips. At "through calloused hands", she shakes a finger at the viewer, hand on a hip. As the first verse concludes, she sweeps her arms up then pulls them back in, finishing with a thumbs-up, then— at the question "what is this happiness called?"—a shrug. During the bridge, she nods her head in jerky slow-motion against a backdrop, stamped with a watermark, of full-page printouts of question marks (ChinChinChenel 2020a: 6.25-6:58).

A montage of rural and natural imagery accompanies the first refrains, while ZheludOk shimmies and snaps, then whirls around to face the camera. During the following heavy metal guitar break, ZheludOk, wearing a black leather jacket and sunglasses over a montage of bison, whips off the sunglasses, chants "Shchu-chyn-shchy-na" while pumping her fist, then whoops. At the second bridge, she appears to falter—she stiltedly lowers her arm, then, with an uncertain smile, mouths something until the chorus returns. The second round of refrains is accompanied by a stream of imagery that has shorter shot lengths than the rest of the video and that accentuates its comedy (a tiny version of ZheludOk dances in front of footage of chickens) and folkloric fantasy (a meteor shower over a farm). Throughout,

ZheludOk shimmies her shoulders, grins, winks, claps her hands in time with the beat, and, except when closing her eyes in an apparent excess of feeling, maintains direct eye contact with the camera (ibid: 6.58-8.00).

"Schuchynschyna" effects a pop-music detournement, as standard elements of Belarusian official "reality" exist side by side with the blatantly unreal. Initially, the images adhere strictly to the lyrics, underlining the song's ideological program like the Belarusian flag pinned to ZheludOk's chest. ZheludOk's gestures—wiggling her hand when she sings about a river—often add another level of redundancy. Her pigtails, toy melodica, and excessive explanatory gestures, along with her unflagging smile, are reminiscent of a kindergarten teacher, emphasizing the song's instructive aspect and its implicitly addressal of the viewer as a child. However, the video culminates in obvious fantasy: high mountains and meteor showers (ibid: 7.50-7.55). These shots transcend the lyrics, flout reality, and cast doubt on the video's depictions of Belarus as a whole. In this way, "Schuchynshchyna" follows Ousmanova's program for art: it subverts the state's version of reality, rather than declaring an explicit political program. These latter exuberant images seem to stem from ZheludOk's intense enthusiasm and naïve passion, rather than the text of the lyrics. Thus, ZheludOk both espouses the ideological version of reality and provides the excess that exposes its falsity.

Additionally, the video makes it obvious that ZheludOk is the song's performer but not its musical orchestrator, defamiliarizing the state-approved pop hit. ZheludOk's focused expression as she nods and awaits her cue sets up a motif of exaggerated attention to the beat, which returns when she gets momentarily lost during the second bridge. Although she puts on a leather jacket and sunglasses for the guitar solo, she still wears her blouse underneath—a visual incongruity suggesting that the extent of ZheludOk's familiarity with rock is surface-level and sartorial. She doesn't so much as strum an air guitar. ZheludOk's distance from the music—except when it comes to singing—is what defines her as a prototypical pop star, who performs songs composed by others but nevertheless is the authorial voice (Eckstein 2010: 53). However, the visible cracks in this authorial position draw attention to ZheludOk's limited musical agency, and thus subvert the fantasy of the pop star's authorial voice.

ZheludOk's ambivalent authority is also gendered in a way that, in the webisode, is central to the power of both pop music and the state. Stephen Amico writes that, by separating women's performing bodies and musical authorship:

> "[a]lthough the female voice may indeed performatively enact a type of agency (via affect, via the indexing of presence, via the metaphorical connections to the manifold meanings of 'envoicement'), the material and symbolic impediments to women's access to the tools of a technological control of music-making (…) may effectively fix the definition of the musical female as the one who sings, the one whose musical communications is the 'unmediated' sound of her body" (2016: 434).

"Shchuchynshchyna" mobilizes the gender dynamics Amico describes to characterize the politics of the Belarusian state. The episode in which "Shchuchynshchyna" debuts frames it as not only embodying the regime's aesthetic sensibilities, but as enacting the regime's political program. In "Officials", the

officials (Zuy and Esenevich) explore a trendy area of Minsk, disparaging everything from the murals to the food (ChinChinChenel2020b: 0.00-5.16). Eventually, they come across representatives of "the next generation's" music, a raver dancing alone to up-tempo EDM and an acoustic guitarist in black, playing NRM's "*Tri Charapakhi*" ("Three Tortoises"), a classic of Belarusian protest rock. As their bodyguard violently arrests the dancer, the functionaries despairingly wonder if all Belarusian youths are like this. They are encouraged when they encounter a young woman—ZheludOk—who is unimpressed with the neighborhood and prefers her home region. (The video suggests that this is no accidental meeting: the woman has been in the background for much of the episode. Later episodes confirm that she is indeed a plant.) ZheludOk shows them, on her phone, her music video dedicated to this home: "Shchuchynshchyna" (ibid: 5.16-6:25). After the video ends, the protest musician stares down at the phone in ZheludOk's hand, then raises his eyes to hers, smiling slightly. She meets his gaze then glances downward, suppressing her own smile, and looks back up. The image cuts to a bust of Lenin and zooms in on its eyes. The following exchange ensues:

> Guitarist (murmuring): Cool…you're also cool.
>
> ZheludOk smiles and looks down.
>
> The guitarist (glancing at the officials): Maybe we can meet tonight, hang out.
> I have an empty place, the folks are out of town.
> (He flicks his cigarette to the ground).
>
> ZheludOk (sternly, pointing at the cigarette): Pick it up.
>
> The guitarist looks at the officials. They nod. He picks up the cigarette.
>
> ZheludOk: Ok, we'll meet—but at the Metro Museum. I have a lot to tell you.
>
> As the guitarist watches, she walks away, then turns to face the camera.
>
> ZheludOk: A good guy, but confused.
>
> The guitarist shrugs, tucks his cigarette under a guitar string, then walks away.
>
> Nikolai Sergeevich: You know, Sergei Nikolaevich, our boys are a little poorly brought up. But our girls are more conscientious—good for them. I think they'll change something in our country.
>
> Sergei Nikolaevich: Yes, it's possible, possible. That little spoonful of honey will turn it all into something a little more digestible and edible (ibid: 8.00-9.41).

Nikolaevich's latter remark and ZheludOk's name, which puns on the words for "stomach" and "OK", continue an ongoing digestion metaphor. In an earlier scene, Sergei Nikolaevich complains about a menu that lacks his preferred Soviet-era cuisine: "You know, this is how replacement goes. First on the menu, then in the stomach (*zheludok*), and then in the head" (ibid: 1.38-1.43). ZheludOk's name—

also the name of a village in Shchuchynshchyna—suggests that she can intervene in this process, satiating Belarusians with what they already know. Her name, like Nikolai Sergeevich's and Sergei Nikolaevich's interchangeable names, signals that she represents something other than herself in the fantasy world of state media. Through these metaphorical dynamics, the episode represents the state as operating within a discursive, moralistic allegory—a would-be "hegemonic allegory of the social" (Berlant 2012: 48).

Positioning pop as an opposing force to rebellious rock music mobilizes discursive associations, or genres, by which musical aesthetics map onto politics and onto gender. In what Cope and Liubimau call Belarus's system of "centrally planned leisure" (2011:104), government-endorsed mass media and state-sponsored events like the Slavonic Bazaar art festival in Vitebsk promote pop (in Frith's definition of the genre). Ousmanova points to popular music—the pro-Lukashenka *Za Belarus* ("For Belarus") concerts and Belarusian radio stations—as illustrations of government "brainwashing" through mass media (2006). Meanwhile, Belarusian rock has a "protest mythology" that dates to the early days of Lukashenka's rule (Kryzhanouski 2016) and Perestroika-era Belarusian rock's promotion of national consciousness (Survilla 2002). Pop and rock are also "sticky" with gendered genres, in Berlant's sense. Anastasia Wakengut found in her 2019 work on music and identity construction in Belarus a discourse in which "rock is considered male, sincere and rebellious, implying instrumental ability and reflecting a lifestyle, while pop is regarded as lighter and better suited to women, and is associated with commercialism rather than with musical talent" (63). Her findings point to a local iteration of the transnational discourse in which, as Norma Coates describes, rock is "metonymic with authenticity, which is in turn metonymic with masculinity, and pop is metonymic with inauthenticity, which in turn is metonymic with femininity" (1997, cited in Hansen 2022: 31).

However, the episode's representations of masculinity and femininity are not limited to an imagined polarity between authenticity/rebellion and inauthenticity/brainwashing, in which discourses of genre and politicization meet. "Officials" satirically constructs the state's hegemonic version of reality with a range of discursive imaginaries of gender. It invokes a discourse Susan Gal and Gail Kligman have argued was central to gender in socialist Central and Eastern Europe, wherein dissidence was associated with men, but men were also widely perceived as having been infantilized by the state, which was seen as usurping their paternal roles in the family through its direct financial support for women. Women, in turn, were "often perceived to be in an uneasy alliance with [the state]" (2000: 48). The period of Belarusian statehood, meanwhile, has seen the "re-domestication" of women, which Elena Gapova argues was an ideological meeting point for the shift to capitalism and the Belarusian national idea in the 1990s (2002: 658). Tatsiana Shchurko conceptualizes present-day Belarusian state ideology for reproductive assigned-female bodies as "a regime of 'compulsory motherhood'" in which "[w]oman's civil status is linked to her role as a mother, promoting the tendency of pushing women into more traditional social roles" (2012: 263), and links it to neoliberal economic policies. The video's narrative, then, uses gender relations to characterize a situation, which it suggests is fundamentally Soviet.

However, the different gendered "genres" it mobilizes reveal other influences, such as post-Soviet transition, neoliberal policies, and the global music industry.

"Officials" entangles the above discourses within a single narrative, wherein "metonymic slides" (Ahmed 2004: 119) allow a male rock musician to be both infant and protestor, and a female pop musician to be a maternal object of desire. In the resulting allegory, a rebellious, protest-rock playing son is brought back to the paternal state. ZheludOk's dual performance, as mother and state-sanctioned object of desire, brings them into Oedipal familial harmony. She enamors the guitarist with her music video and then takes on the role of a mother who will bring him up to be a good citizen in the pseudo-Soviet model. In an ironic reference to the protests, Nikolai Sergeevich says he thinks that girls will change something in Belarus. However, for him, it is because their performances of gender enable them to "sweeten" the goals of the coercive state so that otherwise rebellious Belarusians will find them more "digestible". The nature of this coercive state is revealed in part through its construction of heterosexuality. The officials' orchestration of the guitarist's and ZheludOk's meeting, their position literally in between the guitarist and ZheludOk, and the interspersed shots of Lenin's gaze tell us that heterosexuality is a state affair and links this gender order to the Soviet era. As in Scott's (1986) formulation, power constructs gender, but is also constructed through it. In this narrative, music is cast as a medium through which gender and sexuality operate, and consequently as politically potent. Thus, "Officials" suggest that femininity, more so than music, is necessary to the state. Pop becomes necessary *because* it is feminized—or perhaps, out of necessity to the state, becomes feminine. More than promoting the state's authoritative version of reality through song, gendered musical performance precipitates a "rerouting of affect" (Berlant and Greenwald 2012: 85) in citizens that the paternalistic state cannot accomplish in its own, masculine voice.

This rerouting of affect culminates in absurdity, exposing the gaps between the metonymic terms through which the state's allegory operates. There is a disconnect in the guitarist's reaction (overwhelming attraction) to ZheludOk's performance, which apparently precipitates it. ZheludOk is modestly, even childishly dressed. Her manner is more instructive than seductive: while her gestures and expressions inevitably draw attention to her face and body, she redirects this attention back to the song. This didactic mode and ZheludOk's persona mark a convergence of musical genres, in Berlant's sense, that construe pop as both government brainwashing and feminine coded with hegemonic gender ideals. As a pop star, ZheludOk is a state-sanctioned object of desire. As a state-sanctioned object of desire, she embodies femininity through the maternal. She relates to her audience, both viewers and the enamored protest musician, as to children under her care. With her toy melodica and almost ever-present grin, she is a pop star by way of a kindergarten teacher. ZheludOk's performance as officially sponsored popstar-slash-mother-figure frames the state's investment in pop as a gendered, and gendering, medium through the state's hegemonic ideals of gender, and suggests these ideals are fundamentally absurd. Nikolai Sergeevich's patronizing remark about women "changing" something in Belarus, while offscreen they have become a symbol of protest, is another moment of detournement, underlining that this allegorical narrative about gender and power stems from a false version of reality.

In the final scene of "Officials", the guitarist sits against a wall dedicated to the memory of Perestroika-era post-punk star Viktor Tsoi of the band Kino, whose song "*Peremen*" ("Changes") remains a protest staple. As the guitarist mournfully teaches himself to play "Shchuchynshchyna", the raver dances and the officials' bodyguard smokes and stares off into the night. This, perhaps, is a burgeoning "event"—social, cultural, and political alignments must be in disarray for "Shchuchynshchyna" to continue the legacies of "Peremen" and "Tri Charapakhi". Although this upheaval is depicted in musical terms, music's role in bringing about this moment of radical openness, in this narrative, results from its promise to fulfil personal, intimate desires: a man's heterosexual desire for an ideal of femininity, and an infant's desire for his mother. It is through these intimate desires that the state draws subjects in its reality through the mediations of popular music, and now the gendered logics that enable this transference of attachment have apparently broken down. ZheludOk is absent. Her impossibility reveals the impossibility of the state's reality.

Conclusion

"Ne Smeshno's" visual and lyrical depictions of absurdity and somnambulance are politically legible through a lineage of political/aesthetic theory wherein surrealism is understood as a condition of (Belarusian) political life. Within this framework, art's political role is to detourn, to defamiliarize, to make subjects awake to absurdity and to facilitate new modes and directions of perception. However, in "Ne Smeshno," music mostly seems to accomplish the opposite: with only one exception, it keeps people asleep, perpetuating the very situation that the lyrics protest. Though the video does depict a change in what reality may be perceivable thanks to the mediations of music, and Nasibullina's consequent opening the curtains, we see actual change in the characters' perception only on the most individual of terms. A political problem is resolved through an intimate encounter: the political implications of this encounter, in turn, emerge through allegorical readings of gendered performances and a gendered genealogy of musical aesthetics.

Meanwhile, "Shchuchynshchyna," a pop song with patriotic overtones, serves as a tool of the paternalistic state in a satirical reality where politics plays out in a contest between rock and pop. "Officials in the Next Generation" collapses metonyms of pop as feminine and as government brainwashing. In this collapse, the music video "Shchuchynshchyna" is politically effective not because of its ideological content, but because it is a means by which the state can attach itself to feminine performance, thereby harnessing unruly subjects' deepest attachments. This feminine performance embodies the paradoxes of hegemonic gender norms. The effect is absurdity and chaos. Music, as the medium through which these contradictory terms are simultaneously experienced, becomes the medium through which we see an allegory's failure to describe reality.

Both videos frame music as political and participate in a discourse of aesthetic politics. However, music's ability to redirect the course of a life by facilitating a break in perception comes second to music's power to bring about new intimate relations. It is these relations that change characters' orientation to the

world, and thus have the potential to do political work—directly, symbolically, or both. To the extent that music facilitates a rupture in the state of things, it does so through creating possibilities for and vesting meanings in intimate encounters. Importantly, these narratives of rupture and possibility become legible through pre-existing logics of gender. In using gender to mediate transformation, they may translate gender to the transformed context. However, the videos differ in how they mediate transformation through gender. Whereas in "Ne Smeshno," the affirmation of normative relations affectively resolves a problem music embodies, in "Officials" gender is inextricable from the landscape of absurdity; gender, too, is being made strange, and the approaching event is experienced through the withdrawal of gender's promise.

Endnotes

1 Translations from Belarusian and Russian are my own. Transliterations of both follow a modified version of the ALA-LC system. I used an online translator for sources in other languages.

2 Claudia Lonkin (2021) also reads this music video as a metaphor for the protests, using Jan Patočka to critique nostalgic interpretations of Molchat Doma.

3 As of 31 May 2024, this episode is private on Youtube. The music video, which is still available, features minor differences: a title card and swirls of light that seem to emanate from ZheludOk in the opening shots (ChinChinChenel 2020b).

4 My discussion of "Shchuchynshchyna's" music draws on a video in which Zuy and Esenevich, in character as the officials, teach N.R.M. guitarist Pit Paulau how to play "Shchuchynshchyna" on the guitar (Pit Pawlaw, 2020).

5 Sometimes "Soft Belarusification" or "Soft Belarusianisation".

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