

UKRAINIAN CULTURAL STUDIES  
AS A “RISKY PROJECT”: REVISION  
OF THE POST-COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

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*Abstract:* The article explores the current state of Ukrainian cultural studies, tracing its origins from the late 1980s and its development within Ukrainian universities and the cultural market, with an emphasis on decolonisation processes. It seeks to validate discussions among representatives of various cultural studies schools (Kharkiv, Kyiv, Odesa, Lviv, Ostroh), offering insights into the challenges and progress in the field. The analysis draws from two key discussions: the Vilnius conference “The Decolonisation of Education and Research in Belarus and Ukraine” (September 2023) and the UAC Lviv event “Culturology as a Risky Project” (December 2023). Despite the establishment of cultural studies following Ukraine obtaining independence in 1991, the field continues to grapple with its objectives in the context of ongoing social and cultural shifts. The article questions whether cultural studies can liberate itself from the legacy of colonised discourse and speculates on its future trajectory amid decolonisation efforts. By examining political and methodological factors, the authors conclude that Ukrainian cultural studies navigate a complex landscape of evolving educational paradigms and societal expectations, defining the unique experience of the “Culturology project” in Ukraine.

*Keywords:* Cultural Studies in Ukraine, Culturology, Decolonisation, Post-colonial Studies, Post-Soviet Thinking, Ukraine, Education, Ukrainian Association of Cultural Studies (UAC), Decolonising Practices.

## Preface

The emergence of Ukrainian cultural studies coincided with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, evolving concurrently with the establishment of the independent Ukraine. This development was twofold: on

the one hand, it was in alignment with the agenda to modernize state policies in humanities education, while on the other hand, it inherited Soviet and postcolonial discursive backgrounds with limited prospects for cultivating a distinct research identity and a comprehensive educational framework. This prompts inquiry into the contemporary configuration of this field amidst profound societal shifts, cultural metamorphoses, and the ongoing struggle for independence. Can cultural studies disengage from the remnants of the colonised scholarly discourse? What trajectories of development are discernible and foreseeable today in the context of ongoing decolonisation processes? What seminal concepts can it advance, and what inquiries can it provoke? How can it forge connections with the political and ideological landscape? Lastly, does the paradigm of the 1990s retain relevance, or is it consigned to the annals of history? These inquiries, among others, have been deliberated by Ukrainian academics over the course of the cultural studies' evolution in Ukraine. These considerations unfolded within the framework of the conference "The Decolonisation of Education and Research in Belarus and Ukraine: Theoretical Challenges and Practical Tasks" in Vilnius, and continued in an online format (UAC-LVIV 2023) thereafter.

The participants of the discussion were Oleksandr Kravchenko, Doctor of Cultural Studies, Professor at the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture; Oksana Dovhopolova, Dr Habil. in Philosophy of History, Professor at the Odesa National University named after I. Mechnikov, curator of the Past/Future/Art memory platform; Dmytro Shevchuk, PhD in Philosophy, Professor at the National University of Ostroh Academy; Olha Mukha, PhD in Philosophy, Programme Director and Co-Founder of the Ukrainian Association of Cultural Studies – Lviv; Zoriana Rybchynska, PhD in Philology, Associate Professor at the Ukrainian Catholic University; and Oksana Darmoriz, PhD in Philosophy, Associate Professor at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv.

Each of the founders or representatives of these schools has a leading idea that reflects the main pillars of discourse around cultural studies over the past decade. Professor Kravchenko argues that cultural studies are primarily a project and points out the risky nature of this project in the absence of clear boundaries and a database foundation (the sphere from which this data is to be taken, as well as how to select it). Cultural studies as a discipline grapples with periodic crises of identity and internal issues stemming from the peculiarities of its creation and formation. Dr. Rybchynska points out post-disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, where the fluid and interdisciplinary nature of research within cultural studies aligns with contemporary intellectual trends. Dr. Mukha examines cultural studies through expert analytics

and pragmatic cultural studies, which combine both practical field research and a theoretical foundation (including economics, management, and marketing). She emphasises the unique experience provided by cultural studies, forming a knowledge base and unique expertise distinct from other fields. Central to this experience is a deep understanding of the cultural code as the basis of the science of culture. She also highlights the mediating role of cultural studies. Professor Shevchuk advocates for a review of the discipline in both its humanitarian and educational contexts through a decolonial lens, proposing a shift in focus from theoretical and philosophical frameworks to a more pragmatic orientation towards practical projects and thematic research. Professor Dovhopolova emphasises the demand for practical application of knowledge, which is also a strength of cultural studies today, and it primarily emerges in the transmission of knowledge from experts to interested parties (students, ordinary people), with informal education playing an important role in this context. Dr. Darmoriz asserts the mission of contemporary cultural studies in interaction with society and the formation of social narratives, creating discourse not only in the academic sphere but also among various social strata and generations, thereby reactivating its mediating function.

The participants engaged in this discussion represent the foundational figures of cultural studies and leading scholars within the academic schools in their respective regions. Prof. Oleksandr Kravchenko presents a focused perspective rooted in the post-colonial heritage of the Soviet era, reflecting the unique academic tradition of Kharkiv. Dr. Oksana Dovhopolova, offers insights from her role as curator of the Past/Future/Art memory platform, emphasising practical implementations in cultural analysis and management. Similarly, Dr. Dmytro Shevchuk contributes some perspectives shaped by the academic milieu of Ostroh known for its rigorous scholarly approach to cultural studies. Dr. Olha Mukha, a practitioner, acting in the curatorial and communication spheres in Ukraine and abroad, an initiator and founder of a number of significant projects that influenced the cultural landscape of Lviv and Kyiv, brings to the discussion her expertise in navigating the complexities of culture management and advocacy not just in a local context, but also on a global scale. Dr. Zoryana Rybchynska offers nuanced insights informed by her background in philology, enriching the discussion with interdisciplinary perspectives. Lastly, Dr. Oksana Darmoriz contributes to the dialogue with her expertise in philosophy, providing critical reflections on the theoretical underpinnings of cultural studies within the Lviv academic context. Together, these scholars embody a diverse and multifaceted landscape of cultural studies in Ukraine, though not entirely comprehensive, but each

contributing distinct perspectives shaped by their respective academic and professional backgrounds and regional contexts.

Since the issues discussed have not yet been addressed in academic literature while they offer crucial insights for understanding the problem, we believe it is essential to document this discussion in writing and make it accessible to a wide audience in the humanities. This article format has been chosen to ensure that these significant questions serve as a catalyst for further academic discourse and are pursued by other researchers.

Olha Mukha  
Oksana Darmoriz

### An overview of the origins and development of cultural studies in Ukraine

**Oleksandr Kravchenko** (Kharkiv State Academy of Culture)

Culturology is an array of academic practices concerning culture that emerged in post-Soviet countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was a time of revisiting historical narratives and rehabilitating marginalised knowledge. The desire to restore “historical justice” stimulated the return of previously forgotten or banned authors to the public discourse. However, culturology was neither a “repressed” discipline that needed to be “revived” nor a “revolutionary” theoretical and methodological alternative to existing humanities practices for understanding culture (Kravchenko & Kravchenko 2019: 442).

The state played a decisive role in the emergence of culturology and culturological disciplines. This idea was first voiced in 1989 at the All-Union Educational-Methodological Conference convened by the State Committee for People’s Education of the USSR. The new academic discipline was intended to replace ideologized courses, such as “Scientific Communism” and “Dialectical and Historical Materialism”; the new specialty was also meant to replace “Cultural and Educational Work”, which was the most common specialty in cultural institutions of the Soviet times. During its implementation, this strategy underwent significant transformations, complicating the identification of its results.

The first step in the institutionalisation of culturology in Ukraine was the preparation of instructors for culturological disciplines at the Kharkiv State Institute of Culture (now the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture). Starting from 1992–1993, the training of culturologists began in “revived” universities: Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ostroh Academy, and

several private higher education institutions. In the second half of the 1990s, this specialty was offered by 6 institutions under the Ministry of Culture and 8 pedagogical universities. In the 2000s, 12 classical universities, 5 technical universities, as well as a military and even a financial university, were added to this group. In each of them, culturology proved adaptable to specific subject contexts within faculties and departments of philosophy, history, philology, art studies, management, pedagogy, and psychology. In 2006, the initiative of the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture introduced an academic specialty that currently trains doctors of culturology in two institutions of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, as well as in 13 universities and academies. Its expansion was not driven by institutional mandates; rather, it was initiated in alignment with the professional interests of the faculty. This decentralised structure hindered consolidation of the discipline in the field, complicating its self-definition. The competition for a symbolic power over culturology between the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the Ministry of Culture ended in 2015 with its transfer from the field of “Culture and Art,” where it had initially belonged, to the “Humanities.” The compromised nature of the higher education standards approved for this specialty at the Bachelor’s and Master’s levels in 2020 created the prerequisites for a further sectoral migration. Thus, by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, culturology had become a standardised educational and scientific discipline, though it retained the intrigue regarding its affiliation with specific knowledge systems. Lacking a solid methodological foundation, it has taken a nuanced position in the evolving landscape of the humanities, fostering ongoing dialogue around culture.

The introduction of culturology mobilised instructors from former “general scientific departments” – mostly historians, philosophers, philologists, and art historians. As a result, the historiography of culturology is largely composed of narratives from these fields of knowledge. This diversity is reflected in dictionaries, textbooks, and encyclopaedias, which became the main forms of presenting culturology in its first decade of existence. (I wrote about this issue in my previous publications (Kravchenko 2019)). Therefore, culturology has united different ideas of culture, various methodologies and perspectives, without having a coherent theoretical structure. At the same time, it is a field of intellectual creativity that allows for some departure from established narratives and supports variability in the interpretation of culture.

In the early 1990s, the content of culturological disciplines was formed based on numerous individual interpretations. However, their nomenclature status played a key role in shaping their normative

contours, reflecting changes in the political climate. From the educational course “Ukrainian and World Culture” in the 1990s to “The History of Ukrainian Culture” in the early 2000s, culturology gradually formalised as a separate academic discipline. In 2015–2016, it was reoriented toward the issues of Ukrainian culture. The main motive for these shifts was the revision of educational paradigms aimed at moving away from the ideological legacy of the Soviet era. The early 2000s were characterised by efforts to affirm Ukrainian statehood within the framework of political “multi-vectorism.” From 2009 to 2017, there was a shift towards articulating Ukraine’s European aspirations in a broader geopolitical context. Thus, culturological disciplines remain an information resource in the implementation of national ideological strategies and a hostage to political circumstances.

**Oksana Darmoriz** (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv)

The early incorporation of Cultural Studies into the curricula of academic institutions in Ukraine was spearheaded by institutions such as Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and Ostroh Academy, emblematic of the burgeoning movement towards redefining educational paradigms in alignment with contemporary perspectives in humanities education. This strategic initiative aimed at revitalising pedagogical traditions in accordance with the evolving landscape of humanistic inquiry. The trajectory of cultural studies within the Ukrainian academic milieu during the 1990s and the early decades of the twenty-first century was characterised by a gradual yet steadfast expansion, culminating in a notable proliferation of professional contexts by 2015–2016. This diversification encompassed realms such as the arts, pedagogy, and classical humanities, each affording cultural studies distinct avenues for adaptation commensurate with their respective disciplinary frameworks.

Within the domain of classical universities, such as the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, the inception of cultural studies during the 1990s heralded a period of academic renaissance. Reflecting on this era and at the same time representing the University, I want to point out that cultural studies emerged against the backdrop of a concerted re-evaluation of humanistic knowledge, which had been imbued with strong ideological underpinnings during the Soviet era. Notably, cultural studies curricula were characterised by an array of author courses, granting individual lecturers considerable autonomy in shaping their course content. This decentralised pedagogical approach afforded a degree of academic latitude; however, it also engendered a reliance on Russian scholarly frameworks owing to the accessibility of Russian-language humanities literature. Consequently, translations

of European texts into Russian assumed prominence, in the absence of widespread access to English-language scholarship. Despite these challenges, endeavours to situate Ukrainian culture within the broader European context were pursued with varying degrees of emphasis.

### **Olha Mukha** (Memorial Museum “Territory of Terror”)

The 1990s and early 2000s saw a surge of interest in exploring national identity and cultural authenticity in Ukraine. However, this intellectual buzz was more like a scattered brainstorm than a focused research effort. There wasn’t much coordination between different fields of study or institutions, so the early days of cultural studies in Ukraine were more about trying out lots of different ideas rather than building solid academic traditions or focused research programs.

In 2003, universities started training cultural studies specialists, mostly from the humanities perspective. These programs were often part of philosophy departments, giving them a strong philosophical foundation. As the field grew and adapted to job market needs, the traditional philosophy-heavy curriculum was beefed up with practical skills such as museum studies, cultural management, and project administration.

### **Zoryana Rybchynska** (Ukrainian Catholic University)

Among the nascent cultural studies programs in Ukraine is the initiative spearheaded by the Ukrainian Catholic University, inaugurated in 2016. We arrived at UCU with a distinct proposition when the Faculty of Humanities embarked on a restructuring endeavour, revamping its curriculum and launching the *Artes Liberales* program. This undergraduate initiative serves as a multidisciplinary platform, amalgamating disciplines such as history, philology, and cultural studies... Several of my department colleagues had previously been involved in an experimental master’s program developed at the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. Following its completion, a cohort of our faculty transitioned to UCU, enticed by the prospect of exploring novel horizons and enhancing our pedagogical approach within a divergent institutional framework. Our objective was to map out an unconventional trajectory, thereby forging our distinctive pedagogical formula, a quest that came to fruition.

### **Oksana Darmoriz** (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv)

The contemporary landscape of cultural studies within the humanities and educational domains, particularly concerning pedagogical methodologies and practical applicability, underwent scrutiny by the Ukrainian Association of Cultural Studies – Lviv, an NGO dedicated to

scholarly inquiry in this domain. In 2021, the organisation conducted an analytical inquiry, revealing sustained interest in cultural studies educational programs among prospective students and stakeholders within the cultural sector (UAC-LVIV 2021, Darmoriz & Mukha 2021). Despite the nascent formulation of its research framework, cultural studies has garnered increased prestige in recent years, evidenced by a surge in applications for cultural studies programs across various universities, with 5159 applicants in 2019 alone. Furthermore, the burgeoning non-formal education sector has witnessed a proliferation of offerings, with 35 bachelor's degree programs in cultural studies now available at Ukrainian universities as of 2020.

The concentration of universities offering cultural studies programs is primarily observed in five regional hubs: Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Lviv and Ostroh. Kyiv boasts the highest number of institutions, with seven local universities and one relocated establishment, followed by Kharkiv (three universities), Odesa (three universities), and Lviv (three universities). Notably, the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv hosts two faculties authorised to award degrees in cultural studies.

Entrance standards at these universities tend to be rigorous, with the average admission score for state-sponsored education programs ranging from 146 to 188, an overall mean of 174. Consequently, these institutions attract a substantial volume of applications.

Program offerings span a diverse array of institutional settings, encompassing both traditional philosophy faculties at classical universities (such as the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Karazin National University of Kharkiv, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, and Mechnikov National University of Odesa) and specialised institutions catering to the cultural sector (such as the National Academy of Culture and Arts Management, Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, and Kharkiv State Academy of Culture). Additionally, universities with a focus on art-related industries, such as the Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine, Lviv National Academy of Arts, and Odesa National Music Academy named after A.V. Nezhdanova also offer cultural studies programs. Furthermore, pedagogical universities and even one technical institute extend educational opportunities in this domain, too.

Despite the proliferation of programs, gauging the quality of education and the competencies acquired by graduates in cultural studies remains challenging. The heterogeneous nature of these programs across institutions suggests significant disparities in curriculum content and pedagogical approaches. Moreover, there exists a systemic misalignment between the educational curriculum and the demands of the labour market, accentuating the need for a more cohesive

integration of theoretical foundations and practical skill acquisition in the cultural studies education.

In recent years, the landscape of non-formal education in cultural and project management has undergone significant expansion, presenting a burgeoning array of offerings and opportunities. Both international and domestic entities have played instrumental roles in fostering this growth. Notably, international organisations such as Creative Europe – School of Cultural Management and the Goethe Institute – School of Cultural Leadership have emerged as prominent facilitators of capacity-building initiatives for artists and cultural practitioners. These organisations administer annual training programs designed to cultivate managerial acumen within the cultural sphere.

At the national level, the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation has emerged as a key player, spearheading a series of training initiatives focused on cultural management within Ukraine. Additionally, institutions such as the Centre for Cultural Management in Lviv, Litosvita, and various grassroots initiatives have contributed significantly to the landscape of non-formal education in this domain. Through their concerted efforts, these entities have worked to enhance the professional competencies of individuals operating within the cultural sector, thereby fortifying the infrastructure of cultural management in Ukraine.

### The risks and challenges inherent in Ukrainian cultural studies: uncertainties and distinctive expertise

#### **Olha Mukha** (Memorial Museum “Territory of Terror”)

Cultural studies in Ukraine has a unique and somewhat puzzling history. Unlike many other countries where this field typically starts with research before making its way into educational programs, Ukraine took a different route. Here, cultural studies began primarily as an educational initiative, with research developing later on. This unconventional approach has left the field somewhat unclear, making it difficult to define exactly what cultural studies encompasses and how it should be taught.

Interestingly, there are no official job titles like “culturologist” or “cultural analyst” in Ukraine. The term “cultural manager” has only recently emerged in the job market. This absence of clear titles adds to the ambiguity surrounding the field. Determining whether a researcher’s work falls under the cultural studies field can depend on various factors, including their academic background, the focus of their research, and their chosen methodologies.

In today's academic landscape, the boundaries between disciplines such as Cultural Studies, Philosophy, and Art History are increasingly blurred. Researchers often draw from multiple fields to tackle complex cultural issues, making it hard to categorise their work neatly. As a result, whether someone is seen as a culturologist or belongs to another discipline often hinges on how their contributions are perceived within the academic community and the broader intellectual conversation. Given that many professionals in this area come from diverse educational backgrounds, this fluidity is quite natural and reflects the evolving nature of cultural studies in Ukraine.

**Oleksandr Kravchenko** (Kharkiv State Academy of Culture)

For 30 years, it has remained a *project* without evolving into anything more definitive. Yet, this perpetual state of promise may be inherent to its nature. Moreover, it embodies intrinsic risks, particularly as an educational initiative lacking a cohesive foundation. The disciplinary boundaries of cultural studies remain elusive, creating subjective, objective, and methodological uncertainties. Furthermore, its practical application is also fraught with uncertainty, as there exists no clearly defined professional role. Individuals engaged in cultural activities may not necessarily identify as culturologists. Contemporary discussions surrounding cultural studies echo perennial issues raised three decades prior, suggesting enduring challenges.

And who then determines the cultural or non-cultural nature of the researcher's work? Perhaps we can somehow delineate the relativity of clear boundaries in modern sciences between a culturologist/philosopher/art historian, and so on.

I would characterise contemporary Ukrainian cultural studies within the framework of social mythology, accounting for the collective expectations of various social groups, such as educators and scholars, alongside the requisites of educational and humanitarian institutions. Employing a metaphorical lens, I can portray cultural studies anthropomorphically with an image of a 35-year-old individual who has experienced notable career achievements within a relatively brief period, securing significant positions and accolades in education and the humanities. However, amidst these accomplishments, the discipline grapples with periodic identity crises and psychological challenges stemming from its foundational origins. Despite a tenure of approximately a decade, cultural studies has seemingly plateaued in terms of career progression, transitioning laterally across organisational domains, notably from the realm of "Culture and Arts" to that of the "Humanities," as directed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

Nevertheless, cultural studies encounters scepticism from its professional peers, who perceive it as an ambitious newcomer underserving of its rapid ascent. While outfitted with the trappings of institutional legitimacy – a desk, a chair, and a computer – its shelves remain populated with borrowed texts from adjacent disciplines, predominantly philosophy and history, with marginal contributions from philology and theology. Displaying an inquisitive disposition, cultural studies frequently engages with neighbouring departments such as “Social Sciences,” fostering relationships with psychology and sociology while maintaining a distant rapport with political science. Despite the dissemination of concepts gleaned from these interactions, cultural studies encounters resistance from within its own ranks, with outcomes often criticised as lacking scholarly rigour, manifesting primarily as essays, abstracts, and generalisations.

**Zoryana Rybchynska** (Ukrainian Catholic University)

For instance, at the Ukrainian Catholic University, Cultural Studies is part of *Artes Liberales*, which combines historical, philological, and cultural studies disciplines. The idea behind this model lies in the integration of the classical tradition of university education with innovations related to the development of soft skills demanded in today’s job market. Other institutions predominantly develop cultural studies within their humanities departments. Even when discussing the development of cultural studies in arts or technical universities (as mentioned earlier), cultural studies in these institutions will also primarily be developed by professionals from various humanities fields: sociology, philosophy, philology, history, art history, and so on.

Precisely because of this, cultural studies demonstrates proficiency in the realms of moderation, mediation, and communication, leveraging these talents to broker alliances and collate diverse viewpoints. Its versatility and popularity among students render it a welcome addition to the educational landscape, notwithstanding lingering doubts regarding its depth of expertise in the humanities. This multifaceted persona frequently diverts attention from its professional responsibilities to engage in public affairs, accruing significant influence in these spheres.

Cultural studies at our institution similarly evolved from an educational initiative, with colleagues lacking individual research projects, and only one department member possesses a formal qualification in cultural studies, obtained from the KMA. The department comprises scholars from diverse fields such as philology, including literary studies, history, music history, and ethnology. Despite this interdisciplinary composition, the environment is beneficial, characterised

by mutual interest and receptivity among faculty members regarding course development and the exchange of research findings. This collaborative dynamic is particularly advantageous given the challenge of integrating cultural studies research within traditional disciplinary frameworks. Interdisciplinarity will then serve as a form of adaptation for an entire field that is alive but not very well reflected in the ministry's charts over the past 30 years. This vitality of *culturology* appears to us as a crucial characteristic feature and a connecting thread.

In response to the question regarding the postmodernist perspective, it is essential to emphasise its characteristic blurring of disciplinary boundaries and its embrace of cross-disciplinarity. Postmodernism challenges traditional distinctions between academic disciplines, fostering a fluidity that allows for interdisciplinary approaches and collaborative inquiry. This perspective encourages scholars to explore connections between diverse fields of study, recognizing that complex phenomena often transcend disciplinary confines. While cultural studies may not conform to conventional disciplinary norms, its disruptive nature is inherent to its ethos rather than a deliberate attempt to carve out institutional space. Moreover, the significance of cultural studies is a humanitarian endeavour, its existence challenges established notions of disciplinary boundaries in the modern era, characterised by hybridity across academic domains.

In an era characterised by post-disciplinarity, the fluid and interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies aligns with contemporary intellectual trends. In our opinion, it is worth highlighting interdisciplinarity as a highly significant and representative characteristic of cultural studies, which is not its weakness, but rather evidence of its timeliness and adaptation to the demands of contemporary humanities and the cultural industries market. The field is dynamic, evolving, and adapting, although it exists somewhat in parallel with the reality of the bureaucratic ministerial worldview.

Cultural studies in Ukraine is changing from year to year, slowly transforming into something concrete, and I think this is right. Here I will be a postmodernist, a supporter of fluidity and uncertainty, because, despite all the institutional frameworks, cultural studies is "a scandalous discipline that breaks these frameworks." Not because it wants to find a place, to move these "tables" and these "offices" and create a space for itself: this agile approach is in the nature of this way of thinking.

The specificity of Ukrainian cultural studies lies in the dynamic interaction between the educational process and research, and vice versa, creating a beneficial recursion of methodologies.

Drawing from international discourse, the ongoing debate surrounding the definition and purpose of cultural studies is a perennial thematic concern within academic circles worldwide. This discourse often extends beyond intellectual debate, evolving into competition for increasingly scarce resources within the humanities and university settings. This competitive environment underscores the imperative for each academic field to assert its relevance and secure institutional recognition as a means of survival.

Addressing the visibility of cultural studies within Ukrainian society, we have to acknowledge a growing recognition of cultural studies scholars, primarily driven by practical and socially engaged projects rather than academic endeavours. People of culture and in academia in particular, especially since the full-scale invasion, have demonstrated an amazing level of mobilisation, a level of intellectual mobilisation, and a willingness to respond to what our country and society are going through now, and moreover, to mobilise in order to promote Ukraine, to protect Ukraine. And we have to consider this as well.

Cultural studies scholars and practitioners become visible because in the current conditions of war, they are among the first to react to realities and change the rules of the game by creating volunteer hubs, completing research of war-provoked changes, creating education programmes for temporarily displaced people, promoting Ukrainian culture abroad, initiating the support for the militaries and humanitarian needs, and acting in the field of culture advocacy. This positions cultural studies at the vanguard of the humanitarian sphere.

**Dmytro Shevchuk** (National University of Ostroh Academy)

My observations gleaned from recent examinations taken by first-year students enrolled in the Cultural Studies program, noting a prevailing trend towards tactical thinking over strategic perspectives, particularly in terms of global socio-cultural analyses. It led me to think that perhaps cultural studies should be increasingly focused not on theoretical and philosophical ways of understanding culture, but primarily on practical projects and cases.

It is possible to play out scenarios of two types: a cultural studies professor and a field practitioner with a focus of cultural studies on social action. Currently, scenario one is winning. But it stipulates another question: why isn't it enough to have anthropologists and ethnologists? Where does the uniqueness of cultural studies lie?

I would suggest that discussions surrounding cultural studies as a "risky project" should include presentations showcasing successful cultural initiatives implemented across various cities. The inherent openness and attendant risks associated with the cultural studies

project present numerous opportunities while also posing significant challenges. Nevertheless, the openness characterising cultural studies in Ukraine serves as a salutary feature. It allows for the mitigation of academic and pseudo-humanities distortions inherent in formally structured disciplinary frameworks, thereby facilitating the resolution of such distortions through collaborative networking among cultural stakeholders.

**Olha Mukha** (Memorial Museum “Territory of Terror”)

I would like to shed light on the current trajectory and areas of potential growth of Cultural Studies as a discipline. Cultural Studies as a discipline is at a crucial point in its development. There is a clear gap in the field, particularly in cultural analytics and market-oriented expertise. A 2021 study by UAC-Lviv highlighted a growing demand in cultural management, especially following increased international engagement due to geopolitical events. This has sparked important discussions about the role of cultural studies in academia, research, and practical applications.

To explore this conversation, we can start by examining how cultural studies scholars differ from their counterparts in other fields, focusing on their practical and philosophical leanings. Additionally, it is essential to consider the specific knowledge that cultural studies offers. Central to this is the ability to understand and interpret cultural codes, which is a core skill for scholars in the field.

Cultural studies often acts as a bridge between different areas of society, functioning as a “middle theory” that connects various domains and encourages meaningful dialogue. This role is particularly important in contexts like Ukraine, where there is a lack of dedicated institutions for such facilitation.

Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies complicates efforts to pin down its exact place in the humanities. However, this ambiguity can be viewed as a strength rather than a weakness. While self-reflection is crucial in cultural studies, it is important not to let doubts overshadow opportunities for growth and innovation. A balanced approach is key to navigating these tensions. I advocate for a balanced approach that navigates the tensions between self-questioning and forward momentum.

Finally, there are specific areas within cultural studies that warrant further development, such as cultivating unique expertise in cultural analysis and formulating cultural policies. These areas demonstrate how the field continues to evolve and adapt to new societal needs and challenges.

**Oksana Dovhopolova** (I. I. Mechnikov Odesa National University)

Specifically, cultural project management emerges as the foremost aspiration among prospective students, many of whom bring prior professional experience in fields such as radio or television. We should add here that the demand for practical application of knowledge is also a strong aspect of cultural studies, which arises from the interaction types: “teacher-expert”/ “student-future expert”. The mediation of cultural studies occurs not only between disciplines but also within. I underscore the imperative for cultural studies to meet these practical expectations, thereby enhancing students’ competencies within their respective domains.

The significance of informal education in augmenting the reach and impact of cultural studies lies beyond the confines of academia. Reflecting on my own engagement beyond the university, I should highlight the imperative of addressing societal challenges through informal educational initiatives. Against the backdrop of societal polarisation and the instrumentalization of culture and history, there arises a pressing need to foster informed dialogue and critical engagement. Informal education serves as a vital conduit for such discourse – and compared to other humanities disciplines, this is an additional strength, facilitating broader societal engagement and fostering a nuanced understanding of cultural issues. In 2014, I went beyond the university because it became obvious that culture was being used as a weapon, history was being used as a weapon, and people could kill each other through historical narrative, and we began to look for ways to organise informal education projects. In fact, informal education is an essential sphere and it needs to be developed. It was an attempt to talk to society. In fact, there were different attempts.

**Oksana Darmoriz** (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv)

Drawing on recent sociological studies and practical case studies, we can observe the burgeoning interest in Ukrainian cultural history and its contemporary manifestations. This interest reflects a broader societal reckoning with the complexities of Ukraine’s colonial past, marked by successive imperial subjugations and divergent colonial narratives.

The dual imperative of comprehending and disseminating these historical narratives, not merely at an academic level but also within the broader public sphere, is in process. Such engagement serves a dual purpose: enabling societal acknowledgment and processing of the colonial experience while also contributing to the ongoing formation of cultural, national, and civic identities. By fostering informed dialogue and critical reflection, cultural studies assumes a pivotal role

in shaping societal narratives (for example, around Ukrainian identity or promoting of Ukrainian culture abroad, as mentioned earlier) and fostering a more inclusive and self-aware civic consciousness (including cross-generational).

## Revision of the postcolonial experience and peculiarities of decolonisation processes

### **Olha Mukha** (Memorial Museum “Territory of Terror”)

Analysing the colonial legacy in the fields of humanities and education is an urgent task for cultural studies today. For years, as we have been trying to establish our own schools and directions in cultural studies, we have still been influenced by neo-colonial Russian perspectives. This is particularly sensitive in the cultural realm, where ideas and narratives can shape national identity.

Since the war began in 2014, and especially following the full-scale invasion by Russian troops in 2022, there has been a strong push for decolonisation. This process involves rethinking many concepts and narratives that have long been taken for granted. It is about questioning the frameworks we have used to understand our culture and history, and developing new approaches that better reflect Ukrainian experiences and viewpoints.

While this process of decolonisation has started, it is still ongoing and far from being complete. It requires careful attention and active participation from the entire Ukrainian community – not just academics, but also artists, writers, educators, and ordinary citizens. We need to critically examine our cultural institutions, educational curricula, and even the language we use to discuss our heritage. This is a challenging but necessary step in asserting Ukraine’s cultural independence and shaping its future.

### **Oleksandr Kravchenko** (Kharkiv State Academy of Culture)

Culturology has not become a radical departure from existing paradigms. While rejecting Marxism, it also inherited the concept of a monologic “science of culture” from the “Marxist-Leninist theory of culture.” The theoretical and methodological chaos that resulted from this is often seen as a manifestation of interdisciplinarity within culturology. However, it is still presented as a distinct discipline. Can such dynamic variability be accepted as the norm? Or perhaps it is better to abandon the very idea of calling something that does not align with academic tradition a science? I have already detailed my thoughts on

the ambivalent characteristics of culturology through the lens of post-modernism in previous publications (Kravchenko 2021).

Over the 35 years of its existence, culturology remains a project. Its content, structure, and functional orientation are subjects of debate. The professional community has not reached a consensus on its theoretical and methodological foundations or its affiliation with a particular field of knowledge – whether humanities or social sciences. Culturology resembles a “cloud atlas” that contains a catalogue of scientific problems, ideas, and cultural concepts, but does not demonstrate the internal systematic connections inherent in a “normal” science. Therefore, instead of the term “paradigm” (model, standard) concerning culturology, it would be more appropriate to use the term “paradox” (unusual, unexpected). Perhaps uncertainty is intrinsic to its nature?

However, this uncertainty creates certain risks. The subject, object, and methodological uncertainty of culturology threaten to preserve its theoretical marginality and thematic isolation. The uncertainty of educational content risks turning cultural knowledge into a mere ersatz philosophy. Its practical application is also fraught with risk, as no such profession formally exists. Yet, its social relevance outweighs its epistemological effectiveness. The presence of these risks does not imply inevitable collapse, as there is no direct interdependence between cultural science, education, and practice. The absence of a research strategy does not lead to the decline of cultural education, and the absence of an original theory does not hinder the popularity of various cultural practices. Meanwhile, professional ideology has formed not around the subject or method of research but as resistance to any encroachments on its autonomy.

I consider contemporary Ukrainian culturology a form of social mythology. Its sacred core is the idea of culture. In the ritual practices of cultural education and science, a myth has developed that culturology has always existed but in thousands of different intellectual forms. The cultural hero in this mythology is a cultural scholar I mentioned above – a 35-year-old individual who claims kinship with almost all academic knowledge about culture. In a short time, he has conquered the academic Olympus, gaining official recognition and status. However, he occasionally experiences an identity crisis and struggles with self-realisation. Declaring ambitious goals to present a comprehensive teaching of culture, he encounters scepticism from disciplines that have precedence in the study of culture. They regard him as a neophyte, whose research potential is overestimated, as his teachings are a mix of philosophy, history, and, to a lesser extent, linguistics and theology. He wanders through academic worlds searching

for his place, competes with art history, ventures into the territory of psychology and sociology, and maintains distant relationships with political science. Despite the popularity of ideas gained from these interactions, he lacks a strong demand for his research. His texts, primarily in the form of essays, reports, and summaries, are often criticised for not adhering to scientific standards. Seeking other paths to self-realisation, he tries to fulfil his mission in enlightenment and project activities. However, even in this realm, his advantages over representatives of other fields of knowledge related to cultural awareness are not obvious.

**Dmytro Shevchuk** (National University of Ostroh Academy)

Speaking about the importance of decolonisation processes facing modern Ukrainian cultural studies, when freed from the influence of the Russian humanities, we need to find our own path. Key to addressing this demand is the ability of cultural studies scholars to listen to different perspectives and bring them together within a common space. The media function of cultural studies once again demonstrates additional advantages.

At the same time, it is important not to fall into the trap of flexibility and adaptability. The Ukrainian academic community, unfortunately, suffers from these “diseases”: at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, this was evidenced by the introduction of the Bologna process; in the last five years, we see how universities are adapting to new accreditation requirements and procedures. Often enough, all this has a formal nature. Therefore, the decolonisation of cultural studies cannot be limited to the formal removal of Russian and Russian-language literature from the curricula of academic disciplines. It is necessary to use the moment characterised by a kind of “renaissance” of Ukrainian literature and the world’s interest in Ukraine. This opens up new opportunities for cultural studies and the search for its own path of development, analysis, and understanding of culture. Meanwhile, in the context of development, one of the systemic problems of cultural studies, the deeper clarification of which requires a separate article, is the internal issue of Ministry approvals of courses, disciplines, and specialties. Educational bureaucrats need to listen to grassroots initiatives and adhere to more horizontal decision making, rather than pushing them top-down, often without understanding the internal context and market demands.

It must be emphasised, that the biggest problem of decolonisation may be adaptation or adjustment to new conditions. If we are talking about decolonising the humanities or academic space in general, there are already signs that Ukrainian humanities, especially on the level

of institutions, are beginning to adapt to these requirements. A sort of self-censorship is developing so as not to include certain books in the list of literature or to remove Russian literature.

Ukrainian culture and its textual dimension faced difficulties primarily due to a deliberate soft power policy implemented by Russian cultural actors, including publishers. In natural conditions, decolonisation would have been faster, but there is a certain political will from a post-imperial neighbouring country resisting internal demands for Ukrainization and pro-Ukrainian native narrative formations. In addition to the subjectivity of ministry officials, responsible for some obstacles, this subjectivity should also be attributed to the adversary. These are not abstract impersonal forces, but specific facts that we as cultural scholars and practitioners have dealt with at various levels. Some may have encountered them less often, others – more frequently, but it is nevertheless the story of constant struggle. Today we can talk about the renaissance of Ukrainian culture; we are rediscovering it primarily for ourselves. This renaissance must be used properly, and decolonisation, de-Sovietization, and de-Russification should primarily be overcome by using this rebirth of Ukrainian culture.

**Oksana Dovhopolova** (Odesa I.I. Mechnikov National University)

A practical case of decolonisation in the field of Ukrainian cultural knowledge is the Memory Culture Platform “Past/Future/Art,” which emerged and has been operating since 2019. It has gathered people with highly diverse experiences. The name of the platform reveals all aspects of its work: Past – because it deals with memory, Art is the space where new meanings are formed, questions arise (it is important for people to identify these questions and seek answers to them). The Platform team organises exhibitions, public discussions, and forms a Glossary of Memory Work, thus translating colonial and postcolonial experiences into the conceptual plane. At the same time, the platform is designed for a broad audience aiming to explain complex concepts in accessible language that can be easily applied. Meanwhile, everything is based on values, because it is important to understand why we are working with all this, why we are studying memory, dealing with the themes of the past, why we are working with culture in general, what we want to see in the future, why we look into the past, why we work with art? The answer is – in order to see something in the future (PASTFUTUREART 2019).

Together with our colleagues, we conducted a sociological study and prepared an analytical essay for the Development Strategy of Odesa on the current state of the Odesa myth. And for me, the most significant thing in this study was not even to discover what Odesites

consider as culture, what image of the city they have, with which personalities the phenomenon of Odesa is associated. The most powerful message in this survey was: “We want people to talk to us.” People want to be talked to, especially considering the rethinking of the city’s past, the myth of Odesa. And when there are a lot of changes in culture, it is important for people to be talked to. Sociological data shows that people are ready to talk, that they have questions to ask, and it is our task to try to launch some processes and organise public discussions. We should not be limited to educational purposes only, simply providing expert knowledge about how culture must develop. No, we must talk to people and receive some feedback from those discussions. So, this practical dimension of cultural studies is extremely significant now.

In addition to understanding the colonial past within the country, it is also important to consider how these messages are articulated externally, beyond the borders of the nation. This necessitates an understanding of Ukraine in the world and a re-evaluation of its cultural heritage, which is often distorted or even unknown, as it was presented in the context of the concept of the so-called “great Russian culture,” which overshadowed the contributions of colonised peoples.

### **Olha Mukha** (Memorial Museum “Territory of Terror”)

I have extensive experience addressing these issues on international platforms, and can confirm that there is currently a significant demand for Ukrainian culture on the international stage. Ukrainian culture is experiencing a surge in international interest, which creates both opportunities and challenges. As Ukrainians living abroad have become unofficial cultural ambassadors, there is a growing need for people who can effectively communicate on the issues associated with Ukraine using shared terminology, while also developing new ways to express uniquely Ukrainian perspectives.

The process of cultural decolonisation requires boldness to challenge established norms and create new paradigms. This can involve uncomfortable conversations and risky language, but it is precisely this willingness to push boundaries, which attracts young and innovative thinkers to the field.

Recent conferences on decolonisation have highlighted promising developments. At a Stockholm event (“Decolonisation of Memory in the Former Soviet Spaces”, 27–30 August 2023), participants from former Soviet countries chose to communicate in their native languages rather than Russian, using English as a common language. Even more encouraging was a conference in Vilnius (“The Decolonisation of Education and Research in Belarus and Ukraine: Theoretical Challenges and Practical Tasks”, 28–30 September 2023) where Ukrainians and

Belarusians could understand each other's languages, with only English-speaking guests needing translation.

This linguistic shift is crucial in the decolonisation process. The goal is not to simply replace Russian influence with English or another dominant culture, but to develop Ukraine's own cultural agency and voice. However, this task is complicated by the intense global scrutiny currently facing Ukraine.

The only way forward is through our own agency and its construction. This is our huge goal, complicated by the fact that we do not have time to stay with ourselves and build it. Ukrainians are simultaneously rebuilding their cultural memory, forming a stronger national identity, and learning to engage with other cultures on equal footing. The challenge lies in balancing self-reflection and cultural sensitivity while asserting Ukraine's unique voice on the world stage.

**Oksana Darmoriz** (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv)

The decolonisation of culture and cultural studies must be approached not only through the lens of narratives from the colonial period (including the era of imperial and Soviet rule, which perpetuated colonial policies), but also through consideration of neo-colonial influences from the Russian Federation post-1991, when Ukraine gained independence. It is also worthwhile to mention the change in influence technologies and colonisation that we are currently experiencing. Classical decolonisation will not work well for us because the tools were invented before the Internet: modern information technologies, TikTok, and social networks have significantly changed the tools of colonial influence (see the concept of *cognitive warfare*) – otherwise, in the third year of full-scale war, we would not have had to deal with youth in the centre of Kyiv who listen to Russian rap. These young people are also displaced persons because their cities have been destroyed by the Russian army. And this is the reality of modern colonisation, for which we need to invent new tools.

Cultural studies emerged during the neo-colonial period, characterised by indirect colonial processes facilitated through economic pressure, political agreements, and cultural dominance within market-driven cultural industries. The creation of a shared television and Internet space was instrumental in shaping neo-colonial identities, providing platforms for Russian cultural representatives, involving Russian artists, scientists, athletes, and opinions in Ukrainian projects, and promoting a plethora of common cultural products. Furthermore, the appeal to Russian and Soviet artworks as exemplary models, as well as the influence on children's and adolescents' psyche through entertainment content, animation, literature, and music were significant

strategies. These methods proved effective both domestically and internationally, posing challenges for overcoming their influence and addressing their consequences. Developing a distinct methodology and collaborating with various Ukrainian stakeholders are imperative in confronting these challenges.

**Oleksandr Kravchenko** (Kharkiv State Academy of Culture)

When viewed through a decolonial lens, the epistemological secondary nature of culturology and its dependency on foreign centres of the humanities become evident. Initially, culturology was envisioned as a sphere of intellectual creativity, free from official dogma, a kind of “hippie” in education and science, offering an alternative to the Soviet academic style. However, it traded its rebellious potential for the respectability of official recognition and became a fashionable “hipster.” Culturology accumulated public interest in culture but, lacking a conceptual core and theoretical foundation, could not satisfy it. Exploiting its discursive originality without relying on research practice, it remained a hostage to established theories and ideas, occupying a dependent position in the competition among contemporary analytical strategies for understanding culture. At the same time, culturology became a convenient tool for adapting knowledge in the humanities to modern social trends.

An obvious characteristic of Ukrainian culturology is its hybridity (transitivity, transition). Its formal normativity is undermined by its optional status within the system of knowledge. Claims of originality have revealed its methodological anarchism. Its institutional respectability does not exclude the risk of marginalization. If science is compared to a garden, culturology is trendy, resembling a “natural garden.” However, the lack of a clear concept leads to an imbalance in its composition. Local plants compete with exotic ones; some are transplanted from nurseries, some are grafted, others sprouted from stumps and roots, or were brought by the wind. But they all grow on the depleted soil of an abandoned old Soviet park.

“Disciplined” culturology employs broad generalizations and speculative schemes, often becoming a refuge for marginal topics. Balancing on the edge of scientific and non-scientific knowledge, it remains a hostage to ideology. Its prospects are determined not by the relevance of cultural research, but by the activity of the communities that present it and the interests of power. The proclaimed novelty is often a reflection of either Russian science, with its dependency on the state, or the practices of Central and Eastern European countries that have shed the Soviet legacy, or the academic formats of Western countries. Lacking objective prerequisites for its emergence, it is

largely dependent on the political cultures of the countries in which it operates. In Russia, culturology became part of neo-imperial policy with its messianic attitude towards culture, fetishization of history, and mystification of philosophy. In Ukraine, it coexists with politics, which occasionally encroaches on its symbolic resources but has not developed a clear interaction algorithm.

During the 1990s, the institutionally “fragmented,” methodologically weak, and theoretically “diverse” Ukrainian culturology lagged behind the changes in Russian culturology. In Ukraine, a tacit agreement on Russian leadership in the conceptualization of culturology formed, along with the support and recognition of the cultural discourse of the neighbouring country as more prestigious. The legitimization of the “superiority” of Russian achievements occurred through the adoption of borrowed models for structuring culturology, copying organisational structures, and importing didactic and scientific literature. Spontaneous self-colonisation created the illusion of a shared academic space. The common Soviet foundation of both versions of culturology became a prerequisite for the creolization of Ukrainian culturology: the creation of a structurally similar, yet substantively different content. Most textbooks in Russia and Ukraine, while accumulating a national vision of culture, share similar methodological matrices. These include the pursuit of theoretical coherence in understanding culture, the attempt to provide a comprehensive system of knowledge, the search for patterns, and an all-encompassing determinism, with special attention to categories to discover universal meaning (Kravchenko 2019). The “Russian path” of political mobilisation of culturology has a conditional alternative in the Ukrainian “nationalisation.” However, narrowing its issues to relevant aspects of state-building increases the risk of turning culturology into an intellectual phantom. The decolonisation strategy involves rejecting the temptation to follow a similar path.

Recognizing the creole nature of Ukrainian culturology is a step towards its transformation. The absence of deep academic roots allows it to become one of the first fields where the imperial codes inherited through Soviet narratives and institutions are effectively overcome. Ukrainian culturology must shed its provincialism in its self-definition and move from academic simulations to actual construction. This requires abandoning its mythologization, forming a discursive academic space, and transitioning to real research on contemporary practices.

**Zoryana Rybchynska** (Ukrainian Catholic University)

The importance of developing a shared conceptual framework, methodological approach to decommunization, and unified

communication strategies in cultural studies cannot be overestimated. I would link the risky cultural studies to Humbrecht's concept of risky thinking, which transcends conventional boundaries. Cultural studies can be seen as an undisciplined discipline and a non-specialized specialty, presenting both challenges and strengths. Risky thinking allows for the exploration of cultural phenomena beyond disciplinary confines, emphasising intellectual openness and sensitivity to cultural dynamics. Cultural studies acknowledge the fluidity of culture and its constant evolution, remaining attuned to contemporary developments and societal transformations. They possess the tools to analyse, diagnose, and reflect on cultural practices, elucidating how these practices shape individual and collective identities, values, and societal interactions. This perpetual process of inquiry provides endless opportunities for exploration within the realm of cultural studies. Ukrainian cultural studies, with its focus on the present moment while acknowledging historical and future perspectives, possesses a unique strength that can be harnessed for scholarly advancement and societal engagement.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of cultural studies as a “risky project” illuminates both its challenges and potential. Through the insights shared by scholars and practitioners in the field, it becomes evident that cultural studies in Ukraine navigates a complex landscape characterised by evolving educational paradigms, societal expectations, and practical demands. The discipline's interdisciplinary nature and its role as a mediator between various academic fields underscore its unique position within the humanities. Despite the uncertainties and critique, cultural studies continues to adapt and evolve, offering valuable insights into contemporary social, cultural, and political dynamics. As Ukraine grapples with continuing transformations, emphasised by the ongoing war, the resilience and dynamism of cultural studies position it as a critical endeavour for understanding and shaping the complexities of the modern world, including the reactivated and acute issue of Ukrainian identity and international culture representation.

The exploration of cultural studies as a “risky project” has yielded valuable insights into the nature and trajectory of this discipline in Ukraine. Key points to consider include:

*Interdisciplinary (or even post-disciplinary) nature:* Cultural studies emerges as a field that intersects with various disciplines within

the humanities, reflecting a complex web of theoretical frameworks and methodologies.

*Mediator role:* The discipline serves as a mediator between different academic fields, offering a unique perspective that bridges gaps and fosters dialogue across diverse areas of inquiry.

*Educational challenges:* The evolving landscape of cultural studies in educational institutions highlights challenges in curriculum development, practical training, and aligning academic programs with market demands.

*Practical applications:* Despite challenges, cultural studies demonstrates its practical relevance through initiatives such as informal education projects and cultural management endeavours, addressing societal needs and engaging with broader audiences.

*Identity formation:* Cultural studies play a crucial role in shaping cultural, national, and civic identities by critically examining historical narratives, colonial legacies, and contemporary cultural developments.

*Resilience and adaptability:* The discipline's ability to navigate uncertainties and adapt to changing contexts underscores its resilience and dynamism, positioning it as a vital tool for understanding and navigating the complexities of the modern world.

*Decolonisation and reshaping social narratives:* In times of war, reshaping social narratives and deeper decolonisation become urgent matters for Ukrainian cultural studies which influence the formation of the discipline itself.

Through these observations, it becomes clear that cultural studies in Ukraine occupies a dynamic and multifaceted space, offering both challenges and opportunities for scholars, practitioners, and society at large.

In the context of the ongoing conflict, cultural studies in Ukraine has assumed a role akin to cultural diplomacy, necessitating a basis and methodology that are non-political and aimed at promoting the country abroad without resorting to propaganda tactics. This entails the challenging task of mapping cultural identity amidst the complexities of societal upheaval and external scrutiny.

Addressing the need for decolonisation, we want to reflect on the imperative of rebuilding the agency, emphasising the demonstrated resilience of Ukrainian civil society despite adversities. However, the internal struggle to reconcile core identities poses significant challenges. The intimate nature of this process is further complicated by its public exposure, subjecting individuals to scrutiny and judgement from both domestic and international audiences. This heightened visibility creates a form of mental exhibitionism, inhibiting the necessary sensitivity towards self-exploration and identity formation.

Acknowledging culture as a vital tool for encoding and decoding societal values and norms, the speakers assert the indispensable role of cultural knowledge in achieving a delicate balance. This balance, they argue, is achieved through embracing the uniqueness of individual experiences while leveraging the accumulated wisdom of collective human endeavours. Ultimately, we underscore the importance of cultivating sensitivity towards oneself as a prerequisite for navigating the complexities of cultural identity and societal transformation. Those tasks belong to the emerging objectives for Ukrainian cultural studies today – risky but acute and proven need to remain in force.

Olha Mukha  
Oksana Darmoriz

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