

CAMOUFLAGE MASCULINITY AND CAMPISH DAZZLE

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In this paper the concept of *camouflage masculinity* will be presented and discussed. The concept was coined with the aim to analyse masculinity manifestations with the main focus on gay culture, and to create works of art on the corresponding theoretical basis. In the scope of the research, empirical data from the gay dating site *PlanetRomeo* was collected and analysed. Such data – representational visual images – are one of the core sources of inspiration for *camouflage masculinity*. Another important concept in this paper is *camp*. Its definition and relation with gay male culture are scrutinised in the context of the relevant aesthetic and social aspects. Finally, the author aims to look beyond *camouflage masculinity* and *campish dazzle* in quite an unexpected perspective.

KEYWORDS: camouflage masculinity, gay culture, visual representation, camp.

INTRODUCTION

To what extent does heteronormative masculinity influence gay males? ‘The history of homophobia reveals an extraordinary array of ills laid at the door of people who depart from the heterosexual norm. They have been seen as sinful, pestilent, criminal, unnatural, sick, degenerate and unpatriotic. They have brought plague, poison, and threatened the family, state, natural order and survival of human race.’¹ No wonder that homosexual males were forced to learn and adopt survival strategies in order to cope with the burden of standards of hegemonic masculinity.

The stricter heterosexual normativity is, the more often homosexual men mask themselves by putting on normative camouflage. A public display of hegemonic masculinity enables them not only to survive, but also to gain more influence. How is it reflected in online dating practices? Dating websites perform the function of a kind of mirror, in which a gay man can represent himself to other users and also to himself. In dating profiles from Eastern Europe representation of traits of hegemonic masculinity is very common. Textually in such camouflaged profiles gay men represent themselves via distinctive traits of heteronormativity, frequently use negatives to describe the qualities they are looking for, and are often homophobic towards alternative masculinity.

¹ V. Baird, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Sexual Diversity*, Oxford: New Internationalist, 2007, p. 79.

Another survival strategy of gay males is especially closely related to the culture of *camp*. Male homosexuality is *not only a sexual practice, but also a cultural practice*. The core features of gay male culture are most despised and repudiated by the standards of heteronormative masculinity. *Campish dazzle* as alternative masculinity represents many qualities, which are thoroughly hidden under heteronormative camouflage by many gay males, and it is not surprising that antagonism between these two approaches is intense.

The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the concepts of *camouflage masculinity* and *campish dazzle*, their interconnection and corresponding works of art. For that purpose the theoretical works by Halperin, Warner, Sontag, Connell, Lowder and other authors, along with the artworks by Gonzalez-Torres, Elmgreen & Dragset and myself are used.

In the first and the second parts of this paper, normative camouflage and its reflections in online dating will be addressed. The second survival strategy (*campish dazzle*) and its relations to the first one (*camouflage masculinity*) will be analysed in the last two parts. To facilitate the research, the analysis of literature and artwork is combined with the methods of autoethnography² and artistic autoappreciation.

1. THE COLOURS OF CAMOUFLAGE MASCULINITY

The term *camouflage masculinity* is coined by the author of this paper as a capacious metaphor describing the practices of subordinated masculinity in heteronormative societies. According to the sources, the French word *camouflier* means ‘to conceal’, ‘cover up’, ‘disguise’, ‘put makeup’, or ‘blow smoke’ (i.e. to disguise oneself for illicit purposes). It can also be traced back to a 16th

2 Autoethnography in this paper is understood as ‘research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political’; E. Carolyn, *The Ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*, Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004, p. xix.

century French slang word *camouflet* meaning ‘a practical joke’³. The concealing traits of camouflage are used not only by soldiers, but also by thieves and members of the criminal world. By masking their face and blending into the crowd, they pursue their illegal objectives.

These concealing practices of thieves and criminals are also used by homosexual men ashamed to reveal their sexual identity in daily practices. ‘Although nearly everyone can be easily embarrassed about sex, some people stand at greater risk than others. They might be beaten, murdered, jailed, or merely humiliated. They might be stigmatized as deviants or criminals. They might even be impeached. More commonly, they might simply be rendered inarticulate, or frustrated, since shame makes some pleasures tacitly inadmissible, unthinkable.’⁴ To camouflage one’s true identity is not merely convenient, but often vitally necessary for many gay men even today.

Like many animals depend on their camouflage traits to survive in wild habitats, homosexual men mask themselves in heteronormative society. It is like putting on makeup each morning – a gay man prepares to perform certain masculine practices, because otherwise, if his homosexual identity will be disclosed, he will be pushed down to the lowest level in the field of normative heterosexual masculinity. Wishing to become accepted in a heteronormative society and gain corresponding perks, homosexual men are forced to follow a hegemonic model of masculinity. This kind of normative masculinity is described as ‘heterosexual, economically independent, capable of supporting a family, physically potent, rational, suppressing hurtful emotions, dominating against women and other men, paying considerable attention to sexual “conquests”

3 A. Hamilton, B. Wadham, *Camouflage: Unmasking Militarism: Exhibition Catalogue*, 2014, p. 6, [Last accessed 2016-02-22], <http://www.academia.edu/3493279/Camouflage_Unmasking_Militarism_-_Exhibition_Catalogue>.

4 Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of the Queer Life*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 3.



1. Adomas Danusevičius, fragments of paintings from the cycle *Guiltless Touch*, 2013, oil on canvas, 52 × 38 cm (each)

Adomas Danusevičius, tapybos fragmentai iš ciklo *Nekalti prisilietimai*, 2013, aliejus ant drobės, 52 × 38 cm (kiekvienas)

and, the most important, not doing anything that can be perceived as feminine.⁵

By putting on normative camouflage, men acquire greater power over other members of society. Public display of hegemonic masculinity enables them to gain more influence both in the outer circle of normative masculinity and in the inner gay circle. Conforming men often demand from other gays to implement normative practices and, in the case of non-compliance, shame is the punishment for alternative masculinity, especially if it is performed in public. It is important to note that this ‘survival’ strategy is not the only one available; nevertheless, it is most commonly applied by gay men in heteronormative society.

The above-mentioned transformation into a normative male is especially well seen in sports. Overall homophobia can be measured by the quantity of openly gay athletes. After all, it has been always presumed that

gays engage in sports, but are closeted. It was only in the last decade that more gay athletes have removed their heteronormative camouflage. Manifestations of heteronormative masculinity in sports and concealed homosexuality beyond these masks inspired me to create a series of paintings unified by the concept of *camouflage masculinity*. In the sub-cycle ironically called *Guiltless Touch*, men performing in sports grounds are depicted as privileged members of heteronormative society. Athletes are hiding their true sexual identity, so their homosexuality in normative spaces can only be manifested in slightly perceivable signs. As B. E. Denham puts it, ‘In competitive sport, male athletes who appear to lack aggressiveness and “intestinal fortitude” may find themselves labelled a “pansy” or a “queer” by their coaches and teammates. A man, after all, is inherently aggressive yet cool under pressure, leads others by example, and is strictly heterosexual.’⁶

5 A. Tereškinas, *Esė apie skirtingus kūnus*, Vilnius: Apostrofa, 2007, p. 130; reference to R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity, 1995.

6 B. E. Denham, “Social Views of Masculinity Related to Sport”, in: *Sociology of Sport and Social Theory*, Ed. E. Smith, Champagne, Il.: Human Kinetics, 2010, p. 145.

Often the larger part of society presumes that many social norms are universal and constant: ‘Moralism so often targets not just sex but knowledge about sex, people come to believe, nonsensically, that moral or legitimate sex must be unlearned, prereflective, present before history, isolated from the public circulation of culture.’⁷ Contemporary gay culture started to develop as an alternative to the heteronormative approach. Its manifestations help us to uncover the time-varying conventionality of social norms. Nevertheless, many homosexual men adopt heteronormative standards even in their interactions with other homosexuals. The content of advertisements on the Lithuanian website *gaycafe.lt* can serve as a convincing illustrative example of such adoption.

Gay men in online dating frequently use negatives to describe the qualities they are looking for. Many homosexual men also represent themselves via distinctive traits of heteronormative masculinity and are often homophobic towards gays from the field of alternative masculinity, especially if such ‘deviants’ do not hesitate to show it publicly. Several vivid examples of such advertisements are:

‘Looking for a date. Don’t like queers and stupid people’;

‘You have to be very handsome, max. 35 years old! Not overweight! And be really masculine – without any effeminate manners, you must be a normal male, I don’t like gays’;

‘We will meet, drive to the forest to ****. We will sit in a car without talking. We will **** in the forest and return without saying a word to each other.’⁸

As can be seen from these examples, driven by heteronormative pressure, homosexuals show contempt for all mannered gays in the case of non-compliance with the dominant social norms. The last advertisement represents a kind of ideal fantasy for heteronormatively oriented homosexual men – a fantasy to escape to some isolated and safe place, receive the most desired sexual satisfaction with another man and skip all the other unnecessary forms of mutual interaction – a socially non-dangerous and sexually rewarding perfect deal.

The link between the adoption of heteronormative standards in casual public interactions and the internalization of these standards in the inner gay circle is, according to Michael Warner, *ethical as well as political*⁹. Erving Goffman unveils the mechanism of such internalization through the categories of stigma and shame: ‘Whether closely allied with his own kind or not, the stigmatized individual may exhibit identity ambivalence when he obtains a close sight of his own kind behaving in a stereotyped way, flamboyantly or pitifully acting out the negative attributes imputed to them. The sight may repel him, since after all he supports the norms of the wider society, but his social and psychological identification with these offenders holds him, transforming ashamedness itself into something of which he is ashamed. In brief, he can neither embrace his group nor let it go.’¹⁰

The chain of homosexual stigma and shame continues: ‘On top of having ordinary sexual shame, and on top of having shame for being gay, the dignified homosexual also feels ashamed of every queer who flaunts his sex and his faggotry, making the dignified homosexual’s stigma all the more justifiable in the eyes of straights. On top of that he feels shame about his own shame, the fatedness of which he is powerless to redress. What’s a poor homosexual to do?’ An

7 Michael Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

8 Lithuanian dating website *Gaycafe.lt*, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <<http://www.gaycafe.lt/>>.

9 Michael Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

10 Erving Goffman, *Stigma – Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New York: Touchstone, 1986, p. 108.

unfortunate answer to these questions is *in-group purification*: ‘Pin in on the fuckers who deserve it: sex addicts, bodybuilders in Chelsea or West Hollywood, circuit boys, flaming queens, dildo dykes, people with HIV, anyone who magnetizes the stigma you can’t shake.’¹¹ Such insights encourage us to broaden the scope of research into this topic.

2. IN DEPTH OF PLANETROMEO.COM CASE

The artists’ duo Elmgreen and Dragset created a very special work which gave me the inspiration to analyse the representation of gay men in online dating practices. This artwork is a complete *mise-en-scène*, a snapshot from the private apartment of a young man who incorporates all the most sought-after qualities on a gay dating site, which is open on the screen of a notebook next to him. The artists also created an actual dating profile for this perfect wax lover, so that other users would be able to send ‘him’ messages.

As is generally the case in online dating, photos uploaded by homosexual men often have discrepancies with the real images of profile holders in one way or another. In comparison with general Western culture, gay men from Eastern European countries are especially keen to ‘modify’ their virtual identity, put on protective camouflage and hide any important details, which can harm their public heteronormative masculine image. Such details can include even the distance between possible dating partners. For example, the popular gay dating application *Grindr* in response to security allegations regarding location data took proactive measures to keep its users safe in territories with a history of violence against the gay community: ‘Any user who connects to Grindr in these countries will have their distance hidden automatically by default.’¹²

11 Michael Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

12 Official blog of gay dating application *Grindr*. Grindr’s Location Security Update, posted on 2014 09 05, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <<http://www.grindr.com/blog/grindr-location-security-update>>.



2. Elmgreen & Dragset, *Andrea Candela* (Fig. 3 (*Virtual Romeo*)), 2010, wax, t-shirt, hoodie, socks, in: T. R. Myers, *Letter from Copenhagen*, 2014, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <<http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/12/artseen/letter-from-copenhagen>>. Photo: ONUK. Courtesy: Andrea Thuile & Heinz Peter Hager

Elmgreen & Dragset, *Andrea Candela* (Fig. 3 (*Virtualus Romeo*)), 2010, vaškas, marškinėliai, džemperis, kojinės, in: T. R. Myers, *Laiškas iš Kopenhagos*, 2014, [žiūrėta 2016-02-22], <<http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/12/artseen/letter-from-copenhagen>>.

Nuotrauka: ONUK. Courtesy: Andrea Thuile & Heinz Peter Hager

Elmgreen and Dragset’s *Virtual Romeo* inspired me to conduct research into the visual representation of homosexual men from Europe in the online dating platform *PlanetRomeo*. This research definitely confirmed the correlation between the general scale of homophobia in a certain country and the intensity of camouflage by which gays are concealing their identity. Homosexual men freely adjust the scope and content of uploaded images. For me these images are revealing as a form of art. In the dating profiles from Eastern Europe, representation of traits of hegemonic masculinity (athletic body, sexuality, strength, endurance, etc.) is very common, separate parts of the body are distinctly emphasised, and a fully unmasked body is rare. The most concealed part of the body is the head – the central identification object often is deleted, blurred, masked or hidden in some other way.

Textually in such camouflaged profiles gay men represent themselves via distinctive traits of hegemonic masculinity, frequently use negatives to describe



3. International dating website *PlanetRomeo*, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <https://www.planetromeo.com/>

Tarptautinis pažinčių tinklalapis *PlanetRomeo*, [žiūrėta 2016-02-22], <https://www.planetromeo.com/>

the qualities they are looking for, and are often homophobic towards alternative masculinity. For example, such criteria as non-mannered, non-effeminate, non-fat, non-bottom, etc. are very popular. This indicates internal homophobia and censorship of homosexual men, who are trying to achieve the standards of heteronormative masculinity. Such censorship became more delicate and easily adjustable in the digital age: ‘Thanks to GPS-technology, gay people now have amazing opportunities to meet one another and to fall in love. But it also highlights that gay people continue to live very, very different lives – some of which continue to be hidden from view.’¹³ This technological shift in the culture of gay dating prompted me to paint *Into the Dark*, in which blurred identity and dating digitalisation are combined.

The analysis of images from *PlanetRomeo* revealed another tendency – in comparison with heterosexual men, gays are more demanding towards their physical appearance. The images of well-trained and well-tended bodies are uploaded in the profiles of desirable users. Dating websites perform the function of a kind of mirror, in which gay men diligently represent themselves not only to other users, but also, and most importantly, to themselves. There is no doubt that the construction of an individual’s self-worth on the basis of physical appearance has been very dramatic over the last century in society as a whole; however, gay men are influenced by it more strongly than heterosexual men.

This trend – as Brando Ambrosino insightfully termed it, *the tyranny of buffness*¹⁴ – is intensely pervasive not only in Eastern Europe, but also in many

13 D. Hudson, “Digital closet: Why Grindr and other apps show how far we are from true equality”, in: *Gay Star News*, 2015 08 05, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/digital-closet-why-grindr-and-other-apps-show-how-far-we-are-from-true-equality/#gs.Uz3Mek/>.

14 Brando Ambrosino, “The Tyranny of Buffness”, in: *The Atlantic*, 2013 08 16, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <http://www.theatlantic.com/saxes/archive/2013/08/the-tyranny-of-buffness/278698/>.

other Western culture driven countries all over the world. This obsession with body image that prioritises *gym fit, muscular* and *masculine* dudes¹⁵ is scientifically confirmed by the most recent research: ‘Over one third of gay men (many of whom were not overweight using common body mass index [BMI] guidelines) reported directly experiencing antifat bias. The most common type of antifat bias reported was rejection by potential romantic partners on the basis of weight. <...> Gay men reported greater likelihood that the overweight man would be blatantly ignored, treated rudely, or mocked behind his back if he approached an attractive potential romantic partner. These studies suggest that antifat bias is a challenge for many members of the gay community, even those who are not technically overweight. Additionally, gay men expect other gay men to show these antifat biases when looking for a romantic partner.’¹⁶

On the other hand, a positive trend is that in the case of decrease of the scale of homophobia in certain society, homosexual men (especially of the younger generation) feel safer and are willing to reveal more details of their identity. Lithuanian society is a good example of this tendency – over the last decade of deeper integration in the European Union, homophobia has slowly started to fade, and gays have begun to represent themselves more and more openly. Changes of images on dating websites should be perceived in the light of recent social changes.

15 S. Copland, “In challenging homophobia, gay men have become our own oppressors”, in: *The Guardian*, 2016 02 05, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentsfree/2016/feb/05/in-challenging-homophobia-gay-men-have-become-our-own-oppressors>>.

16 O Foster-Gimbel, R. Engeln, “Fat Chance! Experiences and Expectations of Antifat Bias in the Gay Male Community”, in: *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 2016 01 18, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <<http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2016-02344-001/>>.



4. Adomas Danusevičius, *Into the Dark*, 2015, oil on canvas, 58 × 46 cm

Adomas Danusevičius, *Tamsoje*, 2015, aliejus ant drobės, 58 × 46 cm

3. CAMP MUST BE BEAUTIFUL

There are many different (and sometimes even competing) approaches to camp and definitely no ultimate consensus on its final definition. As Susan Sontag famously defined the term in her short essay,¹⁷ camp is ‘a sensibility that revels in artifice, stylization, theatricalization, irony, playfulness, and exaggeration’. According to Sontag, ‘Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical’. As she argues, ‘Not all homosexuals have Camp taste. But homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard – and the most articulate audience – of Camp’. By exaggerating sexual characteristics and personal mannerisms, such queer-inflected camp could be said to contend

17 Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’”, in: *Partisan Review*, Fall 1964, p. 515–530.



5. Adomas Danusevičius, paintings from the cycle *Camp Must Be Beautiful*, 2015, oil on canvas, 40 × 40 cm (each)

Adomas Danusevičius, tapybos paveikslai iš ciklo *Kempas turi būti gražus*, 2015, aliejus ant drobės; 40 × 40 cm (kiekvienas)

that all behaviour is really performative. Sontag also distinguishes between ‘pure camp’, which amounts to kitsch, taking itself so seriously that we can now see it as hilarious (in other words, camp sensibility is on the side of the audience rather than the author of the work), and ‘Camp which knows itself to be camp’ and is, therefore, already making fun of itself¹⁸.

Another approach to camp is presented by J. Bryan Lowder. He partially agrees with Mark Booth’s definition of camp as ‘being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits.’¹⁹ For Lowder ‘camp is not itself the nuance; rather, *it is the pleasure that seizing upon the nuance evokes*. It is the shiver that travels down your spine when your unsuspecting finger breaches the crease, the electric

jolt when the punctum suddenly pierces your field of vision’, and the best definition he can produce is ‘camp is the thrill of a whisper.’²⁰

Another perspective on camp is political. Camp, as Esher Newton says (borrowing a phrase from Kenneth Burke), ‘is a “strategy for a situation”’²¹. Camp works from the standpoint of ‘disempowerment to recode social codes whose cultural power and prestige prevent them from simply being dismantled or ignored. It is predicated on the fundamental gay male intuition that power is everywhere, that it is impossible to evade power that no place is outside of power.’²²

One of the latest contributions to this debate is R. Chambers’ approach: ‘Chambers describes camp as queer but not necessarily gay – a “performance genre” which involves “a collective interaction of performance and audience, somewhat akin to acting” and offers a

18 D. Felluga, *Terms Used by Postmodernists: Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/postmodernism/terms/>>.

19 Mark Booth, *Camp*, London: Quartet Books, 1983.

20 J. Bryan Lowder, “The delight is in the details”, in: *Slate*, 2013 04 02, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/features/2013/postcards_from_camp/camp_roland_barthes_we_need_your_help.html>.

21 Esher Newton, *Mother Camp. Female Impersonators in America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 105.

22 David M. Halperin, *How to be Gay*, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012, p. 217.



“rallying point” for “affiliations of unofficial, *non*-national, *non*-familial, *non*-state-sanctioned kind”²³; understood in this way, camp becomes an appropriate vehicle for expressing various sorts of cultural and political dissidence beyond the merely (homo)sexual.²⁴

The aesthetics of camp in my works of art is directly derived from gay male culture. I completely agree with David M. Halperin that ‘male homosexuality is not only a sexual practice but also a cultural practice, that there is a relation between sexuality and social or aesthetic form.’²⁵ Halperin thoroughly reveals the core features of gay male culture (which are most despised and repudiated by the standards of heteronormative masculinity): ‘gay male femininity, diva-worship, aestheticism, snobbery, drama, adoration of glamour, caricature of women, and obsession with the figure of the mother.’²⁶ In my paintings from the cycle *Camp Must Be Beautiful* I tried to represent camp as ‘a timeless practice rather than a perishable essence, a chosen

point-of-view as opposed to an innate sensibility or concrete set of qualities.’²⁷

The distinction and collisions between traditional gay culture and the newer definitions of gayness in the context of heteronormative masculinity is very intriguing. ‘Traditional gay male culture – with its female icons, its flaming camp style, its division between queens and trade, its polarized gender roles, its sexual hierarchies, its balked romantic longings, its sentimentality, its self-pity, and its profound despair about the possibility of lasting love – all that seemed not only archaic and outdated but repulsive. It was an insult to the newer, truer, and better definitions of gayness that gay men had recently invented, popularized, and labored to embody as well as to exploit.’²⁸ Many traits of traditional gay male culture nowadays appear as some kind of homophobic stereotypes. They are frequently internalized by gay men themselves.

The effect of heteronormative pressure on gay male culture created a considerable divide between, as Halperin calls it, *The Beauty* and *The Camp*. ‘The categorical split in traditional gay culture between beauty and camp, between glamour and humor, turns out to be isomorphic with a number of other symmetrical and polarized values, which correlate in turn with a basic opposition between masculine and feminine gender styles.’²⁹ Camp, obviously, represents the feminine gender style, and beauty – the masculine one.

Such division involves ‘a whole system of polarized gender styles, gender identities, erotic object and subject positions, sex-roles, sexual practices, and sexual subjectivities.’³⁰ Beauty is the object of sexual desire, and that is why gay male culture takes it very seriously. On the other hand, the role of camp is to ‘puncture the breathless, solemn, tediously monotonous worship of

23 R. Chambers, “Isn’t There a Poem about This, Mr. de Mille? On Quotation, Camp and Colonial Distancing”, in: *Australian Literary Studies*, 23.4 (October 2008), p. 381.

24 David M. Halperin, *op. cit.*, p. 491.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

27 J. Bryan Lowder, “Postcards from Camp”, in: *Slate*, 2013 04 01, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/features/2013/postcards_from_camp/camp_is_not_dead.html>.

28 David M. Halperin, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 204–205.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 205.



6. Adomas Danusevičius, *Camp Must Be Beautiful*, 2015, drawing, marker and paper A0 (841 × 1189 mm)

Adomas Danusevičius, *Kempas turi būti gražus*, 2015, piešinys, markeris, popierius, A0 (841 × 1189mm)

beauty, to allow the gay men who desire and who venerate beauty to step back ironically from their unironic devotion to it, to see it from the perspective of postcoital disillusionment instead of anticipatory excitement.³¹

Can it be that the adoption of camp in daily practices for homosexual men is another kind of survival strategy contrary to camouflage masculinity? This alternative masculinity, which can be called *campish dazzle*, represents a number of qualities that are thoroughly hidden by heteronormative camouflage of many gay males, and no wonder that the antagonism between these two approaches is quite harsh. In my opinion, the strict distinction between Camp and Beauty is a direct product of hegemonic masculinity.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 207.

In real life one rarely happens to meet ‘pure’ representatives of these categories; more likely, the major part of the gay population will fall into many shades of grey between these two polarities. That is why in my artwork I decided to connect these two opposites by the ironical title *Camp Must Be Beautiful*. It is like Thomas Neuwirth’s artistic experiment, by which he combined the incompatible: an important element of manhood – the beard, – feminine style and gay bearing in the unique image of *Conchita Wurst*. It is not surprising that the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest Final spurred the apologists of homophobia in Russia to shave beards in unison with condemnation from the Russian Orthodox Church³².

32 P. Vale, “Conchita Wurst Eurovision Victory Spurs Russians To

4. BEYOND CAMOUFLAGE AND DAZZLE

The role of camp in gay male culture should not be overestimated. It is surely very important for homosexual men to re-establish themselves after the prolonged pressure of hegemonic masculinity, and to some extent camp can be a great help. However, by escaping one (hetero)normative trap it is possible to fall into another trap of (homo)normativity.

In this context, the thoughts of Eckhart Tolle on spirituality can add several significant insights: 'As you approach adulthood, uncertainty about your sexuality followed by the realization that you are "different" from others may force you to disidentify from socially conditioned patterns of thought and behavior. This will automatically raise your level of consciousness above that of the unconscious majority, whose members unquestioningly take on board all inherited patterns. In that respect, being gay can be a help. Being an outsider to some extent, someone who does not "fit in" with others or is rejected by them for whatever reason, makes life difficult, but it also places you at an advantage as far as enlightenment is concerned. It takes you out of unconsciousness almost by force.'³³ Hegemonic masculinity forces gay men to put on heteronormative camouflage; however, their true identity is pushing itself away from the established normative culture. Thus, being gay can potentially help to raise existential questions, not to be afraid to scrutinize social norms, and to be able to choose the path of self-cognition and to reach new patterns of thought and behaviour.

However, 'on the other hand, if you then develop a sense of identity based on your gayness, you have

escaped one trap only to fall into another. You will play roles and games dictated by a mental image you have of yourself as gay.'³⁴ In this perspective, the conceptual opposition between two extremes – masculine camouflage and campish dazzle – is clearly manifest. My argument is that between these two extremes there can be a perfect middle ground for gay males, which will boost individual growth of consciousness and creativity. An example of an artwork created from the position of such middle ground is *Don't steal the stick!*

One of the prime sources of inspiration for this work, in addition to the analysis of camp and heteronormativity in gay culture, was *Perfect Lovers* by Felix Gonzalez-Torres³⁵. The artist shows two clocks ticking simultaneously, like the hearts of two lovers. In one of his interviews Gonzalez-Torres gave a more detailed framework of his ideas: 'The stacks of paper, or piles of candies are indestructible because they can be endlessly duplicated. They will always exist because they don't really exist, or because they don't have to exist all the time. They are usually fabricated in different places at the same time. After all there is no original, only one original certificate of authenticity. If I am trying to alter the system of distribution of an idea through an art practice, it seems imperative to me to go all the way with a piece and investigate new notions of placement, production, and originality.'³⁶ I interpreted these perfect watches by depicting them without their hands – this way the image fades into infinity.

By adding the words 'Perfect Lovers' to the title and putting them into parentheses, Felix Gonzalez-Torres evokes those who cannot be named, perhaps because they are of the same sex. Many of his works were acts of mourning for a partner, friend, or lover lost during the AIDS epidemic, which erupted during the 1980s. However, he deliberately avoided using the

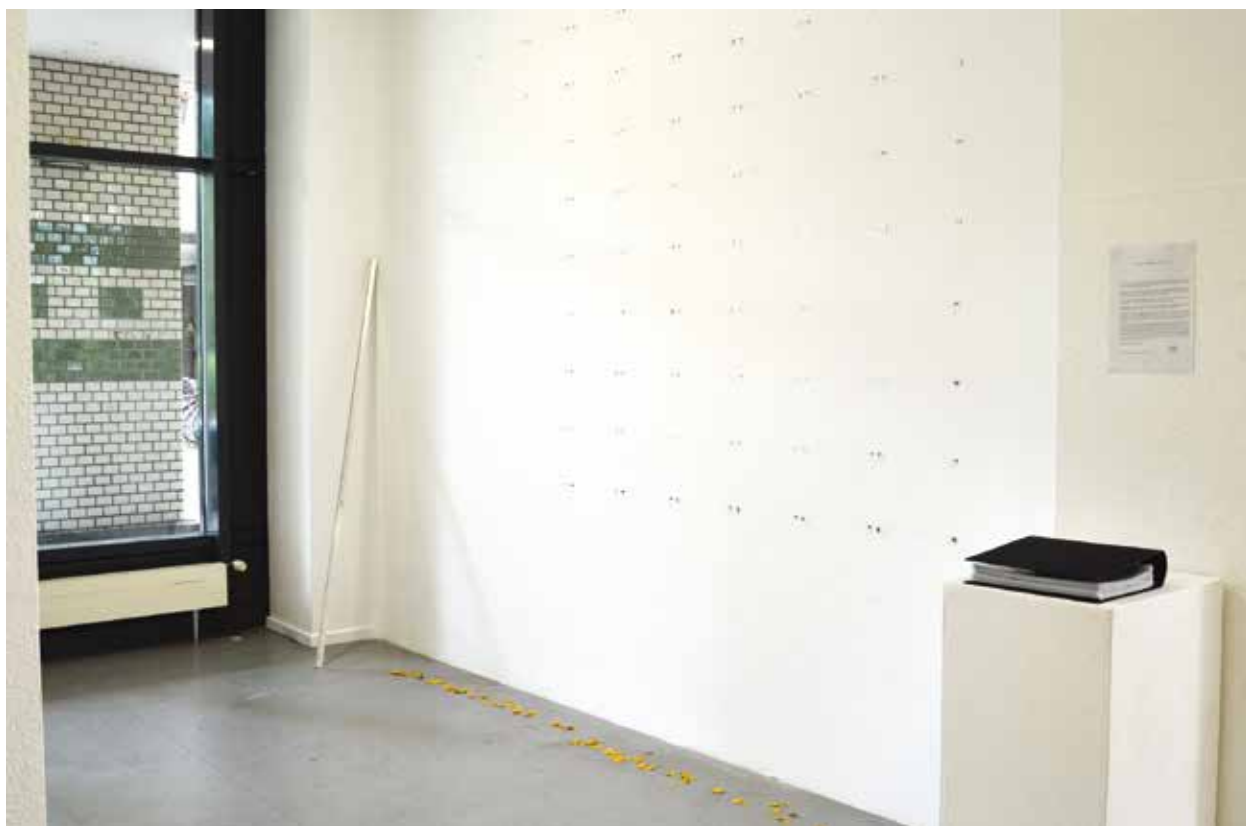
Shave Beards, Garners Condemnation From Russian Orthodox Church", in: *Huffington Post*, 2014 05 12, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/05/12/conchita-wurst-eurovision-victory-spurs-russians-to-shave-beards_n_5311973.html>.

33 Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide To Spiritual Enlightenment*, California: Namaste Publishing and New World Library Novato, 2004, p. 145.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, 'Untitled' (*Perfect Lovers*), Clocks, paint on wall, 35,6 x 71,2 x 7 cm, 1991.

36 T. Rollins, "The interview with Felix Gonzalez-Torres", in: *A.R.T Press*, 1993.



7. Adomas Danusevičius, *Don't steal the stick!*, 2015,
drawing installation

Adomas Danusevičius, *Tik nepavok lazdos!*, 2015,
piešinių instaliacija

imagery that would reduce the meanings of his works to a single category, or make them representative of a single perspective. As the artist commented, 'Two clocks side by side are more of a threat to power than the images of two guys giving each other a blow job, because it cannot use me as a rallying point into struggle to obliterate meaning.'³⁷

The creative process of *Don't steal the stick!* made me directly experience the significance of time in works of art for the first time. The transformations that occur in the course of time as a result of meeting new people, experiences, contemplation and deeply

felt moments are the most important in my life. There is neither time nor space, just this moment, an experienced phenomenon. There is only this second, this moment, and the present, in which we can feel the depth of the world. I choose to display a blank wall without any drawings, for the presently lived moment is very strong and powerful, and I want to share it with the audience here and now. This piece conveys a meeting of free people, which is eternal. I am focused on helping the viewer to *see* rather than representing.

This approach is similar to the concept of the fourth seal in Buddhism: 'In many philosophies or religions, the final goal is something that you can hold on to and keep. The final goal is the only thing that truly exists. But nirvana is not fabricated, so it is not

³⁷ T. Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 309.

something to be held on to. It is referred to as “beyond extremes”³⁸. Likewise, the purpose of my art is to raise awareness on the scale between various social constructs, to help the viewers to identify their place in the system of social norms, and possibly find higher-level self-consciousness in the middle ground far from the existing extremes.

SUMMARISED CONCLUSIONS

Homosexual men mask themselves in heteronormative society – by putting on normative camouflage, gays acquire greater power over other members of society. Public display of hegemonic masculinity enables them to gain more influence both in the outer circle of normative masculinity and in the inner gay circle. The manifestations of such masculinity in sports are artistically explored in my series of paintings *Camouflage Masculinity*, whose sub-cycle *Guiltless Touch* is devoted to heteronormativity in sports.

Dating websites perform the function of a kind of mirror, in which a gay man diligently represents himself not only to other users, but also, and most importantly, to himself. In dating profiles from Eastern Europe, representation of traits of hegemonic masculinity (athletic body, sexuality, strength, endurance, etc.) is very common, separate parts of the body are distinctly emphasised, and a fully unmasked body is rare. Textually in such camouflaged profiles gay men represent themselves via distinctive traits of hegemonic masculinity, frequently use negatives to describe the qualities they are looking for, and are often homophobic towards alternative masculinity. This indicates internal homophobia and censorship of homosexual men, who are trying to achieve the standards of heteronormative masculinity. In my work *Into the Dark I*

tried to connect the rapidly growing dating digitalisation with the above-mentioned tendencies of defining oneself by blurred identity.

There are many different and competing approaches to camp. Camp can be defined as a *sensibility that revels in artifice, stylization, theatricalization, irony, playfulness, and exaggeration; as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits; as the thrill of a whisper*. From the political perspective, camp is a *strategy for a situation*.

The aesthetics of camp in my artworks is derived directly from gay male culture. I completely agree with David M. Halperin that male homosexuality is *not only a sexual practice, but also a cultural practice, that there is a relation between sexuality and social or aesthetic form*. The core features of gay male culture (which are most despised and repudiated by the standards of heteronormative masculinity) are *gay male femininity, diva-worship, aestheticism, snobbery, drama, adoration of glamour, caricature of women, and obsession with the figure of the mother*. Many traditional gay male culture traits nowadays appear as some kind of homophobic stereotypes. These are frequently internalized by gay men themselves.

Campish dazzle as alternative masculinity represents many qualities, which are thoroughly hidden by heteronormative camouflage of many gay males, and it is not surprising that the antagonism between these two approaches is quite harsh. The strict distinction between *Camp* and *Beauty* is a direct product of hegemonic masculinity. In my artwork I decided to connect these two opposites by an ironical title *Camp Must Be Beautiful*.

It is surely very important for homosexual men to re-establish themselves after the prolonged pressure of hegemonic masculinity, and to some extent camp can be a great help. However, by escaping one (hetero)normative trap it is possible to fall into another trap of (homo)normativity. Hegemonic masculinity forces gay men to put on heteronormative camouflage,

38 D. Khyentse Rinpoche, “Buddhism in a Nutshell: The Four Seals of Dharma”, in: *Lion’s Roar*, 2000 03 01, [last accessed 2016-02-22], <<http://www.lionsroar.com/buddhism-nutshell-four-seals-dharma/>>.

although their true identity is pushing itself away from the established normative culture. Thus, being gay can potentially help to raise existential questions, not to be afraid to scrutinize social norms, and to be able to choose the path of self-cognition and to reach new patterns of thought and behaviour.

The analysis of *camouflage masculinity* and *campish dazzle* and corresponding artworks contributes to raising awareness on the scale between opposite social constructs and may help in a quest for identifying one's place in the system of social norms, as well as for possibly finding higher-level self-consciousness in the middle ground far from the existing extremes. An example of an artwork created from the position of such midpoint is *Don't steal the stick!* which represents an approach similar to the concept of the fourth seal in Buddhism: *Nirvana is beyond extremes*.

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ribų. Taigi homoseksualumas potencialiai gali padėti kelti svarbius egzistencinius klausimus, nebijoti persvarstyti socialines normas ir sukurti prielaidas galimybei pasirinkti kruopštaus sąmoningumo kelią bei pasiekti naujus mąstymo ir elgesio modelius. *Kamufliažinio vyriškumo*, *Kempiškojo blizgesio* ir susijusių meninių darbų analizė prisideda prie sąmoningumo ugdymo kažkur per vidurį tarp dviejų minėtų kraštutinių ir viena kitai priešiškių socialinių konstrukcijų.

KAMUFLIAŽINIS VYRIŠKUMAS IR KEMPIŠKASIS BLIZGESYS

Adomas Danusevičius

SANTRAUKA

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: kamufliažinis vyriškumas, gėjų kultūra, vizualinė reprezentacija, kempas.

Homoseksualūs vyrai užsimaskuoja heteronormatyvioje visuomenėje – užsidėdami normatyvinį kamufliažą gėjai įgyja daugiau galios santykyje su kitais visuomenės nariais. Hegemoninio vyriškumo viešas demonstravimas suteikia galimybę labiau įtakoti ir išoriniame hegemoninio vyriškumo, ir vidiniame gėjų laukuose. Pažinties tinklapių narių iš Rytų Europos anketose yra gausu hegemoniniam vyriškumui būdingų bruožų (atletiškas kūnas, seksualumas, jėga, ištvėrmė ir pan.), akcentuojamos atskiros kūno dalys, o visas kūnas rodomas retai. Tokio vyriškumo pasireiškimai sporte yra meniškai atskleisti mano sukurtų paveikslų cikle *Kamufliažinis vyriškumas*.

Kempiškasis blizgesys atskleidžia alternatyvųjų vyriškumą išryškindamas savybes, kurios daugelio homoseksualių vyrų yra slepiamos po heteronormatyvumo kamufliažu, todėl neturėtų stebinti didžiulis priešiškus tarp šių dviejų skirtingų požiūrių. Hegemoninio vyriškumo tiesioginis produktas yra griežta skirtis tarp *kempo* ir *grožio*. Šias dvi priešingybes nusprendžiau sujungti savo meno kūrinių cikle ironišku pavadinimu *Kempas turi būti gražus*.

Hegemoninis vyriškumas homoseksualius vyrus verčia naudoti heteronormatyvumo kamufliažą, nors jų tikrasis tapatumas juos stumia už įtvirtintos normatyvinės kultūros