

Zoe Dewitt

# I D E O L O G Y

*... is Slavoj Žižek right?*

Mandelkern Project

Vienna 2016

IDEOLOGIES are collections of ideas and beliefs held by an individual, a group or society. Their function is usually to strengthen the social coherence, often based on the claim that they represent the only true vision or world-view. They may appear as political ideologies imposed by governments on society, as implicit ideologies connected with social and economic systems (as capitalism in free market economy) or as specific philosophies of life shared by subcultural groups. In one of his lectures the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek illustrated his assertion that ideologies are present even in the most intimate spheres of everyday life by the following example:

Friends from Vienna told me that in avantgarde student circles the pubic haircut was strictly codified. There is the triangle, the new age hippie way, where everything grows profusely, the yuppie way, where only a small strip may be visible, and the punk style with pubic hair clean-shaven and rings hanging in the clitoris etc.\*

This statement was directed against Jean-François Lyotard and all those who proclaim the end of ideology as a characteristic trait of our postmodern times. But is Slavoj Žižek right, is there really a significant relation between the pubic hairstyle of individuals and the social or subcultural group they belong to? As a Vienna based artist and philosopher I decided to empirically reassess Žižek's argument by an artistic research and exhibition project. For that purpose I asked a number of individuals if they would be willing to let me take a photo of their pelvis zone and answer a question form regarding subcultural groups and political camps they feel close to or have been influenced by. The photos and the personal data were combined in the works shown in this catalogue and the exhibition which is going to take place at Mandelkern Project, Vienna, in December 2016.

As in any scientific and artistic work the given data is open to interpretation, and it may also be useful to have a look at the initial conditions of the investigation. The social back-

\* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwTJXHNP0bg&t=3so>

ground of the participants was broadly similar to the group which was named by Žižek as 'avantgarde student circles': A big majority of them were either artists or art students. As such they are probably not representative for the majority of students or society in general. So one could assume that this group itself shares to some extent a common ideology, which may partly be true and partly also not be true, as the participants of the study did not come from a homogenous social field or group, but rather represent a heterogenous aggregation of individuals with widely varying personal histories, national origins and cultural backgrounds. Despite this heterogenous character there were hardly to find individuals who could be considered as representatives of the subcultural groups named by Žižek. The avantgarde student circles of 2016 obviously do not consist of new age hippies, yuppies or punks, and I'm in serious doubt if that ever was the case. Even at the heyday of punk around 1980, when I had started to study philosophy in Vienna, there were almost no punks to be seen in the auditoriums of the university. On the other hand, students of other fields of study might be considered as belonging almost entirely to one of these groups, as it might be the case at universities of economics where the majority of students match with the yuppie stereotype that stands for a neoliberal carrier-oriented life plan. The hippie way of life, although frowned upon since the 1980s, is currently finding a new acceptance in some fields of art and society as a kind of alternative to prevailing ideologies that are considered by many as too sterile and hostile to life. Obviously Žižek's quote refers to a time that might be narrowed down to the 1980s or 1990s, and even if the situation has changed and became more complex since then, their ideological influences can still be found in many fields of everyday life and the way individuals and social groups style their bodies until the present.

As can be seen from the personal data given by the participants, the investigated group widely shares a common feminist conviction, and while the practice of shaving pubic hair has become increasingly common for several reasons within society in general, there is

a growing counter-position within younger feminist-influenced generations that refuse to meet male sexual expectations. Yet there is not only an ideological influence to the way bodies are styled: As I was told by most participants of the study their pubic hairstyles change in the course of seasons as well as according to their moods. The photos were taken in November, and if they were instead taken during summer the result would have been probably a different one. Another determining factor may be whether a person is in a sexually active phase or not. These facts obviously are a severe argument against Žižek's assertion, as individuals will very likely not change their world view or political orientation as often as they change their public haircut. One could of course say – and probably Žižek would argue in that way – that even the position of not following clear stylistic stereotypes is an ideological position, which might basically be true. On the other hand, as most of the participants were artists, one could likewise argue that art somehow is an antidote to fixed and prevailing ideologies as it grows in a field of openness and multi-layered meanings.

Based upon these considerations I wouldn't say that Slavoj Žižek was completely wrong or right in his assertion, even if there is no strict codification or obvious relation between pubic haircuts and individual worldviews to be found within the investigated group of persons. However, it was not the aim of the study to simply verify or falsify his statement. Though it basically followed a neutral and unbiased scientific method of research, it was not intended to be a scientific study, but rather a work of art. In that sense the interpretation of the given data is delivered to the viewers who may draw their own conclusions from the presented series of works. As any relevant work of art it hopefully serves to open up the view to realms that usually are hidden from our eyes.

Zoe Dewitt  
November 2016

I.

VIENNA RESIDENTS



name: acir

occupation: photographer, performance artist

subcultures: biopunk, hippie, glam rock, nerd, raver,  
riot grrrl, rocker, skater, science fiction fan

political orientation: green, postfeminist



name: agnes

occupation: mother, painter

subcultures: cyclist, hippie, nerd, new romantic,  
nudist, riot grrrl, witchcraft

political orientation: green, postfeminist



name: angela

occupation: art therapist

subcultures: bdsm community, hippie, punk subculture

political orientation: green, socialist, postfeminist





name: ariel

occupation: filmmaker

subcultures: lgbt community, punk subculture,  
queer culture, riot grrrl

political orientation: anarcho-syndicalist, queer-feminist



name: asta

occupation: photographer

subcultures: biopunk, cyberpunk, cybergoth, emo, nerd

political orientation: green, postfeminist



name: ava  
occupation: philosopher, performance artist  
subcultures: anarcho-punk, riot grrrl  
political orientation: social democrat, postfeminist



name: bella

occupation: multimedia artist

subcultures: afro-punk, lgtb community, queer culture

political orientation: green, postfeminist



name: ben

occupation: performance artist

subcultures: bdsm community, high culture, lgbt community,  
nerd, queer culture, video gamer, witchcraft

political orientation: transfeminist



name: copia

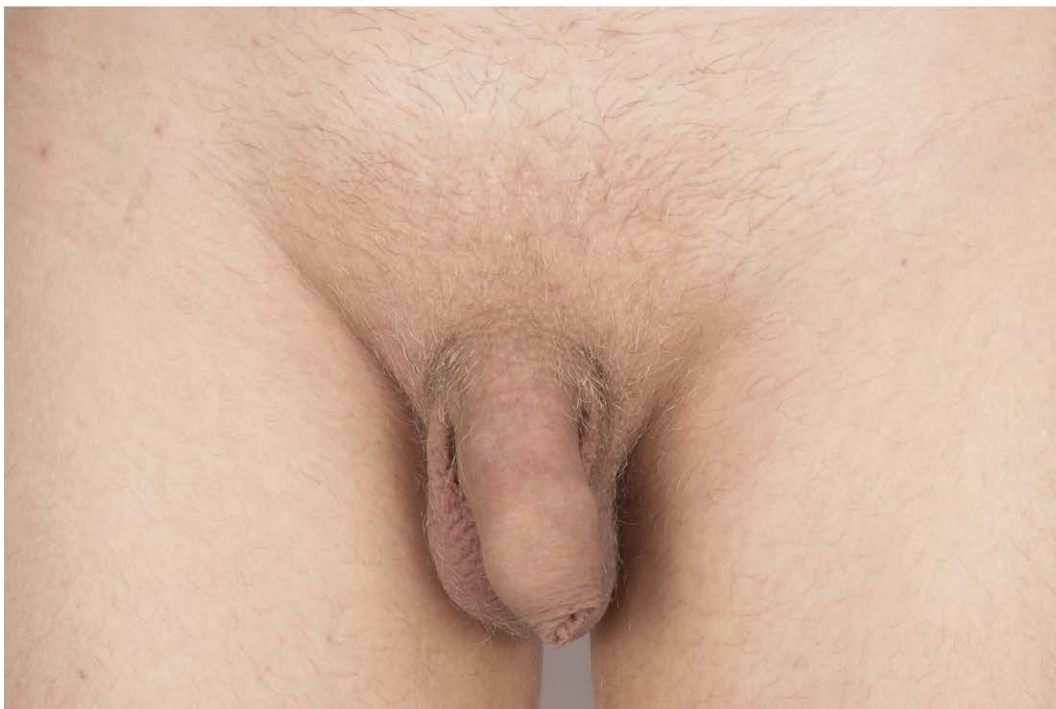
occupation: mother, lecturer, artist (voyeur)

subcultures: beatnik, high culture, hippie, lgtb community,

low culture, nudist, queer culture, raver, witchcraft

political orientation: anarchist, green, enlightenment, postfeminist





name: danielle

occupation: multimedia artist

subcultures: high culture, lgbt community, queer culture

political orientation: marxist/communist, transfeminist



name: dru

occupation: poet, performance artist

subcultures: cosplayer, hipster, lgtb community,  
queer culture, raver, rocker, swinger

political orientation: social democrat, queer-feminist





name: frantischek

occupation: visual and performance artist

subcultures: lgbt community, queer culture

political orientation: anarchist, queer-feminist

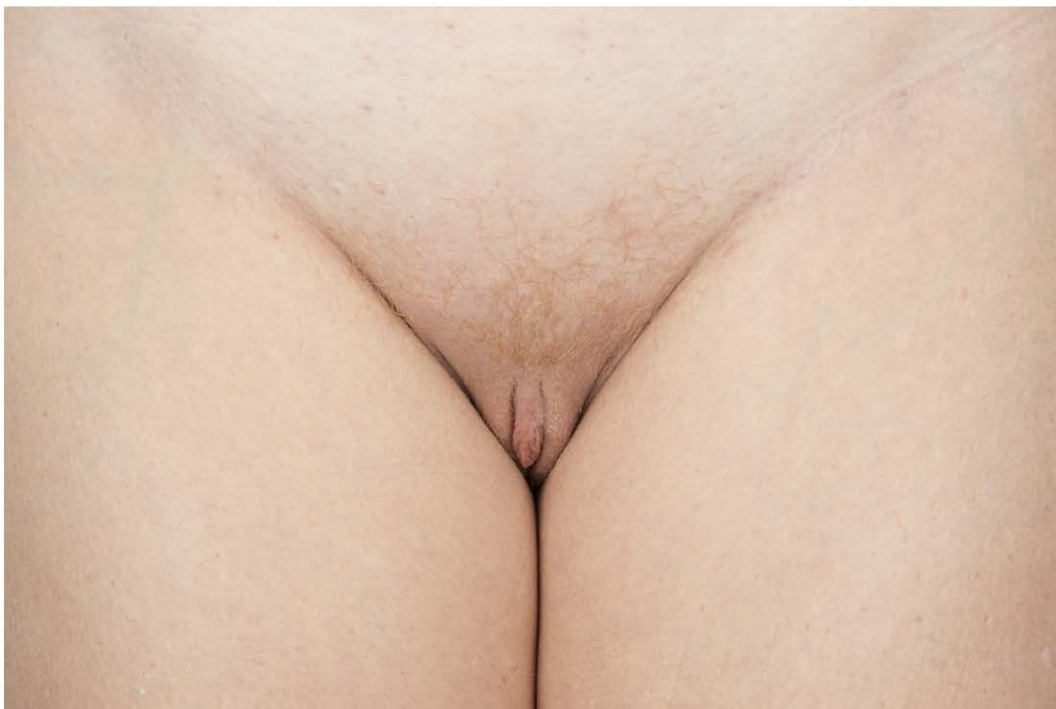


name: helmut

occupation: photographer

subcultures: bdsm community, hippie, industrial,  
nudist, psychedelic, satanist

political orientation: green

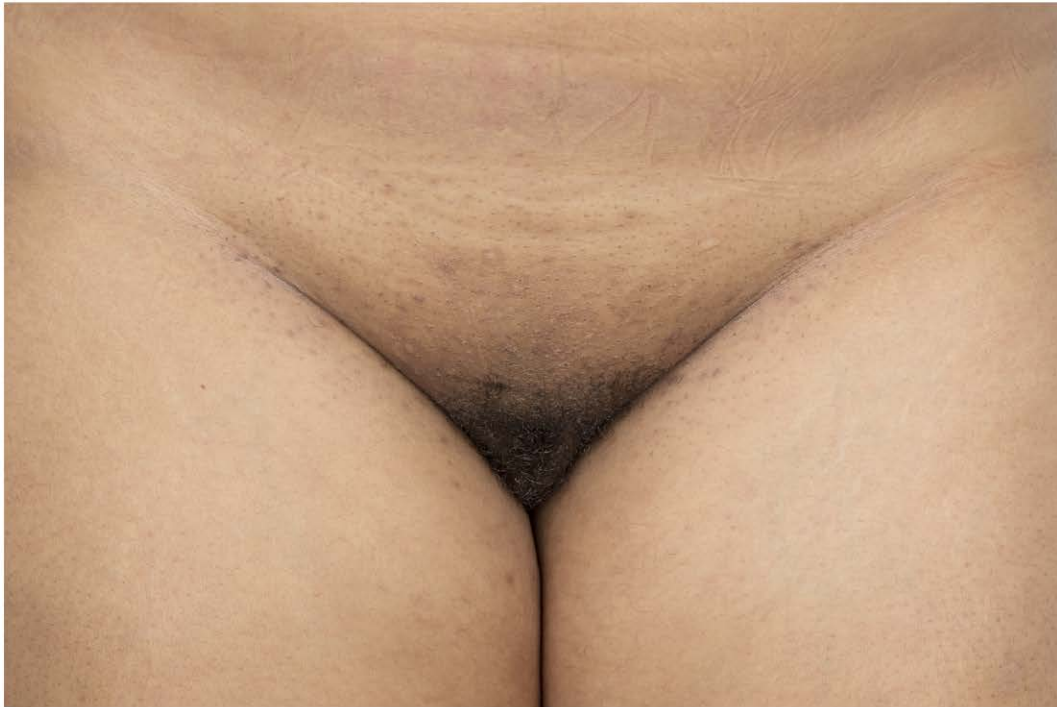


name: julia

occupation: performance artist, photographer

subcultures: lgbt community, queer culture, faux drag

political orientation: green, queer/postfeminist



name: liti

occupation: gallery employee

subcultures: hip hop, hippie, lgtb community,  
queer culture, science fiction fan

political orientation: green, queer-feminist



name: maria

occupation: researcher

subcultures: goth subculture, heavy metal, industrial, satanist

political orientation: feminist





name: max

occupation: philosopher

subcultures: nerd, science fiction fan

political orientation: social democrat, feminist



name: mori

occupation: photographer, video artist

subcultures: lgbt community, nudist

political orientation: green, queer-feminist



name: natascha  
occupation: graphic designer, musician  
subcultures: industrial, psychedelic, satanist  
political orientation: green, feminist





name: pauli

occupation: construction worker

subcultures: anarcho-punk, dark culture, hippie, skater

political orientation: marxist/communist, green

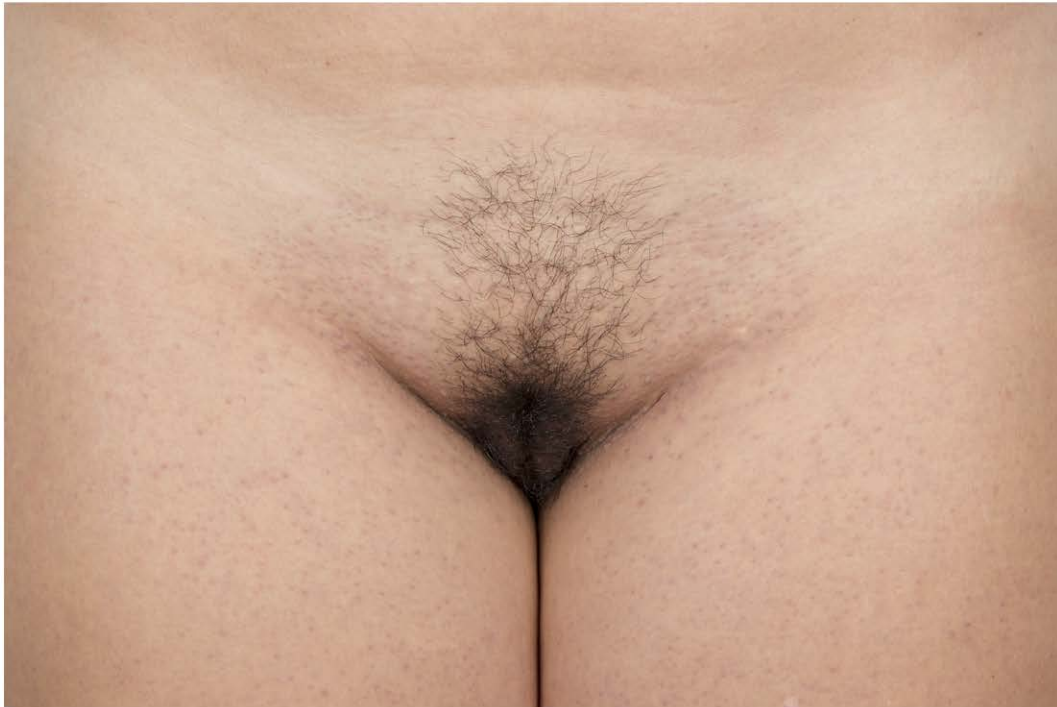


name: pedra

occupation: performance artist

subcultures: lgbt community, low culture, queer culture, witchcraft

political orientation: green, transfeminist



name: schieschie

occupation: cultural manager

subcultures: britpop, dark culture, goth subculture, new romantic,  
punk subculture, queer culture, riot grrrl, vampire lifestyle

political orientation: queer-feminist



name: sofi

occupation: collective artist

subcultures: hippie, hipster, queer culture, chicana culture

political orientation: intersectionalist, intersectional feminist



name: stefanie

occupation: performance artist, musician

subcultures: cyberpunk, high culture, hip hop, new age esoteric,  
punk subculture, raver, rocker

political orientation: green, postfeminist





name: svetlio

occupation: tatoo artist

subcultures: bdsm community, industrial, occultist

political orientation: green, feminist



name: veronika

occupation: author

subcultures: new age esoteric, new romantic

political orientation: marxist/communist, antifeminist



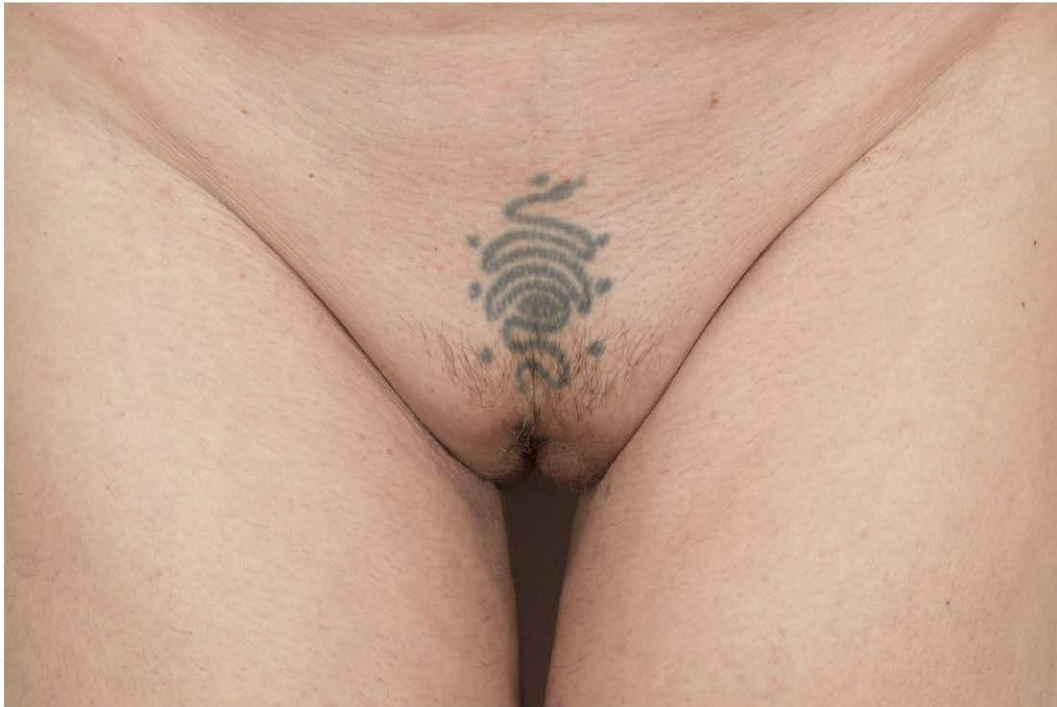
name: waxi

occupation: multimedia artist

subcultures: glam rock, new romantic, nudist,  
psychedelic, witchcraft

political orientation: postfeminist





name: zoe

occupation: multimedia artist, philosopher

subcultures: industrial, nerd, nudist, occultist,  
psychedelic, queer culture, witchcraft

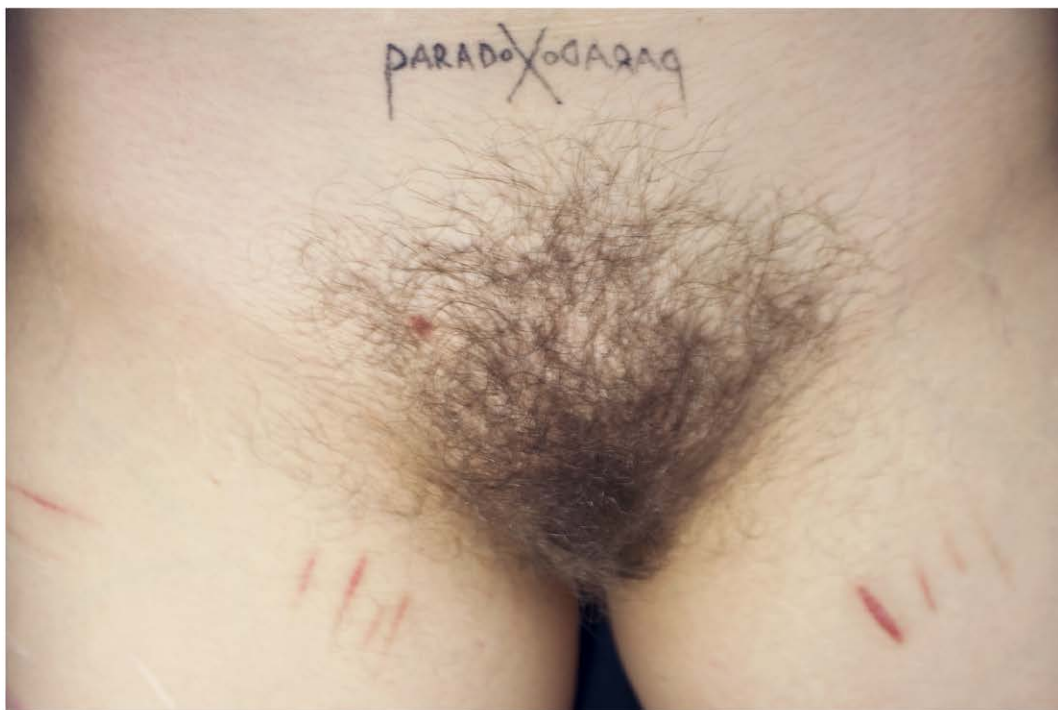
political orientation: green, transfeminist

II.

INTERNATIONAL SUBMISSIONS



name: catharzyna  
city: gothenburg, sweden  
occupation: consultant  
subcultures: satanist  
political orientation: nazi asshole



name: ingrid  
city: uppsala, sweden  
occupation: musician, philosopher, visual artist, writer  
subcultures: nerd, nudist, occultist, psychedelic,  
science fiction fan  
political orientation: none



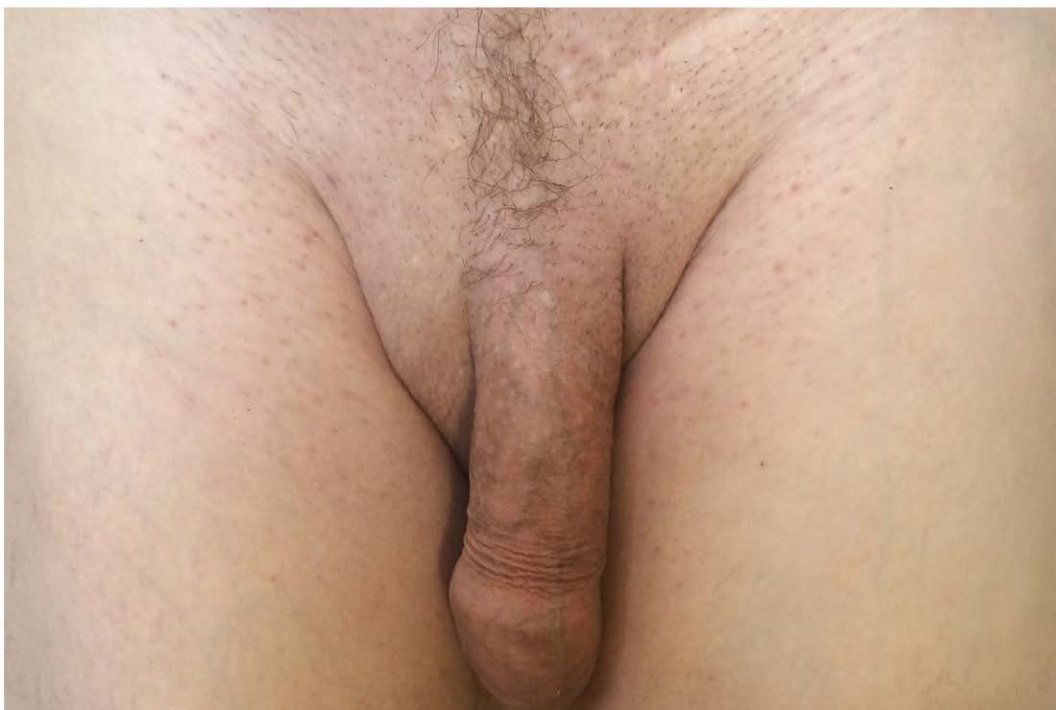
name: kristian

city: sundsvall, sweden

occupation: gallerist, musician, visual artist, writer

subcultures: industrial, psychedelic, occultist,  
satanist, anarch

political orientation: none



name: ruth

city: almaty, kazakhstan

occupation: performance artist

subcultures: electronic music, performing arts,

avant-garde and experimental cultures of modernity

political orientation: new materialist, queer-feminist,

leftist cosmo-politics



Further information:

[www.zoedewitt.com](http://www.zoedewitt.com)

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