ANARCHIVING "MEMORY": NORMATIVITY, AESTHETICS, AND CREATIVITY IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an autotheoretical and performative study of the relationship between normative power, everyday aesthetics, and creativity as it unfolds in "memory" of the Great Patriotic War in contemporary Russia. "Memory" of the war has increased in significance for Russia's national identity over Vladimir Putin's reign, most recently and visibly used to justify the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, "memory" of the GPW is irreducible to the well-studied official narrative of the war as a heroic sacrifice and the explicit, oppositional challenge to the regime and its policies. Rather, through the sheer extent of references to the war, which few of the living have witnessed, and their circulation across various disconnected contexts and sites, "memory" of the GPW constitutes an essential part of the everyday sensory background. As such, it is hardly possible to avoid and is important less for the specific meaning and more for the very fact of its punctuation as a component of "normal" life.

Departing from this observation, the thesis offers a dual intervention on the conceptual-empirical and aesthetico-political levels. First, the dissertation argues that the aestheticisation of "memory" contributes to the reproduction of the equivalence between the capacity to "remember" the war and being a member of the national community. However, it also enables the proliferation of instances where "memory" is treated simply as an everyday resource for creative experimentation and its memorial side is suspended. The thesis demonstrates both of these effects by drawing the cartography of various memorial signs, symbols and popular expressions, conceptualised with Guattari's term "refrain," and showing their circulation in high politics, popular culture, everyday life, and contemporary art. Such refrains of remembrance are important not only as aesthetic background but also as a matter of aesthetico-political practices in fields such as music and performance art that feed on the normativity of "memory" to transgress it.

Second, building on the tradition of autotheory and arts-based methods in IR, the text takes the creative attitude analysed here one step further and incorporates it into the research ethos and methodology to exhibit the process of disidentifying from "memory's" normativity. It does that by translating Erin Manning's concept of "anarchive" into the performative methodology of an aesthetic citational practice. As part of the anarchival process, the thesis experiments with ways of capturing and amplifying what in "memory" is irreducible to its "memorial" side. Through the wandering style of writing and situated techniques such as herbarium assembly and photographic performance, the thesis pursues an aesthetico-political task of articulating alternative discursive spaces related to "memory" in breaking with it. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to show the persistence and political significance of everyday creativity as the process of transgressing, trans- and de-forming social norms.

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CHAPTER 1. WHAT IS THIS THESIS (ABOUT)?

Introduction

One of the skills that I have not been able to master over the years of my academic training is the ability to translate the poststructuralist-jargon-filled language in which I developed the idea behind this dissertation into a simple, everyday language that most of my dearest people speak. The "What is your thesis about" question provokes a desire to explain what matters to me but somewhere in the middle of a detailed but simplified spoken abstract of my project I notice that it matters *only* to me. Boasting passion not patience, my parents are the ones who make the fading of my story's power the clearest in their habitually honest and bold manner. In a sudden interruption, they withdraw the original question and pose a new one instead.

And how do you think we are supposed to explain that to our friends?

Those "friends" might look like a distant figure of speech, but I know well the real persons inspiring it. I know the task is challenging – it is not a paraphrasal that is called for but an immaculate work of translation. That requires knowledge of both languages. It seems in learning the language of concepts though, I have forgotten the language of words. Now, to my parents' question, I can find none.

In a single sentence, my parents articulate two opposite worlds: one where they and their inner circle are too dumb to understand the academic language I speak, and one where I am too dumb to explain to them what it is that I have been paid to do for the past several years. The boundary between these worlds is solid, as my sudden puzzlement and bodily arrest make clear. I am an outsider. And yet, outside the *words* spoken, in the irritated *voice* my mother

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speaks with, I hear a request – to move, not freeze. *Learn to speak our language*. Neither an insult to the foreigner, nor an invitation to cross the border, but a powerful blow into the wall it is – a force unmaking the structure of inside/outside that the words articulate. Perhaps, the wall won't fall. But now at least there is a hole in a transparent bulletproof glass separating us, a hole that makes the appearance of glass visible. I still cannot pass through it. I am pulled into it, regardless.

Over the years of trying to respond to that pull (or in a more theoretical vocabulary, "interpellation") I have succumbed to building my replies to the "What is your thesis about?" question around the concepts of "collective memory" and "memory politics." Unlike the language of social norms, practices, agency, and the untranslatable into Russian word "negotiate" which I have used in every single phrasing of my primary research question, "collective memory," its multiple variations like "historical," "cultural," "social," and simply "memory," as well as many concepts associated with it are surrounded by a magical aura of clarity and conciseness, some elegance even. "Oh, now I see! This is actually interesting!" my parents' friend would tell me. Perhaps, some clarifications may be asked about the specific aspect of the "memory" I study, or whether my research is historical (it is not) – but the wandering, disinterested gaze and the request to forget that excessively intellectual environment I've become socialised into remain in the past. Adding "the Second World War" or better "the Great Patriotic War" (as the period from Nazi Germany's attack on the USSR until the former's defeat is called in Russia) to the "memory" part has an even more powerful effect, for the revised spoken abstract of my project is now not just clear, but above all else, relatable. "Oh, now I see! This is quite relevant!" To frame it slightly differently: "Oh, now I see. This is actually about *me*."

This thesis is indeed about her, as it is about me and the multiple instances of the "we" that emerge within and in response to the constant invocations of a single event in history that

we must not just *know* about but *remember* on a deeply personal level, even if by no means any of us, born long after June 22, 1941 – May 9, 1945, truly can. The starting point of the inquiry pursued here is that in contemporary Russia "The Great Patriotic War," the war of the past, is *everywhere in the present.* The state demands that the victory is commemorated at schools, universities, and workplaces through rituals such as historical reconstructions, poetry readings, laying of flowers, and storytelling. Countless monuments and memorials mark squares, streets, bridges, beaches, train stations, highways, and otherwise abandoned fields as the sites of war and memory, transforming urban and rural landscapes alike into an endlessly expanding memoryscape. Posters celebrating the victory hang upon the outer walls of buildings, decorate supermarkets, adjoin boards of honour at schools, and infosheets on disease transmission at hospitals not less than a month before and after Victory Day (as well as the local liberation days) – and sometimes indefinitely. War commemorations, such as the Immortal Regiment – an annual procession of people carrying portraits of their deceased – and the display of St George's ribbon (attached to any object one could imagine, including bags, cars, and trees) are the major mass rituals conjoining millions of people in a totalitarian form of democratic participation. Phrases of different emotional hues, such as "No one is forgotten. Nothing is forgotten," "Thanks to grandpa for the victory," "We can repeat," "Memory of the war lives in each family," "If only war never happened again," "Holiday with the tears upon eyes," "At 4 AM without a declaration of war" (but not the common in the West "Never again!") are stable linguistic expressions that make memory of the war an inherent part of common everyday language. Try as much as you can, you will not be able to avoid references to the Great Patriotic War in Russia. "Memory" of the war will find you – upon arrival to Saint-Petersburg by train or plane, on your way to a small surf camp on the shore of a lake, in an email from the state web portal that you cannot avoid because every single state service passes through it, in your child's narration of their day at school, in your friends' discussion of their plans for the

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weekend, in an algorithm-driven Instagram feed. It will find you in the unchanging president's constant ramblings about history, a liberal friend's rage over your unsympathetic comments about Victory Day, and a 20-plus-year-old emigrant talking about war and "memory" when you only wanted to know what his research was about after not seeing him for years. And if somehow you manage to avoid all that and retreat into the farthest village, there will still be a neighbour to place a huge "Victory banner" – a reiteration of the Soviet flag accomplished with the name of a division that placed it on top of the Reichstag towards the end of the war – in the middle of their plot so that it can be seen from the farthest corner of the locale.

It is that scattered yet intense and seemingly unavoidable field of remembrance that I direct my inquiry into. When "memory" of a single event that none of us can remember reaches such an extent, when references to the imaginary past become an inherent part of everyday landscapes, when symbols and rituals burst out with meaningfulness, absorbing everything and everyone into a single interpretive frame and at the same time are repeated to the extent that all meaning they might have is lost, it is futile to focus on the narrative content of "memory" because *if you dig deep enough, you will find any particular "memory" whatsoever.* What you may have much more trouble finding are suggestions that we *should not* remember the war. And even if you do discover (or worse, make!) such statements, you may find out that they reaffirm the authority of "memory" – not only by provoking accusations of blasphemy and potentially a violent response from the police but also by relying on the same fundamental assumption that we *can* remember. In this sense, any talk of "memory" of the unexperienced past carries assumptions about capacity – and calls to act (or not) upon it. It is deeply *normative*. "We remember," that seemingly factual statement that in Russia is usually expressed as "memory of the war lives in each family," appears to be an implicit order: if you are truly a part of a national community, you must find a memory of the Great Patriotic War in your family. If you want to be a part of our "we," *you must remember*.

What I have tried to understand for the past five years – and what this thesis asks about – is how that normative call is enacted and reproduced, but more importantly challenged, transformed, and suspended (or again, that untranslatable into my parents' language word "negotiated"). The basic theoretical premise upon which I have developed this project is that interpellation is rarely straightforward – it demands a response but does not determine the precise form that response takes. We are fundamentally unfree, as Butler (2005) would say, because the very terms through which I can speak of myself are not of my making and the very act of self-narration happens in relation to another. But the social norms through which my 'I' comes into being are both "an *enabling* and limiting field of constraint." (Butler 2005, 19, emphasis mine) They bind but do not determine me. They leave space (once again, however limited it may be) for crafting oneself within and in relation to them, including space for questioning these norms, even if such an operation puts my 'I' in ontological, and in the empirical case of this thesis very material, risk. As Fred Moten, another crucial inspiration for this project, puts it, "to be interpellated, to be rendered subject, is to be put in profound existential trouble" (2018, 207). The question is how to call "interpellative trouble into its own troubled being (where being is understood as the regulation of living)" (ibid, 208). It is that space of limited agency, the parameters of freedom and creativity to constitute oneself, the community and "memory" within such a normative framework and, from within, to suspend it, that this thesis addresses. The central question guiding my research is:

How does remembrance of the Great Patriotic War become a social norm in contemporary Russia and how is its normativity negotiated in everyday life?

The problem is, my research question is quite far from an inquiry into "collective memory" proper. Rather, it is a study of the relationship between social norms, power, and

subjectivity in a specific context. It is also an inquiry into everyday aesthetics and creativity, the capacity to inhabit social structures otherwise than how they demand us to do, to find pockets of freedom under a repressive – and in the case of contemporary Russia, very depressive – environment, and in these pockets to invent and enact modes of life-living that refuse to be assimilated by the categories distributed to keep the norm in place. It is an attempt to see what escapes and exceeds the discourse of "collective memory" in the objects deeply infused by it, what works against that discourse in the sensorial background that provides necessary everyday support to it. It is driven by the desire to understand how to free oneself from the pressure of "collective memory" discourse and to imagine what kinds of "I" and "we" may enter the horizon of thought and imagination once that pressure is no longer experienced. In this chapter, which both introduces the thesis as a whole and establishes its major theoretical and methodological foundations, I unpack these lines in three parts that capture the themes together constituting the core of what this thesis is (about): *normativity of "memory," aesthetics and creativity*, and *critical ethos and creative methods*.

But this is quite far from what my parents would like to hear.

Too vague.

Too *abstract*.

And how do you think we are supposed to explain that to our friends?

Normativity of "collective memory"

Before returning to the questions of explanation, translation, normativity, aesthetics, and that stubborn but untranslatable and hence incomprehensible in the language of my parents and their friends "negotiation" though, let me make a slightly more familiar detour and establish the historical socio-political context within which I find all these terms and lines of inquiry inseparable from "memory" – and more importantly, within which I find their inseparability from "memory" an academic problem and a political opportunity.

In *The Living and The Dead*, Nina Tumarkin (1994) reconstructs the rise and decline of the GPW victory's mythical status in the USSR. Through archival and sociological research conducted in the last years of the Soviet Union's existence, Tumarkin shows that although the question of how to commemorate the war had been important for each Communist Party leadership, the emergence of the victory as the founding myth of the state coincided with the crisis of ideology and bureaucratisation of the state during Brezhnev's rule (known as "the period of stagnation"). As the promise of future utopia was losing power, particularly among "an increasingly disaffected, alienated, and alcohol-prone youth" (Tumarkin 1994, 130), it was the recent event of grandiose scale, the war that was won at the cost of almost thirty million lives of Soviet citizens and devastation of the country's economy, could become the source of social cohesion, as the authorities believed. As Tumarkin puts it, the appeal of the war memory was that "in its idealized form, the war had everything: violence, drama, martyrdom, success, and a chic global status" (ibid, 132). That "everything" was put into play through excessive ritualisation of remembrance aiming "to shame young people into feeling respect for their elders or, as a minimum goal, into behaving obediently in their presence" (ibid, 133). It is also then that the official story of the war stabilised:

> "The master narrative's basic plot: collectivization and rapid industrialization under the First and Second Five-Year Plans prepared our country for war, and despite the overpowering surprise attack by the fascist beast and its inhuman wartime practices, despite the loss of twenty million valiant martyrs to the cause, our country, under the leadership of the Communist Party headed by Comrade Stalin, arose as one united front and expelled the enemy from our own territory and that of Eastern Europe, thus saving Europe – and the world – from fascist enslavement." (ibid, 134)

That story survived the collapse of the Soviet Union, even if without the references to Communist Party, and with the pre- and post-war violence a little more acknowledged. After the brief yet radical period of breaking with everything Soviet, the state, in dire need of finding symbolic sources of legitimacy, turned towards the GPW as the familiar object of national pride – but also an event that could be commemorated without the similarly familiar yet no longer

adequate references to Lenin, revolution, and communism (Malinova 2017, 45). For Yeltsin, turning the military parades (previously held only on the anniversary of the October Revolution and jubilees of the Victory) into an annual May 9 ritual was also a way "to re-appropriate the patriotic space occupied by his communist and nationalist opponents" amidst the crisis of legitimacy he endured (Markwick 2012, 709). It was under Putin, however, where commemorations of the war reached an unprecedented scale, with massive May 9 parades held in Moscow and smaller ones in other cities, all the local and national rituals and practices of Brezhnev's time revived, and references to the war appearing in random presidential speeches. Through references to the GPW Putin positions Russia in continuity with the glorious Soviet past and invokes the country's "great power" identity (Reshetnikov 2024), legitimising aggressive foreign policy and authoritarian reforms together with building his own public image. Meeting with the veterans, reminding the citizens of his own family's story of the war and leading commemorations, he positions himself as "dutiful son, solicitous father, and leader of men" (Wood 2011, 175). In the 2000s, commemorations of the war became a foreign policy tool of reaching out to Russians and Russian-speakers abroad (Danilova 2015, 179). Moreover, reflecting on world politics and the USSR's role in it in the 1930s-1940s, Putin also frames the Soviet Union as a victim-turned-hero of the world order at the time, and "the West" as malicious and opportunist, transposing that representational structure upon contemporary Russia, the United States and the EU (Kucherenko 2022; Pörzgen 2022, 238-240). The most striking example of such a representational system put in play is the war in Ukraine, largely framed by the authorities and propaganda as a modern reincarnation of the GPW since 2014 (Fedor, Lewis, and Zhurzhenko 2017, 5; Gaufman 2015; McGlynn 2020), and officially codified as such in 2022, when "denazification" of Ukraine was proclaimed as one of the full-scale invasion's major goals (Bækken 2023). Public expressions of disagreement with the narrative of heroic sacrifice (and, since 2021, offense of veterans and the memory of the war more broadly) are

potentially punishable by law under article 354.1 of the criminal code ("Rehabilitation of Nazism," up to five years in prison) (Edele 2017).

While in Russia such a framing of the victory in the GPW has accompanied an overall conservative turn of the state ideology, it is a system of representations that has been well-researched in nationalism studies and International Relations (IR). The classics of nationalism underscore that a nation has to be "imagined" (Anderson 2006, 6) and that the invention of the past secures the imaginary of a nation as a homogeneous entity exceeding any particular individual (Hobsbawm 2012). Poststructuralist IR further unpacks this position by showing the necessity for that imagination to be sustained through repeating practices of statehood, such as the delineation of new threats from which protection has to be sought (Campbell 1992; Shapiro 1997). By approaching statehood as performative, that is, lacking any ontological foundation outside and prior to the repetition of practices that the state performs, scholars show the significance of repeating certain practices for the state to continue its existence. In such a performative ontology the state exists through its actions, or as David Campbell puts it, "For a state to end its practices of representation would be to expose its lack of prediscursive foundations; stasis would be death" (1992, 11).

Studies of trauma, memory, statehood and (national) identity further point out that traumatic events such as wars, genocides and revolutions provide powerful past referents for the present-day nations (Auchter 2014; 2019; Bell 2006; Edkins 2003; Rai 2014; Zehfuss 2003; 2007). These studies specify the temporal dimension in the construction of national identity: by positioning the past into the narratives of heroic sacrifice, in which the same ahistorical nation just follows through a sequence of events, states place the trauma in a stable, coherent "linear time" (Edkins 2003, xiv). Ruptures, discontinuities, and the state's failure to provide security are made invisible under the linear reconstructions of the national past (ibid, 13-16).

As these studies also show though, the state's narratives of the national past are first and foremost pretenses for representing the whole nation and attempts to create a homogenous community by crafting a "memory" of the past that would be shared by the members of the collective. The process of constructing the state's "biographical narrative" (Berenskoetter 2014) does not immediately efface differences between the citizens but rather (often unsuccessfully) suppresses them, turning memory into a security issue (Mälksoo 2015) that can be used to legitimise the very existence of the state, provide a stable identity for it as a coherent unit, capable of acting and exercising its sovereign power upon people. In this light, Duncan Bell suggests abandoning the notion of "collective memory" at all, since its 'collectiveness' is always subverted by the multiplicity and diversity of (indissociable from the society) personal memories, no matter how authentic they are (Bell 2003; 65). Tumarkin shows such failure of the official "memory" under the weight of multiple personal memories and unofficial commemorations in the Soviet Union too. The story of the USSR saving the world through its heroic sacrifice, narrated through numerous war memorials, taught at schools, and extra-curricular "military-patriotic education" that involved (semi-)forced participation of children and young people in joyful militarised public performances was only a part of the war remembrance. It relied on the broader, more diffuse memory of the war preserved through the continuing lives of the war generation, family gatherings, and spontaneous meetings of veterans; that (for a while) lived regardless, despite the specific official memory politics; that stood *against* the conservation of memory through official rituals. That memory seemed to be only sustained by the censorship of what could be said about the war, as the memoirists and storytellers learnt to trick the censors, to preserve the original manuscripts, and to keep the stories in mind to tell them as soon as the space for sharing that which did not fit the myth of heroic Victory opened up.

The everyday disbelief in and discontent with the official GPW commemorations that Tumarkin shows persist in contemporary Russia. Krawatzek and Frieß' (2023) study based on the focus groups including urban youth shows that while people of various ideological orientations agree on the need to remember the war, that "memory" often fits anti-government sentiment and becomes the source of its critique. Most research on remembrance of the GPW in Russia sidesteps the resistance and alternatives to official commemorations though. Historical (Edele 2017; Pain 2006; Sherlock 2007; Omelicheva 2017), discursive (Foxall 2013; Luxmoore 2019; Riabov and Riabova 2014; Wood 2011), and ethnographic (Bernstein 2016; Davis 2018) studies show that the 'myth' of Great Patriotic War operates on multiple social levels, manifesting itself in a range of socio-political setting from the president's biographical interviews through schools, museums, popular songs and films to commemorative lunches and laying flowers at the graveyards. Yet, in most of these studies the multiplicity of settings, interaction between them and complexity of ways in which people relate to the war, to the state's use of its memory as well as to the familial past is reduced to an image of dynamic, yet homogenous support for the government's nationalist heroic discourse of the Great Patriotic War. "Affective management of history," whose effect is that "facts and events of the past are not registered for their historical significance; they are emotionally relived and reenacted (*perezhivaiutsia*)" (Oushakine 2013, 274), seems to be a perfect managerial accomplishment that does not backfire and makes all the citizen-employees united in performing meaningless rituals. As a result, studies of memory politics in Russia further concede the Great Patriotic War to the state, reifying the connection between "memory of the war" and "the regime," instead of acknowledging how the latter feeds on the former and asking how that relationship can be broken or is already questioned – even if in subtle, not necessarily outright confrontational ways.

In this thesis I address this gap by studying many examples of using "memory" of the Great Patriotic War in popular culture, contemporary art, and political activism to challenge contemporary Russia's authoritarianism and militarism, as well the minor everyday instances of "remembering" that cannot be reduced to either supporting or explicitly resisting the state and its narrative of the war. However, unlike autobiographies and collections of stories written and edited by Soviet dissidents that Tumarkin studies as examples of counter-memory, these cases do not contain any lived memory of the war. As soon as we forget about the Soviet Union, which became an object of history and memory more than thirty years ago, and focus on contemporary Russia, we have to acknowledge that everyone who could remember the GPW, except the few centenarians, is dead. Why, acknowledging that there is no homogenous collective body and mind remembering its past should we call memory "collective"? Why, arguing that it is through the practices of doing presentist history and embodying it as our and my own that we emerge as "we," and "I" as a part of it, should we call these practices "memory"? Does not critique of memorialisation reproduce the essentialist imaginary of a nation as a collective "body" by reiterating the same word "memory" that is at the heart of such an imaginary – even if behind this word now stands a heavy weight of an academic concept? In the next section, I address these questions and show that as a concept "collective memory" performs similar series of normative exclusions as its everyday counterpart.

Normativity of "collective memory" concept

Already in the work of Maurice Halbwachs, discovered and made canonical by the 1970s-80s memory studies, we can find a conceptualisation of what it means to remember as a part of the collective that both emphasises the normative power of "memory" and is quite different from the everyday, nation-oriented use of the word. First and foremost, it is crucial to underline that as primarily a sociologist, Halbwachs focused mostly on the relationship between individual memories and the social environment within which they emerge, not on any archive

of a group history that would today be said to constitute its "memory." The starting premise and the major argument of Halbwachs' work on memory is that "in reality, we are never alone" (1980, 23). Looking at multiple instances of remembrance, including childhood and adult memories, events recalled when one seems to be alone and in the immediate presence of others, he argues that there is no such thing as "individual memory" closed in upon itself because we are always a part of some group, and our memories are infused with images of interaction with others (ibid, 33-35). Moreover, it is in such interactions that we recall, mould, and reconstruct the past. If we are unable to do so, then it means that we are no longer – or perhaps have never even been – a part of this group and that there is no longer a connection between myself and the social environment in which my memories originate (Halbwachs 1980, 26-27). This does not mean that all the memories in the group are the same. It does mean however, that despite the gaps and discrepancies between our memories, in this act of remembering and in the picture it evokes the members of the group stand together.

Importantly, to the question of whether I can remember the events that I have not experienced, Halbwachs gives a definite answer: "I can *imagine* them, but I cannot remember them" (1980, 52, emphasis mine). These events form "a historical memory" that reaches me only as a collection of (no matter how distorted) facts, as opposed to the "lived history" that is inseparable from the lived experiences of the group members, dies together with the last of those who experienced the event and in this way changes through generations (ibid, 56-57). The former may be easier to pin down, to understand, to know, but its emergence coincides with the end of the latter: "General history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up. So long as a remembrance continues to exist, it is useless to set it down in writing or otherwise fix it in memory" (ibid, 78).

Therefore, the story of what is usually called the GPW "memory" in Russia – an assemblage of small- and large-scale rituals, statements, cultural artifacts that have the war as

their referent, and institutions guarding them – is not of "the collective memory" in Halbwachs' use of the term. This absence of collective memory concerns not only the exploitation and cultivation of the victory in the war to legitimise aggressive foreign policy and repressive practices against the critics of the regime, but also more genuine and personal commemorations of family members who fought in the war. Whether we talk about May 9 military parades (that were only held in the Soviet Union in 1965, 1985, and 1990, Pörzgen 2022, 237) and "the military-patriotic education" that, through various movements and educational projects, teaches children and youth that to love Mother-Fatherland is to love authorities and warfare (Alava 2021; Danilova 2015, 176-183; Sieca-Kozlowski 2010), or movements of enthusiasts searching for the remains of the dead (Dahlin 2017), people searching for and sharing information on their wartime ancestors on internet, and criticizing the state for the lack of support for the veterans, calling these instances "a memory" only conceals the fact that there is no one left who can truly remember. It "hide[s] a widespread anxiety related to the current moment of generational change and to entering a new world without the "war generation" whose moral authority was almost univocally accepted in fragmented and politically polarized post-Soviet societies" (Fedor, Lewis, and Zhurzhenko 2017, 3). We can very well remember the relatives who survived the war, but we cannot remember the war.

These detached conceptual reflections help little to understand why the practices of thinking about, studying and reenacting moments from long-passed events still acquire a status of *memory* – like commemorations of the Great Patriotic War in the 21st century Russia – and what their elevation to that status does. Halbwachs may argue that "'historical memory' is a rather unfortunate expression because it connects two terms opposed in more than one aspect" (1980, 78) but this does not change the fact of the colloquium's everyday use (and in Russia it is used more frequently than "collective memory"). In other words, while his work is helpful for understanding the social dynamics of memory formation, persistence, and change, it does

not (directly) address the socio-political consequences of calling "memory" something that is not and claiming "to remember" when in reality we – and I – cannot.

Two parts of Halbwachs' theory deserve closer critical examination. First, as I have already mentioned, Halbwachs easily accepts the fact that not everyone can remember an event from the past and that not every event can be remembered by anyone in the present. He turns that difference into a marker of being a part of the group – if a person listens to another talking about the past they experienced together with other people and cannot remember it, this simply means they are no longer a part of the same group (1980, 24-30). But whereas Halbwachs focuses on the emotional investment into the past and the necessity of social bonds' persistence for the continuation of memory, he does not consider the emotional effects of these bonds' collapse, as well as of their persistence despite the person's incapacity to relate to what other members of the group consider important. In other words, he does not consider the ease with which not being a member of the group transforms into the feeling of *not belonging* to it. Halbwachs discovers that the very *capacity to remember*, regardless of the memory's content, is one of the many markers through which membership in the group is asserted and the boundary distinguishing it from the outside is drawn. In short, he exposes the *normative* aspect of memory. Yet, the disregard of the effects of such a practice and the treatment of it as a simple fact effectively *normalises* it.

Second, Halbwachs does not deem a nation a group worthy of consideration in relation to the collective memory because it is simply too large for its members to maintain a strong connection. As he writes, "ordinarily, however, the nation is too remote from the individual for him to consider the history of his country as anything else than a very large framework with which his own history makes contact at only a few points" (Halbwachs 1980, 77). Debatable as such a statement may be (after all, other sites of socialisation Halbwachs considers – primarily family and school – are inseparable from the state), it leads him to completely forego

any discussion of the practices through which nations assert themselves as the groups comparable to and even more important than those we most immediately associate ourselves with. While undoubtedly Halbwachs worked at a time when no television, let alone the internet, could magnify the scale of interactions and experience, by downplaying the role of larger communities in the constitution of the self, he effectively falls short of interrogating the interpenetration of "historical" and "collective" memories, and their substitution by one another.

The simplest explanation for the latter shortcoming is that at the time of Halbwachs' writing – the interwar period in France – the different "memories," as well as "memory" and "history" were not often confused though. It was only in the 1970s that "memory" became a popular term both in everyday life and in academic discourse within a broad Western "memory boom" (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011; Winter 2001; 2006). The most common explanations of this boom's emergence revolve around the perception of the increased density and speed of history (and thus the decreasing capacity to hold on to the ever-passing present), accumulation of, and the increasing distance from the recent large-scale traumatic events (particularly Holocaust), and the rapid progress in our technological capacity to create large, accessible multi-media archives (Nora 1989; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011, 14-16; Winter 2001).

"Memory" entered academic discourse around the same time, both as an attempt to grasp the public interest in memory and as an integral part of it (Gensburger 2016; Klein 2000; Winter 2001; 2006). Here "memory" offered a more fragmentary, partial, embodied alternative to old-fashioned and long-debunked "history" that seemed to accommodate both the poststructuralist critique of knowledge and the rising demands of identity politics (Klein 143-144). It also offered an alternative to concepts such as "culture" that suffered the same fate (Berliner 2005). It is as a part of this trend that Halbwachs' work was "discovered" and

retrospectively included into the newly invented canon of memory thinkers. However, unlike other such philosophers and theorists, Halbwachs indeed conceptualised memory and did not simply write about themes that scholars would label "memory" later. [2] Still, that conceptualisation seemed to be insufficient, for his major book on memory titled *Social Frameworks of Memory* [*Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, 1925] had to be coupled with excerpts from another work and together issued in English under the title *On Collective Memory* despite the existence of a separate posthumous book originally titled *The Collective Memory* [*La mémoire collective*, 1950]. Obviously, translation sacrifices quite a lot of the title's specificity in what the work was really about. However, it simplifies the reception of an old book within the present-day intellectual trends and simultaneously offers legitimation of an inquiry into the newly found phenomenon by establishing a tradition within which that inquiry proceeds.

Kerwin Lee Klein argues that the result of such a retrospective attribution of a foundational role is that "we speak quite often of collective memory but seem not to mean what Maurice Halbwachs meant by that term… , although the new memory studies frequently invoke the ways in which memory is socially constructed, Freudian vocabularies are far more common than Halbwachsian or even Lacanian ones" (2000, 135). Multiple alternatives to "collective memory" proliferate in memory studies, including "social" (Climo and Cattell 2002; Olick and Robbins 1998) "cultural" (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995; Ben-Ammos and Weissberg 1999; Erll and Nünning 2010), "public" (Dickinson, Blair, and Ott 2010; Phillips 2004) and "popular" (Brabazon 2005) memories – and in their different ways, these terms account for the evocations of the past that exceed one's life yet are embodied as one's own. But they only describe "the social frameworks" that shape individual memories or "the process of culture itself" (Berliner

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[2] For instance, Nietzsche's essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1997) is often considered one of the earliest modern conceptualisations and critiques of memory and is treated as the canonic text in memory studies, despite the fact that Nietzsche explicitly referred to his subject as "history" and only used "memory" (and especially "forgetting") as an introductory analogy.

2005) and explicitly contradict Halbwachs' fierce rejection of the application of the word "memory" to the past that happened before anyone living could experience it.

Klein suggests that the appeal of "memory" for critical scholarship could be found not so much in its displacement of history but in providing "a therapeutic alternative" to it (2000, 145). As he sharply notices, "we sometimes use memory as a synonym for history to soften our prose, to humanize it, and to make it more accessible. Memory simply sounds less distant, and perhaps for that reason, it often serves to help draw general readers into a sense of the relevance of history for their own lives" (ibid, 129). Similarly, Gedi and Elam argue that "the employment of "collective memory" can be justified only on a metaphorical level - and this is how historians of old have always employed it - as a general code name for something that is supposedly behind myths, traditions, customs, cults, all of which represent the "spirit," the "psyche," of a society, a tribe, a nation" (1996, 35). It is a "pass-word" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 110) between the academic and the everyday, between the world of concepts and the world of words. It is a word that my parents can understand and critical academics would find complex enough. Or, as Klein puts it, "it promises to let us have our essentialism and deconstruct it, too" (2000, 144).

In this thesis, I join these critics of the concept "collective memory" who highlight multiple contradictions and simplified generalisations built into it. My argument is that this concept-word is deeply *normative*, and as such, also *exclusionary*. It relies on the assumption that the group and its constituent members *can* remember an event (even if they do remember it differently, and no matter how distorted their memories are). The assumption of that capacity translates into a prerequisite: as soon as we evoke "collective memory," we imply that to be a part of the "collective" one must be able to remember. If you can't remember, and the group does, that simply means you are not a part of the group. The *in*capacity to remember (which is different from forgetting) turns into a marker of exclusion. When, against Halbwachs' explicit

limitation of the concept to lived experience, we extend "collective memory" onto a past that people cannot remember because it precedes their ability to experience, we only allow that kind of norm-based exclusion to thrive – and provide, not challenge, the epistemological foundations for modern nation-states to exercise their power and violence.

Yet, the persistence of a "memory" imaginary in everyday life makes both that phenomenon and the word used to describe it impossible to simply dismiss. What may have been sedimented through critical academic work, now appears to pose a challenge to it. How can we study that real, even if fundamentally flawed field of "memory" without reproducing all the normative, exclusionary lines built into the word? The two major alternatives to "memory" rather than "collective" are "remembrance" and "a myth." The former, endorsed by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, is "an activity of individuals coming together in public to recall the past" (2000, 11). It reorients our attention towards the acts of bringing and making the past in the present. It also performs conceptual distancing from the state to the people participating in commemorative practices. Yet, in turning our attention toward the making of both the collective and the past, it remains attached to the idea that what is made is *memory* – as Winter and Sivan's more frequent use of the word demonstrates. In its turn, "myth" foregrounds these practices' function of providing the origins for the collective, no matter what part of the story of that origin is imaginary or real (see Davis 2018, 14-26). Yet, the term carries a dismissive tone that distances the people believing in it from scholarly accounts through a "progressive" temporal distinction between "primitive" myths and "advanced" knowledge of them.

It seems that the choice is then between either returning to the practice of the past and risking a dangerously arrogant relationship to the fiction that is *real* or adopting the language of "memory" and risking forgetting that it is the *fiction* that is real. I have done my best to adopt a third option and express my distance from the discourse of "memory" by using quotation marks. These quotation marks do not merely designate an "object" of study. They exhibit my

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deep skepticism towards calling the practices of excavating and making the long-gone past "memory." In doing so they also turn our attention toward "memory" as a signifier rather than the signified – or, in a vocabulary that I prefer here, toward "memory" as the substance of an aesthetic citational practice rather than a citational practice that has substance. This move is important, for as Derrida writes, in being cited, a sign "can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (1988, 12). To quote "memory" (whether a signifier or the practices it denotes) is to break with the context of memory, and to engender an infinity (well, at least a few) new ones. This is what many of the characters in this thesis do. This, as I will explain in the rest of the chapter, is what I attempt to do here as well.

Aesthetics and creativity

While my research question explicitly articulates the normative dimension of "memory" as the central theme of this thesis, by focusing my analysis on the practices of (re-)making that norm and oneself within it, I position my research firmly within contemporary studies of *aesthetics*. Here I use this term in three co-dependent ways. First, as may be clear from the previous examples of the GPW "memory's" appearance, it is irreducible to the domain of "meaningful" and "signifying." In Russia, "memory of the war" circulates as countless fragments that individually and collectively may mean a lot but that are so widespread, condensed, and fleeting that they constitute an everyday *sensory* background. More often than not, it enters perception the same way as jammed roads, casual clothes, green grass, dirty snow, and indifferent faces rather than a heavily guarded painting that you have to wait in a long queue to see – as mundane elements of the environment that may excite or irritate, that we can ponder for a moment but more often do not pay attention to because they appear as natural parts of atmospheres that we constantly navigate through. Scholars working at the intersection of critical geography, philosophy, and cultural studies call that field *everyday* or *social aesthetics*,

foregrounding its distance from fine arts together with assigning a certain degree of art-value to the most banal, ordinary and unexceptional moments of daily life (Leddy 2012; Light and Smith 2005; Highmore 2011; Saito 2001; 2017).

Second, in this thesis, I use the word "aesthetic" to refer to those practices that act within *and* upon that sensory background. A major part of my argument is that while normalisation of "memory" in everyday life as it can be seen in contemporary Russia limits the opportunities for, and renders futile direct, oppositional challenges to it, aestheticisation of "memory" enables and makes even more important the politics of the indirect, appositional, *artful* practices that engage with "memory" as *a cultural resource*. A hip-hop remix based on the sample of a wartime song (Chapter 2), an art-activist project inspired by a commemorative ritual but developing its concept to challenge any "collective memory" whatsoever (Chapter 3), a banal, apolitical, "innocent" act of a child's herbarium collection at a memorial site (Chapter 4) – these cultural phenomena approach "memory" as plastic and elastic material for creative experimentation. The site of grief and pride for the nation turns into that of joyful exploration and dialogue with nature; the chorus of a song about a soldier missing his beloved one becomes the refrain of a story about the crazy weekend friends spend in 1990s Saint-Petersburg; the portrait photograph used as a symbol of the country-wide commemorative movement serves as inspiration for a project putting forward the dead as a political subjectivity without identity. In Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) vocabulary, these are examples of drawing "lines of flight" from the field of "memory" and creating new "existential territories."

With Fred Moten (2017), we may further call such practices musical "interpolations" of the "memory's" interpellative call. They are "vicious revisions of the original that keep on giving it birth while keeping on evading the natal occasion" (Moten 2017, 30). Whereas on its own the original sound may appear a complete, self-enclosed tune, interpolation simultaneously opens it up and provides yet another closure, enlivening it in "killing," completing it in showing

incompleteness (ibid). To interpolate "memory" is to effectively strip it of anything memorial and transform it into something else. In that partial suspense, which is a prolongation of "memory's" sound too, lies the politics of the aesthetic practices I study. It is a politics of "apposition," an interrupting commentary that "remixes, expands, distills, and keeps radically faith with the forces its encounters carry, break, and constitute" (Moten 2018, 41).

It is also a politics of creativity. Brian Massumi's definition of creativity speaks well to the significance of practices I study: "a mental power, with mentality defined in neo-Humean fashion in terms of the capacity to surpass the given" (2014, 17). Massumi delinks creative act from art and extends it to nature, evolution and especially animal play, where a gesture "repeats the dynamic form of combat, without the combat" (ibid, 23). While throughout *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* he emphasises the instinct and spontaneity of animal politics, what is equally, if not more important for him is that the embodied thought at the heart of such politics "is reflexive in the special sense that the gestures it bodies forth open and maintain the gap between "is" and "could be" (ibid, 40). I return to the significance of that difference in play in Chapter 3. For now, it is important that a creative act simultaneously acknowledges the given and uses it to enact the "flight away from the imperatives" in place (ibid, 39). It takes the power, or as Massumi (2014, 26-30) calls it, "categorical affect" of the given away, rendering it inoperative while depending on it. Such an act is both productive and disruptive, trans- and de-formational, aesthetic and political.

Such uses of the term "aesthetics" are quite different from and expanding upon the problematic informing "the aesthetic turn" in IR (Bleiker 2001). When Roland Bleiker first proclaimed it, he performed a double movement of critique that showed academic knowledge to be a representation of reality while not being the only one. Writing that "representation is always an act of power" (Bleiker 2001, 515), he called upon the discipline to be more attuned to that power as its object of analysis *and* to recognise that very analysis and the form in which

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it is conveyed as always infused with power. As such, Bleiker's seminal article called for a simultaneous expansion of the range of "data" available to IR and heightened ethical sensibility towards the representations of reality we, scholars, produce. In practice though, that double gesture translated into two quite distinct lines of inquiry in IR. The first, followed by scholars studying visual politics (Campbell 2004; Hansen 2011; Hutchison 2016; Möller 2007; Shim 2013) and popular culture (Clapton and Shepherd 2017; Grayson, Davies, and Philpott 2009; Holland 2019; Pears 2018; Robinson 2012; 2015; Saunders 2017; Stock 2018) and today largely synonymous with "the aesthetic turn," mostly focuses on how various representations of reality shape our understanding of it, enabling specific political actions and reproducing or challenging entrenched labels, stereotypes and subject positions. In these approaches, the task of the scholar is to analyse the meanings emerging in such forms of cultural production as cinema and photography, and to show what those meanings do politically – to apply discourse analysis to non-textual data.

Here, I often pursue that methodological procedure too. Interpretation is an essential component of our everyday life and a necessary part of critical scholarship. Especially throughout Chapters 2 and 3, I analyse the specific configurations of the "we" and "memory" emerging in references to the GPW in popular culture, contemporary art, everyday life, and more traditionally political domains. Yet, as I make it clear, for me, what happens parallel to signification, how representations turn into the ordinary, insignificant background noise, and how, as (often material) objects in themselves they decompose and fall apart is more important. Bleiker himself emphasised the significance of such *non*-representational moments in writing that an aesthetic approach "generates a more diverse but also more *direct* encounter with the political" (2001, 511, emphasis mine). "Represented" is not "direct" though. It is mediated, that is, *in*direct.[3] A memorial may be full of meaning. It may represent the war as a tragedy and a

[3] See Manning, Munster, and Stavning Thomsen 2019a; 2019b for an extensive critique of the "mediation" concept and the intersections between art and philosophy beginning with the concept "immediation."

moment of national pride, may narrate the documentary story of the place and exhibit nationalist propaganda. A child picking up wet fallen leaves there and drying them until the fragile texture is seen and risks collapsing upon touch has absolutely no concern about any of those (Chapter 4). She falls in love with the colourfulness of the place and the vibrancy of its change rather than the blandness of the stories literally fixed in stone. I consider *this* experience as aesthetic and unpack the politics of practices grounded in it throughout the thesis.

The IR studies undertaking to develop another part of Bleiker's argument – that "existing social scientific approaches to ir already have an aesthetic" (2001, 516) and that we must not take that aesthetic for granted – offer a more inspiring alternative (to) "aesthetic turn." Together forming the body of what I would call creative or experimental IR (Callahan 2015; Charrett 2019; Choi et al. 2023; Choi, Strausz and Selmeczi 2020; Dauphinee 2013; Harman 2019; Möller 2013; Möller, Bellmer, and Saugmann 2022; Särmä 2014; Strausz 2018; Zalewski 2013), these contributions push the limits of what could be considered academic writing and a research method. More art-*based* than art-*focused*, attentive much more to the *performative* rather than representational aspect of knowledge, this literature incorporates artistic techniques into the research process as "devices that interfere in the worlds in which they are deployed" (Aradau and Huysmans 2014, 604). I will unpack the significance of that literature for my dissertation – and the last way in which I use the word "aesthetic" here – in the last part of the thesis. Before that though, in the rest of this part, I need to introduce the last important piece of the context in which the aesthetics of "memory" that I study here and this thesis as a critique of it operate. As I will show in the next two sections, the transformation of the GPW's "memory" into an aesthetic matter in Russia and the practices that treat it this way have, to a large extent, been informed by the earlier attitudes and practices of relating to the state developed in the late Soviet Union.

Everyday aesthetics and creativity in the late Soviet Union

The non-coincidence between the official commemorations of the GPW and the private remembrance of the war in the late Soviet Union that Tumarkin (1994) describes is a historical background for the "memory" figuring in this thesis. As I have mentioned, that alternative, more private sphere was not necessarily opposed to the official commemorations, and even provided a foundation to them. The state responded to the significance of remembering the war for the people by incorporating the victory into the official mythology, organizing and supporting collective rituals referring to the war; yet in doing so it also divested "memory" of the personal sentiment it wanted to build on, thereby reiterating the need for its continuous existence in more private domains and collective practices relatively free from the state control. However, that complex relationship between the official language and commemorative rituals, on the one hand, and people's belief and participation in them, on the other, was an instance of a wider dynamics between the state, ideology, and the society in the late Soviet Union. As Alexei Yurchak argues,

> What tends to get lost in the binary accounts [of the late Soviet relationship between the state and the people] is the crucial and seemingly paradoxical fact that, for great numbers of Soviet citizens, many of the fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialist life (such as equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, safety, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future) were of genuine importance, despite the fact that many of their everyday practices routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain norms and rules represented in the official ideology of the socialist state. For many, "socialism" as a system of human values and as an everyday reality of "normal life" (*normal'naia zhizn'*) was not necessarily equivalent to "the state" or "ideology"; indeed, living socialism to them often meant something quite different from the official interpretations provided by state rhetoric (2005, 8).

Yurchak offers a very detailed, full of multiple everyday examples story of how a large autonomous sphere of everyday life had developed by the late years of the Soviet Union. In a condensed way, the story sounds like this. After the death of Stalin, the position of an external "master" located outside ideological discourse and through this external position able to verify

its alignment with "objective" knowledge, to produce "metadiscourse" on ideology disappeared (Yurchak 2005, 13-4). This resulted in the exposure of what Yurchak calls "Lefort's paradox," which he summarises the following way:

> In other words, to fulfill its political function of reproducing power, the ideological discourse must claim to represent an "objective truth" that exists outside of it; however, the external nature of this "objective truth" renders the ideological discourse inherently lacking in the means to describe it in total, which can ultimately undermine this discourse's legitimacy and the power that it supports. (2005, 10)

The exposure of that paradox led to the "performative shift," which consisted in the increasing significance of the "performative" rather than "constative" aspect of language and the reproduction of established forms of expression together with their detachment from meaning (Yurchak 2005, 24-6). In the absence of a figure having access to the outside, "what constituted the "norm" of that [ideological] language became increasingly unknowable, and any new text could potentially be read as a "deviation" (ibid, 47). As a result, for "the enunciators of authoritative language, such as local secretaries of the party or Komsomol" (ibid) it was easier and safer to repeat after each other than to offer their own contribution to ideological discourse.

Participation in that reproduction did not necessarily remove all meaning from the rituals and language to be reproduced though. Rather, it "had the important effect of enabling new meanings and descriptions of reality and forms of life that were neither limited to nor completely determined by those provided by the constative descriptions in authoritative language" (Yurchak 2005, 75). To the extent that "even shifts in party policy could be represented by the same formulations" (ibid, 54), repetition of the official language as much standardised it as enabled disidentification from the ideological content. Being cited across contexts with little regard to its literal meaning, the formalised or "hypernormalised" ideological language of the late Soviet Union enabled the emergence of everyday reality that

was autonomous of what was said and "exploded into the Soviet world in powerful, multiple, and unanticipated forms" (ibid, 76).

Yurchak analyses multiple instances of negotiating that hypernormalisation of ideological language and conceptualises the styles of living and the kinds of sociality they exemplify. What brings workers of the Communist youth organisation (*Komsomol*), history and literature circles, rock musicians, and absurd artists together in his analysis is their defiance of the oppositional relationship to the state and subversion of its ideology through that rejection of opposition. *Disregarding* the content of ideological speech allowed them to pursue activities oriented towards what Yurchak, in a multi-level citation of Neils Bohr through Sergei Dovlatov calls "deep truths" as opposed to "clear truths" – moral coordinates perceived to exist outside the ideology and its ability to define what is true (2005, 127). Importantly, that opposition translated into the separation of "normal people" from the images of both "activists" and "dissidents" who read the ideology literally and either energetically agreed or equally energetically disagreed with it (ibid, 103-104).

Yurchak qualifies that relation to ideology as being both inside and outside it, using Russian word "vnye" (2005, 127-28).4 Sergei Prozorov argues that the better word would be "'beside' that is, not simply being outside in the sense of not belonging, but rather coexisting side by side in proximity" (2009, 109). He calls the subjectivity pursuing life beside the Soviet "para-Soviet," meaning that people shaped "their lives in such a way that nothing recognisably Soviet remained in them, yet nothing anti-Soviet was expressed either" (Prozorov 2022, 95). Specifically, he emphasises the significance of those cultural practices that withdrew from both the form and the content of ideological discourse, crafting an everyday that was not affected by ideology even if reliant on the material support of the Soviet system. In the end, it was the expansion of such para-Soviet life that rendered ideology "inoperative" (Prozorov 2009, 111).

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4 In everyday language it simply means "outside." Yurchak's conceptualisation of the word as referring to both inside and outside is rather a result of a particular reading of Bakhtin, see Prozorov 2009, 109.

It enabled the paradox that the collapse of socialism "was completely unexpected by most Soviet people and yet, as soon as people realized that something unexpected was taking place, most of them also immediately realized that they had actually been prepared for that unexpected change" (Yurchak 2005, 282).

These kinds of attitudes will figure prominently in this thesis. In Chapter 2, I will show that it is through the circulation of specific signs, which following Guattari I call "refrains," that "memory" becomes both sedimented as a social norm and is deterrritorialised as an everyday aesthetic matter. Here, the reproduction of forms that Yurchak shows in the late Soviet context is present in the state efforts to appropriate "memory" as a post-ideological foundation, the critique of that appropriation and the state in general, and the apolitical cultural products. Through that extensive circulation of different signs, the very need to "remember" the war is affirmed – yet, it is also through such circulation that "memory" loses its memorial content and opens up to other milieus. In Chapter 3, I will show an instance of pursuing "deep truth" despite and against the state with the analysis of the Immortal Regiment. Finally, Chapter 4 has been inspired by the pursuit of an "ethics of disengagement" in relation to "memory" in everyday navigation through a memorial space. Overall, these chapters show that not only is "memory" of the war irreducible to the state rituals and language but also that "memory's" normalisation as part of everyday life goes hand-by-hand with practices of reclaiming meaning in it *against* the state and rehashing symbols of "memory" *regardless* of the meaning that might be attributed to them. As such, "memory" of the GPW in contemporary Russia functions similarly to the ideology in the late Soviet Union, with the "para–memory" undermining the call to "remember" – together with prolonging its sound. The question looming over this dissertation is to what extent such practices offer a challenge to the state's uses of "memory" in contemporary post-socialist Russia. As the next section, together with chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis, show, under Putin, the state has mobilised many of these forms of critique.

Stiob and freedom in contemporary Russia

One of the main kinds of everyday attitudes toward the state, ideology and the forms it took that Yurchak analyses is stiob. He defines it as "a peculiar form of irony" that "required such a degree of overidentification with the object, person, or idea at which this stiob was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two" (Yurchak 2005, 249-50). In addition to overidentification, *stiob* consisted in decontextualisation of its object, which contributed to exposure of this object's emptiness and meaninglessness (ibid, 252). The most well-known case of public *stiob*, which happened already after the dissolution of the USSR, was artist Sergei Kuryokhin's televised attempt with utter seriousness, in a documentary style, for an hour, to prove that Lenin was a mushroom (see Yurchak 2011).

In the late Soviet Union stiob was an effective strategy of subverting the state ideology. However, Prozorov argues that it also paved the road for the depoliticisation of the society: "The more Soviet citizens excelled at styob, the less they were capable of taking and upholding a serious political stand" (2022, 96). Rendering ideological interpellation inoperative, stiob and other late Soviet aesthetics of living translated into cynicism with regards to *any* ideology – into a simultaneous understanding of "what the truth *is* and *that it is untrue*" (ibid, 103).

Prozorov's grim argument goes further – in Putin's Russia stiob, or its contemporary version of trolling (Kurowska and Reshetnikov 2021), are the very post-ideological foundations of the regime. As Prozorov argues, Putin's presidency from the beginning was built on "radicalising to the point of absurdity the ideology critique that weakened and eventually doomed the Soviet order" (2022, 111). If the Soviet regime proclaimed itself the guarantor of truth, "Putin regime consolidated itself by grounding itself in the conspiracist disposition that affirms that every truth claim is ultimately a lie. Every discourse *is not what it says it is*" (ibid, 113). That regime has mobilised the strategy of *stiob* to make any critique based on truth claims inoperative. Criticism of the authorities is met with a response that questions motifs behind such

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criticism. The emancipatory critical injunction to question transforms into a conspiracist satisfaction with knowing that all that is important is why something is said, not what. Whereas the Soviet regime was built "on the exaggerated commitment to serious speech," Putin's regime "has dispensed with ideology even as a matter of appearance and does not even *pretend* to believe in itself, always appearing on the verge of laughing out loud in the midst of its solemn speeches" (Prozorov 2022, 121).

Prozorov's analysis of stiob's transformation from a strategy of resistance into the state (post-)ideology shows that in contemporary Russia neither facts-based argumentation nor critical inquiry into the forces and structures behind a given phenomenon can offer a true challenge to the regime since the former is doomed to fall victim to the state's logic of omnipresent conspiracy and the latter affirms it by following the same strategy of seeking deeper, hidden meaning. The only way of finding freedom, as he argues with an example of Pussy Riot's 2012 punk prayer, is to reclaim seriousness in politics rather than laugh at one who is always ready to laugh with more power. By that, Prozorov does not mean the need to uphold a particular "serious" appearance. Rather, it is a suggestion to pursue truth-telling in which truth "pertains to the subject's *commitment* to its own discourse rather than to any conventional procedure" (2022, 144). It is a call to pursue critique enveloped in "restitution," a critique that affirms what its object negates *in* the act (ibid, 145). In such a pursuit of truth-telling that Prozorov unpacks through reading of Foucault's discussion of *parrhesia*, "the political subject acquires an autonomous *consistency* that goes beyond any notion of resistance" (ibid, 157).

The problem is that it is hard to imagine that kind of truth-telling in relation to the Great Patriotic War. The state's use of "memory" largely corresponds to the kind of cynical post-ideological discourse that Prozorov describes, with statements and symbols fused to produce any picture of the world whatsoever (Oushakine 2013), to ostracise any political enemy and to legitimise any policy and political decision, including a declaration of a new war in the name

of the old one. Any expressions of "true" "memory" of the GPW, including those that accuse the state of offending the memory of the war generation, can be easily appropriated by that post-ideological regime precisely because they continue speaking the same language, keep supplying new forms of "memory" into the mix. In other words, commitment to the restitution of "memory" against the state's "blasphemous" use of it may require that its subject acknowledges the impossibility of remembering the war. *A critique of "memory" discourse has to shift towards articulating something other than "memory" of the war*. In Chapter 3, I show how an art-activist project "the party of the dead" does that by performing a juxtaposition between anonymity and finality of death and "memory's" quest for immortality. In the rest of this chapter, I show how the need to free oneself from "memory" by articulating an alternative discourse translates into the methodology of this thesis.

Critical ethos and creative methods

I cannot remember the Great Patriotic War. But I can remember the scenes in which, just as in the conversations with my parents and their friends, I was interpellated by the world of "memory" only to appear as an alien in it. A tipsy balcony chat with a friend turned into a fight over what he perceived as my offense of the "memory" of the war. A similar fight with the grandpa after my first lonely walk around the festive city full of drunk teenagers, aggressive men, and indifferent salespersons, the city shaped by the smell of piss and vomit, by the whitebluered of Russia's flag plus the redyellow of Soviet one behind the green soldier behind the blackorange of the St George ribbon, by the weak, unbalanced sound of Soviet songs out of the old, broken speakers on a stage decorated with tons of cheap, glossy plastic. An encounter with primary school kids rehearsing a commemorative ritual that's supposed to be about their relatives under the supervision of the angry teacher giving out the photos of the dead to those who did not have any. A family member telling stories about her life in evacuation and her father who died while fighting in Germany at an ordinary family gathering. Another relative

delivering a toast "Let war never happen again!" on maybe the same, maybe different but equally ordinary evening. These, and many other scenes, these *memories of "memory,"* have been with me throughout the process of writing this thesis. They have been the primary sites for pondering normativity of war remembrance and the kind of subject emerging in response to it. They are the reason why I decided to design this project and the first, most important "data" I have acquired.

This thesis has always been personal, that is, grounded in my own experience of subjection and using that experience as one of the sites for exploring the everyday operation of "memory's" normativity. In articulating that personal aspect of my research, I follow Naeem Inayatullah's call "to engage in a form that retrieves the "I" and explicitly demonstrates its presence both within the world and within academic writing" (2011, 6). Inayatullah argues that "academic writing assumes the simultaneous absence and presence of the writer within the writing. The writer *presents* herself/himself as absent, as distant, and as indifferent to the writing and ideas" (2011, 5, emphasis mine). Likewise, Roxanne Doty suggests that academic writing pursues not "a neutral style" but "a *style of neutrality*" (2004, 386). While it may pretend to eliminate writer's subjectivity or "a voice" as Doty calls it, from the text, that style "is indicative of a desire to suppress desire, which is itself a desire" (ibid). The problem with the "fictive distance" (Inayatullah 2011, 5-6) then is not only that the biases we hope to dispense with by pursuing "a style of neutrality" are hidden instead, but also that in trying to remove ourselves from what we do, we risk *experiencing* that disconnection from both the world we study and from oneself appearing as disappearing within the text. In Inayatullah's words, "academic practice begets *alienation*, we might say" (2011, 6, emphasis mine). To add this alienation to the one that informs the empirical focus of this study would mean reproducing the "affective economy" (Ahmed 2004, 44-49) of belonging and alienation that I would like to problematise.

The desire to avoid multiplication of alienation is the reason why for me, the question of "memory's" normativity and its suspense is indissociable from that of the form and the style in which the inquiry into that question unfolds. The failure to translate has felt like a "fail" mark upon the thesis before it has been finished, before the proper research has begun, the judgment of the "people's defence committee" before the true one has been summoned and after all the formal checks have been passed. In the world of concepts, something along the lines of "everyday operation of memory's normativity, ways of its negotiation, transformation and instances of its suspense" may sound like a valid topic of research that, if narrowed to a properly formulated research question grounded in academic literature and substantiated with a methodologically sound design, may allow me to pass as a member of a community. But in the world of words and experience, that very world where I had encountered normativity of "memory" before calling it as such, its exposure creates the distance that is too hard to pass, the distance across which *I*, a living being behind the written and spoken 'I,' do not pass. Trying to make one structure of belonging and alienation visible and to highlight ways of disentangling oneself from it, I emerge as the subject of another structure producing similar experience.

The problem seems to be only exacerbated by my continuing attempts to settle at an imperfect translation because in doing so the true intention behind this thesis does not merely fail – it disappears entirely. *I* disappear in that translation. Trying to make my research recognizable within the everyday *language* – the language that does not recognise quotation marks in "memory" – I become more distant from my (academic) everyday *life*, which for the past five years pretty much revolved around studying the politics of quoting and unquoting "memory." If the language of critical inquiry alienates me from my dearest, the everyday language of "memory" alienates me from myself.

Just as everyday language and ordinary sites where it can be heard may exclude or control the appearance of the 'I,' the language of critique does not need to erase it. This thesis

emerged from my experience of "memory's" normativity and the desire to find and articulate possible pathways outside of it – yet, that norm, pathways outside, and the desire to find them could only become intelligible to me through theory. It is here where my concern with "everyday life" was born, for "the everyday," as Guillaume and Huysmans (2019) remind me, is first of all a *concept*. My 'I,' as the preceding references to *theoretical* accounts of the writing subject in IR demonstrate, is the effect of academic discourse. My *I* is its effect too – if only due to discovering the real, visceral feeling of joy and enthusiasm for discovering multiple possibilities of what kind of an 'I' I might, not must be.

Rather than reiterate the separation between "theory" and "people," "abstraction" and "everyday life" (oppositions replicating the old one between "theory" and "practice"), we may consider multiplicities of everydays, each infused with a dose of abstraction and alienation to a different extent. My academic is my everyday – and my everyday is my academic. The term that captures the coincidence of theory and everyday life of the theorist, describes the style of writing and the mode of inquiry that does not separate between them is *autotheory*. Lauren Fournier defines autotheory as "the integration of the *auto* or "self" with philosophy or theory, often in ways that are direct, performative, or self-aware—especially so in those practices that emerge with postmodernism" (2021, 6). Inextricably tied with feminist theory and practice, autotheory does not privilege one coherent and self-contained object and style of inquiry over another but works with *both* the self (be it lived experience of the author or the subject on the page) *and* the theory as the sources and objects of knowledge. Fournier provides "memoir with footnotes" as an example (2021, 7) – the work that is explicitly theoretical *and* autobiographical, that foregrounds "I" as a theoretical voice and theory as that which has a voice. The conjoining of two terms that would often be considered as distant from each other as possible – (embodied) self and (abstract) theory – autotheory is "a particularly appropriate term for works that exceed existing genre categories and disciplinary bounds, that flourish in the liminal spaces between

categories, that reveal the entanglement of research and creation, and that fuse seemingly disparate modes to fresh effects" (ibid, 2). As such, the term designates a practice that is both conceptual and lived, critical and poetic, experimental and experiential.

Recently Quỳnh N. Phạm brought to my attention Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's phrase "theory in the flesh" (1983, 23). An embodied practice, it "means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (ibid). For me though, read through the lens of autotheory, this phrase also opens up the possibility of thinking about theory as that which has flesh. Words and concepts are the flesh of theory, its muscles enlivened by the movement of blood circulating as thinking and writing. Theory in the flesh is also that which comes in contact with our corporeal flesh, whether as a tender touch or painful strike. By nurturing the flesh of theory, by treating it as an organic substance in need of care, we may be able to enrich the ways it comes in contact with the reader's flesh and build a more direct, involved yet ethically-oriented relationship to our academic praxis. Such theory has a capacity to "liberate" and "heal," as bell hooks argues, but "only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end" (1994, 61). In a similar vein, Stefano Harney says that "the concepts are ways to develop a mode of living together, a mode of being together that cannot be shared as a model but as an instance" (Moten and Harney 2013, 105). Concepts can be operative tools – and playing with them "a way to help us do something" (ibid). With Deleuze and Guattari (1987; 1994) in mind, we may further consider theoretical practice and its major activities of thinking and writing themselves "ways of doing something." And, as Brian Massumi suggests, "once you have allowed that, you have accepted that activities dedicated to thought and writing are *inventive.*" (2002, 12, emphasis mine). To acknowledge theory's productive (and not only disruptive) power is to allow and invite experimentation (in an artistic, not positivist sense) – with and through it. It is to allow our academic practices to act "at the

limit where *what if?* becomes *what else?*" (Manning 2016, 202). It is to welcome a scholarly ethos that is as critical as it is affirmative (see Shapiro 2013, 8-9; Strausz 2018). Theory can stiffen our sensibility of course. But it can also allow us to feel what is otherwise inapprehensible, perceive what can otherwise only be felt, and know otherwise than the everyday language of positivism allows us – to inhabit everyday world differently, *to live otherwise*.

In this thesis, I play with the frames of perception, moving between banal and spectacular, fleeting and long-lasting, background and foreground; between exploring the limits of vision and hearing, photography and storytelling, mediated gaze and immediate bodily sensation; between writing personal stories and more abstract theorising, writing stories without a person and people without stories. I do so to highlight different modes of "memory's" normalisation and violence together with different ways of reflecting, modulating, and redirecting its power. The style of writing that I develop here refuses a single mode of telling in order to foreground the multiplicity of often contradictory kinds of alienation that I would like to challenge. There is no universal language in which I can convey what this thesis is about, no language that does not alienate. This does not mean I should be content with leaning into detached academic writing. Rather, it means that the form and the style of writing I develop here are fragmented, incoherent, shifting between first-person narrative, storytelling, and theoretical analysis, between a more traditional structure of a chapter proceeding from the introduction through the main body to the conclusion and sections-fragments inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "rhizome" (1987) as much as by the children assembling a herbarium at the place of mass cremation.

The kind of fragmented writing I develop here also brings me back to the memories of "memory" animating this project. My memories of "memory" might not be perfectly accurate. The impressions they carry have certainly been modulated by countless encounters that

happened after, and, in being expressed, have further transformed. Yet, that pressure of ex-upon im-, a move out and then in, writes neither a neat story nor a disembodied abstraction, neither a myth nor a critique of it. It composes vague, unstable images that jump from one to another, from childhood to fieldwork, and are best expressed as fragmented scenes, the form that underlines the existence of blank spots, gaps, and inconsistencies instead of covering, smoothening them up. These fragments can always be re-assembled into a story, re-interpreted in a critique. But before and after that, to remember "memory" is to subject a myth and its critique to the very mode of dissonant, uncertain, and incoherent sense-making that they suppress. It is to respond to normativity of "memory" by refusing its ground – the capacity to remember that which precedes my life – and displacing it with assertions of that normativity's experience, *the experience of "memory,"* as the content of corporeal, embodied, though once again, never entirely accurate memories. It is to recognise and foreground "a scene" in "a scene of subjection" (Hartman 1997) and through that recognition to invite a possibility of restaging it and of writing new stories, with a different plot and characters, out of it.

The problem remains though.

This is too abstract.

Yes, it is. But what are "everyday life," "memory," "politics," "international relations" if not abstractions that are lived? And what can we do when those abstractions come to structure our thought and experience, displacing and containing truly abstract moments and scenes that our lives are composed of? How can we foreground and amplify that second, more poetic than neutral kind of abstraction? And what kind of life might we envision once the abstraction of "collective memory" and its variations no longer hold a grip over the kinds of "we" we, I, can be?

Anarchive as methodology

What interests me is not only the everyday manifestations of "memory's" normativity though but also, as I have mentioned, how that norm is challenged, transformed, and suspended. How can writing respond to, accommodate, and embrace *this* question, which implies a stronger, more involved, even if subtle kind of response to the structure of alienation than an attempt to avoid its reproduction? How, to echo Erzsébet Strausz's (2018) concern with the transformational potential of writing, can research be a vehicle of desubjugation from the object of critique and self-transformation rather than only a process of learning about it? Strausz writes that "thought cannot be suspended through *thinking* that suspense" (2018, 66). My memories of "memory" can only show the range of situations in which normativity of "memory" is in play, expose its demands and the effects of those demands, and acknowledge the experience of alienation as a form of connection to the norm, a condition intrinsic rather than external to it. They can offer little to imagine what kind of life might be possible without it. Neither are they the instances of that kind of life precisely because, on their own, these memories are still invested into the "memory of the war." I am searching for a way of no longer being invested in it.

Strausz deploys reflexive narrative writing where the *process* of writing is visible throughout the text as a method of exposing and transforming academic discourse and the subjectivity emerging in it. What emerges through the focus on that process is a "liminal space, a kind of threshold, not one of the abstract, conceptual kinds in critical theory but a threshold *lived*" (Strausz 2018, 34). "Grounded in a commitment to challenge any sense of fixity" (ibid, 164), her project puts forth an 'I' that does not remain the same throughout the text and reflects on the process and conditions of its emergence in the process of being born and left on the page, again and again. As the object and the subject of critique emerging literally in the process of its conduct (and trying to suspend that distinction), as the mark left on the pages of the dissertation and the book to be reflected back upon a few pages later, it is dispersed across the text(s), always

present yet as that which has always already left the place where we find it. On top of that, visibility of the writing process foregrounds the living being behind the words, the being whose relationship to the 'I' Strausz explores in length, prompted by "a sense of separation between who I was as a person and what I had turned myself into in academic life" (ibid, 4).

Processuality of knowledge further appears in a unique relationship between what could be considered two versions of the same text, Strausz's doctoral thesis (2012) and the first monograph (2018). Strausz describes the intention behind the thesis:

> "I wanted to create a mode of engagement and style of writing that was able to record the vistas and trajectories that my thoughts travelled in the process of producing 'knowledge' (and what was later named and recognized as a doctoral dissertation). As I was constantly propelled forward by the flow of continuous, impulsive writing I sought to find a way to capture the journey as it was, with its twists, turns, stumblings and meanderings. I wanted to record whatever might resurface on the surface of discourse, anything that could carry something about my formation as an academic subject and the ways in which I negotiated my involvement in the field of IR as a person." (2018, 7)

The book largely focuses on the same themes of the relationship between academic subjectivity and living self, Foucault's critical ethos, and writing as transformational practice. Yet, "creating an archive like this necessarily calls for looking back" (ibid). Arising from the place of the initial project's completion and the transition from PhD towards academic employment (with the corresponding change of structures, practices, and sites of subjectivation) while compelled to pursue and continue the ethos of transformation driving and studied in the dissertation, the book appears as an altogether different project – that of *rewriting*. For it, the archive of transformation that a process of undergoing it produced became the new object of reflection and transformation. What emerged as the content of relentless editing was "an *impression*" of the original, "a rendition, translation, even performance of what was designed to be an archive" (ibid, 13). An impression of an archive, or – *a memory of "memory."* That kind of memory is different from those that I have of "the memory of the war." Less distanced and explicit, the result of direct intervention into the archive and remoulding it into an object

and practice more responsive to the new needs and constraints, it carries traces of the past and the 'I' built through it rather than explicit reflections on, recreations of it. In this memory of "memory" quotation marks do not designate disbelief. Instead, they signal a connection between the two terms in building a transitional, critical distance of "a liminal space."

Andrew Murphie, Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, and other participants of the SenseLab offer the term "anarchive" for this kind of transformative citational practice (Murphie 2016a). "A feed-forward mechanism for lines of creative process, under continuing variation," "an excess energy of the archive: a kind of *supplement* or surplus-value of the archive" (Massumi 2016, 6), anarchive could be imagined as a *force* that animates the archive, opens the minor tendencies stored in it for further unfolding and change. As Andrew Murphie describes the relationship between an archive and anarchive,

> "The archive is not just about how we store the past… It is also about how we organise possible actions for the future… about who or what can participate in those actions, or not, and in what way. So the questions of where the potential for feeling goes and from where it returns, is crucial. These are questions of the archive. Yet there are also other questions not so much of the archive. These concern the way this potential might find new pathways and new relations in and between bodies, minds, and worlds. These questions are questions of the anarchive. The anarchival is that which breaks free of the archive, often, though not always, from within. Maybe the anarchival is moving dance moves differently. Perhaps it reads at odds with the authorised version. Or maybe it departs from established techniques in making art (whatever "art" might mean). It never just relies on the same old techniques" (2016b, 41).

Anarchive, thus, is not about the past, but about engaging with the traces of the past in the present, recomposing and unfolding them in the catalytic movement of generating novelty. Anarchive is the practice, the principle of "looking back" at an archive that Strausz describes, of turning towards the marks that may have appeared unintentionally, despite the archive, certainly not as its focal point, and writing those lines out in a new creative process. Anarchive re-members an archive that remembers; aligned with Deleuze and Guattari's ethos of responsive experimentation "in contact with the real" (1987, 12), it activates what has been left behind as

potential, establishing closures on its way but being aware that those closures can and need to be reactivated and reenacted again, differently.

As a *concept*, "anarchive" foregrounds the possibility of things being otherwise and the excess of form (Manning (2020) conceptualises it through Duchamp's "infrathin" and Whitehead's "anarchic share") as the ground of that possibility. As a *technique*, it seeks to amplify that potential through experimentation with ways of registering the excess without arresting it, "to feed forward the more-than of the event's taking-form" (Manning 2020, 84). Being both a concept and a technique, anarchive brings thought and practice together in a process that "is by nature a *cross-platform phenomenon*" (Massumi 2016, 6). It enfolds knowledge and action in creative experimentation where "many products are produced, but they are not *the* product" (Massumi 2016, 7). As such, "anarchive" engenders the ethos of transformation from and toward the "liminal space" that Strausz expresses through the project of writing and rewriting, and through the movement between written "I" and lived *I*. It can unfold in the text but necessarily exceeds it, opens the text to the outside, and enfolds the two. In Félix Guattari's vocabulary, it is *transversal*.

In this thesis, I am trying to harness the force of anarchive, to perform that work of citation upon citation, a memory of "memory" that does not necessarily explicitly recreate the scene of subjection but carries a trace of it in the form of impression only to be carried away by the practice that turns *this* operation into an expressed impression. It is an approach that seeks to amplify whatever lies "beside" "memory," what in "memory" is irreducible to its "memorial" side. It is my way of engaging with "memory" not by reproducing or dismissing it but by de- and trans-forming it. That work of de- and trans-formation constitutes the *methodology* of this thesis. It also the *ethos* behind the dissertation.

In this thesis, two methodological choices in the spirit of anarchive are important. First, I had to design the techniques that would enable me to continuously work with the "excess" or

the "infrathin" and to acknowledge that the "data" I might produce in the process would most probably not look like the "data" in social science. These techniques could never be the same – they depended as much on the initial instance of "memory" I wanted to work with as on each act of decontextualising citation carrying its own new share of excessiveness. I ended up with two processes that began during my fieldwork, which took place in Saint Petersburg between June-October 2021. The first one explored the ways of perceiving minor memorial objects and involved a month-long photographic performance, a several months-long attempt to turn that performance into an Instagram account from the perspective of a memorial inscription, and multiple semi-fictional stories about the inscription's everyday life. The second process involved month-long visits to a memorial park, attempts to understand the tension between "a memorial" and "a park," collection of fallen leaves, seeds, and rotting petals, and their assembly into meaningless compositions on paper. Serving as the research background and inspiring the form of Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, these processes carried me away from "memory" and towards herbaria and blurred photographs as my "data," towards an inquiry into topics such as the aesthetics of decay and material transformation of monuments. That change of theme is neither a form of escapism nor a lack of focus. Rather, it is a result of each process striving to find out what is unassimilable to "memory" in its aesthetics, what works against normativity of "memory" by refusing to be a part of it, and how these qualities can be amplified and developed further.

Second, the very structure of the thesis expresses an attempt to find what in "memory" can enable a move away from it. Now it may be the right time to outline it.

The structure of the dissertation

The rest of this thesis is split into two parts, each composed of two chapters. The first part, *Refrains of Remembrance*, offers the most direct and expansive examination of how normativity of the GPW "memory" operates in Russia. Here, I draw a cartography of "refrains

of remembrance" – repeated elements of "memory's" everyday aesthetics – and show how these elements transmit "memory's" normativity together with subverting it in the process of creative reappropriation. I borrow the concept of "refrain" from Guattari and explain it at the beginning of Chapter 2, focusing on the simultaneity of standardisation and variation that refrains can enable. Chapter 2 brings together a diverse range of refrains, which include popular expressions, images and sounds circulating in popular culture, official discourse and ordinary commemorations to show how refrains hold instances of "memory" together as an assemblage. Here, the focus is on refrains as elements connecting heterogenous signs and practices, seemingly unrelated spheres of life and making the resulting mass consistent. My key goal is to outline the a-signifying, performative aspects of the everyday memory discourse and aesthetics and its role in both consolidating the norm and enabling creative action within it.

By contrast, Chapter 3 focuses on the circulation of one refrain of remembrance, "No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten." I show how a refrain itself can be subjected to variation, and how, in that process, new practices, meanings, and emotional attachments emerge. Concentrating on the relationship to the dead that "No one is forgotten" expresses, I bring together both minor moments of its utterance and the longer projects explicitly or implicitly interpreting it. I look closely at the social movement "Immortal Regiment," the core of which is an annual procession of people holding portraits of their deceased relatives who participated in the Great Patriotic War. Having originated in 2012 as a grassroots initiative and a critique of mythologising the war, soon after it gained immense popularity throughout the country the movement was appropriated by the state, which supported foundation of an identical in all but the key principles organisation. Whereas the original Regiment aimed at creating a horizontal, self-organising (and more so, transnational) community of the remembering bound by nothing else but having a story of loss, the state-sponsored Regiment incorporated official symbols, including the president as the sole representative of the nation, thereby itself being co-opted by

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the chauvinistic discursive regime, where to remember the war means to chant "We can do that again!"

The Immortal Regiment not only stages the community of the remembering based on the presence of a personal story of loss to share – it is also an attempt to imagine the dead as alive through a public display of portrait photography. In the annual procession, the living bodies march together with the faces of the deceased, creating an image of both a linear succession between the past and the present, and the membership of the deceased in the community that we are. Here they are, the dead, among us, preserved through our care, in their memory. That membership is not direct though: it takes place through representation, whereby the living speak for the dead, claim to know what they died for, and act in their name. The dead are not allowed to die. Such a conceptualisation of remembrance as post-mortem life, and its use in legitimising contemporary internal and international violence of Putin's Russia became the source of inspiration for various projects of artistic critique, one of them being "the party of the dead," whose practices and underlying ideas I juxtapose with those of the Regiment. The "party," which has artistic roots in the Russian art-movements of necrorealism and actionism, articulates a different from the Regiment relationship between the living and the dead. Its conceptual idea, according to Maksim Evstropov (2020), one of the founders, is "not to include the dead into any existing identity group but to include any community whatsoever into the ranks of the dead." Through its parodical, hyperbolical, troubling everyday ethics of relating to the dead performances in public spaces, especially at the places of death like memorials and cemeteries, the party attempts to pursue both a negative critique of the state's appropriation of the voices of the dead, and an affirmative task of imagining a radically inclusive community, in which an impossible task of direct, non-mediated speech by the dead, is achieved.

The last part of the thesis pursues the creative spirit behind the project to the fullest. The two chapters that it is comprised of are a result of continuous, long-term experiments in

producing memories of "memory" through archiving, writing, and rewriting in a manner discussed in Chapter 1. Chapter 4 uses remains of the plants collected during the fieldwork to ponder plants' capacity to inspire and dissuade hope, as well as our ability to listen to them in search for it. Specifically, I focus on growth and decomposition as two processes in which plants are always enfolded and which we may constantly witness in everyday life. Originally rooted in my attempts to understand what it means for a place called "Victory Park" to be both a memorial and a park, the chapter was inspired by and offers an analysis of the children's practice of assembling herbaria from the plants growing at the site of mass cremation, and art group {rodina}'s work 9 stages of the leader's decomposition. Bringing literature from Critical Plant Studies, I show that vegetation constitutes our limit of experience, which only intensifies when we encounter dead plants. Following Deleuze and Guattari, whose "rhizome" I unpack methodologically by introducing the work of Fernand Deligny, I suggest that this limit can be productively engaged with if we listen to plants by responding to them, by practicing a form of studying vegetation that incorporates its style. I show herbarium assembly to be a form of such "phytographia" as Patrícia Vieira (2015) calls it, the specificity of which is in its transduction of both plants' persistence and fragility, growth and decay. This chapter, itself a herbarium of nine fragments, is further accompanied by images of leaves, petals, seeds, and crumbles collected at the Victory Park. This herbarium functions as both a material, bodily archive of vegetation's uses in competing memorial projects and as a non-representational cartography that highlights life and death as the everyday present of "memory" rather than the distant past it commemorates.

Whereas Chapter 4 highlights the symbolic and material power of growth and decay to counter "memory" imaginary and normativity it exhibits, Chapter 5 further explores transformation but this time occurring within a non-living assemblage. It tells several short semi-fictional, imagined and speculative stories about the everyday life of a memorial

inscription warning of shelling located in the city center of Saint-Petersburg. The inscription is the replica of those widely painted across the streets of Leningrad under the blockade. As such, it looks like a direct trace of the past, preserved as evidence of the trauma that still has not been healed. Yet, the inscription has not been preserved – instead, since 1960s, it has been repeatedly reinscribed. The chapter ponders the kinds of politics emerging at the intersection of these multiple acts of reinscription, wartime aesthetics and memorial signification. Specifically, it takes as the point of departure the duplicity of the inscription being an object that is both fixed and in the process of material decay and rewriting. By emphasising the relational and processual registers of the inscription's everyday life as crucial for the inscription to resist incorporation into any signifying regime, I highlight the agency of non-human forces in attuning human perception to non-categorisable, meaningless registers of existence, as well as in enabling the notion of "remembering" that is rooted less in the desire to fix, and more in the desire to keep the process of transformation open-ended – less in the desire to archive and more in the process of anarchiving.

But what can be said about a small inscription on the wall that is located in such a place that, for most people, it is just another background object to pass? How to make its slow, long-term fading (or a noticeable but only temporary damage) visible if, for our eyes, it remains the same? The chapter includes photographs of the inscription and its vicinities taken over July-August 2021 during my daily visits to it. The photographs were taken from various angles, under different light conditions, still and in movement to capture the multiplicity of ways in which that memorial object can enter perception. They serve as visual support for the stories and the objects that these stories emerged from thinking with.

The movement from the more analytical part 1 toward the more creative part 2 represents and performs the movement beyond "memory," the process of investing oneself in the norm of remembering to the extent that the power it holds over me collapses. This process

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has been much less linear than it may appear through that structure. It has been troubled by Putin reminding all of us why "memory" of the GPW is so important politically by waging a new war in the name of the old one and making me rethink the tone, the structure, and the content of the thesis after all the fieldwork had been done and the new round of it was no longer possible. It involved endless – and often absolutely unnecessary – edits, returns from Chapter 4 to the no longer existent chapter on the ethos of Félix Guattari between Chapters 1 and 2, from dead plants to generalised "dead," from the non-living inscription on the wall to the lively covers and samples of wartime songs. Each chapter carries some share of another – the teenage girl reading a poem about fascists dismembering children returns once or twice, as do the descriptions of "memory" aesthetics, fascination with "limit of thought and experience," and the same quotes from Guattari. Songs from my playlist for Chapter 3 ended up on my analytical list for Chapter 2, and I was too lazy to delete some truly bad songs from the latter-turned-former so they are still occasionally playing in the background while I am writing this introduction. As a result of all these returns and repetitions, it is difficult to truly assign the label "critical" to one part and "creative" to another. There are more than enough traces of both modalities across the whole dissertation (I believe). An acknowledgment of all this is a reminder to myself that *writing* this text has been part of anarchive. It is also a reminder that *the text* itself is just one of its *products* (although for us reading it now, the one that matters). I cannot narrate that myriad of moments structuring and shifting the direction and the flow of my research process. However, I would still like for that *process* to be visible in the *product* that this text is. The progression from studying activists playing the dead toward assembling meaningless compositions of dead plants is one way of doing that.

As this outline and the introduction more broadly make clear, my thesis pays extended visits to disciplinary fields other than the one for which it has been submitted. The inquiry unfolding on these pages is by necessity interdisciplinary, because it asks about normativity and

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aesthetics of discourse shaping and shaped by an interdisciplinary field of study, looks for politics at those spaces that are often considered too ordinary, renders artful that which is perceived at best as unimaginative and at worst as kitsch. My thesis speaks to the field of memory studies by showing the normative power of its object of study and providing detailed examples of how that power creates opportunities for its own suspense. It speaks to critical geography and literature on social aesthetics by studying creativity and micropolitics at play in navigating through aesthetic and affective atmospheres shaped by the fragmented yet intense and persistent demand to associate oneself with the past one did not, could not experience. It contributes to the arts-based research in IR by designing and applying a methodological approach based on SenseLab's concept, technique, and ethos of "anarchive." It certainly contributes to studies of contemporary Russian politics by providing an innovative theoretical framework for studying the role of the Great Patriotic War in Russian politics and society together with highlighting and conceptualising instances of minor disobedience to one of the major pillars upon which Putin's authoritarian and militarist regime stands.

I do submit this thesis as a work of International Relations though. How does my research speak to the discipline? Where is "the international" in it? While all the aforementioned threads apply to IR given its state of extreme diffusion and fragmentation (almost like a community of "whatever beings" as Agamben (1993) would call it), there is a particular line running across my thesis that allows it to be recognisable as IR study. When I only began working on this project, I used to tell friends that my thesis touched upon the international, because the discipline has been traditionally preoccupied with issues of war – and when war is over, it is through "memory" that it keeps being (re-)lived. Two and a half years into the research, when Vladimir Putin justified the invasion of Ukraine by referring to the need to "denazify" it and echoing the common militarist commemorative cry "We can repeat!" I had to correct that statement. As long as "memory of the war" is sustained, so is "the war." As long as

"memory of the war" is a part of everyday life, so is "the war." I show that transformation in the two chapters of the first part of the thesis, particularly in analysing latent militarism and imperialism of "the Immortal Regiment." By showing how both the transformation of "memory" into "war" and dissent against it happen primarily on the level of everyday aesthetics, this thesis contributes to studies of everyday militarism and anti-militarism.

I wish this thesis was irrelevant. But it seems like I don't need many words to explain what this thesis is about to my parents or their friends anymore. Silence and nods reign in place of a pull and a blow.

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I wanted to end this introduction here. But for it to end on such a low, depontentialising note, would be to negate everything I have said before about transformation, experimentation, excess, and creativity – all those affirmative lines that flow through the body of this dissertation even in its saddest, angriest parts and have rejuvenated this project at times when words "war" and "memory" invoked intellectual and emotional numbness. It is a reminder to myself of the risks and costs of embarking on such an emotionally invested process of no longer being emotionally invested into something, in this case "memory" of the GPW (but this might be a better subject for conclusion). It is also a reminder of the need to keep that process ongoing and that part of doing this is to hold onto the many truly joyful moments of looking at the world anew and making something – however small it is – from that new sensibility. All the academic contributions aside, this thesis calls upon us to ask what we (don't) perceive in things we perceive, especially in our focus on content and the rush to interpret what is represented. This thesis is *about* the relationship between normativity and creativity, as it unfolds in the cases of "memory" of the Great Patriotic War in Russia and academic languages with which that relationship could be understood and expressed. But no less important is what this thesis *is* – a

product and an instance of such a relationship, as it has unfolded on these pages and in the process of writing them.

PART 1. REFRAINS OF WAR, REFRAINS OF REMEMBRANCE

Chapter 2. Wake Me Up When February Ends: Refrain, Sample, and Creative Appropriation

> Today at 4 a.m. without any claims having been presented to the Soviet Union, without any declaration of war, German troops attacked our country, attacked our borders at many points and bombed from their aeroplanes our cities – Zhytomyr, Kiev, Sevastopol, Kaunas and some others, killing and wounding over two hundred persons…This unheard-of attack upon our country is perfidy unparalleled in the history of civilized nations. The attack on our country was perpetrated despite the fact that a treaty of non-aggression had been signed between the U.S.S.R. and Germany and that the Soviet government most faithfully abided by all the provisions of this treaty…This war has been forced upon us not by the German people, not by the German workers, peasants and intellectuals, whose sufferings we well understand, but by the clique of bloodthirsty fascist rulers of Germany, who have enslaved the French, the Czechs, the Poles, the Serbs, Norway, Belgium, Denmark, Holland, Greece and other nations…This is not the first time that our people has had to deal with the attack of an arrogant foe. At the time of Napoleon's invasion of Russia our people's reply was a patriotic war and Napoleon suffered defeat and met his doom. It will be the same with Hitler, who in his arrogance has proclaimed a new crusade against our country…Ours is a righteous cause. The enemy will be routed. Victory will be ours. (Molotov 1941)

This excerpt from the radio broadcast by the commissar for foreign affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, officially marked the beginning of the war between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Today, almost 80 years after the war's end, when the Soviet Union no longer exists and only a few thousand war survivors are still alive, Molotov's speech is more than simply an archival record of how the beginning of the war was communicated to Soviet citizens. It contains plenty of expressions that, over the years, have become separate cultural artefacts. The comparison with the "patriotic war" of 1812 was quickly sedimented and two weeks later, in his address to the people, Stalin called the ongoing war against Germany "the Patriotic war" (1941). The end of Molotov's address quickly turned into a wartime slogan (Watson 2005, 190) that keeps appearing in the titles of ideologically driven historical research in contemporary Russia. Most importantly though, the speech, belatedly marking the beginning of the war for

the Soviet people as a subjective event, established the primary coordinates for the retrospective transformation of the events of that day into objective history. The war may have been anticipated by Western countries and Soviet leadership, which did not prepare for it despite multiple signs and intelligence reports (Hill 2009, 35-37), it may have been officially declared around an hour and a half after the first airstrikes, as Molotov mentioned in his speech (1941) – but in the cultural imagination it remains the sudden, unexpected, ruthless attack initiated "without any declaration of war." It may have started much earlier than 4 AM (which time standard do we use – of the attacked or the attacker, the CET or MSK, and does the "local time" rule apply when it is the whole country spanning 11 time zones that was attacked?), but it is "4 AM" that is remembered. How did the Great Patriotic War start?

"On 22nd June, at 4 AM, without a declaration of war…"

Detached from the rest of Molotov's lengthy address, this expression certainly carries mythical undertones. It provides a concise but powerful, emotionally charged story of the precisely dated national origins. At 4 AM, without a declaration of war, "we," the great Mother-Fatherland and its patriotic defenders, were born – even if at noon Molotov spoke more about class struggle and reiterated the back-then familiar tropes about the unity of international workers. However, calling a story "a myth" does not account for its pervasiveness and for what that pervasiveness does. It draws attention to the story's content and how that content constitutes both the protagonist and the world they inhabit. Simultaneously, it overshadows the story's expressiveness, the state of being "stripped of its signifying and discursive function in favour of the 'existential transference' of the non-discursive" (O'Sullivan 2012, 105). "At 4 AM, without a declaration of war" carves the bottom within the plain discourse and weaves a narrative out of it, but as it is repeated over and over again without an immediate resolution, the

words acquire a material consistency and partial autonomy from the story. They do not require any additional context or explanation to be understood. Instead, they *are* the context and explanation for what is being remembered and why. The expression marks the situation of its utterance, transforming it into that of remembering the war and painting each element participating in the event with a colour palette of grief, hatred, victimhood, mistrust towards outsiders, fear of the unexpected, and the need to prepare for it. At 4 AM, at four o'clock in the morning, *v chetyre chasa utra* – pronounce the whole phrase like this, each word distanced from another with an even space like that of a written document, and voila, you are talking about war, *the* war. "The war" part does not even need to be declared – "four o'clock" is that very declaration of the war that seems to have been waged forever since, undeclared, already won, just about to begin.

The wording "The Great Patriotic War" operates in this way too. The Great Patriotic War is a myth of national origins and is full of sub-myths that constitute its mythology – but as "the Great Patriotic War" appears across Putin's otherwise disconnected and internally incoherent speeches, across state institutions, on the walls of residential houses, in popular culture, life-stories of celebrities and warm family gatherings, it acquires the consistency of an order other than the mythical one. It is still about the past – sure – but there is so much "about the past" that it is the principal mark of the irreducible to imagination, lived present. The Great Patriotic War – the great myth of Russia's origins. "The Great Patriotic War" – a structured reiterated sensorial event, the ambiguous, omnipresent, trans-iterated *refrain*, one of the founding blocks of contemporary Russia's directly experienced aesthetic and affective atmosphere.

In this part of the thesis, I draw a cartography of such "refrains of remembrance" – the discursive-material elements that constitute the aesthetic landscape of the Great Patriotic War memory in contemporary Russia. I borrow the concept of the refrain from Félix Guattari, who

developed it in his single-authored texts starting with *The Machinic Unconscious* (2011 [1979])
and, together with Deleuze, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987 [1980]). Like most of Deleuze and
Guattari's concepts, "refrain" is a complex term, the meaning of which changes depending on
the precise conceptual territory it occupies. In the rest of this introduction, I unpack those
aspects of the refrain that are the most significant to the research question of my thesis. In doing
so, I first and foremost establish the conceptual ground for the critical reading of the
commemorative elements in this chapter. However, by introducing the concept of the refrain, I
also set up the stage for the analytical and creative movements that span across both chapters
constituting this part of the thesis. Therefore, this introduction should be read as both a general
introduction to this part and a more specific introduction to this chapter.

First, a refrain holds together heterogeneous components without necessarily imposing
a universal meaning upon them. It acts like a glue or "reinforced concrete" (Deleuze and
Guattari 1987, 329), providing *consistency* to an aggregate that would otherwise fall apart or
stay an undifferentiated mess. As Derek McCormack writes, refrains "draw out and draw
together blocks of spacetime from the chaos of the world, generating a certain expressive
consistency through the repetition of practices, techniques, and habits" (2013, 7). Think of a
typical Western pop song: a chorus splits it into distinct parts, proclaiming the end of a verse,
but also, through repetition, becomes a source of gravity that does not let the verses go separate
ways. If the song's meaning gets reduced to the chorus, this is only because language is an
intrinsic part of it – but neither is it the only one nor is signification the only side of language.
The harmonic progression, melody, rhythm, and rhymes are the primary constants in the
repeated chorus, not the lyrics and their meaning, which may well be absent. Closer to politics,
Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie explain this function of the refrain in writing that
"opinions and arguments matter of course, but *it perhaps matters more that an opinion has to
be had*" (2010, 144). Likewise, analysing the securitisation of weapons of mass destruction, Ido

Oren and Ty Solomon show that the collective utterance of catchy phrases is "a collective chant that, though it is performed in time, constitutes a single linguistic event" (2015, 324). The content of the threat matters little for it becoming a threat – what matters is that "the phrase 'burrows into' audience members by becoming stuck in their memory like a refrain of a popular song, or even by becoming 'entrenched' in the brain in the form of an 'earworm'" (Oren and Solomon 2015, 324). The refrains of remembrance are matters of expression which, in being repeated – progressively and discretely – punctuate everyday life, marking the spaces of their appearance as those of memory regardless of that memory's content and binding these distant sites and moments into a consistent "tune."

The second important aspect of the refrain directly follows from the first. As Guattari writes, "subjectivity is collective — which does not, however, mean that it becomes exclusively social. The term "collective" should be understood in the sense of a multiplicity that deploys itself as much beyond the individual, on the side of the socius, as before the person, on the side of preverbal intensities, indicating a logic of affects rather than a logic of delimited sets" (1995, 9). Holding components of an assemblage together, refrains also hold a subjectivity together, providing the ground (or in D&G's vocabulary, establish a "territory") for its processual unfolding. Guattari's most well-known example of that aspect of the refrain is TV consumption. Watching a show, a person may be subjected to several forces of attraction and distraction: a bright animated sequence, a captivating story, pressing everyday concerns – but the screen keeps these forces together and so binds me to the couch in front of it "as a projective existential node" (Guattari 1995, 17). The social media feed is similar in this regard – it bombards me with all sorts of content and thus tears attention apart, but the feed as such attracts my gaze (and hands), providing the ground the exact moment it shatters the old one. A refrain acts as an operator of subjectivation and may both overshadow other refrains, becoming the primary point of attraction – as is the case with "capitalistic refrains," in whose realm "everyone lives in the

same rhythm and the same accelerated cadences" (Guattari 2007, 109) – and work together so that a multiplicity of refrains catalyses the development of the multiplicity in oneself. What is important for my thesis is that the aggregate bound by the refrain is irreducible to a static bricolage, to an English "assemblage" and is as much a spatial "lay-out" (see Guattari 1996a, 160), as it is a process of producing subjectivity. The expression "memory of the war lives in every family," when put on an endless repeat and accompanied by the typical response "my grandpa reached Berlin," creates an expectation that one has such a memory, a story to share. Stories as such may rarely circulate in society, but the expression, and with it, the expectation that everyone has a story – even if that story is reducible to one sentence – does. Other refrains are more subtle: an image of an elderly man dressed in a uniform decorated with the awards only needs to appear on stage to command respect, to submit everyone around to the authority of a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, even if the person had nothing to do with *that* war. Refrains of remembrance mark the space of their appearance as that of "memory" – and in doing so, transform the subject in front or uttering them into a remembering subject.

Finally, as "glue," a refrain not only holds the assemblage but also enables "passage" – horizontally, from one assemblage to another, and vertically, from "a milieu" to "a territory" to "an assemblage" to "a machine" (I will not dive into D&G's complex "geology" in this thesis). This passage is transformational rather than communicational and is captured by Deleuze and Guattari's terms such as "decoding," "deterritorialization," and "transduction." Importantly, all these transformations involve both ungluing and connection, the "detachment of an ethico-aesthetic 'partial object' from the field of dominant significations" (Guattari 1995, 13) and the emergence of new "existential territories" (ibid, 14-15), autonomisation and creation/creativity. In this part of the thesis, I will show plenty of examples of such "an excited state" (Guattari 2013, 146) of the refrain in memory assemblage and, at the end of this chapter, will unpack it by situating a refrain in the art of readymade and musical practice of sampling. For now, it is

important to note that refrains of remembrance escape strict positioning in memory – not only to move between calls for war and expressions of anti-militarism but also to question and, in rare instances, suspend the very logic of grounding subjectivity in an imaginary past that the use of the word "memory" reproduces.

Therefore, the concept of the "refrain" is the most direct answer to the question of the everyday normativity of war "memory" and its relationship to creativity, both as the process of variation within the norm and the practice of its suspense. By drawing the cartography of the major refrains of remembrance, I aim to make visible the normative power that they are operators of, that they are captured by, and from which they carve ways out. Some of the refrains I write about are firmly connected with militaristic pride and resentment, others – with the force of mourning, while yet others with both. Some refrains are hypervisible – for example, the songs about the war – while others are omnipresent yet subtle, lurking on the margins of the sensible ("The memory of the war lives in each family"). Most importantly, together, they all contribute to the normalisation of remembrance in everyday life through their repetition across and within different milieus, connecting even the most contradictory instances of remembrance and weaving them into the fabric of the ordinary, common, everyday life. They make *war* an integral part of everyday life – whether as a glory to repeat or a disaster to avoid.

Yet, I do not aim to provide an all-encompassing map of commemorations. While this part of the thesis offers a more familiar critical analysis in comparison to the more experimental chapters of the next one, the least I want is to reduce memory of the war to an ideology and either subject my reader to it or explain it away to such an extent that the aesthetic and the affective – the *experience* of remembrance – disappears behind the intelligible. It is for this reason that although the most well-known symbols of the GPW memory in Russia – the black-and-orange St George ribbon and the infamous slogan "We can repeat!" – are essential components of the commemorative aesthetics, I do not devote separate sections to the analysis

of their circulation. Far more refrains of war than refrains of remembrance, "a dead memory" (Guattari 2013, 146), they are so rigidly positioned in the militarist discourse, so strongly draw an equivalence between being a part of the nation and supporting violence that there is little room for manoeuvre in relating to them, little potential for creative reappropriation. The rhythm they make is overly simplistic: repeat, repeat, repeat. Yet, I cannot entirely avoid the refrains of war – precisely because they are *everywhere* I look for refrains of remembrance. Hence, both "we can repeat" and the St George ribbon, as well as other expressions of militarism, do appear in this part of the thesis – and in the rest of the dissertation – but only as the aesthetic devices that help me recreate the affective atmospheres I try to withdraw from. Instead, I give the floor to several refrains that circulate primarily as sensible material and, in themselves, are ideologically indeterminate. Similar to what Kathleen Stewart calls "ordinary affects," these refrains "don't lend themselves to a perfect, three-tiered parallelism between analytic subject, concept, and world. They are, instead, a problem or question emergent in disparate scenes and incommensurate forms and registers; a tangle of potential connections" (Stewart 2007, 4). What matters to me in this curatorial work is that the refrain under consideration is a tension, a juncture between irrelevant noise and all-too-powerful meaning, the site where power is most intense and where it collapses under its own weight. I aim to make both lines present within a single "exhibition."

While I work with refrains of remembrance in both chapters that constitute this part of the thesis, they significantly differ in empirical focus, depth, and writing style. In this chapter, I concentrate more on the standardisation of memory and the use of refrains in popular culture. I show the extent to which memory of the war is present in the everyday aesthetic landscape by bringing together various conflicting instances of refrains' circulation and the modes of expression as diverse as language, body-image, and sound. My aim is to show the heterogeneity that refrains of remembrance hold together and their normative power through the range and

diversity of the examples of the refrains' expressiveness. In this sense, this chapter fulfils most of the "cartographic" function I mentioned earlier. It is important for me not to reduce refrains either to "empty signifiers" or overly meaningful symbols but to show how their signifying and a-signifying sides, the standardisation and creative appropriation that they are caught by, come together to constitute the "memory" of the Great Patriotic War as a "meaningful noise."

By contrast, the next chapter works primarily with one refrain – the expression "No one is forgotten. Nothing is forgotten" – and shows how its circulation informs different relationships to the dead in everyday life, collective commemorative rituals, and contemporary art. In that chapter, I go deeper into the everyday operation of a single expression and focus more on the variety of practices that its indeterminacy enables and the variation that the refrain itself undergoes in each line. Put simply, this chapter focuses more on the normativity of remembrance, while the next concentrates on creativity through which it is diversified and suspended, although both aspects are present in each chapter.

Lastly, it is worth emphasising that no single mode of expression is "appropriate" to the refrain. Guattari developed this term to account for "the polyphony of modes of subjectivation," which "actually corresponds to a multiplicity of ways of 'keeping time'" (1995, 15). According to Guattari, while signification is undoubtedly a critical component of the subjectivity's constitution, "extra-linguistic components: somatic, ethological, mythographical, institutional, economic, aesthetic, etc" (1996a, 162) are always at play too, even if their roles are unequal. Guattari's major concern was that, especially on the collective level, simplification of refrains and modes of subjectivation "leads to an impoverishment, to a serialization of the assemblages that it affects" (2011, 109). However, a refrain can be the catalyst for creativity and change, too. If analytically "the refrain" is one of the "diagnostic" concepts through which Guattari criticised standardisation, within the "ethico-aesthetic paradigm" that Guattari (1995) advocated for "a refrain-analysis could be productive of a different subjectivity, other

modalities that dis-pose existence differently" (Guattari 2013, 149). It expresses the need for experimentation, for finding new refrains when the old ones lock the subjectivity within a single path, for subjecting refrains themselves to transformation. Here, such an "ethico-aesthetic" approach, examined in detail in the previous chapter, manifests in the transformation of some refrains of *remembrance* into refrains of *writing*: the matters to think with and the aesthetic devices that punctuate *this* text as refrains turning it into the plane where their connection with "memory" is both exposed and severed. One such refrain is "at 4 AM, without a declaration of war," with which I began this introduction and which I continue confusing and unpacking in the next section.

The cranes are gone

One of the most internationally well-known and critically acclaimed Soviet films, *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957), is an early example of how "at 4 AM" transformed from an instance of direct speech marking the beginning of the war into a piece of popular memory culture. It tells the story of a young couple – Boris and Veronica – whose happy lives are interrupted by the sudden outbreak of the Great Patriotic War. Boris, despite having a reservation on the mobilisation due to his professional skills, volunteers as a soldier. Veronica, unable to find her way through the Moscow streets packed with the about-to-die young conscripts and their beloved ones, is unable to say her last goodbyes. Most of the film focuses on Veronica's wartime life after that moment. Her flat gets destroyed under the shelling and the parents die. She moves in with Boris's family only to be raped by his cousin (Marc), who she feels morally obliged to marry afterwards. Marc stayed in Moscow due to the reservation, which, as we learn later, he obtained through a bribe. The family is evacuated to the east, where they live together with another family and treat wounded soldiers. At one point, Veronica is on the verge of committing suicide due to the shame over her marriage, which she believes Boris would consider a betrayal, but she witnesses a lonely child on the road and saves him. Having learnt

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that his name was Boris, Veronica adopts the kid. Soon, she discovers that Marc is cheating on her – and when the infidelity of his reservation is revealed, Marc is kicked out of the family house. All this time, Veronica believes that Boris is alive, despite having received not a single letter from him – and keeps expecting his return even after hearing the story of his death from a fellow military comrade. Only when the soldiers return home and Veronica meets her fiancé's friend, Stepan, does she acknowledge the loss. In the end, she rejoins Boris's father. The two watch the flying cranes and leave into the new world they will rebuild in the name of the fallen.

A major example of Thaw cinema (Woll 2000, Youngblood 2001), *The Cranes are Flying* stands apart from most of the Soviet and Russian films about the Great Patriotic War in focusing on civilian life in besieged cities and evacuation rather than the heroism of soldiers on the battlefield. Although some of the war violence is experienced by the characters directly – for example, the destruction of Veronica's flat – they get to know the loss belatedly, as an event they did not witness but experienced as a story (and, in a meta twist, this is precisely our experience as an audience watching the film many decades after the end of the war). Focusing on the experience of loss, the whole movie is structured precisely to convey that split in time, the co-existence of multiple temporalities at war. In the very beginning, time itself communicates the belatedness of the event's intelligibility. The film starts with Boris and Veronica walking along the streets of Moscow on a summer night and enjoying the emptiness of the city centre. Joyfully sharing romantic moments free of parental and social control, they approach the Kremlin Clock, and suddenly, the frame shifts – now far darker, it shows the Clock from below, diagonally positioned, striking 4 AM. Boris sees Veronica home, and the two part ways, promising to meet the next day. At noon, his family gathers for lunch and listens to the radio broadcast. We do not get to hear the content of the radio broadcast, but the audience knows its content. A bit after noon MSK, on 22 June 1941, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, delivered a speech, whose condensed version I have provided in

the epigraph to this chapter. Marc rushes to wake Boris up. "Borya! Bor'ka, it's the war! Boris, do you hear – it's the war! War!" Boris responds: "So be it" – and returns to his dreams.

Boris never truly wakes up. He volunteers as a soldier because he believes that this is his duty – and yet, as his father, who repeatedly unmasks the work of ideology, reminds us, this "duty," imposed upon a young man who has not seen violence and has not experienced loss yet, is a version of romantic nationalism (that does not correspond well with the Marxist-Leninist ideology) removed from the brutality of warfare. Neither the striking clock nor its transformation into a story told by Molotov imbue Boris with the horror of the unknown, loss and killing. As the finale of the character's arc, the scene of Boris's death, which with utmost precision begins right in the middle of the film, completes the story initiated by the "4 AM." Now Boris is in the midst of the war and so should finally wake up – yet, precisely because it is death, because it is he who is lost, Boris plunges into the dream even more, imagining his and Veronica's wedding in the final moments of his life.

A consequence of the war, Boris's death – the climax of the only episode that carries us into the more conventional setting of war taking place on the battlefield – condenses the war into a single scene, which shows it as a trauma after which "peace" cannot be lived as a simple return to the normal life, where the brightest moment of peace coincides with the first, yet unrecognizable sign of war – "at 4 AM." As such, it is both the end of Boris's arc and the beginning of Veronica's. Following the repetition of "at 4 AM," Boris's death occurs thrice. First, it is shown as an objective event – as something that truly happened and that we, as the audience, know. Veronica, however, is unaware of the passage of her beloved one. She keeps waiting for his return home – or at least for a letter. When Vladimir, a fellow soldier whom Boris died saving, comes to their family house to tell the father of his son's death, he narrates the story to Veronica, unaware that she is the fiancé Boris kept talking about. At this moment, we see Boris's death the second time – now not as direct witnesses but as listeners to the story

told by the witness. Even this, however, proves to be insufficient for Veronica to acknowledge the new world she has to live in, and she refuses to believe Vladimir because he did not see Boris's funeral, only the moment he fell. Finally, Boris dies the third time when Veronica acknowledges his death and the need to move on. That happens when she meets Stepan, Boris's old friend, as he returns home after the war. She asks him, "So?" and he, without a single coherent word and expressing heaviness and grief with his face, gives Veronica a photo of hers that Boris carried until the last moments of his life. Now, the third, most credible, and final death appears neither as a direct visual scene nor as a story told by the witness of that scene ("Did you see him die? Perhaps he was just wounded"), but as the absence of a story, an unspoken event that is only ever masked by the attempt to represent it directly.

The Cranes are Flying is full of symbols that narrate the story and accentuate specific themes implicitly, indirectly, nonverbally. Sometimes these symbols are used to represent unrepresentable (due to both the heaviness of depicted trauma and state censorship) – as is the case with the scene of rape, in which the sounds of the dive-bomber, the loud, chaotic piano play and the menacing gaze of Marc draw the outlines of violence that we cannot witness, and the survivor cannot narrate. Sometimes symbolism matters little for the story and appears as an additional aesthetic layer that captures our attention – the cranes flying as the war starts and ends symbolise peace, but their movement, taking place after the war started and after it ended, is only a "consequence" of the violence. Sometimes, though, while retaining the representational function, these symbols establish the tone, the rhythm, and the points of intensity of the film, becoming repeated signposts that keep our attention, the integral elements of the film's structure, and the subjective points of leave and return for the characters. The flight of the cranes may have no effect on the war, but it is the last and the first moment of peace for Veronica; the clock is the repeated motif of death that may be shown explicitly (the Kremlin Clock striking 4 AM) or remain on the margins of the immediately perceptible (the timing of

Boris's death) but is the major catalyst of the story, the marker of the scenes,' themes,' and locations' change, the tissue differentiating and holding the parts of the film together. In this last instance, it is no longer a generalised sign or a symbol that the audience is presented with but an element and a technique of composition. A refrain.

Completing the temporal play of the film, Stepan delivers the final speech in front of the cheerful crowd. After celebrating the victory and acknowledging those who fell, he says:

> Time will pass. People will rebuild cities, villages; our wounds will heal. But the ferocious hatred of war will never fade! We deeply feel the grief of those who cannot meet their dearest today. And we will do everything for future fiancées to never lose their fiancés, for mothers not to shiver for their children's lives, for brave fathers not to cry furtively. We won and stayed to live – not in the name of destruction, but in the name of building a new life!

I wake up to the sound of the alarm clock. The gravity of the bed, however old, balled, and uncomfortable the pillows are, is too strong for me to stand up, and the space of thoughtless dream is too attractive for my eyes to open just yet. As always, trying to turn off the alarm on my phone, I miss the button and instead postpone it. My wife, who tends to be more diligent in following the technological reminders of the need to upkeep the routine, opens her eyes and picks up the phone to check the news. A few moments later, with a calm of shock voice, she turns towards me. "So, my darling. The war started." I mumble something in return, still hesitant to leave the bed. The second alarm forces my consciousness to regain control of the body. I check the news feed. It is the war indeed. Scrolling through the reports of shelling and the first comments on the outbreak of the new war in Europe, I reach the very beginning, the excerpts from Putin's speech. The war has not been declared; "the special military operation" has been. Time of the speech: the night/early morning, February 24. 6 AM Moscow time. 5 AM in Kyiv. 4 AM here, in Vienna.

Cranes have long flown away – it's winter.

At 4 AM, without a declaration of war.

Not in the name of destruction but in the name of building a new life.

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Just wake me up when February ends.

Levitan and Levitanians: the voice of the war, the voices of "memory"

Anyone may utter "at 4 AM" to bring about "war" as the object of memory, but it is a distinct, singular voice of Yuri Levitan that the appearance of the words summons. The icon of Soviet radio, from the mid-1930s, he was trusted to be an intermediary between the state and the nation at most essential times. The death of Stalin and Gagarin's flight into outer space are two well-known examples of significant events that were announced to the people of the Soviet Union by Levitan, that the people of the Soviet Union heard announced with his *voice*. It is the Great Patriotic War, during which Levitan read out the state decrees and battlefront news, that this voice has come to be associated with though, constituting the commemorative soundscape together with the technologies of killing and wartime songs.

The words are spoken even if they rest on paper; the words are spoken in a very precise way. Even if expressed in the genre of documentary prose, as a factual report, the words "at 4 AM, without a declaration of war" *sound*. The text marks the space of its appearance as that of memory, but the voice that releases them into the world is the sonic background against which the words themselves are organised. A much-repeated "territorial motif" of an unexpected, ruthless attack early in the morning joins a "territorial counterpoint" of a deep low voice (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 317), forming a "complex refrain" that "marks the intersection of heterogeneous modes of subjectivation" (Guattari 1996b, 199). The repetition of the words delimits the space, the milieu – but the voice fills in the gaps and underlines cracks, establishes the heights and lows, providing the tune of remembrance with a dynamic, or in this case, better say, affective range. The voice is to the lyrics as the instrument is to the note. The instrument does not simply let the content sound but makes it resonate in a specific way, within the multiple constraints the instrument's design imposes upon the qualities of the sound and the manner of playing. Its timbre escapes language, including the language of musical notation, but is what

makes the performance of that language sound *this* way (Dolan and Rehding 2021, 5). In the voice, the design and the expression coincide in one body. It is not the "who" or "what" that makes the sound what it is but *how* – the manner of the performance, or to put it simply, style. What: at 4 AM. How: Levitan's voice.

The announcement of the beginning of the war could be the reason for Levitan's inseparability from its memory; however, it was not him who uttered "at 4 AM" for the first time. What the people of the Soviet Union could hear on June 22, at 12:15 PM, was the voice remarkably different from that of the state broadcaster: it sounded much sharper and resonated on a higher range of frequencies; it changed in volume and intonation frivolously, as if inserting several exclamation marks in the middle of a sentence. Despite being the head of Soviet diplomacy, Vyacheslav Molotov was not accustomed to public speech and suffered from stammer since childhood (Watson 2005, 5). His was the voice of the *party* before the war, the voice that called upon the unity of the international workers and that could easily differentiate between the fascist enemy "elites" and the working-class people. It could not have announced the *patriotic*, let alone the *Great* Patriotic War – his voice proclaimed another kind of a war that will have become the one I know as the Great Patriotic one later, consolidated this way in the final radio broadcast with which Levitan announced the end of the war, the beginning of peace, the beginning of memory.

Although Levitan was not the first to retrospectively trace the start of the war to the early morning of 22nd June 1941, he did read out Molotov's speech. Later. First, nine times over the same day (Taranova 2010, 9). Then, in 1967, in a significantly condensed and modified version (Levitan 1967). During the war, radio broadcasts were not recorded, and it was only when the state embarked upon the extensive project of monumentalising the war as the most outstanding achievement of the Soviet people in the 1960s that he repeated the wartime reports for the archival records (Abesser 2021, 195). At the same time Levitan became one of the hosts

of "The Minute of Silence," the annual radio and TV program broadcast on May 9 at around 7 PM and consisting of memorial speeches culminating in the actual minute of silence (Kachkaeva 2004). The myth of Levitan's announcement was further solidified as the generals reinforced it in their memoirs, erasing references to Molotov (Taranova 2010, 9). Levitan also led regular radio show *Veterans are Writing* (*Pishut veterany*), where he read out letters from the GPW veterans and younger generations interested in "memory" (Taranova 2010, 193-195). Levitan spent four years as the voice of the war. He spent the rest of his life as the voice of its memory.

It is not Levitan's voice that I, and those who were too young or not even born yet at the time of his death, customarily imagine as the voice of the war though – or rather, it is still his voice, but one he has been dispossessed of. Levitan died in 1983, thirteen years before I was born. It is the voices of two other broadcasters that the late Soviet generation and those who were born after the collapse of the USSR are most familiar with: Igor Kirillov and Evgeny Khoroshevtsev. Both started careers long before the dissolution of the USSR. Kirillov was one of the prominent faces and voices on Soviet television, while Khoroshevtsev worked on radio with Levitan. Their continuing participation in the post-Soviet Russia's war commemorations ensured that the remembered event was still "ours" despite the collapse of the state that won the war, that the "we" of the USSR and the "we" of Russia were the same. More importantly, though, the voices of Kirillov and Khoroshevtsev established the continuity between the "we" that fought in the war and the "we" that has never known it by being hardly distinguishable from the voice of Levitan. If you listen to the three attentively, on repeat, aware that it is different persons speaking on each recording, you will be able to discern the differences in timbre, height, and the overall manner of speech, especially comparing Kirillov to the other two broadcasters.[5] But outside the explication of the person that the voice belongs to, contextualised

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[5] Compare, for instance, Khoroshevtsev (Kremlin 2015), Levitan (1945) and Kirillov (1991).

only in the war commemorations, the differences between them collapse, as if Kirillov and Khoroshevtsev intentionally recreated each aspect of Levitan's style. As a result, the broadcasters' voices produce the same "sonic body" – an imaginary outline of the voice's source (Kane 2014, 8). In the absence of Levitan but feeding upon the fame of his name and voice, they only need to recreate the latter to summon the former. Hardly discernible from the original, even when playing in the neighbouring tab, Kirillov and Khoroshevtsev *are* the originals. They are Levitans speaking after death, outside death. The speaker may have been dispossessed of his voice, but he continues living as long as that voice keeps resounding – just as the nation lives even after the formal proclamation of its death as long as the traces of the past are nourished.

Levitan came to substitute Molotov in saying "at 4 AM, without a declaration of war"; Kirillov and Khoroshevtsev came to substitute Levitan in saying anything about the war by adopting his manner of speech. However, the relationships between the substitute and the original differ in these cases. The appearance of Levitan as the voice of the war erased Molotov from the memorial soundscape, but the appearance of Kirillov and Khoroshevtsev as Levitanians outliving the teacher positioned him even more firmly in the memory. On the one hand, there is the erasure of the past, and on the other, the memorialisation of a monument, the conservation of a memorial. The significance of the latter move comes to the forefront if we remember that the relationship between the voice and the text is that of how to what or the style to the content. The substitution of Molotov's voice for Levitan's is an attribution of a different timbre and tone to the beginning of the war, the retrospective change of its aesthetic and affective quality from the international class struggle to the patriotism of the great nation – one *how* against another. But the appearance of Levitan's fan base marks a different kind of shift. Against the death of the author, the author is reborn in the countless army of fanatic followers who allow for little deviation from the written word or, in this case, a sounding voice. One style,

ʹone voice becomes several, which are then brought together again but under the authority of the name. The style becomes standardised.[6] Levitan appears in place of Molotov. In the absence of Levitan, the *Levitanian* voice is born. The memorial *how* becomes eternal *this is how*.[7]

Transformation of how into this is how, of the style into the standard is also a movement that tears apart the separation between the style and the content, the voice and the text, because the voice itself, as the object of imitation, has become the spoken content. It matters little what that voice says because it is itself a "what," both the reiteration of Levitan's style and what that reiteration is about. Most important is that the voice keeps saying something and the sound continues. It is "auto-objective" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 317). Now, it does not merely envelope the words within another aesthetic layer but constitutes a parallel sonic and mnemonic space. A memory of nothing other than itself, the Levitanian voice becomes a separate refrain, a motif autonomous from both the content and the speaker.

Yet, the voice is still significant, special, unique because there is a name to it, even though there is no longer a body carrying that name. Adriana Cavarero argues that between "two exemplary modes of uniqueness," the voice is primary compared to a proper name (2005, 24). The latter belongs to the domain of speech, which "can play tricks" (ibid). The voice, however, "does not mask, but rather unmasks the speech that masks it" (ibid). According to Cavarero, "Every voice is unique, and because it is unique, once it is known, it can be recognized" (2005, 25). But what happens when the voice is too easily recognised and joins the lie of language instead of subverting it? One of the strongest arguments Cavarero makes in favour of the voice's uniqueness is the limit of imitation: the imitator cannot mimic their own voice (ibid, 98). Yet, as she also insists throughout the book, the voice is irreducible to expression – it emerges in "the play between vocal emission and acoustic perception" (Cavarero

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[6] Deleuze and Guattari write of a similar process as crystallisation of "a signature" into "a style" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 316-317)

[7] Kirillov himself admits this but goes beyond the issue of voice to suggest that the broadcasters "took his [Levitan's] perception of our life, his approach to reality as a standard" (1987, 131).

2005, 4). That "play" also produces a gap, though – we are able to hear only a fraction of the frequencies that the vocal cords release. Outside of marketing *this* voice, the marginal difference between the ever-expanding aggregate of voices may be hard to discern. Undoubtedly, there is always a voice behind "Levitan," but the name does not need it to resound from the speakers to acquire significance. On the contrary, the name *gives* significance to the voice while seizing its resonating, durational, undulatory mode of expression. No one knows an imitator's own voice – and so cannot imitate it – but there is no need for an imitator to copy the voice of a person whose name is unfamiliar to the audience, for its uniqueness will not register. The name distinguishes the voice as worthy of listening to. But in that very appearance of uniqueness, the voice becomes distinguishable, recognisable – and so eventually imitable and standardisable. To paraphrase Cavarero, every voice is unique, and because it is unique, once it is known, it can be standardised.

The documentary "Yuri Levitan is at the microphone" (Tsyvarev 1989) is a special case in this respect. It brings together Levitan's name and voice in a story about the announcer that mainly consists of excerpts from interviews with him and his daughter. Here, the unity of the name and the voice is achieved by introducing Levitan's own words into the film – now, speaking outside of the written script, the voice appears attached not only to the name but to the *person*, reassembled this way six years after his death. What the resurface of the actual living being who has friends and relatives, whose speech extends beyond reading out the state decrees and other pre-made texts, who is capable of expressing emotions other than those required by the job, reveals though, is that "outside the script" is not so different from the script, that the person is strikingly similar to the impersonated voice. His "life" seems to end with the beginning of a career or shows only through it – through his determination, professionalism, trips across the country where he was so kind to talk to other people, and, of course, his eternal love for the Motherland that called upon him to fulfil his duty. That duty was to make people

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happy, as he frames the essence of the profession in the late talk at the end of the film – happy

for the achievements of the great Soviet people and the Party. The most captivating part of the

film comes when Levitan's daughter Natalia gives the following qualification of her father:

> "I want to say that he was a person of a high communist morality – and not only
> by appearance, he was a person of a high communist morality within. He was a
> true party person, of a Leninist kind" (Tsyvarev 1989, 16:40-16:50)

Ultimately, bringing separate Levitan-refrains together to show that the voice and the

name belonged to a person, the film only succeeds in showing that just as the name and the

voice were the impersonal treasure of the nation, so was the living body in which they

coincided. Levitan was truly the voice of the Soviet Union, "the most official of all Soviet

voice-over men" (Hicks 2014, 132). The voice of the country, where, as the late- and post-

Soviet generations keep saying, everything was the same.

In their 2021 song, Saint-Petersburg-based band Shortparis uses another phrase firmly

associated with Levitan, "Govorit Moskva [Moscow is speaking]," as a critique of a security

apparatus, in which the rigid hierarchy, the demand for undisputed discipline, the extensive

application of force to achieve it, and social abandonment only result in the proliferation of

resentment and everyday violence. Here, authority appears meaningless, demanding nothing

beyond submission ("The fear of the revolver is like faith, is the eternal measure of our love.

'And the discipline is the reason,' said the man having come to the wall."), and the crisis of

meaning among those who follow the orders for nothing ("Half-price boys") leads to them

finding meaning in violence as such. In the video clip, the collapse of discipline into violence

is expressed in André Breton's words: "The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down

into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the

crowd" (Breton 1969, 125). The clip features training cadets and ends with words becoming an

action: one of the band members randomly shoots his comrades. The cameraman flees – until

the bullet reaches him (Shortparis 2021).

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Crucially, the expression of both authority and unrest is encapsulated in a single phrase: "Moscow is speaking." Levitan's calling card, the words with which he started the wartime broadcasts, here they are detached from the style of speech they are associated with and are uttered by a radically different, high, bright voice of the frontman Nikolai Komyakin to reveal the side of security that disappears behind the official "radio voice" talking about the outstanding achievements of the nation. The declaration of the speaking subject is exposed as the top-down imposition of both the content and the structure within which it appears. Moscow is speaking, it is only Moscow that can speak. Moscow is speaking to everyone; Moscow is speaking for everyone. Moscow keeps speaking with the same voice. That is how Moscow speaks; that is how you should. At the end of each verse, the power of the titular phrase bursts out into violence, as "Moscow is speaking [govorit Moskva]" turns into Komyakin's scream "TELL ME [govori mne]."[8] On the one hand, this finale brings us into the situation of interrogation, and together with the rest of the lyrics, shows how the police forces, both trained to follow orders and holding power, redirect the humiliation they experience onto those whose place in the social hierarchy is less ambivalent; on the other, "TELL ME" appears as the rebellion of the subjugated who, faced with orders for the sake of obedience, with repeat for the sake of repeat, reclaim their right to speak and demand response and responsibility. "TELL ME" is an extension and dissemination of power but also its suspense that is contemporaneous with the collapse of language. The never-changing voice of the party and the war breaks down as another sings with a falsetto that somehow seems less pretentious and demands not silence but response.

Moscow keeps speaking though, its voice barely changing. For many years, Khoroshevtsev's main job was to announce Vladimir Putin's entrance. While the content of

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[8] It also occasionally collapses into "govori 'ma'," ("speak 'ma'"), which is probably an allusion to the standartisation of a Moscow dialect of Russian, where the unstressed letter "o" is pronounced as [a] (e.g. "Moskva" is pronounced as [Maskva] – hence "speak 'ma'").

that announcement was straightforward – the title, the first, last, and patronymic names of the president (Taranova 2010, 190) – its Levitanian style drew the connection between the summoned person and the universe of the war, between the appearance of the leader in the present and the images of a distant past. In this way, Khoroschevtsev's voice participated in the establishment of continuity between the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia together with other elements of the past, such as the music of the national anthem. The resurgence of the voice was different from that of the anthem, though – whereas the latter is a generic leitmotif of a nation, the very specific manner of speech inherited from Levitan both carried on the legacy of the Soviet Union and a particular part of it. The voice of the nation *and* the voice of the war binds the two, jumps from one to another. The war continues, the nation lives, the nation living under the war calls for a leader who will bring peace. Reconnecting war, generic nationalism, and autocracy in a single scene, the voice enriches the banal walk of a human being with layers of meaning, sensation, and affect. It fills the lack of authority's foundations and masks the meaninglessness of the authoritarian demand for submission. The transcoded voice ties the different milieus and temporalities into a thick thread, making it difficult to untie war "memory" from the praise for the one and only leader. What: Vladimir Putin. How: Levitanian voice.

Den' Pobedy: The sound of repetition

Levitan gave the Soviet Union the voice to *speak*. Lev Leshchenko and Iosif Kobzon drew another dimension of the official sonorous territory by incorporating a similar timbre and formal style into a popular *song*. In the early 2000s, the time of my childhood, the highly academic, classical style of these established Soviet artists stood in stark contrast to the new pop scene dominated by the desire to imitate the West. At one moment, the stage on TV was occupied by a single performer dressed in a classical monotonous suit, standing still and singing about the Motherland in a low, far-reaching bass. A few minutes later, the young boy bands reaching the highest pitches of their voices, dancing all over the stage, dressed in bright suits or

top tanks and loose trousers took over that same stage. It was clear what the preferences of a younger generation should be: on the one hand, there was the late Soviet decadence and boredom, and on the other, the new Russian growth and fun. My mom helped solidify that distinction in a little boy's psyche. For her, a woman whose adolescence coincided with the collapse of the USSR, everything ugly and malfunctioning has been (and still is) "Soviet" (whether it indeed was or not). In the early 2000s, for me, still learning language and the affective slippages built into it, everything bad was Soviet and everything Soviet was bad.

Kobzon and Leshchenko could be considered "official" performers of the communist party under Brezhnev. Kobzon's career started in the 1960s, while Leshchenko came to fame a decade later, reaching the peak of his career in the late 1970s. Their continuing presence at the concerts broadcast on the TV in the early 2000s was odd. Their repertoires consisted of "patriotic" songs, and their formal clothing style corresponded to that of the party elites. They looked and sounded like a reiteration of a standard – but that standard was no longer in place. It may be for this reason that the dislike of them brought my family together – while my grandfather used to remember the old Soviet times (particularly the late 1950s-1960s, his childhood) with nostalgia, he never expressed fondness of the authorities and instead educated me about the violence of the regime before I was able to read anything about it. Thus, he was more prone to listen to Soviet folk or "bard" songs and Russian chanson (the genre of criminal-themed songs that has nothing to do with the French genre it is named after). My mom still hated it, and so did I, associating that music with the fights the two would have at the end of the family gatherings. But at least there was some common ground, a collective catalyst or a counterpoint that would call for the shift of pace, the change of the channel, the lowering of volume – and perhaps ultimately for us to turn off the repetitive voices of the TV and to listen to our own.

For me, Kobzon and Leshchenko seemed to be the same person, even if the collective body of the two was distinct from the glossy mass of contemporary performers. However, despite the resemblance of their voices and the manner of performances, each had a distinct calling card. Kobzon used to wear a recognisable wig, whose sharp outlines only highlighted the pretentiousness of his singing. Leshchenko, by contrast, was well-known for one special song: "The Victory Day." Composed in 1975, it has become the anthem of commemorations and is especially renowned for these lines: "It [the Victory Day] is the holiday with the grey hair on the temples, it is the joy with tears upon eyes." Slightly modified, they have become a common epithet to describe 9 May and yet another refrain of remembrance – "the holiday with tears upon eyes."

The song never made me happy or sad though; never made me smile or cry. Performed with the large orchestral led by Leshchenko's opera-trained voice, it was still a *song* rather than an *aria* or a *lied*, a musical composition infused with the loftiness of classicism but lacking the appropriate tonal and dynamic range. Its melody covers one octave and is organised upon an even, metric march rhythm. The three-chord progression its verse and a large portion of the chorus are built on is the basis for most Western pop music, as the annoying YouTube commercial keeps reminding me whenever I watch too many guitar gear videos, and is the major constant of the music my grandpa loved and I loathed. The only relatively unusual quality of the song is the key, A#m, which is half a step higher than a typical pop song. In short, "The Victory Day" is an example of standard *pop music*, or a variation of a pop music *standard*, mixed with an academic *vocal* standard, further standardised by the metric rhythm but pretending to be exceptional. If Levitan's voice has been standardised, Leshchenko's is the replication of standards, unique for how impersonal it is rather than for how special but impersonated it has become. Even Soviet musical bureaucrats initially found it inappropriate (on the grounds of it being too cheerful though; MacFadyen 2001, 180).

The excessiveness of everything "standard" should come as no surprise given that "The Victory Day" is a military and a memorial song. The genre determines repetition as the central aesthetic motif – repetition of tradition, lyrics, rhyme, and beat, repetition of the victory. "There is nothing less rhythmic than a military march," as Deleuze and Guattari write (1987, 313): the even, binary meter it is composed around demands only obedience and discipline, rejects interpretation, and offers a straightforward interpellation, outlines death as the destination of both acceptance and denial. One – two, left – right, cry – cheer. The voice may be singing "The Victory Day! The Victory Day! The Victory Daaaaay!" but doing so in style defined by unoriginal, soulless, and disembodied perfection, without a "grain" (Barthes 1977) it superadds the repetitive manner to the repeated content. Repetition as such is what the voice says in singing about the Victory Day in a manner devoid of style.

Still, Leshchenko's absence of style is a distinct style, a unique manner of reciting the most typical manners of public performance, a "without a voice" that is still a voice. One of the ways in which that voice comes to the forefront as that of a distinct artist is through the appearance of a background – a military choir. Absent from the record of "The Victory Day," the choir has been integral to the song's live performances since the time Leshchenko sang it during the televised concert celebrating the Day of Police [*militsiia*] in 1975 (Leshchenko 1975). While the appearance of the soldiers on stage is a thematic element of a memorial song more broadly, it also has an aesthetic function – to draw a contrast. Standing and singing behind the lead artist, the choir populates an otherwise empty stage and introduces a difference within the homogenous scene, drawing a foreground contemporaneously with becoming a background. A separate performance of men in uniform is placed on the margins of our perception, contributing to the production of what appears as the edge and the centre, the blur and the focus. That performance at the border of the stage is even more standardised, lacking improvisational capacity, than the one of the artist whose name has been announced. A crowd

of unknown soldiers dressed in the same uniform and singing in unison appears as a new homogenous space against which the all-too-standard artist looks exceptional, the lead, the head of the collective. Yet, that contrast emerges precisely because the background and foreground are not entirely separate. They are a part of the same event, which also includes the audience, randomly appearing in the shot of the TV camera but usually consisting of high-profile, occasionally slightly crying, but generally rather cheerful guests. [9] Together with the transformation of the styleless into a distinct style through the introduction of contrast, the background, the foreground, and the beyond are brought together in a collective "we," energised by the slight contrasts.

Leshchenko's role in the song is to elevate repetition to the status of its main but unspoken content. The role of the choir is to make the bland, overly simplistic design of the package into which that content is wrapped over and over again look distinct, stylish, and, if not brand new, then at least not overly old. Additionally, with the choir's appearance, the "we" of soldiers and artists, civilians and leaders, exceptional and ordinary, powerful and obedient but equally patriotic, is born. Finally, the contrast within the scene makes it somewhat more appealing and transforms it into the catalyser of the collective movement, even if that movement is an even, repetitive march. Repetition, collective, and potential – this triad translates into the refrain of remembrance, which is also the refrain of war, the refrain calling for more victories even if they coincide with tears, for the latter are inseparable from a holiday proper, from the event constituting the nation, and so must repeat too. The artist sings "The Victory Day!" A banner on a poche car parked in the centre of Moscow translates: "WE CAN REPEAT."

Tears, joy – all gone. At 4 AM, without a declaration of war. Neither in the name of destruction nor in the name of building a new life – just for the sake of repeat. Just because we can.

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[9] See for instance, Leshchenko 2018.

The image of a veteran

Leshchenko's live performances of "The Victory Day" background the choir of soldiers. However, since within the context of a memorial song, these soldiers represent the generation that fought in the war, it is the veterans that the song effectively backgrounds. Their place in the discourse and aesthetics of the GPW remembrance is ambivalent. The state officials have justified the need to hold the May 9 parade with the need to honour the survivors of the war (Markwick 2012, 712), thereby placing them at the centre of the commemorative discourse. The definition and privileges of the veterans are provided by federal law "On Veterans"[10] and have been expanded over the years since the end of the war.[11] A veteran is a sacred person whose status, coinciding with age, commands unconditional respect. Yet, a veteran is known for being continuously sacrificed, excluded from material welfare, and valued in words, not action – the reality many of them found themselves in by the late 1990s (Danilova 2010, 907). While for the state, a veteran is a symbol of the victory, for the critics of the government, a veteran is a symbol of the state's hypocrisy and cynicism manifested in the poor living conditions of the war survivors. "We are proud of the veterans, they are proud of us" clashes with "We are proud of the veterans, but you are only using their image for self-promotion." A man dressed in a uniform decorated with multiple awards stands against a person who survived occupation but lives in a flat with no water. A veteran attests to both the success of nation-building and the failure of capitalism, to the intergenerational unity and antagonism, to the embodiment of what has to and must never repeat.

A veteran, or rather an image of a veteran, has a symbolic power, acts as a signifier that, on the one hand, fits well any chain, links with the opposed sides of an antagonism and, on the other, imbues them with value. Its function is not so much to bind elements together as it is to

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[10] Available here http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/7432.

[11] See Danilova 2010 on the development of Soviet and Russian welfare towards the veterans and the specific place of the GPW veterans in it.

highlight them, to *reinforce* the chain that is already strong enough. As such, a veteran may appear as the discursive centre of gravity, as an attractor that captures our perception – but only to step back and transfer the captivated gaze onto someone else. Putin can never stand behind or to the side of the dozens of aged people invited to the 9 May parade, just as Leshchenko cannot give away the centre of the stage to the masses. They are the stars – the veterans can only be honorary guests or backstage performers.

The case of Alexey Navalny's trial for defamation against Ignat Artemenko illustrates the simultaneous foregrounding and backgrounding of veterans. In June 2020, RT released a video promoting the vote for the amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation.[12] The clip featured famous actors and sportspeople reading the preamble for the future Constitution together with "ordinary" people ("a mother having many children," "a farmer-cheesemaker"), sentence by sentence. The same day, Navalny reposted the video on his social media accounts and strongly, offensively criticised its participants, calling them "corrupt lacqueys," "traitors," and "the shame of the country" (Navalny 2020). None of the celebrities featured in the clip seemed to disagree with that description or take offence for it except one – Ignat Artemenko, a 94-year-old man who was featured in the clip for several seconds, seemed to have never participated in the public activities of such scale before and unlike other actors was unknown to the broader audience. A few weeks after the publication, Navalny was sued for the "defamation" of Artemenko (Meduza 2020). The core of the case, the reasoning behind the "defamation," as the trial would reveal, was simple – Artemenko was a veteran of the Great Patriotic War and, as such, could not be "a traitor."

The ensuing trial, which took place over the winter-spring 2021, right after Navalny was sentenced to almost three years in prison for supposedly violating the terms of the 2014 suspended sentence for embezzlement, legally revolved around the accusation of defamation

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[12] The original RT version is currently unavailable in the EU; for this thesis I referred to Telekanal STV Sevastopol 2020.

against Navalny, but in content was more about debating who was guilty of defiling the memory of the war embodied by the veteran (most explicit during Navalny's interrogation towards the end of the second day of the trial, see Mediazona 2021b, 20:52-21:01). The side of the prosecution, which apart from the prosecutor (and the judge) consisted of Artemenko's grandson, neighbours, and experts-linguists talked about righteousness, decency, and honesty that his status automatically presumed (thereby cancelling the possibility of him being "a traitor"). For example, on the second day of the trial, the prosecutor read out the statement that Artemenko had allegedly submitted to the court before trial, which contained multiple episodes of his wartime biography, for almost thirty minutes (Mediazona 2021b, 13:34-14:01). The side of the defence insisted that Navalny did not target Artemenko specifically but described the group as a whole and, together with the defendant himself, argued that Artemenko, who was present only on the first day of the trial (online), was exploited, read out the statements given to him and did not write any of the lengthy documents submitted to the court on his behalf himself.

A proficient politician, Navalny, already imprisoned, used the court hearings as the only available stage. Each time he was allowed to speak, he redirected the accusations towards the prosecution, the government it represented, and the witnesses, insisting on their hypocrisy. "You are trading your grandfather" was Navalny's repeated accusation against Artemenko's grandson (Mediazona 2021a; Mediazona 2021b). But anything he could say was already caught in the trap out of which there was no escape. Accusing him of defamation against the veteran, the authorities established the unshakable foundations of what the case would be about. By standing as the accusing side, they appeared as the defendants of the undisputable good, for no matter how forged the trial was, the guarded value was articulated well. Standing his ground and insisting that a veteran's life was irreducible to the events that occurred seventy-five years before would have only confirmed that Navalny opposed the fundamental marker of goodness.

But trying to avoid that by highlighting Artemenko's physical weakness and pointing out that it was the prosecution that "used" and "traded" him, Navalny denied the agency to a hero, no matter how truly constrained it was – and thus again offended, or in the perverted logic of prosecution, "defamed" him.[13]

Artemenko, the veteran who coincidentally happened to have a name, was brought into the very heart of the discursive regime, and that presence limited what could be said. But simultaneously, he was removed to the margins of the scene and reduced to the blurred live stream on the small TV screen, his voice barely audible. Artemenko did not have much to say except that he fought in the war, but nothing else was required or allowed to be said; he did not appear on screen a lot due to his health issues. The side of the defence kept asking about the people observing him behind the camera, demanding the shift of the frame too. He only had to show up in court but not be present there; as soon as that happened, the trial proceeded without him. The prosecution may have had Artemenko's name written into the protocols, but all that mattered was the status of a veteran and the actions everyone performed to the body marked by it – whether it was defamation or exploitation.

Artemenko died in June 2022, at the age of 95 – peacefully, at home.

Navalny died in February 2024, at the age of 47 – after several years of torture in prison.

When I was in my early teens, it was customary that besides amateur theatrical performances held in the main hall and all the humanities classes implicitly teaching us that murder is fine when accompanied by the accordion, the GPW veterans would come to school close to 9 May and share their life stories. The one who used to visit our cohort was a man in his 70s, always dressed up in a uniform decorated with multiple awards. His outfit corresponded

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[13] The prosecution put forward the image of Artmenko as a helpless person as well but only as the activists' explanation of why they reported Navalny to the Investigative Committee in the first place. In that explanation, the rest of the participants in the commercial were influential people (although, at least the way the video put it, this was not the case) and so could stand for themselves. Artemenko turned out to be both the most important of the actors and the most helpless one. See Meduza 2020.

to the occasion and status, immediately making it clear what kind of a person we were about to ~~talk to~~ listen to. Back then, to me, veterans seemed to be almost like mythical creatures that surely existed but only on TV, in my grandparents' conversations about the quality of life in the country, and in the stories my friends kept bringing to the classroom close to the memorial days. My own grandparents, born in 1955 and 1956, were too young in age and appearance to even be recognised as grandparents of a teenager, let alone veterans. Here, in front of a classroom, the myth was a reality – the stories of grandfathers who marched to Berlin finally had the person behind them, the narrator to tell those stories in first person.

As he began talking with the voice of an elderly man that until then I could only imagine, the temporarily achieved unity between the myth and the reality slowly started to crumble. There was no story of him raising the Soviet flag over the Reichstag. Neither was there a story of his comrades' deaths in Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, nearby Rzhev, or any other less-known but equally bloody battlefield. He had not been a soldier at the time of the war. He had been a child and contributed to the victory by working at the factory. The few stories of the hardship I heard concerned life at home- not battlefront. Yet here he stood as a soldier. Perhaps, realizing the gap between the body appearance and the speech content, the veteran enriched the narration with other parts of his life. These additional elements, fused with the personal stories about the war in a non-linear way, clarified some of the issues I had trouble understanding as much as they confused me even more. It turned out he was a former soldier. He even served up to a high officer rank. In 1960s-70s. A child of war, he pursued a military career never to let war break out again (or/and perhaps, just because that was prestigious at the time). Most of what the man talked about concerned the post-war Soviet Union, and he explained the necessity of defending the Motherland in the same old pretentious late-Soviet language. His was the voice of the party after the war, the party that found the past war to be a great source of legitimation, that needed "war" to justify its persistence. He could well be one of those grandfathers who marched to

Berlin. There is just one caveat: at the time he could, Berlin may have already been split in half.

Still, the man was a veteran of the GPW. He just was not a veteran due to being a soldier. In Russian legislation, "a veteran of the Great Patriotic War" includes a broad range of subcategories, including guerilla fighters, home front workers, some of the national security forces members, children who became physically impaired due to military actions, and others. The federal law acknowledges a wide range of experiences to count as those of a veteran, even if many of them fall outside the customary understanding of a "veteran" as a retired soldier. It acknowledges the contribution of non-military combatants and civilians to the victory. Yet, legislation simultaneously reifies the association between the "victory" and a "soldier" by counting non-combatants as former soldiers. The experience of surviving the war is acknowledged, but only through the assignation of a marker of another kind of experience, effectively valuating people for who they were not.

The uniform is unnecessary for a person to receive the status of a veteran. Yet, the uniform is a socially recognizable marker of the status. The veteran I listened to as a child needed it to appear as a veteran, even if it had nothing to do with why he was one. He needed to dress as a soldier to look convincing, but he probably forgot that here, in front of the children, he was not part of a silent background but a solo artist who could push even the most authoritarian schoolteacher aside by the mere force of experience. He had a voice. The uniform did not make that voice convincing. On the contrary, it provoked mistrust.

But then again, the man may have remembered well that he had a voice – precisely because, as an established officer, he had been used to people listening to him without questions. His voice was that of the party *and* the army, the voice of authority, of unquestionable truth. It may well be that he was invited to our school because he had been a late Soviet officer, a person trusted by authorities since he was one of them. A "veteran" is not a homogenous category, as

the federal law reminds us. Not all voices are allowed to sound, just as not all the veteran bodies are allowed to sit behind the president during the parade or to participate in the state-sanctioned commercials. Background is a privileged place too. The speech of that background reveals that to enjoy that privilege, the power of status, one has to agree to be exploited; that being the background is a way of avoiding invisibility, that being the support for the centre of the frame is a way of obtaining support (see Danilova 2010, 902).

"*Yablonnyi Sad* [*The Apple Orchard*]," another song by Shortparis, remixes some of the images evoked in "Moscow is speaking" into a more explicitly anti-militarist statement. The orchard symbolises the country where the older generations of trees "bloom" and bear fruit – children (an homage to the popular description of children as "the flowers of life"). First, it "blooms with honey" – the product of intense collective labour that is both functional and enjoyable. A young soldier appears as both that honey and a bee who makes it; he "eats a bun, happy at sweetness" and is a hard-working part of a hive that is supposed to produce more of it. A soldier is young and enjoys juvenile pleasures. Yet, the hope for the brighter future that the old generation might put in the new generation of "apples" turns out to be false. The second time, the orchard blooms with an equally collective yet much less sweet product – blood. The apple orchard turns out to be the place of grief and ruined hopes – the mood that the song makes explicit from the very first line ("Oooh, my sorrow"). The song expresses the demand for taking responsibility for that sorrow, yet, articulated as a question ("Who shall answer?"), the demand is destined to dissipate in the silent emptiness of "the endless land." Responsibility dies together with the lack of response (in Russian, the verb "otvetit'" means both "to answer" and "to take responsibility").

The *The Apple Orchard* video clip was released in March 2022, less than three weeks after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Shortparis 2022). Instead of simply accompanying a pre-recorded, familiar song with a series of scenes, the band released an entirely new,

significantly more sorrowful version. Bayan and piano dilute the original dominance of electronic sounds, which here have been reduced to a bare minimum; the piano line performed by the choirmaster Pyotr Gaidukov introduces plenty of dissonant blue notes into what used to be largely a harmonised melody. The more comprehensive dynamic range and the prevalence of acoustic instruments contribute to the overall mixture of grief and anger that the song expresses. Most importantly, though, the band's frontman and vocalist, Nikolai Komyakin, no longer sings alone. As soon as his powerful, distinct voice introduces the first lines, [14] it dissipates within the equally powerful choir of veterans repeating them. For the rest of the song, Komyakin's solo voice interchanges with the choir, sometimes entirely vanishing, sometimes being supported by, and sometimes fleeing the choir in a piercing cry. Visually, the clip features members of the band, surrounded by scattered apples, playing live in the empty winter field under the heavy snowfall, and digging a grave together with the veterans. The dull landscape is both familiar to the Russian audience and represents "the endless land" as that of endless death and sorrow, the land so dear and so bloody. Unlike in the rest of their clips, in "The Apple Orchard," the band members are dressed in modest everyday outfits, and Komyakin, while still approaching the dressing style as art, exchanges usual glam shirts for a greatcoat. Here, the choir is not in the background. It is an equal participant in the collective musical performance, in the emotional performance of a collective.

That performance turns out to be a funeral.

They won and stayed to live in the name of building a new life. But the new life just can't accept its own existence. At 4, 5, 6 – does it really matter? – AM, without a declaration – does it really matter? – of war.

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[14] Oooh, my sorrow.
Here I have not been.
Where is the edge of the land?
Has anybody seen it?
And whose are you, and whose?

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Sampling refrains

The Victory Day, a song of 1975, strives to repeat what it does not know. It has been caught in the loop that repeats not the fragment but another loop, that remembers only itself. If we look at the wartime songs, a different kind of repetition resurfaces. "At 4 AM, without a declaration of war" – that expression entered the popular culture already in the first days of the war. Boris Kovynev (1941) used the words he heard on the radio as the foundation for a poem published in one of the regional military newspapers. In a matter of days, the words were put to the music of *The Blue Kerchief* waltz. Over the years, numerous versions of the lyrics have been written, each telling a different story, be it the tale of local patriotism and the desire to defend the Motherland or an address of a soldier to his beloved one. The first four lines, written by Kovynev on the day the war started, always remain the same.

On twenty-second of June,

At four o'clock sharp,

Kyiv was bombed, and we were told

That it was the start of the war.

The words stick in mind. A simple melody sung by the soft male voice and doubled with an equally soft violin play smoothens, contradicts what the words say (Poslednii Pereulok 2003). So does the sound of the words as such: the verb "started" [nachalasya] is pronounced with an informal, spoken ending "-sya" rather than a more academic, presumably neutral "-s'." Yet, it is precisely the contradiction, the dissonance between simplicity, emotional neutrality bordering with tenderness of the starting lines' sonority and the actual event the lyrics narrate, that conveys the belatedness of the conscious understanding of the traumatic event, the co-existence of multiple temporalities during the war, the ordinariness of the Kremlin clock striking 4 AM while the unfamiliar sound of a falling bomb shatters everything ordinary less than a thousand kilometres away.

Just as there is a variety of this song's versions, all brought together with the refrainisation of the introductory lines, so is there an assortment of different songs brought together through the refrainisation of the melodic chorus. The *Blue Kerchief* waltz was written before the Great Patriotic War started (though when World War II had already broken out) by the Polish composer Jerzy Petersburski and very quickly transformed into a popular romance song. It is this version of the song, not *On 22nd of June*, that has acquired an iconic status and kept being performed for years after the end of the war. During the war, its lyrics were modified – now, performed by Clavdiya Shulzhenko (1975), the song about love and separation acquired a vengeful wartime ending about the machine-gunner firing bullets in all directions in the name of his beloved one. Likewise, the dissonance in the first lines of "On 22nd of June" finds a quick resolution. In times of war, no whining or disinterestedness is helpful. The most popular version of the lyrics abandons the story of separation that the original was based on in favour of a several-minute-long expression of hatred toward the enemy (Poslednii Pereulok 2003). The same beginning, the same music – but a very different emotional content, a vengeful closure of the trauma and its redirection into the wartime needs. No, not for the sake of destruction – for the sake of preserving the old life.

In his modern interpretation of the song, pop musician Garik Sukachev (2001) recovers the early non-vengeful lyrics of both songs and weaves them into one. Until the very end, the lyrics follow the *On 22nd of June* version and Kovynev's original text about separation. However, four lines from *The Blue Kerchief* conclude the composition. Moreover, as is appropriate to a good cover, Sukachev changes the music of the original significantly: he substitutes an even tertiary waltz for swing and the instruments of a symphonic orchestral for those of a jazz band. The tempo is faster, and brighter timbres dominate the sound. Sukachev's *blatnaya*[15] manner of singing further contributes to the diminution of the "war" in the song and

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[15] The word usually implies criminal associations.

the accentuation of the "separation." As a result, the gap between the event the lyrics are about and the music is even wider than in the originals. Now, it is not the dramaturgy of ordinary human relations amidst death that the gap expresses though. Recorded fifty-six years after the end of the war, the song treats the original not as a sacred standard to imitate but as a cultural artefact that can be rediscovered, reinterpreted and reinvigorated, that exists as the resource to experiment with, not to conserve, that has the potential to sound differently – the potential that was already visible in the proliferation of different versions of the song before and during the war. After all, we won and stayed to live not to conserve the scenes of destruction but in the name of building a new life.

The song *On 22nd of June* exemplifies the trajectory of refrainisation opposite to the one embodied by Levitan's voice and his musical counterparts. Itself a variation of a famous waltz, produced at the time no one could care less about the issues of authorship, the song is a part of wartime folk art. While *The Blue Kerchief* has become a popular song in the performance of Clavdiya Shulzhenko, it is much more difficult to determine whose voices sing the various lyrics of *On 22nd of June*. Often, the performance of the vengeful version is attributed to Marc Bernes, a famous wartime actor and singer whose post-war repertoire mainly consisted of state praise and military songs. However, none of the song versions available online have been sung by Bernes, and there is no proof that he ever recorded it. One of the two versions was recorded by the group *Poslednii Pereulok* in 2003, while the singer of the other one (Ingen 2023) is unknown. There is no unique voice to imitate, nothing to standardise. The author of the lyrics, just as the author of the music, has been dispossessed of his creation, but the result of these appropriations is a vast field of variations. Instead of the standardisation of a unique voice and styleless recitation of standards, there is an unoriginal original that, with the whole force of unpretentious simplicity, begs to be torn, bent, cut, and rewritten – covered.

It is easy to believe an attribution of the song to Bernes though. A key person in the early memorialisation of the war, he sang many non-militaristic songs after its end and until he died in 1969. The most famous is *Tyomnaya Noch* [*The Dark Night*], which first appeared in the film *Dva Boitsa* [*Two Fighters*] (1943) where Bernes starred as one of the main characters (Bernes 1943). Like the original version of *On 22nd of June*, this is a song about love and separation. Its protagonist is a soldier who thinks about his beloved one waiting for him to return home, thereby warding off the fear of death and destruction surrounding him. Bernes sings the lyrics with a soft voice that reinforces the lyrics – it accentuates the love of a soldier toward his wife who "wipes tears in secret beside the cradle" and cancels out the horror of bullets that "are whistling in the steppe." Its music is simple, but unlike *The Victory Day*, composed two decades later, it does not strive to sound complex. The song recognises itself as a song rather than any other kind of a complete musical composition. Its simplicity is a mark of sincerity.

Hip-hop performers have been especially fond of *The Dark Night*. Bogdan Titomir, one of the first famous hip-hop musicians in Russia, covered the old Soviet song for his 2006 album *Svoboda* [*Freedom*]. For the most part, Titomir's cover follows the original's melody and soft manner of singing but lays it over the electronic beat and funky guitar arrangement. As such, it both pays respect to the 1943 recording and reinvigorates it with a contemporary sound that the young audience might (I don't know) find more appealing at the time. However, the "modernisation" of the sound simultaneously contributes to the dissipation of the song's meaning – consisting of the playful, joyfully innocent part of a slightly distorted guitar and the brightened melody played on a non-reverberating electric piano, music no longer evokes the melancholic mixture of sadness and hope. Reggy-ish recitative of the lyrics at the end of the song accelerates the original's pace, revealing the performer's sonic preferences more than the quietness of the mutation between the loving home and the menacing battlefront. It is a freedom

indeed – freedom from the need to find meaning in war, freedom from the necessity to preserve the standards that no longer hold, freedom to build a new life.

Bad Balance, another 1990s-born hip-hop project, offers a different take on the Dark Night Their song *Piter – ya tvoi* [*Saint Petersburg – I'm yours*] (Bad Balance 2001) is a rap story about the weekend two friends spend in Saint Petersburg read over the sample of Bernes' recording. Unlike Titomir's – and others – covers, this song reproduces the instrumental part of the original as accurately as possible, accentuating the bass E-G-F#-B line that constituted the harmonic "skeleton" of the song rather than the vocal part, which appeared as its "flesh." However, the vocal melody does appear in this song. The chorus starts with the sample of Bernes' performance, yet it is only allowed to sing the titular words ("the dark night"), after which Bernes' soft voice is interrupted with the loud recitative: "Dear city, Peter, I'm yours."[16] Within the song's overall story, the original lyrics acquire a new meaning: now the night is dark because of all the characters' partying – yet, it can't be dark because it is June in Saint-Petersburg, the time of northern "white nights." The city, well-known for both imperial architecture and underground life, appears as an indeterminate space – it is flooded with both nightlife pleasures and violence, with street fights and friendship. The dark night is the time to embrace, not to escape in the search of the illusory love image. There is nothing to build – one can only enjoy life amidst ruins.

A copy, a cover, and a sample – these three different versions of the original's afterlife are the products of three different logics of authorship (that are also three logics of authority) and of the corresponding kinds of appropriation. Levitanian voice and "The Victory Day" emerge in the environment governed by the visible presence of a clear, concentrated authority, but at the time the infusion of that authority with ideological content fades. Conformity to the original is all that matters, to the extent that lengthy out-of-place recitations of the same source

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[16] "Gorod rodnoi, Piter, ya tvoi"

oust the creative spirit deemed "bourgeois." The name of the author (or the first performer) is preserved and used to determine the boundaries of the style to be imitated, but you can't be sure when you've heard the original the last time and if you've ever read it outside the second-source literature (that all sounds the same anyway). By contrast, a cover is born out of a more intimate relation with the original. The latter's authority is strong enough to acknowledge the author but weak enough to allow the melting and the mending of the source. A cover aims at repetition without imitation. It relates to the source with passion and respect but knows no worshipping. A cover is a product of a craft, not the assembly line.

Finally, the logic of the sample – or, more broadly, remix – completely defies authorship (and authority). For many electronic musicians, the "original" is nothing more (or less) than a sonic matter, an analogue sound of everyday life to be converted into a digital code to be processed by filters, speakers, and ears (Rodgers 2003). In the logic of sampling, it does not matter when the war started and who announced it to the nation. For an artist, it is important that "at 4 AM" is here, now, at whatever time decades later, as a part of the everyday aesthetic landscape, a bit of the sensory mess to turn into the mix. As DJ Spooky puts it, "It's all about reprocessing the world around you, and this will happen no matter how hard entertainment conglomerates and an older generation of artists tries to control these processes" (Miller 2004, 21).

As the practice of "stealing" from the original, sampling disrespects memory – but does not necessarily erase it. On the contrary, the transposition of a sonic matter into a new artistic landscape may highlight the pastness of the past (Rodgers 2003, 318). Authority, authorship, uniqueness, and standards – all those elements of a productive structure that reduces (and binds) being to (non-)belonging, the memory of the war to call for arms, "joy with tears upon eyes" to "WE CAN REPEAT" – fade in the detachment of the fragment from the original and its re-contextualisation in the space of a mix. They are still present, but only in creative suspense.

What a sample experientially brings forward is the contrast between the suspended and the actualised: "Within the new song, the sample is the space of simultaneous play and rupture, where the past both defines the present and is effaced by it" (Chang 2009, 145). The night is still dark, but oh my gosh, how amazing the nightlife under the white summer nights is.

Sampling involves risk. Erase the history of the sound too much, and you may easily step onto the territory of colonial dispossession (Rodgers 2003, 318). Overemphasise it – and the whole point of sampling as the practice of artistic de- and re-contextualisation gets lost. Both risks are especially high when the singularity of a sample disappears in the remix. Check this track out:

NATO is expanding. They promised not to. They invaded Iraq. The USSR collapsed. Our traditional values are threatened, they have tried "to impose their pseudovalues, which would corrode us, our people from within." They call us their enemy. But we have a nuclear bomb. We won the Great Patriotic War. The West does not respect its results. But the results of the sacred war are sacred. Fascists rule Ukraine. And nationalists. And "neo-Nazis." They are building "anti-Russia" in Ukraine. "It is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and to its sovereignty." Those "forces" control Ukraine "with the help of ornamental elections" and do not want peace in Donbas. "As I've said in the previous address, it is impossible to look at what is happening there without compassion." We need to stop the genocide. And that is why "in accordance with Article 51 (Chapter VII) of the UN Charter…I made a decision to carry out a special military operation." "It is not our plan to occupy the Ukrainian territory. We do not intend to impose anything on anyone by force." Force is in truth. We

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have a nuclear bomb. "I believe in your support and the invincible force rooted in the love for our Fatherland."[17]

It is easy to recognise the 24th of February as a perverted repetition of the 22nd of June, a logical consequence of an endless promise to repeat. But the Levitanian voice that used to introduce Putin had already died, and the academic manner of Leshchenko's singing gave way to an equally pretentious but just slightly more casual style of a young, blond, white man with dreadlocks praising being Russian but signing his songs under the Latin-spelled name "SHAMAN" (2022). The war was declared – it's just that the indirect language has been the style of Russian officials, who understand the nuances of public speech well, for years. The speech with which the event officially came to be was a recitation and a reshuffle of the already familiar tropes, and apart from the "special military operation," it contained nothing new. Whatever references to the Great Patriotic War one could find in Putin's speech were just parts of a cut-up of random facts, fiction, and speculation, a choir of an imperialist, a Marxist, and a *gopnik*[18] embodied in the voice of a cynical trickster. Or – a samplist.

On 24th of February, sometime around 4 AM

Kyiv was bombed,

And we were told

That it was the start of "the special military operation."

In a commercial track, the composition is all about finding the right sounds and ensuring the cuts and stitches aren't audible. "People will eat that," as the post-Soviet cynical refrain goes; "eat whatever is given to you," as my parents commanded when I cried at the sight of beef liver with stewed cabbage. In an underground avant-garde track, the composition is all

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[17] This is a remix of a remix by Vladimir Putin (Kremlin 2022). All the direct quotes have been put in quotation marks.
[18] A subculture of street bullies in Russia.

about finding the right sounds and ensuring the cuts and the stitches are visible and the contrast they foreground is felt.

A sample, a readymade, and a refrain

So far, I have explored multiple instances of the refrains' participation in contemporary Russian militarism and anti-militarism, in the assertion of the Great Patriotic War's authority regardless of the ideological position, in the substitution of the lack of memorial content with an affective charge to repeat and the exposure of memory's emptiness. I have shown how refrains are captured by discourse where the productive power of their repetition is streamlined, where repetition as such turns into the content, and how refrains are reappropriated in such ways that their repetition becomes a matter of a creative process that, to various degrees, cuts or at least eases the connection between a refrain and the past war. In this last section, I would like to return to Guattari's and Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisations of "a refrain" to better grasp the processes that each of the abovementioned cases exemplifies and that remain yet to be explored in more depth.

Deleuze and Guattari famously begin outlining three main aspects of a refrain with an example of a child singing on the way home. The child's tune "is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, centre in the heart of chaos" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 311). It might be unable to hide the child from the bullies, but it keeps the world of shadows at the periphery of vision and thought. The song summons the magical ground amidst the endless abyss, saving one from the stasis in front of a dead-end or from a deadly fall. Guattari calls such "tunes" *existential* refrains. They are based "on the detachment of an existential "motif" (or leitmotiv) which installs itself like an "attractor" within a sensible and significational chaos. The different components conserve their heterogeneity but are nevertheless captured by a refrain which couples them to the existential Territory of my self" (Guattari 1995, 17).

In the first example, a refrain already serves as the practice of differentiation – it carves a little order within chaos, delimits the front and the periphery, and crafts the self in place of its dissolution. Yet, if here a refrain appears to delimit an 'I,' is sung "for the momentary determination of a center," at other times, it functions to extend that 'I' into the outside, to push the boundary while making it even stronger at the new point, to enrich an 'I' with a possessive 'mine.' In this case, a refrain is "the constituting mark of a domain, an abode" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 316). It delimits a space while filling it with new functions, relations, and affective dynamics. A refrain is performative, it is what makes a performance, it is a little performance in itself. Returning to the 1957 Soviet film, both the flight of the cranes and the punctuation of time establish uneven temporalities that intersect and cut each other. The repetition of these aesthetic elements contributes to the emergence of a rhythm upon which the film's plot and its characters' stories unfold. It breaks the story apart through the connection with the forgotten, or back then irrelevant past, drawing heights and lows, flights and returns. The cranes are flying – it is the moment of peace during the impossible war; the cranes are flying – it is the impossible peace after the war, the peace forever marked with the tune of loss. The clock strikes four – we are awake when we must sleep; the clock strikes four at twelve, more loudly – the hangover of love is still more potent than the reality of death; finally, the clock strikes the middle of the film – the past dreams of future peace coincide with death. Refrains establish pace, but in doing so they delimit the narrative space – into the affective atmospheres the characters inhabit, into the zones of intensity the audience is part of.

The existential and territorializing aspects of the refrain are difficult to distinguish, especially given Deleuze and Guattari's insistence that subjectivity is always collective. All the marks on the flat's walls that proclaim it to be 'mine' also establish me as its possession: "The landscapes are peopled by characters and the characters belong to landscapes" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 320). Just as Guattari writes of "existential refrains," he couples them with the

"Existential Territories" and includes the latter into his list of "the categories of metamodelisation" (along with Fluxes, machinic Phylums, and incorporeal Universes; Guattari 1995, 31). Separating the inside from the outside, a refrain acquires a duplicity that holds it to both, that connects as much as separates them. Deleuze and Guattari write about "territorial motifs" and "territorial counterpoints," "rhythmic faces or characters" and "melodic landscapes" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 317-320). In each of these dyads, the first part expresses the internal relations, while the second produces the outside against which things are set in motion. Leshchenko-the-character and the choir-the-landscape, the evening-gatherings-motif and Leshchenko-the-counterpoint. Levitan's voice – the melody of the nation; Levitanian voice – the counterpoint of Putin's presidency. The cranes are one of the 1957 film's motifs but for Veronica and Boris, they are the counterpoints setting the characters' arcs in motion. Veterans could well be rhythmic characters of some story, punctuating it like the cranes, but in the multiple stories of post-Soviet Russia, they are the true counterpoints, parts of a background in a landscape against which the people are born. They belong to the national "we" and yet keep lurking on the margins so that the centre of the stage is clearly pronounced.

Precisely because it is the aesthetic landscape of the GPW remembrance that I have sought to map out so far, most of the examples of the refrains' operation I have provided in this chapter can be captured by the term "counterpoint." They are elements of memory as a "meaningful noise" – the expression I used in the introduction to the chapter – in relation to and within which the people are founded, whether that relation is of attraction or escape, whether the noise sounds as a coherent tune or loses any meaning whatsoever. As the components of that noise are embodied, encircled by a practice that releases them into the world, they turn into the recurring motifs "*that 'express' the relation of the territory they draw to the interior milieu of impulses*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 317). Or, to put it otherwise, they express me as the possession of the territory. The veterans appear within an anti-militarist video clip released

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three weeks after the beginning of a new war – they are still counterpoints for me, but the clip turns them into the rhythmic characters against the recurring "4 AM" counterpoint. Likewise, here various refrains – "at 4 AM, without a declaration of war," but also "not in the name of destruction, but in the name of building a new life" – have appeared as the motifs that express the possession of the authorial 'I' by remembrance. They also punctuate this text as refrains of writing, demarcating another territory, leading us to the refrain's final aspect.

A refrain can act as the operator of openness, as the "deterritorialising" component that opens the assemblage to the "forces of the Cosmos" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 342). A contemporary band that defies the boundaries between genres turns the beginning of wartime broadcasts into a critique of authority by decoupling it from the standardised voice and opening it to a wider vocal range, by placing it in a variety of situations in which Moscow is speaking. That band places the usually backgrounded veterans on the same level as the frontman and, mixing their bodies and voices with the traditional acoustic instruments, suspends the usual pride and respect for the power of grief. Activists join the annual commemorative procession and, amidst portraits of the deceased, carry the posters inscribed with the words "They did not fight for that" (Radio Svoboda 2022). Another activist turns the old Molotov's broadcast into a placard and displays it in front of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Zhurnal Doxa 2022). At 4 AM, without a declaration of war. The refrain still belongs to the realm of memory, still signifies belonging and values, still marks the territory and the kinds of characters that may populate it. But the refrain also disorients that "memory" and asks what else it can mean to "remember" other than strive for repeat for the sake of repeat; what else that stubborn "memory" of the past no one is alive to remember can do other than summon unfounded authority; who else can "we" be other than the reiteration of the imaginary "we" that has never been. "What else" envelops the "what was" that constitutes so much of what is.

The work of deterritorialising a refrain may consist of two kinds of action. The first is the transposition of the refrain into a new environment in such a way that the refrain turns into a strange matter and that environment pulsates differently. Sampling is an example of such a process in music, but sampling itself is a contemporary form of older artistic practices that in the West were introduced by Marcel Duchamp under the name of a *readymade*. With a simple gesture of exhibiting an everyday object in a gallery space, Duchamp "attached the name of art to a banal object of the environment that had not been conceived according to a functionalist aesthetic and, pulling it out of its usual usage, brusquely conferred on it the uselessness and the disinterestedness of 'pure' art" (De Duve 1991, 109). Readymades did not assign an art value to everyday objects but, by bringing the worlds of art and everyday life together, suspended both "all aesthetic value and all use values" (ibid), effectively questioning the very institutional logic by which something was considered a work of art. Neither the readymade object nor the milieus it belongs to change, but neither remains the same. The object adopts the role of an operator performing the crystallisation of disparate universes into a singular event, where their strange co-presence catalyses the emergence of a new problematic to dwell in.

Stephen Zepke points out that Guattari's "refrain" belongs to the tradition of readymades that is "affectual" rather than "conceptual," and so is "*non*-Duchampian" (Zepke 2008, 35). The key difference is that for Duchamp, the exact object to become a readymade did not matter – it only "exists as '*information*' (1973: 32) indicating that a conceptual decision (a 'nomination' as he called it) has taken place – 'this is art' – that reveals the epistemological conditions…that determine this nomination to be 'true'" (Zepke 2008, 35). For Guattari though a refrain is not a sign that reveals a more profound truth but "a concrete machine" (Watson 2009, 75-77), a singular material element whose power is felt on the visceral level and that produces affects (Zepke 2008, 36). While Zepke's distinction between two kinds of a readymade entrenches the binary between "art for art's sake and political art" (Rancière 2009,

34), it highlights a kind of refrain's deterritorialisation that is different from the "cut and paste" practice inherent in readymade. An irreducible to signification *matter*, within Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm, a refrain is vibrant, malleable, and elastic – standardisation and naturalisation of refrains together with the territories they compose was precisely the object of Guattari's critique. The ethico-aesthetic task then, as Hollie Mackenzie argues, is "to bring the *made* out of the readymade; not in order to return to the artist-as-maker, but to posit that new existential territories are always ready-to-be-*made*" (Mackenzie 2019, 265).

Refrains of remembrance embody the tension between the "ready-made" copy-paste of plagiarism and the "ready-to-be-made" copy-cut-tweak-paste of art, between sampling as a technology of archive and as a technique of production always followed by "post-," between a remix that demands that you don't ask questions and simply move to the beat and a remix which responds to the authority of the beat with disobedient, amateur yet such ingenious "off-". They make *memory* of the war a part of everyday life, they make *war* a part of everyday life. In the end (that abstraction the refrains keep rejecting and advancing), they simply make *everyday life*. That does not mean "memory" of the GPW can be anything and refrains are politically relativist and so unimportant. As the *tensions* that partake in shaping everyday life, refrains are matters of a creative process. Their indeterminateness is the very core of both the emergence of a "normal," standard outlook and the paths outside that normalcy, however tentative they are. It is not "memory" that steps into that process do not allow the state, for which the lack of style is the only appropriate style, to hijack but precisely the creativity that, however slowly, is undoing the demand to remember by refraining, sampling it.

CHAPTER 3. FORGETTING (A) NO ONE: "MEMORY", DEATH, AND IMMORTALITY

Introduction

Of all the refrains of remembrance, one particularly stands out – "No one is forgotten. Nothing is forgotten." Unlike popular refrains such as "Thanks to grandpa for the victory!" and "We can repeat!" it expresses less resentment and more mourning, acknowledging the unintelligibility of experience that the past generations have gone through and the necessity of keeping the "memory" of the tragedy alive – not for the sake of repeating it but for the sake of proving that the death and the suffering of the ancestors have not been in vain. As such, the refrain emphasises a shared experience of loss rather than a desire for an abstract victory, a fear of war or a gratitude to the past generations. In this sense, "No one is forgotten" stands in emotional proximity with the expression "The memory of the war lives in every family." However, unlike in the latter, the mourning of "No one is forgotten" is expressed not through an emphasis on the one who mourns but through the removal of that subject from the statement and a focus on the dead, on the object of "memory," those who are remembered or not forgotten. "No one is forgotten" still transforms the speaking subject into a remembering subject like other popular commemorative expressions do. It does so in backgrounding us, issuing a death sentence to the poor and heroic remembering subject and foregrounding the dead – the mute, absent bodies that, in the lack of life, in the absence of any presence, can only *be* remember*ed*, (not) forgotten.

Most importantly though, the ambiguity of the meaning of "no one" in "No one is forgotten" expresses a paradox. It is everyone who is remembered; yet everyone, or anyone for that matter, is nowhere to be found, totally absent, and so becomes a "no-one," an absence of anyone, of any identity, an absence of any positivity. "No one is forgotten" complements the

experience of "memory" with an object only to discover that this object, the dead, has passed the threshold of experience, of knowledge, of discourse, of life, has become *a* no-one, and so cannot really be an object of memory. No one is forgotten, *a* no-one is immemorial. I remember, yet in saying it, I confirm that I can't remember. The expression evokes the image of countless dead but finds itself impotent before the real experience of death.

If at this point we return to look at the subject who remembers yet cannot and find them once again outside the stage of language, behind the curtain of passive voice, this absence becomes more troublesome. The dead cannot be grasped by discourse and so are transformed into the (not so much) living, the "living" in quotation marks. The living, the remembering, in turn, must be somewhere, yet can be found nowhere. No one is forgotten, but no one can remember.

Below, I ponder this contemporaneous production of death and life by looking at specific forms that "No one is forgotten" takes in contemporary Russia. In tracing the appearance and transformative operation of "No one is forgotten" in memory politics, I treat the expression as a language function that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call "an order-word." In "Postulates of Linguistics," a fourth chapter-plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari challenge communicational models of language and foreground its normative and transformative aspects. Their starting point is that the "illocutionary," the acts performed in speaking (Austin 1962, 99), is not a separate sphere of language but a general "function coextensive with language" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 78). Norms are folded into language, which, in transmitting them, intervenes in the world, enacting immediate "incorporeal transformations" (ibid, 86). An order-word is "not a particular category of explicit statements (for example, in the imperative), but the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions, in other words, to speech acts that are, and can only be, accomplished in the

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statement" (ibid, 79). An order-word is a command, a demand of obedience irreducible to an explicit command.

As an implicit presupposition rather than an explicit statement, "No one is forgotten" is not necessarily explicitly pronounced in practices and sites that I study, which are diverse in form, underlying idea, temporality, and are otherwise irreconcilable. The countrywide social movement Immortal Regiment is followed by a singular episode of poetry reading at a memorial park in Saint-Petersburg, which carries us into a massive graveyard and the original "home" of "No one is forgotten," from where we visit performances of an art-activist group "the party of the dead." These various sites carry "No one is forgotten" as an "implicit proposition" by virtue of expressing "memory" of the GPW and making a pretence at and a demand for a radical "memory" encompassing some kind of an "everyone" or "no one." Death and "memory" of it is the common thread that runs through these sites of inquiry. However, each interprets and enacts "No one is forgotten" in its own way, initiating the expression's variation and, with it, putting images of death and life into variation.

In performing an incorporeal transformation and assigning an attribute to a body, an order-word "carries a little death sentence" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 76). Yet, there is more to it than death: "There are pass-words beneath order-words" (ibid, 110). While order-words effectuate a stoppage, they are susceptible to variation, to a corporeal transformation, in undergoing which their incorporeal effects change too. This passage "pushes language to its own limits, while bodies are simultaneously caught up in a movement of metamorphosis of their contents or a process of exhaustion causing them to reach or overstep the limit of their figures" (ibid, 108). The question, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, is "not how to elude the order-word but how to elude the death sentence it envelops, how to develop its power of escape, how to prevent escape from veering into the imaginary or falling into a black hole, how to maintain or draw out the revolutionary potentiality of the order-word" (ibid, 110). What one should do

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is "bring forth the order-word of the order-word. In the order-word, life must answer the answer of death, not by fleeing, but by making flight act and create" (ibid).

It is such a variation that the writing that follows pursues. As it should already be clear, "death" is used in this chapter both literally and figuratively, as the end of life and the state of political death or apathy under which life continues yet the future, including death, is impossible to imagine, and so life is not so much of a life. Leaving everyday death within life outside of writing and allocating it a place of an object of inquiry would not only be conceptually flawed (since, in that case, all I would do is repeat the same failures that acts of memory do) but also anaesthetic, ignoring the real pain and hopelessness that "death" signifies. However, staying with apathy and despair is not an option either, for expanding the aesthetics of death, however figurative, means expanding and extending the instantaneousness of death into infinity. My task in this chapter is thus twofold: on the one hand, to make death, in both its hopeless and promising aspects, visible, not to hide it further away, like the projects of resurrection do; on the other, it is to write out an otherwise of necropolitics as production of dead corpses and a negation of a possibility to die – to tap into writing as "an abstract machine" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) that places things in motion, to subject "No one is forgotten" to the power of variation so that the order-word becomes a pass-word, its shadows appear in place of identical doppelgangers and the language of war "memory" is put on play not repeat, with "war" and "memory," these two forms of killing and not letting die, gradually disappearing from it.

The absent dead

Among the countless poorly targeted ads that Instagram offers me while I scroll the feed in a fit of procrastination, I notice a new post by a much-beloved family friend. Her account is full of countryside sceneries and pictures of her son and friends, mostly my parents, with whom she shares warm summer evenings and celebrates all the major holidays. This time though, the usual bright aesthetic of countryside escapism is diluted by the scene, which is still familiar but

brings forth the past I'd like to forget. The photo depicts a tall grey obelisk I used to pass by on my way to school for many years and visited on memorial days with my class against my teenage public holiday desires, under the strict supervision of a senior teacher. A local sightseeing surrounded by a river and a small but peaceful park, for me, the obelisk is a much-loathed site where all the fictitiousness, pretension, and bullying of the Russian high school education system find their utmost expression. Now I see that tall symbol of power supposed to be a memorial to the dead, and images of dance performances – of teenagers most often – that to my taste never deserved the name of a "performance," sounds of men's pseudo-opera style howling they call a wartime song, smell of sweat and alcohol within a crowd of people approach me as a knot of experiences which eclipses other, much nicer memories of morning without mourning, the solitary walks I used to embark on here escaping from the classes.

My body shivers at the sight of that place. Habitually disregarding and obviously not pondering the stream of memories and associations flooding my body, I swipe to the right. The second part of the composition appears in front of my eyes. This time, it is a selfie of my parents' friend with her ten-year-old son. Their faces, the centrepiece of the visual part of the post's composition, are utterly serious, expressing no sign of joy or any other recognisable emotional state with which I had come to associate them over the years of tender family evenings. The disgust and resentment I feel in looking at the obelisk fold into the dissonance between the image of the people I know and the image of the people I see. They look straight into the camera, appearing as the key subjects of the photo and defining its selfie genre, but in the serious expressions on their faces, I can't recognise anyone. In withdrawing any sign of emotion, they appear to be disappearing – the faces without identity, the selfie without a self.

Under the series of photos, a concise caption completes the instaesthetics and adds a fine gloss of poetry to this artwork:

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No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten.

How poetic. Not to me though. Having seen the photo of a much-hated monument, a selfie of a mother with a child, and this refrain used on every single occasion of "remembering" the war, I quickly pass the phrase as belonging to the state machine that puts representation and performance in place of genuine expression, to the assemblage of "memory" that produces 'I' and 'we' as equivalent to "remembering," to the state discourse in which "No one is forgotten" means "We can do that again," a repeat repeat repeat which does not know death, forgets it in the name of "memory" and liberation but leaves dead bodies everywhere as its ultimate effect. "No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten." All I remember in hearing that statement is another utterance of it, an echo rather than a response coming from within the depths of my mind and carrying other voices with it, a black hole sinking me deeper into the absence of war "memory" and into the positivity of war remembrance. A child on stage, a local politician in place of a child, a poster on a minimarket on a sunny August day, another at a hospital next to an info sheet on ways of HIV transmission, a poem on a website, a poem in a textbook, a sticker on a car, a title of a research article, Putin putting stuff on a graveyard, ~~Putin put in a grave~~…another, another, another, repeat, repeat, repeat. Irritation, disbelief, anger, disgust, submission, eruption of ranting, exhaustion, boredom, arrogant dismissal, ~~empathy~~…we remember remember remember, repeat repeat repeat. The child looks into the camera – the photo of a child looks at me – I find myself looking at my childhood, performing "memory" within the memory. Another repeat of "No one is forgotten," even if with a slight technical difference, forces me to move to the depths of my mind, where everything repeats, again, if only in memory, especially in memory, in these real, corporeal memories about "memory." A refrain, Guattari writes, "installs itself like an "attractor" within a sensible and significational chaos" (1995, 17), but this refrain does not care if I want to be attracted and so draws chaos closer in the indifference towards

desire. The poetry of no one asks me to find someone within, to find someone and something to remember, but all I can remember is my being within "memory."

No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten. I am a lost case, I know – too alien and alienated to feel anything other than irritation, disbelief, anger, disgust, and, in best-case scenarios, exhaustion and boredom upon the sight and sound of that phrase. My senior friend most certainly does not feel anything of this in writing it – even though she may well share my experience of state discourse and "memory" assemblage. An utterly honest person whose expressiveness never slides into hypocrisy, she writes of no one being forgotten not out of trendiness of remembering but because the occasion is genuinely significant for her.

Yet, my critical mind can't stop raising suspicion. My dear senior friend has attached no picture of a family member who lived through or died in the war to the post. The only persons brought into the scene are the living, the remembering – even those only partially. She has decided to share no personal connection with the past war apart from commemorating it here and now. She has not shared a story grounding the moment of "memory" in a particular experience. No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten. Clearly, the post my friend shared expresses grief over the countless dead and a personal desire to keep the story of a generation that persisted in horrors we cannot imagine alive. It is clear too though, that there is no person my friend could or would like to remember on that occasion. So, who, out of the infinity of ones and no-ones, things and nothings is remembered in saying "No one is forgotten"? Where exactly are the dead who have not been forgotten?

Death is the epitome of absence, a "no more" after which there can be no militaristic "repeat!" For Maurice Blanchot, it is the ultimate limit of experience, an endpoint that catalyses the very much experienceable process of dying but itself is beyond experience, "the inexperience" (Blanchot 1995, 67). As the limit of any discourse, of all discourse, death exerts the power of attraction upon us, itself remaining beyond the relationship of power. It will

inevitably happen, and as such, it has always already happened - "the imminence of what has already come to pass" (ibid, 45) – however, it is never to be found as a presence, as what we could call a "lived experience." The lived experience of death, of the power it exerts upon us, is dying. The latter, being "the experience of the outside" (Foucault 1998b, 149-151), is simultaneously the process of "un-power," the durational presence, which "does not free nor does it shelter. In death, one can find an illusory refuge: the grave is as far as gravity can pull, it marks the end of the fall; the mortuary is the loophole in the impasse. But dying flees and pulls indefinitely, impossibly and intensively in the flight" (Blanchot, 1995, 48).

The dead who are remembered are not alive either though. Memory attempts to eradicate death, and with it, the process of dying, which is coextensive with life. It pushes life forward, yet simultaneously freezes, arrests it. Memory negates death, but in doing so, it also negates life, proclaiming a final death sentence. In refusing death and, with it, dying to the dead, memory resurrects and fails to do so, thereby only confirming its incapacity to bring forth life. If death is the limit of experience, of any and all discourse, if it is the "outside" in a sense conferred to that word by Foucault (1998b) in his commentary on Blanchot, then all that memory can do is bring it back into thought only to discover that something else has been returned, and the outside remains forever outside. The outside is the absence: "The outside cannot offer itself as a positive presence - as something inwardly illuminated by the certainty of its own existence - but only as an absence that pulls as far away from itself as possible, receding into the sign it makes to draw one toward it, as though it were possible to reach it" (Foucault 1998b, 154-155). Memory of death is a structural impossibility, an always failed attempt to exercise power upon death, to turn absence into presence.

My friend who posts nothing but "No one is forgotten" knows that too well to even try remembering someone.

The Immortal Regiment: Not a single One forgotten

My friend may have no one to remember on the Victory Day commemorations. Many others do though. Every 9 May, hundreds of thousands leave the comfort of their homes to occupy central streets in a large procession, a demonstration of what is common at the heart of the community. They move in a crowd, proudly holding wooden standards, yet do not protest and do not so much celebrate. The standards do not host slogans – it is the faces they display, the black and white photos from a time long gone, of persons long dead. Many in the procession mourn. Others exhibit pride in being related to the face above them. Regardless of emotional expression, what brings them together is a refusal of the possibility of dying. The faces enclosed in the frames and the bodies carrying them are not just not dead but unable to die. Immortal.

Founded in 2012 by journalists from Tomsk, a large city in Eastern Siberia, and initially a local, grassroots initiative, the Immortal Regiment quickly became a countrywide commemorative movement. Initially, the Regiment was conceptualised as an alternative to the official, often militaristic commemorations of the war and an opportunity to express one's "memory" without fear of its appropriation by authorities. This intention failed, of course, as will be discussed later. For now, I would like to look at the original concept of the Immortal Regiment and discuss a politics of "memory," which is also a politics of "immortality," that the Regiment articulated. How did it negotiate the absence to which death reduces a person? In what ways was the "memory" of the war by the Regiment alternative to the "memory" of the war by the state? Below, I focus on two major political elements of the initiative: its self-proclaimed non-ideological orientation and portrait photography as the key memorial symbol.

Despite maintaining that the Regiment is a popular initiative and thus must be decentralised, supported and organised by people willing to express their "memory" of the war, the organisers set up the movement's Charter, which loosely outlined its main principles, goals and institutional structure. The Charter codified "preservation of the personal memory about

the generation of the Great Patriotic War in every family" as the main goal of the movement (Bessmertnyi Polk n. d., article 1). Article 3 of the Charter explicitly says that "'The Immortal Regiment' is a Non-commercial, Apolitical, Nongovernmental Civic Initiative" and, according to article 4, "Use of any corporate, political or other symbols is prohibited in relation to anything of concern for the Immortal Regiment" (Bessmertnyi polk n. d.). In later interviews, one of the founders of the initiative, Sergei Lapenkov, insisted that it is not a political demonstration and that "the officials may come out with the portraits but not with the logos of political parties" (Safonova 2015).

Lapenkov's insistence on the apolitical nature of the Regiment should be approached with caution. On the one hand, aversion to the language of "politics" is widespread in Russia and is generally traced to the double movement of official democratisation and everyday precarity after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Not only did the transition to capitalism effectuate the devastation of social bonds necessary for active political engagement (Clément and Zhelnina 2020, 148), but also, and more importantly, the correspondence of "democracy" with an everyday precarity led to a deep distrust towards state institutions and "politics" as "the dirty business" full of deceit and indifferent towards lives of ordinary people (Zhuravlev et al. 2014). In this sense, Russian society is seen as depoliticised in two ways: first, in being "an atomized society where people have difficulties engaging with what they presume to be a hostile and incomprehensible outer world, even when this outer world is close by" (Clément and Zhelnina 2020, 148), and second, as expressing "a conscious, reflexive refusal of "politics" as a field of enforced, empty ideologies and cynical actions masked by hypocritical rhetoric (political technologies)" (Zhuravlev et al. 2014, 19). On the other hand, the relationship between these two tendencies is not that of straightforward correspondence. Multiple sociological studies of depoliticisation under neoliberal capitalism show that what Bennett et al. call "the disavowal of politics" (2013) is a global phenomenon and quite often implies not a

refusal of politics as such but a refusal of "politics" as a category with which people would like to associate their actions (Bennett and Cordner 2013; Eliasoph 1997; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020). In this context, naming one's actions other than "political" becomes a way of acquiring more support and avoiding an immediate judgment – of continuing to do politics without defining one's actions as political (Zhuravlev et al. 2014). Hence, commenting on the Regiment, Mischa Gabowitsch argues that its self-proclaimed refusal of politics is rather "a strategic defense against both cooptation and repression by the state, and as a way of stressing the primacy of intimate family attachments and personal life stories against a commemoration built on general principles, be it official patriotism or abstract individualism" (2018, 308).

It could be suggested that the Immortal Regiment is not a phenomenon of such a "politics of apoliticals" because it does not express either concrete demands or a general popular antagonism between the state and the people, which, for example, became a main motto of 2011-2012 protest movement in Russia, considered by sociologists an unexpected example of politicisation on non-ideological grounds (Zhuravlev et al. 2014). Indeed, in refusing politics, the Immortal Regiment refused possible demands for justice – for example, more extensive state care for the war veterans, and has not articulated a more general antagonism with the regime remembering the war through myths. However, it is worth paying attention to the form in which the "disavowal of politics" takes place.

The central, nonpolitical, otherwise private feature of the Immortal Regiment is an act of carrying a photograph of a relative who lived through or died in the war across the central streets of cities. Although, in theory, participants could bring a photo of any person, not necessarily (although preferably) a relative, the main idea was that the portraits of famous generals, party leaders and other well-known "grand" figures of the war – in other words, of mythical creatures that may once have been living persons but over time had come to represent the war, the Soviet people and the "victory" – would remain in the textbooks, state-sponsored

documentaries and official events. Instead, it is an ordinary dead, with a social status but in excess of it, who, in the original idea, would be remembered. More so, by insisting that the participants bring a photo of a relative, the organisers highlight that the dead who is to become immortal should not be any dead, not a particular instance of a universal tragedy, but *this* person, a singular, unique being, a nameless with a name, a person who is alive in death by virtue of having a relation with the one remembering them.

What is foregrounded in that act of remembrance is a person – a subjectivity that Jenny Edkins contrasts with an isolated, self-sufficient individual, "always the subject of a lack, never complete, always relational, never fully known, never "at home" (2011, 11). This person is, of course, a hero, a victim of the war, less often the victim of Stalin's regime, with its military failures and repressions, which continued throughout the war. Yet, it is the memory of this person, not another, not a hero-victim in the abstract, that the participants of the Regiment perform. Whereas in the "myth" of the great victory the grand ones had come to stand for the mass of nameless, invisible, forgotten by the state no-ones,[19] the act of exposing the face of an ordinary person by another ordinary person gives significance and visibility to these no-ones, transforming them into ones, important as such, not because of the great heroic deeds they committed. If the state remembers in such ways that no one is really remembered but the heroes, the Someones, the Immortal Regiment's goal is to remember these no-ones as ones, so that no *one* is forgotten, or every *one* is remembered.

Such an act of making a one out of no-one is certainly not political if "politics" is understood as synonymous with governance or the contest for top-down power exercised by state institutions. Indeed, as I have already mentioned, it is through such a conceptualisation of politics that the organisers of the Regiment framed it as a nonpolitical movement. However, in rejecting and opposing the mythical politics of war "memory" and in performing a

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[19] For an analysis of World War II becoming a national myth in Soviet Union see Tumarkin 1994.

transformation of an abstract image of the dead into a singular photo-body of a person, the Regiment might articulate a different political logic, one where the dead count less for what they did and more for *who* they were. In her study of politics around missing persons, Jenny Edkins reads such a transformation along Jacques Rancière's (2010) conceptualisation of politics. For Rancière, politics consists in a conflict between two worlds: one where everything and everyone is assigned a clear part in the community so that there is no place for excess or supplement ("the police") and another where this supplement, "the part of those without part" (ibid, 36), is visible and claims the right to speak. Politics is thus a two-sided process – it negates the existing order but does so by inscribing another one into it (ibid, 37-39). Political subjectivation is a double operation of assuming and exercising the capacity to speak in the absence of such a right and in making oneself, as an excess over the existing categories, visible through the exercise of this speech.

Edkins turns to Rancière to suggest that in the search for the missing, states pursue a different political logic from the relatives of the missing. The former look for the missing as a social category, for "what" they are rather than who (Edkins 2011, 2). States, according to Edkins, cannot tolerate the missing because they are the unlocated remainder, the absence, the "no-part" appearing within the social order that rests on drawing lines and positions and, therefore, they subvert the coherence of that order (ibid, 13-14). In searching for the missing, states aim to incorporate them into that order by eliminating their absence and effectively do incorporate them by reducing the missing to the category of "missing" (ibid, 12-13). "For the police order, there can be nothing missing" as Edkins (2011, 14) writes, meaning that any remainder has to be somehow absorbed by the social order, even if the resulting category of "others" puts the whole logic into question. The relatives, however, insist on the singularity of the missing – that it is this person who is missing and missed. Whereas within the police logic, missing can and should be delineated as an object of intervention, the political logic insists on

and puts forward an excess of "no-part" over any specific part, its irreducibility to a position, a category, a bounded presence: "People are not missing in the abstract. People are only missing in relation to those who know them and are concerned for their well-being and want to know their whereabouts" (Edkins 2011, 13).

Portrait photography is a genre of visual representation that can express both logics, as Edkins (2015) shows in another study. In general, it is a representation of a person through a synecdochic reduction of their body and identities to a face.[20] A portrait represents (depicts) a face, and a face represents (stands for) a person. In practices of statehood, a photograph, as a visual representation of a person's incorporeality, further becomes a corporeal standard against which a person's identity is compared. Your passport (please). Take off your mask. A two-dimensional snapshot of myself that is a hundred times smaller than my face stands to establish an equivalence between my profile and my body, marking me as me. The face on the photo, the photo of the face, is a general image of a person, preceding, appearing more important, more truthful, more holistic than any particular appearance of a person who, within that imaginary, is much smaller than a 100 times smaller photo of them. The face must match the photo, not vice versa.

Then comes an odd comment: "This is not you." Well, that is me. Or that is not exactly me because me is me, and the photograph is a photograph. But I can't say that to the police, for whom in a picture, "a pipe, here, is [must be] always and intractably a pipe" (Barthes 1981, 5). I cannot say that to a police officer, a bank employee, a border guard, a university administration, a landlord, etc., unless I want to be refused my right to study, receive a salary and pay for bills, have a place to live, to travel, well, to walk and maybe live; unless I want to be absent. More than establishing an equivalence between myself and my profile, a photograph

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[20] For a discussion of synecdoche in photographic representations see Shim 2013, 31-32.

establishes my presence. Here is my photograph, therefore, I am who I claim to be. Here is my photograph, therefore I am. Without it, I am a no-one.

In this transformation from a representation into an ideal golden standard that enables one's participation in everyday life of a capitalist society, the photograph becomes a tool of administration and an operator of objectification. A snapshot of an immobile, frozen-in-time person is used to freeze the corporeal, mobile, ever-varying person in the image (Edkins 2015, 13). This is who you are and who you must be. The police do not see a person in a photograph. It sees a person *as* a photograph.

Memorial photography expresses this process of a representation's transformation into a body as well. Like any other photography genre, it also aims to establish a person's presence and preserve it in the immediate absence of a referent. However, it cannot be a standard for comparison. The referent of a post-mortem photograph is not simply absent – it is impossible to make present. It is not here, and it *cannot* be. The person is dead, removed of any appearance other than perhaps bones. A picture of the dead restores their presence, gives them a life after and in death. Yet, that life is different, incorporeal, or contained in the corporeality of a photograph only. The photo of the dead cries: "That one who is here is no longer there with you." They cannot be found, recaptured once more, made to fit into the frame. They cannot be yet in a photograph they are – "a part of no part."

The participants in the Immortal Regiment take these photos of the dead, the only bodies remaining of them, onto the streets, the space where "memory" usually appears only as carved in stone, carved as stone in the form of memorials sanctioned and protected by the state, that stone-like structure that remembers not people but other stones. While "memory" practised in the Regiment is political already because it articulates a subjectivity of the dead as a unique person rather than a mythical hero, this articulation is achieved by disrupting the boundary between personal, supposedly apolitical, and public political actions. Here "personal memory"

is not only a memory of a person but also a memory *by* a person, by an equally ordinary living, with a social status but in excess of it. A mythical representation of war is suspended for the form of content that refuses symbolism and signification, and instead consists in a differential fusion of two bodies – one of flesh, another of paper, one present as alive, another as dead, one speaking by holding another, another speaking with eternal silence, a body without a photo and a photo without a body other than itself. These two bodies are neither confused, collapsing into an undifferentiated mass where it is not clear who is remembered by whom, nor kept separate and thus ascribed to their proper territories (the living to the streets, the dead to the graveyards). Instead, they accompany each other in a collective march, forming a temporary alliance, a fragile sculpture, a dance couple. This dance further extends to other living-dead, immortal couples moving together in a collective procession. While it is a personal, deeply private experience of commemorating the dead that is framed as the foundation of the initiative, and the preservation of that experience as its key goal, the Regiment does not take place at one's apartment or during a family visit to the graveyard. Whereas stories about the war and its participants are usually narrated in narrow family circles, at family gatherings on 9 May – that is, in private, hidden-from-the-outsiders situations, the Immortal Regiment pulls the photos of the dead and their life-stories, together with the narrators of these stories and the archivists of these photos into the streets, where one portrait joins many in a polyphonic choir and one living body marches along with others in a collective movement. In the Regiment, an experience of memory considered private and personal, and actions of remembering otherwise performed outside the public spheres of visibility become public and collective, destabilising the very line demarcating the two. The insistence on a nonpolitical form of such a commemoration only contributes to the extension of "politics" beyond both "politics" as a set of institutionalised routine procedures and "politics" as a set of top-down processes of governance, ideological education and technological manipulation.

Ivan Kurilla suggests of the Regiment, that "in the absence of a generally understood political language, millions of Russians took to the streets to assert their right to history, the most powerful political statement in Russia's entire post-Soviet history" (2020, 160). The previous discussion of politics under depoliticisation and of portrait photography as a technique of registering absence and establishing presence shows that a politics of the Regiment, a politics of the immortals, may be found not in the "right to history" (history being almost entirely absent from the initiative, which foregrounds stories instead) but in claiming the right to be – for both those whose faces still move, and those whose gaze will forever be still.

The Immortal Regiment after 2015: Everyone remembers, everyone must remember

Soon after the Immortal regiment was founded, it entered an uneasy terrain of being politically apolitical and, with that, an uneasy relationship with the state. Despite Lapenkov's insistence on its apolitical nature, the Regiment became a national, grassroot social movement almost explicitly challenging the state's ways of commemorating the dead (politically opposing its apoliticism to the state's political use of "memory") at times when any political expression was more and more codified and banned; yet, banning that initiative would mean undermining the very same "values" that are officially proclaimed and constantly emphasised by the authorities as the cornerstones of Russian national identity. Hence, instead of destroying the initiative, the authorities decided to put it under control, which, given the decentralised and popular structure of the Regiment, was easy to achieve. Over several years after the first Regiment took place, new legal entities bearing the same name but run by other people, supported by the authorities financially and via state media, were created (Gabowitsch 2018, 308-309). The founders of the original Regiment tried to cooperate with the authorities first but soon realised that the version of the procession they preferred, promoted, and enforced was the very opposite of what the Regiment originally was supposed to be. Not only did the portraits of

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Stalin and Soviet generals start to pop up in the middle of the walking crowd (see e.g. Dokshin 2019), but also the authorities began issuing "quotas" of how many people are supposed to join the regiment, enforcing employees of state institutions and school pupils to take part in the demonstrations (Bessmertnyi Polk 2016). Finally, the amorphous gathering of immortal bodies acquired a head, a leader, a primary symbol, a representative that reinstalled representationalism into the expressiveness of the march – the president leading the procession in Moscow, broadcast on state TV channels, expanding beyond the immediate co-presence of the remembering and the remembered onto those who do not commemorate the war other than through staying in their private settings and watching the disruption of the private/public occur at a distance, maintaining that distinction.

How could such an easy appropriation of the Regiment by the state, and the transformation of an initiative from a form of political expression into yet another element of the national "mythscape" (Bell 2003) take place? While the institutional means of the movement's takeover should not be disregarded, for they show the precarity of grassroot movements in contemporary Russia, they do not explain how the state could absorb and cancel the political force of the Regiment without radically changing or prohibiting its central feature – a display of portrait photography – that very gesture which made the Regiment political.

Perhaps I have forgotten something.

Let us return to the original goals posed by the organisers of the Regiment. The Charter states the main one is "preservation of the personal memory about the generation of the Great Patriotic War in every family" (Bessmertnyi polk n. d., article 1). Behind the attention that "personal memory" receives in an environment dominated by abstract myths, what gets backgrounded – and indeed, in Russia, feels natural, unproblematic, true even for critically oriented scholars like Kurilla (2020, 160) – is that this memory should be preserved in *every* family. Already at a conceptual and ideational level, the Regiment was created with the goal of

expansion – it could not be limited to one or two participants to become a proper *regiment* but instead had to actively gain popularity within each city, across the country, further becoming an immortal army.

The more people join the initiative, the more it can legitimately claim not only that "No one is forgotten" but also that "Everyone remembers" – even if it is only someone who does. While, as I suggested, representation was not foregrounded internally in the movement of the living holding the dead, the movement in general was designed to represent the nation, its unity in "memory" and mourning. Where portrait photography articulates a political subjectivity of a unique (no longer) living being – a politics beyond representation, a politics of "a person-as-such" (Edkins 2011, 12) – this politics *within* the movement is counteracted by a tendency *of* the movement towards hegemonic representation, a tendency most well captured by another popular refrain: "A memory of the war lives in every family."

Having found a secret to immortality, the movement is forever bound with war, with a military formation, a regiment. For every family to remember, it requires more no-ones to be transformed into ones, more corpses without an identity, more identities without a corpse, more of a nation without a person and more persons abandoned by a country. Immortals can never die, and so can always be sent to die, ordered to kill. For no one to be forgotten, everyone must remember, and if someone does not, regiments of immortals will remind them. Don't wait for a coffin, prepare a photo to put on a standard. "Everyone must remember" – an order word in the word, craving for an ideal order – a death sentence put on an endless repeat.

The Immortal Regiment stands on a shaky balance between two counterposing forces – that of being (not) forgotten and that of remembering, the force of mourning and the force of self-indulgence, performativity and representation. On the one hand, it posits a possibility of everyone remembering, on the other – of no one being forgotten. Radically opposite poles, one of absolute negation, another of absolute positivity, "no one" and "everyone" pull the regiment

in opposite, even though so similar directions, just like those of life and death do. One of these directions annihilates anything approaching it, manifesting death-long decomposition, an endless descent into the void as its preferable way of walking. Another restores meaning to a passer-by, but guiding one through it ends up in another point of annihilation, which destroys not by decomposing but by recomposing the guest around the centre of gravity. A slide in any of these directions leads to an ultimate erasure of *one* and to the primacy of "every" or "no." The personhood articulated *against* the statehood is consumed *by* the totalising tendency of the latter. Representation takes over, and with it, a desire to translate, to reduce ambiguity to a single meaning.

A memory of the war lives in every family.

Repeat repeat not in every repeat repeat family repeat.

Perhaps not every family wishes to repeat.

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(even MS Word believes repeat repeat repeat is wrong)

Remembering nothing

The outdoor stage, the murky sky, the drips of rain around, upon me. A girl in her early teens, twenty-ish unspectacular spectators-adults, myself included, at a distance though. Dressed in a military uniform, the child reads a poem out loud, and a genuinely poetic one it is. With extreme passion and much precision, clearly forgetting nothing, for 10 minutes, she recounts countless ways in which the invaders killed children and the complex internal struggle of an untimely lyrical hero to build a relation to the perpetrators of violence.

Gloating pilots smirking at the bombing of children

Children's flesh

Enemies

Fascists

Vampires

Fascist killer-pilots

never forget that tragedy

never forgive

We swore to avenge

Divine Rus' Mother Rus'

How can it be possible to forgive?

No one is forgotten. Nothing is forgotten.

The child most certainly did not write these words, which I can now recall only as fragments, but her passionate reading of them is in itself an expression of extreme talent, appropriate for the place where she is performing. With the force of her voice, the child-poet makes felt the images the language constructs. Here they are, the invaders into the Mother-Motherland eternal Rus,' at this very moment bombing, shooting, disfiguring children like her. The voice intensifies, sounds louder and louder, echoing across the plain park grassland surrounding the stage. In hearing a child speak about children's death, we feel that she, the

voice outside the content of the story, could be the voiceless, disfigured body within it. The voice and the body of the lively child are doubled with an image of the same person who is no longer a person, cruelly transformed into its opposite, a nothing. A child alive, a child dead, a child decomposed. The voice visualises all stages of transformation.

It seems she feels herself embodying and releasing all these stages too. Perhaps it is that embodiment of an image of a disfigured body that pushes her to try on a uniform, to contain death, to pre-emptively prevent it, to become a soldier. "We swore to avenge them." And we can't let that repeat, all of us in the audience, can't repeat. Let's repeat that. Fear and mourning can wait – it is vengeance and prevention that we seek. The girl has brought the extended clip of words to achieve the desired outcome. As the soldiers do, she does not separate the proclamation of a death sentence from a realisation of it. She keeps releasing the full clip of a fully charged voice-gun against the crowd of vampires until none of them is in sight, until no one can hide, until no body part remains, until all that is left of these no-ones is nothing.

Fabulous.

Fantastic!

Applause.

The vampires, first resurrected, since they all were dead by now, pass into darkness once more the moment they are brought to the scene. Nothing is forgotten, none of their crimes. Nothing can be forgiven. They cannot be forgiven, for they are nothing - the inhumane forces, the demons on earth, the vampires. The dark forces always return, as every child knows - the soulless, they resurrect if killed. Cut off one head – two more will take its place. Hail Hydra.

Close one portal into the upside down - the amorphous Mindflayer will find a new way to invade our normal world. Kill the Emperor – the Sith will build a new body for him. These things, these nothings wait for us to show a sign of weakness. A child must become a soldier, a super soldier, to keep the guard and not forget that nothing is everywhere, constantly expanding, at each turn craving for our own annihilation, our transformation into nothing. We must forget nothing. All we remember is nothing.

The small building behind a child's body and the stage under it bear the name "Olga Berggoltz Drama Theatre." Berggoltz is known as the most famous artistic voice of the blockaded Leningrad, a survivor of the war who kept writing poetry and reading it on the radio even in the harshest times of the blockade-induced famine, even when her husband died in that famine, together with hundreds of thousands of other residents. "No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten." The words the child utters resonate with the name of the author who was the first to utter them. In the absence of anyone who lived through the blockade, it is the name of a poet that marks the site as that of "memory," a particular "memory," a "memory" of the war, before the child's performance begins, after it is over. In the absence of the name, in the invisibility of its mark throughout the performance, the "No one is forgotten…" keeps releasing the force of the name, keeps marking the site as that of war, of "memory," of poetry. Yet, here, on stage, a few meters away from the pond hosting the absolute nothing that the ashes of many thousands of cremated Leningraders turned into, "No one is forgotten" forgets the name, the someone. All that is left for memory is nothing.

At home at the cemetery

Unlike many other refrains of remembrance, "No one is forgotten" is not an expression without an origin, an author, a root – even if it appears as such. The phrase may have been deterritorialised, uprooted from its birthplace and woven into the endless order of discourse, into an infinitely expanding language where the infinite process of translation reigns and the

original is no longer recoverable (Minh-Ha 2011, 28), but the fact is, it does have a locatable author, a text from which it was cut, an original body, a fragment of which it is. Where is that body? Where is it buried, hidden under the weight of a protective coffin and all-consuming soil? And what may that phrase have looked like when it was still attached to its original, before it was cut from the whole body and multiplied in a cloning machine of discourse?

It's wrong to assume a body is buried somewhere though. Abandoned and forgotten, it may well be lying on the surface, in plain sight, where anyone can see it and continue taking whatever they need from it.

Piskaryovskoye memorial cemetery, a massive graveyard and the largest official memorial to the victims of the Leningrad blockade, is located on the outskirts of Saint-Petersburg. Home to remains of four hundred thousand civilians and seventy thousand soldiers, it regularly hosts the living who, whether out of pure interest in landscape design and Soviet post-war architecture or the desire to hang out with the dead, walk along the immobile, hidden remains, lay flowers to the immobile, exposed monument, or maybe the desire to have a photo posted on a personal website, across mass media of a country owned by that same person,[21] cross the long distance within the fragmented city, between disconnected towns, within the memorial, between one endless grave to another, from an entrance museum to a memorial wall.

Narrow pathways demarcate large fields of grass, which nevertheless look too small to accommodate all the bones-used-to-be-flesh lying beneath. Each field is additionally marked by a stone with four-figure numbers carved in it. 1941.1942.1943.1944. The grass behind the stones looks neither like grass on a carefully tendered site of significance nor like a wildly growing, uneven, endless, wild terrain. The pathways carry a trace of importance in what they delimit, the grass that is delimited has long lost that important look. Everything important must be hidden under the banal, forgotten to be preserved.

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[21] Vladimir Putin regularly attends Piskaryovskoye cemetery around the anniversary of the blockade's lifting to lay flowers to one of the mass graves where his brother was presumably buried.

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Far behind the mass graves that the grasslands are, a monument is seen, and a wide dark grey wall is behind it. The monument is designed in the style of "Mother-Motherland" – a tall statue of a woman representing countless mothers grieving for their children and the whole country as a mother who gave birth to its children only to lose them in being protected. However, although the statue draws the visitor's attention by means of its place in the composition, the wall behind it is more important. On the sides, the figures of Soviet soldiers and workers are carved out. Three verses occupy the centre of the wall. The first one reads:

Here lie Leningraders.
Here are the townspeople – men, women, and children.
Next to them are the Red Army soldiers.
With all their lives
They defended you, Leningrad,
The cradle of the Revolution.
We cannot list their noble names here,
So many of them lie under the eternal protection of granite.
But know this you who dwells upon these stones,
No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten.

The words of Olga Berggolts pull the empty-looking, full-of-bodies grave fields in front of them and release the objects within its grasp back, transforming the space they capture into an extension of a poem. Here they are, the nameless, the forgotten, remembered with these words, lying under the symmetrically organised pieces of land. No one is forgotten. Everyone is remembered.

However, Berggolts, a survivor of the blockade and late 1930s repressions, was too faithful to the experience of everyday mass death and the possibility of remembering it to write "everyone is remembered." She was also experienced and proficient enough in the use of language to know that the phrase "everyone is remembered" would mean nothing in Russian. The passive form of the verb "to remember" [*pomnit'*] has almost no use in Russian. The word that sounds like a passive of "to remember" [*pomnit'sya*] is more often used either as an active voice of a word that is identical to "remember" in everything but a context, or as a parenthetic

word: "to be remembered" is used as an action not performed by or with me but *to* me: a memory comes to mind [*pomnitsya mne..*]. It is rather 'I' that, in this case, transforms into a passive object of memory of which I have no control and which appears as the subject of the statement. While grammatically, it is possible to say that "Everyone is remembered," this possibility is excluded pragmatically. "Everyone is remembered," or for that matter, anyone and anything being remembered, is nonsense, a meaningless noise, a nothing that can immediately be forgotten.

Memory simultaneously highlights and eradicates an absence of a person. To remember someone is to recognise their absence from the situation in which the act of remembering occurs and to make them present in this act. Memory preserves, memory resurrects. However, in this act of preservation and resurrection the object of memory has no voice – or rather, can only appear in passive voice. The remembered cannot decide to be remembered, cannot initiate the act of memory. The Russian language disturbs that use of memory in the use of language. The passive voice of what is remembered turns out to be its active voice. The images of the past come to me instead of being brought to light by me. "Everyone is remembered" would not designate our capacity and will to remember. It would bring forth the world of ghosts who haunt the remembering subject-turned-object. "Hauntology" (Auchter 2014) would reveal that our desire to remember holds only as long as the dead can't speak. A memory of everyone would be a nightmare.

Instead of "Everyone is remembered," what is written on the memorial wall of Piskaryovskoye cemetery is "No one is forgotten." Is it though? "No one is forgotten. Nothing is forgotten" is undoubtedly written *here*. But what is written here is not the original – it is a translation, which sounds and looks quite differently from "*Nikto ne zabyt. Nichto ne zabyto*," which in turn sounds and looks quite differently from "Никто не забыт. Ничто не забыто." It is the last version that has been carved into the wall. And this last version, which is the first, is

difficult to translate if the rule we follow is economic, "one word *by* one word," as Derrida (2001, 181) calls it, that is, if we strive for both the accuracy of meaning and the identity of a word count. A translator's footnote is required here. In English, to say that "everyone is remembered" through recourse to forgetting only a single negation is necessary – it would not make sense to say, "No one is not forgotten." In Russian, however, it is the latter version, the double negation that is required – "No one is forgotten," *Nikto zabyt*, would be grammatically incorrect.

It might be suggested that the translation "No one is forgotten" still carries the meaning of the original and, given the lack of other options, is the best possible one. However, let us look at the meaning of the expression "No one is *not* forgotten" and its English translation "No one is forgotten" in more detail. In English, the statement can have at least two meanings. First, "No one is forgotten" means that everyone is remembered – the meaning in which I have used the expression so far. In this case, besides transforming the speaking subject into a remembering one, the utterance performs a double operation of trying to produce a radical presence (everyone) and failing due to its negative form (no-one – a lack of one). The second way of reading the expression is more literal and less immediately relatable though: here, no one becomes equivalent not to everyone but to someone without an identity – *a* no-one. In this reading, any negation disappears (a no-one is indeed forgotten; the negative equivalent would be "(a) no-one is not remembered"), but the statement is tautological, or purely constative because a no-one is a no-one precisely insofar as they are not remembered. Here, the effect is the opposite: what the statement tries to articulate is a radical absence of both memory's object and memory; however, in being said, this absence becomes present.

Translation thus succeeds only partially. Whereas translated, the expression can mean "Everyone is remembered" and "(a) No one is forgotten," in the original, it can mean "Everyone is remembered" and "(a) No one is remembered." In this last instance, the object of memory

undergoes a peculiar transformation. The statement does not privilege absence or presence, instead bringing them both together without opposing or reducing one to another. A no one at stake is remembered, and so must no longer be a no one and become a someone – yet, they do not. A no-one remains a no-one, an absent person, a "missing" (Edkins 2011) but still remembered, made present as absent, as a "no" which does not become a "yes!"

The graves are anonymous, marked only by a year: 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944. Silence, the void where any identity dissipates, reigns in this place of death, of memory, of no ones who are not forgotten, who are remembered only as no ones. No one is forgotten – this form of expression is at odds with the content – the unidentified bodies – and the form of content – the untethered mass graves – it accompanies.[22] Here, on the surface marked by the words of a poet remembered by few, it is a no-one that is remembered, a no-one that is not forgotten.

> Here lie Leningraders.
> Here are the townspeople – men, women, and children.
> Next to them are the Red Army soldiers.
> In short, people of all categories.
> With all their lives,
> Lives beyond identity,
> They defended you, Leningrad,
> The cradle of the Revolution,
> The cradle.
> So many cradles they could not defend.
> We cannot list their noble names here,
> For there was nothing noble about them,
> About those ordinary, abandoned and forgotten lives,
> For now they have no names,
> The no-ones,
> So many of them lie under the eternal protection of granite.
> And even more lie under the eternal indifference of soil.
> But know this you, one who dwells upon these stones,
>
> A no-one is not forgotten. A nothing is (not) forgotten.

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[22] Here the words "content" and "expression" are used in the sense attributed to them by Deleuze and Guattari, who use "content" to describe corporeal components of assemblages (a "body" very broadly understood) and "expression" for incorporeal ones (language). See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

As is the case with all the "no-ones" and "everyones" though, there is always an exception, a someone standing out. To the left of the entrance and the panoramic view of the even, peaceful grass, smaller lawns extend, bordering a wall and a more wooded area. Hidden from the sight of the "No one is forgotten," hiding behind on the side, behind the trees, these smaller lawns are signed with stones too, though these ones are more informative. Four-figure numbers-four-figure numbers. 1920-1941. 1910-1944. A name above them completes all the necessary details; sometimes, a rank is carved out too. These graves without a grave but with a name occupy much less space than the graves without a grave without a name do. But every person occupies a stone if not yet a separate grave. Every stone marks a person, a one among anyone.

Some are just dead. Others are heroes.

No one is not forgotten. Someone is remembered. No one is forgotten – neither no-one, nor one.

The dead arise

[Let us remember them each by name,

Let us remember with our grief…]

It is not the dead –

who need this!

It is the living –

who need that!

[*Vspomnim vseh poimenno,*

gorem vspomnim svoim…

Eto nuzhno —

ne mertvym!

Eto nado —

zhivym!]

These words from Robert Rozhdestvensky's poem *Requiem* (1962) join Berggolts' refrain of no one being forgotten, further writing the silent land of Piskaryovskoye cemetery with a poetic text of ambiguous meaning and an atmosphere of mourning. They do so from the opposite side of the memorial though. Whereas the voice of Berggolts attracts the visitors from the very end of the cemetery, behind the tall statue, from the side that is an endpoint but that has been designed to attract the visitors' gaze, the voice of Rozhdestvensky – and it is a voice, for the words were supposed to be accompanied with music – sounds from the very beginning, before the entrance, across the street, outside of the delimited by the fence territory but still a part of it. The building marked by these lines has not been designed to attract anyone's attention (or maybe it was so poorly designed that the intention to attract attention fails). A former floral, then a café, then a museum, then whatever site indefinitely shut down, this building, once used in an attempt to extend the territory of "memory" and abandoned soon after the mark was left, has been forgotten.

Perhaps it should be no surprise that Rozhdestvensky's words have been included in the memorial space only as the outside, as an inscription beyond the delimited territory yet still a part of it. While the poem does not aim to diminish the feats of the Soviet people and to challenge the mythical "memory" of the war – written at a time when the official myth of the greatest heroic victory was yet to be constituted, it could not have its subversion as a goal – it does articulate the dead as the silent bodies, disregarded by life growing on top of them and in turn indifferent towards that life precisely because now they are dead. "It is not the dead – who

need this! It is the living – who need that!” is the main leitmotiv of the poem that gives meaning to the whole text despite a single appearance and underlines the central message: the dead are dead. Nothing will bring them back to life, not even the most accurate, complex work of remembering, not even a biography recording each movement. The dead don't care where they are buried and how, they don't care how they are remembered and whether they are remembered at all. The dead do not care about anything and anyone, they do not remember anything or anyone. The dead are dead. They could have wished to be remembered when they were alive, and they could have wanted for life to continue after their death, but those desiring, wishful bodies have perished. Remains are all that remains.

“The soldier was dying –

as known.

The soldier died -

as unknown

[Umiral soldat —

izvestnym.

Umer —

Neizvestnym.]

(Rozhdestvensky 1962)”

The soldier was dying –

as one.

The soldier died –

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now a no-one.

It is the soldiers who, at least at Piskaryovskoye, are dead as someones though. The no-ones, the majority of the victims of the blockade, the unknown, the unidentifiable, the "missing missing" as Edkins (2011, 6) calls them, those who have no one to miss them, were civilians.

The person was dying –

    as someone.

The person died –

    now a no-one,

   a person no more.

A no-one does not care whether it is one or a no-one, remembered, forgotten or never remembered (which is different from being forgotten). "No one is forgotten" conceals this utter indifference of the dead by means of a passive voice, which articulates the living, the remembering, as the figure outside speech. A revelation of the absence of needs in death – a revelation of a person's absence - would risk exposing the selfishness of commemorative rituals and undermine an order that rests on forgetting the needs of present life in claiming to do justice to the dead – an order which produces the mass of remembering by first crafting an object of "memory" in need of preservation. The words of Rozhdestvensky expose the remembering subject articulated in "No one is forgotten" through concealment. Political without any political intention, they pose a threat to an order based on the idea of the dead's immortality.

The basic idea of Rozhdestvenskii's poem is clear, as explicit as it could possibly be. Nevertheless, as if it was not, the text at the border of the memorial is clarified by the bodies of flesh holding pieces of carton signed with concise slogans (the party of the dead 2022a).

THESE CORPSES   THE DEAD

ARE NOT ENOUGH   DON'TNEED

FOR THEM   WAR

The bodies clarifying that nothing done in the present can have any value to the dead are made of flesh, and the red-of-cold fingers holding the carton make it clear that this flesh is a long way from post-mortem decay. Yet, they refuse to be called alive – not at this moment, at least. Hiding faces behind the skull masks, not letting "life" enter the space of language as anything other than the other, as "they," these bodies are (or pretend to be) the dead who stood up from the graves that have forgotten, and made us forget, who has been lying in them. These dead have not been resurrected, have not stood up as immortals whose identity, whose name, whose life will never be forgotten. They protest as dead, unconditionally dead, as the skulls without a face, as corpses without an identity – as no-ones who have been forgotten and who wish not to be remembered.

These no-ones could be called a "mortal regiment" since they understand that immortality, not death, is the negative aspect of life. Clearly though, they are utterly disinterested in warfare and so would refuse to join any kind of a regiment, be it mortal, immortal, alive or dead. They are engaged in politics, however, demanding justice for the countless corpses to whom the living attribute a soul, and then in the name of those immortal spirits, who, despite the incorporeal transformation from "no-ones" into "heroes," remain unidentified, unidentifiable remains, proclaim sacred crusades, military interventions, "special military operations" and processes of "denazification." A "regiment" signifies the crowd's continuing participation in (and love for) warfare, as well as their lack of power in making decisions on war. By contrast, a *party* is an ultimate form of contemporary political subjectivity.

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Where the Immortal Regiment, nostalgic for a life, actively negates it, "the party of the dead," oblivious of nostalgia, offers an ultimate affirmation of life.

"The party of the dead": conceptual foundations

"An ethico-political project disguised as an artistic one" (Evstropov 2020), "the party of the dead" was founded in 2017 as an offspring of the Saint-Petersburg art collective {rodina} [{motherland}] led by Maksim Evstropov and Daria Apahonchich. Organising performances at the sites of death and bringing an aesthetics of death into the peaceful, apolitical spaces, both physical and online, "the party" has been associated with the tradition of Russian actionism – "an art of corporeal provocation" (Hanukai, 2023, 114), which has been known for its spectacular, provocative, often violent action in public spaces aimed at confrontation with the state. Within this tradition, the party of the dead has been identified with a recent stream of projects which refuse the violent and masculine aesthetic of an actionist spectacle (e.g. infamous performances of Pyotr Pavlensky) and instead pursue processual forms of activist art and dialogical ways of interacting with the audience without refusing a provocative style of engagement (Hanukai 2023, 126).

The basic problem that the party addresses is "the omnipresent capitalisation of the dead" (Evstropov 2020) in contemporary Russian society and beyond. They find this "capitalisation," which means a simultaneous production of the dead, appropriation of their (no longer existent) voices and their exploitation as sources of authority, in four main fields. First, as Maksim Evstropov, one of the founders, writes, images and voices of the dead are used as an authority in memory politics, "which, in the situation of total necronostalgy, often substitutes any politics whatsoever" (ibid). Second, "the dead are also an electoral resource," by which Evstropov means the existence of "dead souls" – both as the persons existing only on paper and as an imagined "people" supporting the regime (ibid). Third, the party perceives Russian politics in general as a politics of death, which transforms the living into the mute, lacking

political agency politically "dead" (ibid). Finally, the production of political death further leads to the actual production of dead corpses – a theme that has been present in the party since its inception but has become central since Russian invasion of Ukraine. In short, the party sees death as the foundation of Russian politics, used by the authorities as the main resource, which, to be used, has to be constantly produced.

"The party" pursues three goals in its art-activist work: critical, affirmative, and pedagogical. First, it aims to expose this foundational role of death in contemporary Russian regime or, as they put it in the draft charter, "to criticize attempts of getting such [preferential] access [to the dead] and appropriating the voices of the dead" (the party of the dead 2019). The critical task of "the party" is evident in most of its performances and pickets, where the participants use distorted state slogans and everyday expressions (e.g. "We can repeat!" [Mozhem povtorit'] becomes "We can't repeat" [Ne mozhem povtorit'], see the party of the dead 2018) to expose violence masked behind the pretence of the authorities to keep the "memory" alive. The second, affirmative goal of the "party" is to "make the dead speak directly, on their own behalf and with no mediation" (the party of the dead 2019). This goal is articulated as impossible to achieve yet necessary since "there can be no social or political justice without this direct speech of the dead, for the dead are the absolute and the absolutely excluded majority" (ibid) – there are 100 billion dead and only 8 billion living, as Evstropov often reminds. The third goal is more straightforward and complementary to the previous one: it is "the task of reminding the dead that they are dead because many of them forget it or don't even know about it (and, speaking in general, it is not only the dead who are dead)" (ibid).

"The party of the dead" has been inspired by the Immortal Regiment, the rise of which Evstropov witnessed in Tomsk. Yet, that inspiration resulted in a project that is distant from the original in every conceptual aspect. The difference in concept further translates and can be observed in the specific style of "the party's" performances, as I will explain in more detail

further. Putting forward the dead as a political subjectivity opposed to the immortals and foregrounding the force of death rather than "memory," the "party" resembles the original only through the force of distanced commenting on it. This comment criticises the Regiment and its desire for immortality in drawing an alternative discourse that introduces the principle (death) and subjectivity (the dead) actively negated by the original. As such, the party radicalises the kind of creative (re-)appropriation I explored in the previous chapter. Instead of contributing to normativity of the GPW's "memory" by "sampling" its refrains and expanding "memory's" aesthetics, the "party" de-forms them to suspend both the discourse and the aesthetics of "memory."

The Art of Necrorealism

The more specific artistic roots of the party can be found in necrorealism, a late Soviet genre of art primarily associated with films of Evgeny Iufit. Necrorealists produced a critique of the Soviet regime and its ideology by juxtaposing the abstract and dysfunctional Soviet utopias and official rituals with the epitome of material existence – death. Largely absurd, grotesque, macabre, meaninglessly repetitive scenes that are central to necrorealist films and performances mock Soviet ideology "by logically extending the materialist premises of Marxism to include the material fate of the body" (Berry and Miller-Pogacar 1996, 189). In the work of necrorealists, life in death and decomposition emerges as the Soviet reality despite the desire of the authorities to push it outside of social imagination (ibid, 187-189). Death appears less an inevitable destiny and more of a present-day condition, which, being pushed outside of ideology, transforms into an everyday breakdown of ideological conventions, into the future of Marxism that has already happened (Berry and Miller-Pogacar 1996; Yurchak 2005, 246-249). As such, necrorealism offered no promise of hope or a brighter future – instead, it subverted the official discourse by showing its emptiness through a grotesque form

of realism, which appeared both absurd and more real than the utopian genre of "socialist realism" dominating official culture (Berry and Miller-Pogacar, 187).

Necrorealism was part of a broader movement in late Soviet and early post-Soviet culture, sharing an attitude of (a)political cynicism, lack of narrative content, and trash aesthetics with parallel cinema – an underground avant-guard filmmaking, with which Iufit was associated – and what Mikhail Epstein (1995) calls "rear guard art." Epstein qualifies this work in the following way:

> "What is it that constitutes the rear guard as a kind of last outlook? Contemporary aesthetics is equally weary of both "realistically" corresponding to reality and "avant-gardely" anticipating it. Reality turns out to be somewhere ahead, rapidly changing according to its own historical laws, while literature brings up the rear, noting and sweeping up everything along the way through already as historical rubbish, as the disintegrating layers of reality. Having begun with the avant-garde, the art of this century ends with the arrière-garde. The avant-garde vigorously promoted new forms, technical devices, strictly organizing material into specifically designated constructions, doing away with the past out of love for the future: this is the way it had to be when the young century was lunging forward in predatory leaps. Now, on the verge of its last gasp, this century values an art of amorphousness not of exacting experimentation, but of an all-encompassing and accepting bottom, the last gurgling crater into which the overdone excrements of the earlier majestic forms and grandiose ideas are to fall" (Epstein 1995, 90).

The "bottom" in this art corresponded both with the dominant themes – the meaningless violence and representations of bodily decomposition in necrorealist work – and its style. Ellina Sattarova argues that "Iufit and his fellow necrorealists embraced the silent cinema aesthetic and imitated it precisely because it captured early cinema's desire and failure to overcome death" (2023, 92). The technical simplicity of the films, shot on 8- and 16-mm film, black-and-white, and with little to no sound, was as much a result of constraints (lack of training and funding) as an aesthetic technique called upon to consolidate the experience of decay and social collapse they sought to produce (Sattarova 2023, 92-3).

Representation of everyday life in death was central to the work of "the party's" predecessor, an experimental art collective {rodina}, especially in its late stages just before the

emergence of the party and during its early years. As Evstropov (2020) writes of that period, "We didn't imagine anything, we just showed everything as it was – and whatever was there was either dead, or at least non-alive." An example of such a depressive aesthetics is an alas-parade, first organised by the group in 2016 and then repeated a year after (gruppa {rodina} 2016). A social media flashmob, the "parade" consisted in activists holding depressive slogans, many of which parodied popular affirmative expressions, in front of grey, dull background, including train stations, abandoned buildings, and cemeteries. As Evstorpov explains, "What we did with the alas-parade is that we put the common mood of despondency, which resides as if outside of politics, into the political sphere; we've turned it into a political statement" (2016a). Expressing hopelessness, the statements within the alas-parade articulated the atmosphere common in everyday life, where no future is in sight and everything possible has already happened, yet an aesthetics which has no place in either the official discourse or much activist work, which affirms the possibility and necessity of political struggle. Alas-parades articulated an existential crisis, a lack of potential for affirmative "yes!" within everyday life – a political death – before actual death, mirroring an everyday stasis back onto those living it, trying to disturb the normality of a mood that Evstropov (2016a) calls "learnt apathy" and opening it up to potential transformation.

Like necrorealists, {rodina} showed that the Soviet, and later Russia's desire for immortality could only be lived as the permanent state of dying and so its subject turns out to be not immortal but a "noncorpse" (Yurchak 2008, 202). That noncorpse is on the way to death but is not allowed to die. Sattarova reminds us that death itself does not take place in necrorealist films, not least because they stage a spectacle rather than offer a narrative with a clear beginning and end (2023, 97-102). While "the party of the dead" often produces similar representations of everyday Russian reality, it also does more. Its character, or rather "an aesthetic subject" (Shapiro 2013, 11), is not a noncorpse but a corpse, as the skull masks that the activists wear

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remind us. The party of the *dead*, neither dying nor undead – the subject it puts forward is not *about* to die but has already reached that state of nothingness. It is a no-one. That subject is *impossible* precisely because it is irreducible to *life* in death. The dead are dead, they are not. That subject is *political* due to its articulation in the social order that does not recognise the finitude of being and so actively produces symbolic and actual death in the name of immortality. Finally, because that subject is impossible, it can only appear as an "aesthetic" one. Michael Shapiro defines aesthetic subjects as "those who, through artistic genres, articulate and mobilize thinking" (2013, 11). A party that fails to be a party because its subject is "an impossible community" (Evstropov 2020) can only speculate what that community and its party may look like – and in enacting that speculation on the impossible, become a project of political art. Thus, Evstropov qualifies the relationship between necrorealism and "the party" as the move "from necrorealism towards necroactivism" (ibid). I will explain that move in more detail in the next section.

Necroactivism, stiob, and play

Alexei Yurchak (2008) argues that less necrorealist art was political than a particular way of living, an ethos that they developed. Early on, before shooting films, painting, taking photographs and writing stories, necrorealists staged public provocations, such as fights in which the participants would pretend to kill a person only for that victim to be revealed as a mannequin to the disturbed passers-by and the police (Yurchak 2008, 204). Such meaningless, absurd provocations that resisted interpretation "became a permanent presence in their lives" (ibid, 202). Later, necrorealists developed an interest in the body as the site of experiments performed publicly and outside anyone's view (ibid, 208). These provocations and experiments aimed to suspend power and disidentify oneself from discourse and forms of life produced and regulated by it. As Yurchak puts it, "The difference between staging occasional performances

and always living in a certain way is the difference between acting like someone else and *becoming* someone else" (2008, 209-10).

"The party of the dead" has a different rejection of politics at its core. Like necrorealists, it disengages from official politics – and explicitly mocks it in parodying rituals of political parties. However, it does not seek to suspend any discourse. Instead, as the previous outline of the problems that "the party" addresses and the goals it pursues suggests, it actively comments on what it does and why. Evstropov has not only given numerous interviews and written several articles explaining various aspects of the project but has also regularly commented on Russian politics on the "party's" social media channels. Nowhere is the meaning of their political position elusive, like in necrorealists' comments on their work (Yurchak 2008, 210). Instead, the meaning of that position and the style of their performances emerge from active reflections on what death is and what kind of a political subject the dead might be. Against the Immortal Regiment's use of a portrait photograph, "the party" uses a skull mask to express the disappearance of one's identity and singularity in death. Their preferred places of protest are cemeteries and memorials – the sites literally populated by thousands of corpses. The slogans they display are usually depressive and macabre, bearing no promise or hope of a brighter future – because for the dead the ultimate future, death, has already occurred, and so there is nothing else to come.

The content of their political statements is a further reflection of what kind of political position the dead might have as an impossible political subject. Although in the Western cultural imagination, supernatural creatures such as vampires and zombies are ruthless killers who either seek to destroy the world of the living or transform us into their likeness, the dead, as they are seen by "the party," have no interest in killing. This is so because we all will join their ranks sooner or later – "death is the most common thing we have" (the party of the dead 2019). Furthermore, as Evstropov (2020) writes, "All the living are in a roughly equal position

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of not knowing in front of death." This position opens up space for relativism – *anyone* can speak for the dead and so *anything* can be said on their behalf. At the same time, it is this equality of not knowing that death communicates with the end of speech – "and hence, the dead are more likely to hate power than support yet another bloodsucker" (Evstropov 2020).

Yet, in writing the discourse on death, the dead, and their politics, "the party" also articulates the distance between the participants of their performances and the dead as their aesthetic subjects. The activists of the party are *not* dead, as their flesh, postures, and masks hiding faces suggest. The skull masks also protect the party's living participants from identification and prosecution, reminding us that whereas the dead might not know danger, the living do. The dead cannot speak, yet it is only by speaking as the dead that one can. That attempt is always destined to fail though, because the activists can only speak for as long as they are alive. The line between the living and the dead is suspended, only to be temporarily and partially restored in the same gesture of speaking as a corpse, the gesture which in the final instance silently says: "we are dead, we will die, though not just yet – potentially, eventually."

Necrozoopickets articulate the distance between the speaking subject and the subject of speech most powerfully. A genre that the party has rehearsed for years, it consists in placing a small carton with a political slogan next to the body of a small animal found on the street (usually a bird, see the party of the dead 2020b). The subject of this kind of action is very different from both the immortals and the "dead" participants of the "party." The photographs depict not the faces of the deceased photographed while they were still alive and displayed on the monuments but the real corpses, the disfigured, decomposing flesh of an abandoned animal that for everyone around counts as trash in need of being removed – or if it is not immediately visible, not even known about. Here, it is a slogan that performs the function of a skull mask. These corpses seem to speak with the text, but the appearance of hand-written slogans next to them only reminds us that they cannot speak, that it is someone speaking for them. "The party"

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members can take off the mask and return to the realm of the living dead; the fragile cardboard accompanying dead pigeons can be taken away, revealing the nakedness of the corpse. Speech of the dead as dead is impossible – and that is what the incessant attempts to perform it keep revealing.

The difference between such instances of suspending the subject of utterance and the necrorealist suspense of all discourse that could render their lives recognizable is the difference in the *style* of these suspensions. Brian Massumi (2014) shows the significance and difference of style from what Yurchak describes as the meaning and forms of "authoritative discourse" through an analysis of animal play. He summarises the essence of play gestures through the work of Gregory Bateson, who describes them in the following way: "These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote" (Bateson 1972, 180). Performed in the conditional mode, a play gesture enfolds the situation it would otherwise denote in suspense of its actual occurrence (Massumi 2014, 5-6). It actively "says" that it does not "say" what it would. However, suspended actions are not excluded from play but "orient the actions of the game's unfolding by analogy, providing them with a guiding logic" (ibid, 6). They "in- form the game: modulate it from within" (ibid). There would be no play without a suspended action – that action is the play's content. The two situations are brought together in a single act that does not erase the difference between them. The *style* of a gesture is responsible for expressing that difference.

Massumi attributes "a force of induction, a contagious involvement" (2014, 9) to the ludic gesture. It invites another to participate in a shared activity through the very force of vitality emerging from the stylistic difference of the gesture, or what Massumi calls its "-esqueness" (ibid, 10). Because a ludic gesture is relational, the stakes of not expressing difference from that which in-forms it are high. As Massumi writes,

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"If the expressive value of the standing- for is not pronounced enough, if the difference corresponding to the act's - esqueness is too minimal, if the gap between the arena of play and its analog arena is opened too slight a crack, if in a word the aesthetic yield is negligible, then the play activity can too easily turn into its analogue. Too quickly, the bite denotes what it denotes, and no longer what it would denote. It's war" (Massumi 2014, 11).

In the case of "the party's" performances, the failure to express such a gap would not mean war. Complete identification with the object of their play, the subject of their performance, would mean suicide.

Like play, stiob – an everyday ethos and attitude pursued by necrorealists (Yurchak 2005, 243-54) and discussed in Chapter 1– envelops two situations in a single gesture that "is logically undecidable" (Massumi 2014, 7). It suspends content in overidentifying with it, transduces an activity it laughs at into a qualitatively, affectively different one. However, unlike a play gesture, the performance of stiob *does not say that it denies what it says*. In fact, unlike a play, which strives to reveal itself fully to whoever it addresses, *stiob* is predicated on preserving the secret of its own existence for as long as possible and perishes the moment that secret is revealed. At least in its everyday manifestations as a specific kind of a joke and not as "an everyday aesthetic of living" (Yurchak 2005, 250), stiob becomes what it is by reducing the stylistic difference from its object to a minimum. Ideally, that difference is indiscernible to anyone other than its subject – or rather, discernible precisely to the extent that it is hard to tell whether a person is serious or not, whether it's a play or a war. Yurchak's example of Sergei Kuryokhin declaring support for ultra-nationalist Alexander Dugin and no one being able to tell with certainty whether it was sincere support or another act of *stiob* illustrates this (2011, 323-4). The force of *stiob* consists in shielding oneself from power by mirroring it and making the existence of that mirror never wholly recognisable. If play is full of potentialising vitality, stiob is an utterly depotentialising practice.

It could be objected that, like necrorealists, "the party of the dead" stages absurd performances, that both laugh at the political system. However, in "the party's" performances,

laughter is a by-product rather than an end in itself or a method of disidentification. "The party" does not laugh out loud at the regime. They know there is nothing funny in its necropolitics. Their laughter is sad, born of and infused with despair (Evstropov 2024). In Evstropov's words,

> "It [humour] allows us to cope with the situation — there's certainly something therapeutic in humour. But this medicine-pharmakos is also a poison: a remedy for despair that feeds on despair and infects with it. Black humor lives on political death, parasitizes on it and together with it constitutes a kind of general symptom" (2024).

What is at stake in the play of the dead, wherein death is suspended in potential but not entirely ruled out, is not an articulation of another form of life or a mere exposure of the regime's meaninglessness but an acknowledgement of death as the finitude of being and the speech of the dead as an impossibility. The dead are dead – this simple assertion is found in every slogan, gesture, and performance that "the party" makes – and it is because they are irreducible to anyone other than the dead, that their speech is impossible. Trying to speak as the dead and failing to speak as truly dead, the activists of "the party" mobilise an experience of such an impossibility, an experience of the limit, or "the outside" as Foucault (1998b) would put it – *an experience of death as inexperienceable, that, which puts an end to all experience*. Whereas the work of necrorealists and other practitioners of *stiob* functioned in the mode of the "politics of indistinction" (Yurchak 2008, 212-215), "the party of the dead" works against such a politics, which does not challenge immortality but manifests most powerfully in it. The aesthetics of the party expresses the constitutive *difference* between the living and the dead, which is irreducible to an *opposition* between the two and places them on a continuum. In the final section of this Chapter, I return the discussion of "the party" back to "memory" to reiterate how that aesthetics is political and why I talk about "the party of the dead" in the thesis about normativity of the Great Patriotic War "memory" and creativity of negotiating it in the first place.

THE DEAD DON'T NEED WAR, THE DEAD DON'T NEED MEMORY

Commenting on "the party of the dead's" politics, Ivan Kurilla writes that "In fact, participants in the 'Party of the Dead' were voicing a radical version of the position of the Immortal Regiment's own organizers and participants, a protest against the authorities' monopolization of memory" (2020, 161). Since "the party" emerged as a response to the Immortal Regiment, the rise and fall of which Maksim Evstropov followed first in Tomsk and then Saint-Petersburg, and given that it posits the state as its primary antagonist, such an explanation could be viable. However, a quick glance at "the party's" conceptual ground and aesthetics shows that the essential element of the Regiment's politics – the subjectivity of a person – is entirely absent from the discourse that "the party" writes. The Immortal Regiment makes a one out of no-one. The party refuses to do so.

In fact, "the party" never remembers any particular dead, instead always using "the dead" in plural. Whereas for the Immortal Regiment, people bring photos of singular persons who are no longer alive but who become "immortal" in being remembered, "the party of the dead" can only display the image of a skull – a no-one and nothing that was dead, is dead and will be dead forever. "The party" is not interested in memory. As Evstropov argued in a public lecture in Tomsk when the idea of the "party" was only emerging, "the past has not passed…the present has not come…and the future…well, something absolutely vague is happening with it" (2016b). "The party of the dead" is not interested in memory. *The past must pass*. The dead must be dead.

In that lecture, Evstropov engaged the audience in a short exercise, which brought together the practice of reading out the names of the dead and the performativity of naming in the context of the living. Having asked the participants to build a horizontal pyramid of paper skulls representing the horizontal "pyramids of skulls" that contemporary states are built on,

and having asked them to write down their names, not necessarily real, on paper, Evstropov started reading these names out loud. The idea was twofold: first, to let the "dead" who gathered at the lecture die, to stay in the past, and second, to let them be born again as alive, having passed death. Naming here was not used to remember someone forever but to perform a singular, ritualistic act of burring the dead so that they do not come back as ghosts but stay dead, undisturbed by the living and having completed their lively affairs. Simultaneously, naming becomes an act of summoning that, having let one 'I' (or rather 'you' since the participants hear their names read by Evstropov) pass into the past of the skull, evokes a new 'I' that is embodied by the one whose name is read.

"*I* is an order-word" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 84).

Such ritualistic burials are common in the party's practice. In early February 2022, they held a "necropsychoanalytic session" during which the guests could lie in the coffin, remember the past day and tell the analyst – Evstropov, joined by an assistant – "how and why they've found themselves in the coffin" (the party of the dead 2022b). In late October 2020, between Halloween and the day of political repressions in Russia, they performed a public reading of the names of the repressed – the reading was polyphonic though, and all the participants were reading their individual lists at the same time, representing both an impossibility of "returning the names" of everyone, and the necessity of doing so while they are in the "black hole" that official memory politics is (the party of the dead 2020a). In November 2022, when many activists of the party fled to Georgia, they organised a "self-burial (in Russian, *samomogilizatsiia*, an allusion to "self-mobilisation," *samomobilizatsiia*, by which a voluntary decision to kill and die in the war during the general mobilisation is meant; the party of the dead 2022c). Participants had to dig graves for themselves and then be buried while others, waiting for their turn, were watching and mourning.

In all these practices, "memory" is barely at stake. It may serve as the object of parody, critique, and embodied reflection but is never a goal. The dead must not be resurrected. They must be buried. No-ones must stay no-ones, be forgotten, and ones must recognise that before the state, they are no-ones, to remember that little something and reclaim their political subjectivity.

The Immortal Regiment says: "No *one* is forgotten." Another Regiment responds: "Everyone remembers!" A child as-if shouts but whispers: "Nothing is forgotten." Olga Berggolts, long dead but still speaking, corrects them all: "No one is not forgotten."

To all these speakers, who so skillfully try to bring the dead back to life in a performance of *necropolice*, the distribution of the sensible that simultaneously produces death and expels it beyond the limits of the sensible, the party of the dead responds by rearticulating necropolitics, challenges absence of death with death as an absence. The party speaks: "A no-one is forgotten." Their words are unclear though, grammatically flawed. No surprise though, for they must be some "foreign agents" (not yet), with all the terrible things they do.

The party of the dead translates, again, for the voice of the dead dissolves in the air, for its politics is unrecognizable: a no-one is forgotten. A no-one must be forgotten. It is imperative to forget, for we create only more of the past. The past must pass. The dead must be dead. Drop the quotation marks. The living should not be "dead," the dead should not be "alive."

No one is forgotten. The party of the dead, translators between the realm outside the limit of experience and the realm where there's nothing left to experience, not even dying, utter the order-word with a single negation, trying to convey the truth at the limit of language that Russian phrase "No one is not forgotten" cannot express. No one is forgotten. A no one is by definition someone who has been forgotten. To be forgotten is to be a no-one.

THE DEAD DO NOT HAVE NEEDS. IT IS THE LIVING WHO CRAVE FOR MORE CORPSES.

THE LIVING FEED OFF THE CORPSES

HUMANS

BUGS

WORMS

FEED OFF

CORPSES

FEED

NEED

<div align="center">
THE DEAD
DON'T NEED
MEMORY
</div>

Remember yourself.

                                                            forget us.

PART 2. TRACES OF ANARCHIVE

CHAPTER 4. NINE FRAGMENTS ON THE HERBARIUM COMPOSITION

1.

In spring 2015, a Saint-Petersburg-based art activist group {rodina} staged a performance called *9 stages of the supreme leader's decomposition* (*9 stadii razlozheniya vozhdya*). It consisted of placing a photo of Vladimir Putin over the pot seeded with grass and waiting for it to sprout, slowly decomposing the image. The process was documented and later presented in a series of nine photographs, each showing a punctual stage of the image's destruction by the grass, and together representing the process of the grass "dismantling" Putin's face (Edkins 2015). Maksim Evstropov, one of {rodina} 's key participants, explained the meaning of the performance in a blog post:

> "As always, it is all quite ambiguous: on the one hand, this performance expresses hope for slow but inevitable change from below, through a multiplicity of "minor actions" – on the other hand, it reflects despair and love for the death that have been characteristic of Russian society lately: no need to wait for a revolution, a hope for change is no longer connected with any human action whatsoever – the only thing that still gives hope is a natural, "inhuman" process of ageing, decay, dissemination and decomposition. The grass, not humans, is Russia's hope" (Evstropov 2018).

The post, which an excerpt provided above is a part of, was published in June 2018, three years after the original performance was conducted. The reason for that – and the theme of the rest of the post – was that *9 stages* was involved in a case of political prosecution. During a 1 May demonstration in Saint Petersburg, Varya Mikhailova, an activist, was arrested for carrying a printed poster of *9 stages*. The poster fit the occasion well – not only had Putin been re-elected less than six weeks before, but Mikhailova also walked the streets of Saint Petersburg in a column of a recently formed "party of the dead," discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, the politics and public display of the artwork were easy to recognise. Mikhailova was charged with a repeated violation of public assembly legislation and fined. *9 stages*, as a weapon with which the crime was committed, was commissioned for destruction (Bumaga 2018; Nastoyascheye vremya 2018).

Although it was Mikhailova's arrest – and the explicitly political quality of *9 stages* – that attracted media attention, Evstropov, while calling for support for a fellow activist, used the moment to clarify some of the performance's ambiguities. Besides the aforementioned paragraph, he explained that *9 stages* could not be destroyed despite the court's decision since it was not a printed poster but a digital collage and a processual performance. The police's attention to Mikhailova's public display of it, as well as the following trial, only helped multiply it – "to reproduce decomposition" (Evstropov 2018) – the process that Evstropov called the readers to join by buying T-shirts and postcards with the picture of *9 stages* (to help Mikhailova with the fine). Like the grass, *9 stages* could not be contained by the external authority; the artwork absorbed the forces seeking to destroy it, transforming them into the material for further proliferation.

Carried through the streets of Saint-Petersburg and provoking a reaction from the police, *9 stages* became a tool of resistance, an artwork expressing dissatisfaction with the regime. Commissioned to be destroyed, it became a true work of art, Bulgakov's manuscript that does not burn. In *9 stages,* politics and aesthetics are intertwined – its encounter with the police is what allows its "artfulness" (Manning 2016), the resistance to a form, to become visible; the performance's artful open-endedness is what colours it with a political quality of undisciplinarity. Yet, in these beautiful, poetic reflections on politics, art, and their entanglement, what is backgrounded is one of its major characters doing most of the action, performing in the performance. The grass is the hope, not humans – and not art. The subtle politics of plants that the performance builds on disappears behind the explicit politicisation of artwork. It is the qualities of the grass that the performance makes visible, yet the shift of the artwork into a more immediately recognisable political terrain overshadows that visibility. The artwork is commissioned for destruction because it displays Putin's decay and reveals his mortality and humanity, which are carefully expelled beyond the everyday aesthetics, beyond the "partition of the sensible" (Rancière 2010, 36); it survives that death order because art is art. The god-like supreme leader revealed to be

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mortal and rotting and the artfulness inherent in the genre of *9 stages* are the two sources of value. The grass, that living being responsible for the slow death of the dictator's image and serving as the model of duration upon which the survival of *9 stages* is based, ends up being irrelevant, devalued, and hopelessly forgotten in the struggle between politics and the police, art and politics, that very struggle which it seemingly enlivens with hope.

"The grass, not humans, is Russia's hope." Below, I would like to ponder and unpack this statement, which summarises the meaning of *9 stages* but seems to be backgrounded in the story of the performance's clash with the repressive state apparatus. Against the valuation of *9 stages* as a work of political art based on both its critique of putinism and its artful immortality, I would like to ponder the specificity of grass, and plants more generally, as objects invested with and inspiring hope. What hope can plants offer amidst apathy, despair, and depression, in the society where neoliberal self-help and dictatorship are the dyad reigning at the end of history? How can plants help us counter these feelings and activate the imagination of the future – not only of the future end (be it the death of the leader, the collapse of the regime, the end of capitalism and statehood, or perhaps the end of humanity) but also life emerging from the debris, in and thanks to decomposition? What hope can plants offer to research immersed in these feelings? What kind of memory can this life captured by "memory" bring to light?

In this chapter, I dwell on these questions, without providing a definite answer but, as I hope, exemplifying the kind of response plants may give. Inspired by and continuing the *9 stages'* work of (de-)composition, I offer a purposefully fragmented text, which brings together Critical Plant Studies (CPS), non-representational methodologies, notes from the fieldwork, and personal reflections on memorial vegetation. In addition to words, which are of language – the mode of expression unfamiliar to plants – I accompany each fragment with dried-out leaves, petals, and seeds collected at one of the GPW memorials in Saint Petersburg over September 2021. This archive of everyday death occurring at the site of mass cremation functions as a parallel series of fragments

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that provide an empirical background to the text while subverting, growing through, de- and re-composing what words try to communicate. It is a memory of "memory." Together, plants and words constitute a herbarium, a form of plant-writing or, as Patrícia Vieira (2015) calls it, "phytographia," which carries imprints of both plants' vitality and decay, traces of suffering, violence and a share of "the curative force" (Marder and Tondeur 2016, 36).

While the connections between the sections have been made weak on purpose, and so a traditional reading map would be of little help if you would like to read the fragments thematically, here is a quick guideline. Sections 2, 3, 5 and 7 can be read together as reflections on plants, our capacity to listen to them and growth and decomposition as their modes of material "speech." Fragments 4, 6, and 8 build a methodological framework for listening to plants and writing about them by bringing together Critical Plant Studies, Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizome," and the work of Fernand Deligny. The last, ninth fragment focuses on Deligny's concept of "network" or "the Arachnean" and concludes by showing that a herbarium assembly is both a practice of listening and, to borrow from Deligny, "a mode of being" (2015, 33).

Figure 1. Fragment 1

2.

The Moscow Victory Park in Saint-Petersburg is a memorial to the Great Patriotic War that is peculiar not only for the confusing mixture of cities in its name but also for the interplay of competing narratives, functions, and aesthetics. The central alley of the park is a grand passage through the statues of highly rewarded war heroes. Starting with a massive statue of marshal Zhukov, the commander of the Red Army during the war, it ends with the small busts of contemporary Russian officers and a view at a fence of an industrial zone. A stage is located just to the side of the main monument – however, it has not hosted a performance for a while. Its stone steps collapse under the slightest pressure and if you manage to climb the stairs to the balcony, you will see all sorts of curses and invitations painted on the walls. If you walk in the opposite direction, you will find another, smaller, but this time functioning stage hosting the theatre named after Olga Berggoltz, a famous poet who was the leading radio voice of the blockaded Leningrad. Just behind this site bearing the name of that proper Soviet citizen, you will find the opposite of the "proper Soviet" – a small church. Combining elements of the Soviet post-war chauvinistic militarism and post-socialist Russia's apathy, poverty, and preference for glossy, as-if expensive constructions, the park is a typical public space where the demonic, unintelligible but still vibrant and lively aesthetics of life outside Moscow comes into full expression.

The area behind and further to the side of the church holds a special significance and reminds us of the years in the city's life before the war could be remembered as "victory." Here, a series of small monuments tell a story of a distinctly Saint Petersburg – or Leningrad, as it was called in the Soviet Union – war. Before this place was a park, a brick factory was located here, and the current peaceful ponds used to be the sandpits for extracting clay. In 1942, after the cold winter during which several hundreds of thousands of residents died of famine in a blockaded city and local cemeteries could not host any more bodies, the factory was repurposed into a crematorium. Over the remaining two years of the blockade, around one hundred thousand dead bodies were cremated

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there, and their unclaimed, reduced-to-waste ashes were discarded into the closest sandpit-turned pond, which now carries the glorious name of the Admiral's Pond. The brick plant, a place for construction, turned into a site of ultimate destruction.

Now, this area complements but also opposes the more militaristic part of the park. For most of the time, here, one can find refuge from generals and other heroes and discover a spot to hide from death executors and priests blessing them in the atmosphere of mourning, which, like bodies once burnt here, has been reduced to ashes too. Warmongers keep asking the dead to bless the killing though. As I sit behind the trolley that was used to discard the ashes into the water, I hear a class of teenage cadets approach it. Having gathered to lay flowers on the anniversary of the blockade's beginning, they stand still in a few columns, occasionally whispering with each other, waiting for the signal to begin the ritual. The signal is supposed to come from the officer standing in front of the class and facing the trolley with his back. Obviously, the commander, with his hands empty and eyes focused on identifying the disobedient students, is not going to participate in the ceremony as the mourning side of it. Instead, he does the job he is well accustomed to: he commands. "Shut up! Heads up! Everyone, stand still!" As I listen to him continue interpellating the kids into the disordered violence of military order, I feel myself contaminated with his rage. They are about to start the minute of silence, but of course, warmongers can only initiate silence with powerful loud blasts.

When the class (or should I say "the detachment"?) is far enough, I stand up and approach the trolley. All black metal before, now it is buried under the red cloves. This plain and cold object, once used for the destruction of the flesh and forgetting of the person and recently transformed into an object of "memory," is now covered with plenty of colourful, lively flowers, symbolizing mourning for and gratitude to the dead. The never-alive "thing" is now infused with the vibrancy of life.

The story of the commander's violence through which that vibrancy came into being may not be easily accessible to non-observers because there is no one and nothing to narrate it. Yet, the flowers do tell the story of the trolley – although it becomes meaningful only several weeks later. Having absorbed the rage of the commander and the fear of the children, not alive already but not yet disappeared, the flowers wither. Once complicit in forgetting and displayed to remember that, the trolley now carries more bodies, even if unable to deliver them. Whereas the trolley is an archive of the past over which human mourning occurs, the cloves are an archive of repeated suffering carried over to the present.

Discussing the practice of planting memorial groves, Charlotte Heath-Kelly writes that "the tree often stands for the human" (Heath-Kelly 2018, 65), symbolising the resilience of life but simultaneously being displaced from the vegetal ontology in which that resilience was born. Chosen as memorials due to their seeming immortality and capacity to survive catastrophic events, trees become inserted into the human discourse of "memory" and, representing a human, suddenly acquire vulnerability and the need to be carefully preserved (ibid, 66). Moreover, as Sather-Wagstaff argues, for different kinds of trees, longer symbolic chains have to be invented in order for the symbolism to establish a compelling connection between a rhetoric of resilience and the kinds of values circulating within popular cultural imaginations (2015, 246). However, unlike the trees, flowers do not display resilience, even if they turn out to stand for humans. They perish quickly and so need to be sown again, cut again, laid again – that whole circle, again and again.

The bodies of cloves piling at the trolley as if the kids who laid them trolled us are dead, cut from support, from the source of food. They wither. The cloves represent the continuation of death and suffering rather than resilience and recovery. They *are* death and suffering, the new bodies piled on the trolley. The cloves show that the violence of the war is still ongoing – though the party performing violence and the subject who claims to remember is now one and the same.
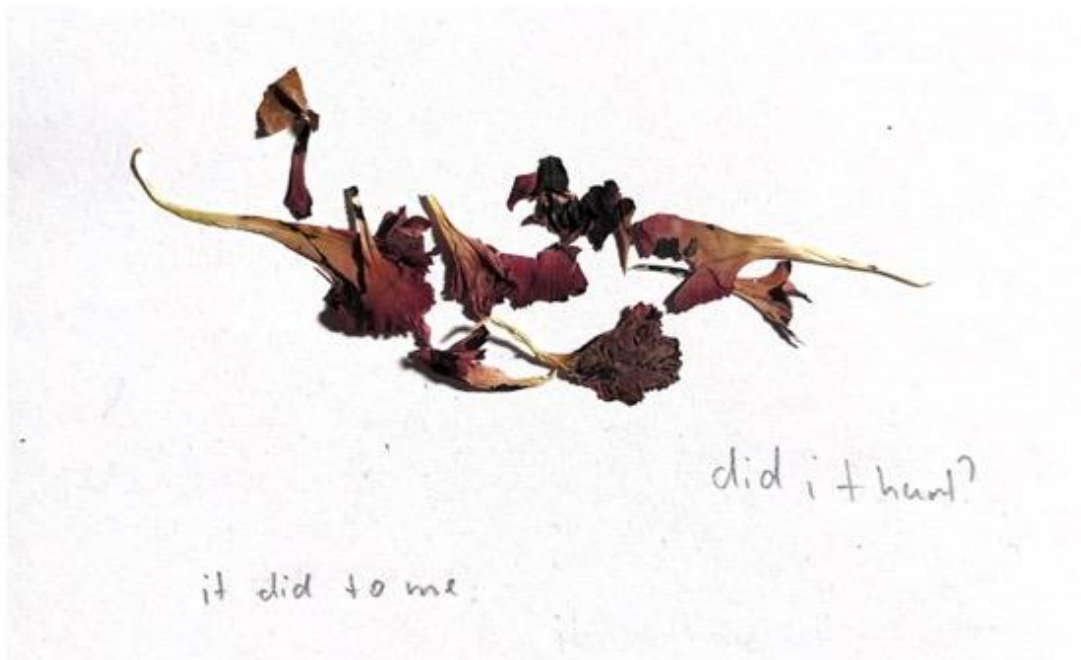
Figure 2. Fragment 2

3.

A child is running along the lanes of the Victory Park. Engulfed with the joy of free exploration, he plunges into the passages between autumn maple trees, vanishing behind immense trunks and errantly appearing in the gaps between them. The little boy is in movement, in a passage between a race and a pause, a tree and a gap, pavement and grass, mother's hand and her worried voice. He does not need speech and sounds to show joy. Errant, disordering, playful run is his primary means of expression.

The child knows the space is vast but not entirely free. Lines to walk by have been prescribed and are now laboriously redrawn by the same-paced adults. But the little girl is indifferent to the borders between the pavement and the grass. She defies prescribed pathways. She is unafraid of falling upon stepping onto the uneven terrain. Parents' hands and voices are her only constraints. Running and stopping, hiding and seeking, she foregrounds the areas otherwise sidelined. She shows alternative pathways not yet laid out. She doesn't need a demarcated playground to find joy. Trees are her rides. Space is her playground.

Agitated and in the process of remaking space as he wishes, the child is ignorant of the kind of a place he is playing with. For him, this space is full of joy, not mourning. For her, it is a park rather than a place of death, a site of potential for exploration and unexpected findings more than the home to human ashes. Sure, the child's parents make some constraints inevitable. Don't run too far. Come here. Don't touch this. Stay in sight. Don'ts and prescriptions abound. But the child knows well how to tweak don't's and enact new do's. Joyfully errant, he suddenly stops. Her gaze turns away from the endless horizon in front to the proximity of the ground. His hand reaches downward. She picks up a maple leaf.

The child curiously looks at the newly discovered artefact. They didn't think in advance what they would do with it. Clearly, the leaf is useless. It isn't a toy, and his guess it's not edible. A natural waste, the leaf can certainly be returned to the ground and let rot. But it is beautiful. She likes it. Maybe he could keep it for a while and decide its fate later. Holding the giant leaf firmly within her tiny hands, the child resumes their movement-play.

The parents watch the scene and admire its undecidability. They can relate to it. They feel uncertain too. Clearly, the leaf is useless. Clearly, it is dirty. Picking things up from the ground is against hygiene rules, and the child must learn the rules an adult knows too well. But the leaf is beautiful. The scene is beautiful. A child in unity with nature, a juncture of double cuteness, the undecidable encounter with the meeting of two species invites participation. Maybe they could play along. Perhaps they could make another kind of lesson out of it. Or they could teach the child that "joy" should only be found in "use."

Together, the parents and the child collect a good bunch of leaves. They will not discard it. Upon returning home, they will put the leaves between the pages of an old book and let them dry out. The parents may insist that the child writes a proto-scientific comment on the margins of the page.

Maybe one day, when the child grows up enough to read it, she will find the leaves – anew, as if she had no relation to their preservation. Looking at the lines on the leaves, he may find them reminiscent of his own errant movements, of a complex spatial web he was weaving. They may admire the cracks. His glance may slide toward the inscription under the leaf. She laughs at the proto-scientific curiosity it exhibits. Then, he may remember that lovely afternoon spent together with the parents. He could think that maybe they should visit the park again. She may remember that one year later, those afternoons were over.

Noticing the fragility of the leaves, they may realise how easily these lines disappear. Maybe, absorbed in memories, the leaf would stand for a human, and the no-longer-child would weep. Perhaps though, the failure to conserve the leaf properly will inspire her for another lesson. The leaves do not symbolise anything, and the herbarium does not pretend to preserve life. It has never intended to be useful and meaningful, regardless of what the parents wanted it to be. It is a trace of the impossible – joyful disregard of the well-trodden pathways of meaning, glory, grief, "memory."

That is at least what I heard in their laughter, contagious for many but not the cadets' commander.

I found the leaf and it was beautiful

Figure 3. Fragment 3

4.

In spring 2022, as I was trying to make sense of what I could learn from the leaves, petals, and seeds that I collected at the Victory Park, how I could connect them with everyday life at that site and the overwhelming disidentification from "memory" of the GPW that qualifies it, I had a chance to participate in 7000 HUMANS, a social sculpture-connective practice initiative designed by Shelley Sacks and Ulrike Oemisch (Strausz and Ogula 2023; Strausz 2024). A global community or a "warmth body" appearing on the map as tiny suns shining from various places on the planet, it is also a non-institutional learning site where participants explore individually and collectively generated questions – in one's mind, in online and local in-person assemblies and with a tree partner. Bringing together inner work of exploration and imagination, intense, weekly several-hour-long discussions of selected questions and a continuous, ongoing dialogue with non-human worlds, be it a tree next to one's home or a distant forest, 7000 HUMANS is aligned with Félix Guattari's insistence on the need for a transversal "ecosophical" approach – a future-oriented "ethico-political articulation" which sits "between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)" (2014, 28).

One of the key elements of 7000 HUMANS is the idea of an "anchor point" – a place on Earth where we can always return to, whether physically or in imagination, and in which we can ground or "anchor" our explorations. The idea of an anchor point builds on and supplements Sacks' long-standing conviction that each person has "the inner atelier or rent-free inner workspace in which this imaginal work takes place" (Sacks 2018, 171). An anchor point is a technique of grounding this otherwise free-floating inner work of imagination and transformation in actual physical space and in one's body, connecting it with experience so that we do not fall back into "the cold thought that has led to climate crisis, war, racism, colonization, and an increasingly disconnected technosphere" (7000 HUMANS 2022.). It is an

"enabling constraint" as Manning and Massumi would call it: "'enabling' because in and of itself a constraint does not necessarily provoke techniques for process, and 'constraint' because in and of itself openness does not create the conditions for collaborative exploration" (2014, 94). As an homage to Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks* but also a step toward "ecological citizenship" (Sacks and Zumdick 2013), 7000 HUMANS asks, although not requires, that it is a tree that the participants choose as their anchor point.

The trees within the framework of 7000 HUMANS exhibit a double role. On the one hand, they are our anchors, the roots from which imagination grows and so do we, as their collective counterpoint. On the other hand, trees are our partners in thinking, interlocutors with which we converse in exploring the questions. This idea of conversing with a tree is important given the extractive nature of capitalism and the everyday treatment of plants as resources, commodities and aesthetic background (Marder 2013, 3-4). Even narratives of mass extinction and ecological catastrophe tend to focus on death – or, on the contrary, uncontrollable growth – of non-human life because change in biodiversity presents danger to humans (Meeker and Szabari 2020, 149-150). In this respect, the framing of a tree as "a partner" foregrounds the need for a dialogue with nature, whereby plants are not surroundings or the "environment" but equal to human parts of an ecology.

This proposition to approach a tree as an anchor for asking and pondering questions hooked me. It offered a promise of learning from the traces of the trees that I carried from Saint Petersburg to Vienna in an anarchival manner discussed in Chapter 1 by using a conversation with the non-human partner as a technique for a continuous generation of thoughts, problems and concepts that could be picked up and developed by the group and its individual participants working in conjunction with their own anchor points. Yet, as I entered the space of 7000 HUMANS full of hope and enthusiasm, I soon caught myself doubting – not the initiative but myself as its human participant, "all too human" (Manning 2020, 216) to be able to listen to life

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which does not speak my language, does not speak *any* language. One of the propositions on selecting an anchor point was that it, too, should be comfortable with us. Before even asking the question you have, first, ask the plant if it's OK with pondering it together. But such a conversation with nature, even if initiated with utmost care and caution, may turn out to be a dialogue with oneself, in which a plant is assimilated into thought and our categories are projected onto life for which they are meaningless. The danger of anthropomorphizing plants is always nearby when we think of talking to plants, and in imposing our categories upon them, it is easy to forget and depreciate plants' own marvellous capacities, such as to "harness sunlight to pull matter out of thin air" and their "alacrity for synthesizing chemical compounds like caffeine and nicotine" (Myers 2015, 39). How, in a situation where the capacity to speak is a point of difference, can we avoid turning it into a sign of inequality? What, in this situation, could it mean to listen – and how can we know where the responses come from?

As Michael Marder reminds us, a plant "boasts neither a self to which it could return, nor a fixed, determinate goal or purpose that it should fulfill" (2013, 153). Its life is non-intentional. That does not mean that a plant is closed in on itself – on the contrary, its "non-intentional consciousness uncontrollably splits and spills out of itself, tending in various directions at once, but always excessively striving toward the other" (ibid, 153-154). Non-intentional, or as Marder further clarifies it, qualified by "non-conscious intentionality," a plant is relational, defined by "immersion in its milieu, with which it fuses" (ibid, 154). Its "speech," if we still want to stick to this word, is material.

Marder identifies "non-conscious, involuntary memory" (2013, 155) as one of the key qualities of plants. By this, he means plants' capacity to keep producing a response to the environment even when the actual stimuli are removed. While non-conscious memory is widely found across life forms, Marder adds a twist specific to plants: "Whereas humans remember whatever has phenomenally appeared in the light, plants keep the memory of light itself" (2013,

156). Non-conscious memory of a plant is "an imprint, or better, an ex-print" left upon its body and modulating its course of life, the specific way in which a plant "fuses" with its "milieu" (ibid).

In seeking a response to the question of plants' speech, Patricía Vieira (2015) pursues a similar line of thinking about the "network of traces" (Marder 2013, 156) while reversing the terms. Her focus is not on the imprints left upon plants but on the imprints left by them. As she writes, the most significant of such traces is life itself: plants "use sunlight to create their material articulations in the world and, in doing so, imprint themselves in the biosphere, enabling the inscription of all other living beings in the process" (Vieira 2015, 216). We all are, in a way, the product of plant writing, or as Vieira calls it, "phytographia."

Leaving the research of this material writing in the hands of science, Vieira proposes a second, more specific meaning of "phytographia," which oscillates between plants' "speech" and our capacity to listen to it. Providing examples of 20th-century anti-capitalist "jungle novels" about the Amazon, Vieira conceptualises "phytographia" as the differential coming together of plants' writing and writing about plants (2015, 215). In this genre, flora is the content or the "character" of the text; however, it also informs the style of writing, growing into it as a non-representational trace. In the end, phytographia, as Vieira explains, is not a language of plants (for they can't speak) but a genre of writing that "can acknowledge the non-human and the traces of *phytographic* arche-writing within" (2015, 220). In that acknowledgement, we learn to listen to writing beyond language, listen to it without anticipating an answer, knowing that our new questions will be their response.

Or rather, our questions and answers are a result of plants' refusal to question and respond. The crumbles of plants once alive that I keep returning to have long stopped exhibiting many of those features that Critical Plant Studies scholars highlight. I have not organised them into a scientific herbarium where they would be mere "specimen," preserved to live forever like

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the herbaria that Marder (2016) and Prudence Gibson (2023) poetically write about and with. They are the traces of life gone. And so to my questions, requiring a direct touch, they have kept crumbling. Just as the bodies cremated in proximity to their roots, these traces of death keep dissolving into nothing as they come in contact with something other than the firmly sealed container. The more I try to anchor myself in them, the more they collapse, uprooting me as yet another part of my memory of them is lost.

This silence, or rather this material refusal to speak, induces *me* to respond though. A coincidence of two limits of experience – plant-life and death – a herbarium of withered petals and never-sprouted seeds patiently waits for thoughts and questions, which, upon reaching it, return as fragments of matter and thought. Together with the power of the root, a herbarium transmits "un-power" (Blanchot 1995, 8-9) to uproot, offering both as material-affective responses to the muttering of speech. A remnant and a reminder of plants' decompositional vitality, of life ongoing in the beauty of passage not passed, never in the past, a herbarium refuses to become another "memory," a memory, let alone *the* memory. It refuses the question and response and, in that refusal, induces them – unstructured, fractured. To ask herbarium a question is to be questioned, to experience the question that is "the most profound" one, to use Blanchot's concept – "*the question that is not posed*" (1993, 16). In Blanchot's words:

> "It is as though, in the question itself, we had to contend with what is other than any question; as though, coming only from us, it exposed us to something entirely other than us. A questioning that does not question, wants no response, and that seems to draw us into the irresponsibility and evasion of tranquil flight" (Blanchot 1993, 14).

Figure 4. Fragment 4.

5.

Let me return to Evstropov's (2018) explanation of *9 stages*:

"As always, it is all quite ambiguous: on the one hand, this performance expresses hope for slow but inevitable change from below, through the multiplicity of "minor actions" – on the other hand, it reflects despair and love for the death that have been characteristic of Russian society lately: no need to wait for a revolution, a hope for change is no longer connected with any human action whatsoever – the only thing that still gives hope is a natural, "inhuman" process of ageing, decay, dissemination and decomposition. The grass, not humans, is Russia's hope."

As an artist's comment on his artwork, this short paragraph is not merely an external reference to the original performance and its photographic exhibition version. Instead, it is an integral part of the performance, a mode of expression through which an intellectual component of the artwork is revealed, is added to it. The text explains the performance and so extends it, only to end the process once more, to enclose it in an authoritative-authorial interpretive frame. "As always, everything is not quite straightforward," Evstropov explains, only to tell the reader, in a pretty straightforward manner, what the ambiguities of the artwork are. If the performance unfolded durationally, showing the presence and contemporaneity of growth and destruction as they occurred, then the meaning of these forces emerges retrospectively, when the work is complete, and the artful process solidifies into an object of art. The artist's comment moves the material (de-)composition from the aesthetic realm of the sensible onto the terrain of the intelligible. In this shift, the performance, with its constitutive "inhuman" forces, acquires value, and so finds an after-life. It also ceases to live, as the material growth and decomposition are firmly placed in the cage of political meaning. In the end, although the grass destroys Putin, he reemerges in a spectral form that is still quite recognisable and turns out to be the source of value for the forces of life, an epistemic ground upon which the grass grows. The hope of the grass is prescribed by the image of the dictator. That is quite hopeless.

"The grass, not humans, is Russia's hope" – the last sentence of Evstropov's explanation of *9 stages* is of particular significance for the emerging interplay of the beginning and the end, life and destruction. Summarising the performance, the last sentence becomes the first – it is as much a summary as it is an abstract, the final chunk of the text and the opening scene, the anticipation of what has already happened. The sentence wards off any further interpretation, telling the reader in a succinct manner what this has all been about, what it will have been about. But that is if we stick to its meaning. If we don't, if we treat it as an instance of phytographia, the sentence shows the performance to be irreducible to any interpretation, vocalizing mute growth, providing conceptualised artwork with artful melody and rhythm. *Nadezhda Rossii nye lyudi a trava*. Containing mostly ringing consonants, the sentence evokes an image of grass as much as it resonates with us in a playfully grass-esque manner,[23] carrying the forces captured and mobilised in the performance, inflecting them in a new direction. The last sentence is as much a summary as it is the final, most powerful chord, which slowly reverberates in the air and fades out, prolonged by the bodies in the audience asking for another encore. It appears as if it was an inscription under the picture hanging on the wall of the personal exhibition, a closure of artwork as well as an intensifying doubling of it. When "the grass, not humans is Russia's hope" is used as an interpretive summary, the (in-)tense movements composing the performance are resolved, thinking completes its work of internalisation, and whatever "hope" was there dissolves (or stays, but precisely as a hopeless hope); when "the grass…" is treated as the textual doppelganger of the actual grass, we find ourselves firmly within the performance of sprouting plants that keep growing through the dictatorial interpretation covering them, revealing it to be a piece of decomposable paper. The grass, not humans – even the most artful and intelligent ones – is hope.

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[23] Following Brian Massumi, here I use the suffix "-esque" instead of "like" to underline "an excess of energy or spirit" expressed in play rather than a desire for similarity. *See* Massumi 2014, 9-14.

9 stages is a reflexive artwork, where "reflexivity" is a property not so much of the artist but of the art itself, independent of the intentions of its creators, and kindly shared with it by the key character – the grass. Enacting a suspense of an external power, the documented process of the grass's growth also suspends its own capacity to signify. The grass breaks through two frames – first that of Putin, thereby drawing the mise-en-scene, the content of the performance, and then, in reaching upwards and with the assistance of Evstropov's last explanatory statement, that of Evstropov, breaking through the photographic frame capturing that content. Putin's decomposition may well be the primary content of the artwork, but beyond the artist's creation, in art and against it, the grass decomposes Evstropov and any critic of his work. "The grass, not humans, is Russia's hope," Evstropov says. In repeating that statement, the grass responds: "It cannot speak." We may prey on the grass to grow and decompose the frame put upon it faster, we might even feed it with the fertiliser, but in the end, it will grow at its own pace.

And this, again, is quite grim – for us, the humans living a rhythm different from plants' patience and passivity. These are the qualities manifested in the absence of a human "I," a subject that stops being patient the moment it says it can be (Blanchot 1995, 13-14). In the final gesture of suspense in signification, the grass stops being hope or despair (or both), the bright future, the dull present, and the archive relegating them into the past, instead calling into question the very possibility of assigning these traits to it. The grass decomposing epistemic frames and the modes of power they correspond to ends up questioning our investment into the future – while still feeding into it. Putin may have decomposed, just as all the fragile archives he touched, including "memory," but while admiring, hoping for and participating in it, it is easy not to notice that we have been swept by this process too. The grass keeps growing – not against or even despite, but thanks to the dead bodies covering it.

Figure 5. Fragment 5.

6.

If *9 stages* and 7000 HUMANS are examples of experiments with phytographia in art, Deleuze and Guattari were its vocal proponents in philosophy. "Rhizome" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) is one of their most well-known concepts, which has been used extensively in IR – in ontologies of "the international" (Lenco 2012), calls for methodological pluralism (Bleiker 2015), and discussions of the discipline's heterogenous state (Eun 2021). Opposed to the tree, a rhizome is a system formed through the connection with the outside and having no separate inner dimension (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 9) – it is a non-hierarchical and "acentered" (ibid, 17-18) mode of organisation opposed to a hierarchical one. It is also open and evolving, with its elements forming connections with each other while continuing to create new ones, extending the body while transforming and escaping it: "A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (ibid, 9).

Deleuze and Guattari introduce "rhizome" in the first chapter-plateau to explain what *A Thousand Plateaus* is about, what it is and what it does, how it should be read – as an open book running in circles and disparate lines, repetitions of the same concepts acquiring different meaning based on the conceptual system they are part of and variations on the same themes restated through completely different conceptual systems, as a book without an external referent and an experiment in doing philosophy as a creative activity. Through the concept of rhizome, we are introduced to their non-representational methodology and its politics, which consists first and foremost in countering "fascist" tendencies in thought – even the most democratic ones content-wise.

The elegance, vibrancy and also analytical applicability of this concept are so great that in the end, it is all too easy to forget plants in a "rhizome," too easy to see this concept as a mere metaphor for the more profound relations, for the ideal types of connections, for the

utopian future and terrifying present. Yet, as Jeffrey Nealon (2016, 85) argues, a rhizome is the concept with which Deleuze and Guattari tackle analytical interpretivism, the worldview in which everything has a deeper meaning, is a metaphor for something else. A tree is their "metaphor for a metaphor" (Nealon 2016, 92) but a rhizome introduces an altogether different relation – it is not a thing but a process, becoming, emergence, and as such, it actively participates in the making of what it describes. As a concept firmly grounded in writing, emerging within a milieu of a specific chapter-plateau, it joins a swarm of other concepts (a map, a territory, a line of flight…), itself forming a rhizome with them. A "rhizome" names an organisation and propels its emergence, activating a rhizome of a book from within. It is an "operative" concept (Massumi 2002, 109-112), not analogical.

Nealon's conclusion from Deleuze and Guattari's pragmatic use of concepts is that a "rhizome" should be read neither metaphorically nor literally – it stands neither for a plant nor for anything else. Instead, he argues that it is a diagnostic tool which can be applied to a specific historical formation to understand its functions better, "if we are to have any hope of looking for new concepts to combat them or to activate them otherwise" (Nealon 2016, 105). In other words, a rhizome is neutral – it "is neither good nor bad. Rhizomatic *effects* most certainly can be judged according to that ethical yardstick… but the transversal field in which those effects happen is beyond good and evil" (Nealon 2016, 106). Through this framing of a rhizome as a diagnostic device, Nealon counters the criticism of D&G's alleged ideological proximity with capitalism – yet at a certain cost. While I agree that for D&G, concepts are neutral in the sense of being neither good nor bad and that it is their effects – what concepts do – can be judged, analytical neutrality or the transcendent position of a knowing subject capable of making knowledge claims from above is certainly not what they propose, as is evident in their persistent critique of psychoanalysis. In other words, moral neutrality of concepts is not the same as

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political neutrality and does not imply neutrality of epistemic practices, analysis being one of them.[24]

In this respect, it is curious that nowhere in *A Thousand Plateaus* does a "rhizome" appear to function as a diagnostic tool (which is another difference from a more diagnostic "tree"). More so, whenever this concept appears, it is surrounded with plant vocabulary – not only "trees" but also "buds" and "gaps, detours, subterranean passages, stems, openings, traits, holes, etc" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 415). While a rhizome may have a very loose relation to plants, it seems necessary for D&G to keep the concept connected to them. A rhizome might not be a metaphor, but it retains a trace of plant life, incorporated into a philosophical rhizome where it acquires new life, mutates, and forms a rhizome with other, even less organic notions. It is a phytographic concept.

Plants do not offer a model for living, but, as Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari argue, they do "appeal to and affect us" (2020, 176). Through that appeal, we may form a relation in which plants are neither subjugated to thought nor erase it but shatter our epistemic authority, substituting it with an emerging sense of connection amidst fragmentation, growing a rhizome with us while decomposing the "we" and "I" they connect to. In Meeker and Szabari's words,

> The botanical particularity of plants can lead toward new speculative orientations, in its strangeness to the categories that organize our experience, and at the same time this particularity permits us to enter into affective contact with alien ways of organizing matter. The latter are not inevitably susceptible to abstraction or sublation into concepts; they retain their link to plant bodies and thus to botany, and they interrupt the schemata that we introduce to explain them, whether we like it or not (2020, 177).

As a concept, a "rhizome" carries a charge of the system from which it was taken, a vitality that extends beyond meaning and qualifies its "tone" (Massumi 2014, 25). A "rhizome" is not a

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[24] For D&G, analytical neutrality is as much of a myth as the myths deployed in psychoanalysis. *See* Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 112-113; 1987, 38. Especially Guattari's late work (1995; 2014) explicitly calls for bringing together analytical and political commitments.

plant but it activates the vibrancy of life, uncontained by the organic body. Its function is to energise, to "animate" (ibid, 9) – both the movement of concepts within the text and the reader, as an essential component forming a rhizome with a book. In this sense, it carries an imprint of plants forward, deterritorialising their "vitality affect" (Stern 1998, 53-61). We can try to listen to plants' silence. We can learn from them. They could teach us. And, if that sounds too anthropomorphic, we can, in Deleuze and Guattari's words, "follow the plants" (1987, 11). This call, resisting metaphorical interpretation as anything else in *A Thousand Plateaus*, can be responded – as an invitation to expand the affective field further, to join the process of decomposition and see what may be composed of the traces, the fragments left behind.

Figure 6. Fragment 6.

7.

There is one more reason why *9 stages* is an incomplete artwork. Besides countering interpretation by expressing the destructive force of vegetation, the photographic part of the performance misses another, final stage – the death of the grass. Like other forms of life, and similar to the dictator who, in vain, tries to push his own mortality outside intelligibility, the grass is mortal. More so, of all plants, the grass is relatively short-lived, having a lifespan of several years compared to hundreds and thousands of years that trees keep growing. If the original performance took place in 2015, then now, eight years later, even if the grass has been tended for, chances are high that it, too, has decomposed.

Plants are fragile, as any fellow gardener who has ever found themselves impotent before the destructive appetite of insects, fungi, and bacteria can attest. Single overfeeding of a potted flower can instigate slow, irreversible, and hardly stoppable rotting of its roots, expressed on the surface by the blackening of stems. Deleuze and Guattari write about the capacity of a rhizome to grow in new directions from the point of the cut (1987, 9). They forget how perishable it is – especially if a rhizome they form includes humans.

Even before a plant dies, and even if its lifespan is long, its parts have a tendency to grow old and fall apart quickly. In those parts of the world where a year is defined by a clear cycle of four seasons, we witness the change in leaves' colour every autumn, followed by their intense fall. The leaves covering the soil decompose to contribute to its fertility and enable further growth in the years to come. After periods of drought and intense heat, the grass turns yellow and dry; in winter, it stops growing and may completely disappear under snow cover. We witness plants' decomposition all the time, yet it is their growth that inspires us the most.

Botanists, travellers and children know the value of plants' dead fragments – all of them, in different ways and for different purposes, assemble herbaria. The first collect leaves for knowledge, to create a "database," wherein a dry fragment of life serves as a representative of

a broader species. Botanists are interested in dead parts of vegetation for classification, for their insertion into the wider catalogue of life, into our knowledge systems. Travelers, for their part, are less interested in knowledge. Instead, for them/us, dead leaves are the evidence of where they/we have been, of the territories they visited and/or conquered. As Gibson and Sandilands write, travellers' herbaria have been "archival repositories not only of the collected specimens but of the history of who collected plants (and where, how and why). The stories to be found are romanticized tales of brave men overcoming difficult new countries with challenging terrain and troublesome local people" (2021, 4). Here, a herbarium is a trophy room, a space where dead bodies are displayed as powerful things telling, through their dry, beaten state, the story of our glory.

Children, like those I observed running around the Victory Park in early autumn, may pick up leaves in their quest to become scientists. They may collect them as small trophies on the journey of becoming dictators and colonisers. They may assemble herbaria for no purpose too. A child's herbarium is an instrument of learning, an archive, and a toy all at once. It may be only momentarily useful only soon to be deemed worthless of preserving. A child collecting the leaves plays the scientist and a coloniser, repeating their herbaria but with a qualitative difference, with less intensity of violence and more joy of curiosity, in total immersion into the space where the leaves are found – even if the place has been inscribed with trauma.

Michael Marder and Anaïs Tondeur (2016) play all of these roles and assemble a herbarium of a different kind. Tondeur plays with the practice by assembling photograms ("lines of light"; Marder and Tondeur 2016, 14), imprints of plants, grown in irradiated Chornobyl soil, on paper. Her photograms carry the vitality of vegetation that grew in the deadly environment and was later cut from that soil to produce the herbarium. They make palpable the "infrathin" (Manning 2020, 15-16) of our interaction with herbaria, the liveliness backgrounded in our attempt to know the plants. The photograms carry "the curative force" (Marder and

Tondeur 2016, 36) in showing the capacity of nature to heal, even after exposure to deadly radiation. As Marder describes it,

> This force is powerless to effect a change in reality, to penetrate its core and decontaminate the bodies of the earth, of animals, plants and humans laced with radioactive isotopes. But, precisely, its powerlessness and desistence from depth are its virtues. It strokes the surfaces of things— the superficies of the remains, including the fragments of the thing called *psyche*—consoling them, patting them, offering gentle contact, caress. It is possible to be touched without a modicum of sentimentality. When I chanced upon the photograms, I was touched in this very sense, attaining a different level of self-knowledge thanks to them (ibid).

Marder, in turn, accompanies these photograms with fragments of autobiographical, philosophical and poetic reflections on the Chornobyl catastrophe. These fragments constitute a parallel herbarium, reminiscent of and building on his earlier attempt to assemble a philosophical one (Marder 2014). However, if Tondeur's photograms carry a "curative force," Marder's fragments act as their counterpoint, an expression of trauma, a testament to the catastrophe. They are "fragments of an exploded consciousness," assembled, "albeit not glued together" (Marder and Tondeur 2016, 28) in Tondeur's herbarium. If Tondeur's photograms carry the force of growth, Marder's fragments show its accompaniment – decay – reminding us of both the fragility of life and its capacity to persist even when fragmented.

A herbarium is a collection of fragments in which the forces of growth and decay coincide, reinforcing, not hindering each other. It is as much a product of play as it is a testimony to violence, a trace of trauma and a "reparative" (Sedgwick 2003) method. Through herbarium assembly, these two forces are expressed, in a "dynamic unity" (Massumi 2011). A herbarium forms a rhizome with plants but itself is a different form, which acknowledges the fragility of life, human and non-human alike. Herbarium assembly is a practice of phytographia that carries traces not only of plants' vitality but also fragility, mortality. It is the negative (in a photographic sense of the term) of *9 stages*, its virtual image consisting of multiple fragments from which "stages" may be formed.

Figure 7. Fragment 7.

8.

While plants are the immediate "real world" referents for Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of "rhizome" and "tree," these concepts and the methodologies they help shape were also inspired by other experiments in ways of knowing and being, particularly the work of Fernand Deligny. A colleague of Guattari and Jean Ouri at La Borde in the 1960s, he moved to the Cevennes in Monoblet to work with classical autistic children in a non-institutional, communal setting where they would be welcome for several months to live under the guidance of locals.[25] Deligny's primary aim was not to "correct" those children but "to invent modes of relation that do not necessarily rely on words" (Manning 2012, 191). He called the "mode of being" in the Cevennes "a network" or "the Arachnean" (Deligny 2015). A primary, pre-linguistic mode of organisation of life backgrounded in the neurotypical belief in the autonomous, volitional subject, for Deligny, a network is not a system of connections between pre-made points on the map, (e.g. social media profiles and webpages or the proliferating professional networks) but, similar to a rhizome, a collection of continuously woven lines forming stoppages, knots, intersections, and digressions. It is an (infra)structure of relations for individuation, wherein "we never know whether it weaves or whether it simply exists from having being woven" (Deligny 2015, 39). A network is a multiplicity of relations between fixed points as well as a multiplicity of processes coming together in every single point – woven and weaving, it is a collective "mode of being" (ibid, 33) in which a "we" is in flux, or as Erin Manning (2012, 195) puts it, "adrift."

Movement is the core practice, the key mode of expression in the network. Similar to Guattari, Deligny wanted to create an alternative to pathological models of psychiatry and study

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[25] Deligny's work is relatively unknown in English-speaking world and has only recently started to receive attention. The key collection of Deligny's texts and maps, *Œuvres* (Deligny 2007), has been assembled by Sandra Alvarez de Toledo, who remains the main expert on Deligny but writes in French. Deligny's *The Arachnean* (2015) and *Camering* (2022) are the two collections of Deligny's texts translated in English. In English, Deligny's work has been extensively discussed in Manning's *Always More than One* (2012, 190-203), *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* (2020, 158-161), and Anne Sauvagnargues' *Artmachines* (2016, 162-181).

neurodiverse people on their own terms instead of approaching them with a predetermined set of coordinates. In the context of classical autistics, as well as the dominance of psychoanalysis, this meant parting ways with the focus on language and foregrounding more immediate ways of connecting with the world. For that purpose, Deligny proposed that the neurotypical, untrained in psychiatry and psychoanalysis inhabitants of the Cevennes record children's movements, and draw them as an unfinished map where the traces would be layered over each other again and again. As Erin Manning explains, Deligny sought "ways to make visible the shape of their movements in order to elucidate, from these movements, the orientations that composed the everyday" (2020, 159). These "wander lines" (Deligny 2015) were more than a cartographic representation of children's everyday life – as a way of engaging with children on their own terms, outside of language, the drawing of these lines, of the web children weaved, was itself a practice of making a network with them, of forming a rhizome where the connection between the neurotypical "humans-that-we-are" and autistic "human beings" was foregrounded instead of subjugating one by another. In short, the practice of drawing children's movements was as much an attempt to understand their everyday life as it was itself a mode of living with them (Ogilvie 2015, 13), a practice of weaving a web, of making a network from within the lines that were already being composed in and by it.

Deligny's experimental cartography is a proposition to listen to worlds that are not defined by language and speech (including silence *as* speech), to attune to a life expressed through other means, and to co-exist with it non-violently. It is an example of a non-representational practice of experimentation that Deleuze and Guattari call for in inviting us to follow the plants. It is both humbler and more ambitious than D&G's method though. It is more modest because, unlike D&G, Deligny does not call for an infinite expanse of a network, for an increase of territory through deterritorialisation. The Arachnean web is fragile, "precarious in all circumstances because defined by the experiment" (Sauvagnargues 2016, 164). It may perish

with the slightest blow of wind, and so instead of being expanded, it has to be woven anew, again and again, without any other aim than to be woven, through many repetitions, only to "necessarily fail" (ibid). Wander lines do not have a clear-cut end but do have limits – even though they transform the space, they are always oriented towards and situated within it.

Transformation is still at the core of that non-expansionist approach. It is not directed at the world out there, at a life with which "we" form a network though. Wander lines emerged first to help the neurotypical residents of the Cevennes who were at unease with inhabiting the same milieu with autistics (Manning 2012, 192-193). They were intended as a technique for "us" – the "humans-that-we-are" – to live in peace with alterity, so that "they," "human beings," can find a non-hostile environment. Wander lines, drawn by autistic children and transcribed on paper by neurotypicals, grow towards the one tracing them. These lines decompose the external position of the observer in the process of being drawn. They also sweep the transcriber into the act, into the sociality of a network that grows and acquires consistency. As Manning writes, that was a project "of co-composition through a common tracing that allows the uncommon to emerge" (2012, 193). Co-composition of the uncommon, in the decomposition of the "common body" (Deligny 2015, 109) – the individual.

Figure 8. Fragment 8.

9.

Anne Sauvagnargues identifies two key aspects of Deligny's "network." First, it "is a kind of resistance woven in response to and disappearing along with a threat" (Sauvagnargues 2016, 164). A network requires a milieu, or an "outside" (Deligny 2015, 36) to unfold on and to creatively remake. Sauvagnargues (2016, 164) suggests that a network is thus secondary to its environment, but this secondary characteristic needs not to be reactive as the word "resistance" would suggest. Instead, "endowed with an ecological competence" (ibid), a network emerges in response, that is, taking into account the constraints and possibilities offered by the place of its emergence. The second quality of a network, which also clarifies the relation of resistance discussed above, "is that it is never of the order of consciousness, will, calculation… It is lodged deeper, in the vital and the ethological domains, where experiments endure or fade away depending upon circumstances, chance, or a propitious moment" (ibid). Throughout the *Arachnean* this quality is of primary importance for Deligny's distinction between "the humans-that-we-are" or "mankind" and "human." The first do not tolerate networks, instead opting for the "society" where everything is planned in advance as a "thought-out project" and deviation is marginalised. The second, "human beings" live fully in the act, without an intention and purpose that would eclipse the value of a practice itself. "Humans-that-we-are" need a purpose, but "human beings" are fully immersed in the surrounding milieu and act in response to, in conversation with the changing constraints and possibilities. As Deligny writes, "The network is not about doing or making; it is devoid of anything that would serve the purpose, and any excess of purpose leaves it in tatters at the very moment when the excess of the project is deposited in it" (2015, 41). "Humans-that-we-are" imagine the future and strive towards it; human beings, immersed in the act, make this future in the present, weaving "unimaginable" (ibid, 53).

These two qualities of the network – its relation with the outside and its non-belonging to the order of intentionality and language – lead to the final feature of the network, or rather to its

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quality that becomes visible when "humans-that-we-are" become a part of it: fragility. Like a spider's web, a network is prone to be fragmented, injured, and even disappear entirely upon the slightest touch. For Deligny, the major threat to a network is that it can become a "thought-out project" (2015, 44-57). Too much cherished and sustained, it can be reduced to a gathering of "beings conscious of being" (ibid, 36), a society where deviation has become a rule and so again has been subsumed under it. As he writes:

> "What happens, and what often makes networks break down, is the overburdening of the project, an overburdening so constraining in its turn that it passes for the network's reason for being; and the impostor keeps on proposing another society; if the conjuncture of history is propitious, the network takes on fantastic proportions; now it is a society, the starting point from which networks are secreted and, the network having become an organized power, it goes to great lengths to keep house, it invents brooms, multiplies teams of cleaners, while the responsible parties get lost in conjectures about the causes of the epidemic of apparently disparate networks whose structures nevertheless probably always remain the same" (Deligny 2015, 42).

Here, Deligny argues that deviation and being in the act characteristic of a network are not opposed to a rigid structure but can well be its founding principles. Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 6) argue that fragmentation is not opposed to unity but can be a unifying principle, an ideology, and so in itself fragmentation is not a rhizome. However, Deligny goes further to suggest that the smoothening of the milieu and the incorporation of a network into it is a condition for the emergence of new networks escaping the understanding of and control by "the responsible parties." Clean the spider's web and all you do is make space for it to be woven again. In other words, a network feeds on its own demise – it grows from the society and regardless of it. Its existence outside of consciousness is what makes it fragile but also persistent – it can be infused with power, but it will still keep unfolding outside of it, as an uncontrollable supplement that we cannot will away.

A herbarium is the penultimate stage of a rhizome, a network on the way towards disappearance but before it decomposes. It can become a recognisable object – a scientific device, evidence of achievements, an instrument of play, or an artwork; its fragments can easily

be seen as parts of a specimen. Then, it may become a model of society. But, on the way towards the tenth stage of decomposition, which also marks the completion of composition, it can also, if only temporarily, become a milieu upon and in response to which the Arachnean web is woven, an anchor point from which imagination grows, a practice of writing emerging from and calling for a continuation of listening, a memory extending and erasing "memory."

Figure 9. Fragment 9.

CHAPTER 5. INSCRIBE_ME_DONT: PHOTOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE, FABULATION, AND FRAMES OF SEEING.

Down Nevsky prospekt, at the heart of Saint Petersburg resides an inscription:

<div align="center">

citizens!
UNDER SHELLING
this side of the street
is the most DANGEROUS

</div>

White letters over the blue background on a grey column of a residential building constructed in 1939, the inscription's bright and colourful appearance stands out from the dullness of its immediate neighbourhood. Although Saint Petersburg is well known for the grandiose imperial palaces turned museums and for their reflections in the summer waters of channels and rivers overwhelmed with tourist boats, the inscription is located in the narrowest part of the Nevsky, next to the intersection with the Moyka river embankment – the part of the city that is much closer to the grey and gloomy Saint Petersburg of Dostoevsky's novels than to the shiny portrayal of the city by the tourist agencies. Apart from the Burger King bistro two steps away, the inscription is the only sightseeing on the way to the Winter Palace, home of the Hermitage and the main point of destination for newcomers to the city.

Still, the inscription is easy to pass by unnoticed. I must have first encountered it back in June 2013, upon my first school trip to Saint Petersburg. Back then, walking along empty Nevsky Prospect at 6 AM, like other tourists, I was too awed by the views of the channels; like other teenagers, too preoccupied with the feeling of freedom from the adults' control and probably like no one else obsessed with touching the Winter Palace to notice, let alone memorise, the outlines of the white-over-blue message about the danger of any side of the street. Later, I would learn from experience that the inscription's precise location does not help with noticing it either. As the pavement narrows down and the intensity of movement on this

"DANGEROUS" side of the street increases together with the density of pedestrian traffic, the ban of the urban atmosphere on the possibility of a random halt becomes harder to neglect. Within the highly fragmented city where the infrastructure foregrounds specific destinations but makes a movement as such almost unbearable, the inscription slides to the background of perception, blending with thousands of other colourful but mundane signs establishing the zones of consumption and the rules of travelling towards them.

Perhaps then, the inscription is an irrelevant object, just another minor memorial existing to fill the space that is properly delineated by other, more significant, major buildings, and there is nothing about this white-over-the-blue street art that deserves special attention. Yet, among the countless architectural archives of national glory and violence that I used to pass by during the four years of undergraduate studies, the inscription kept drawing my attention, despite the simplicity of its aesthetic composition, and for the reasons that later, during my PhD, I would not stop trying to theorise. On my way to the university, along the fancy boutiques and pricey junk food bistros occupying magnificent buildings, whether by bus or on foot, standing in a traffic jam or rushing through the crowds of pedestrians, I used to throw a glimpse at the inscription and ponder, if only for a moment, the awkwardness of its untimely message and the distinctiveness of its colour palette. In the moments of stress and despair, overwhelmed with the density of the readings, the proximity of the deadlines and the longevity of the two-hour-long journey to campus, I found raw harmony of indifference in the inscription's persistence. It pacified me but also provided me with a charge to keep going.

Later, while writing this thesis, I would think of the inscription's hold over my mind and senses as what Jane Bennett calls "thing-power" – "a vitality intrinsic to matter itself" (2010, 10). Based on Spinoza's "conatus," "thing-power" refers to the inseparability of, on the one hand, the capacity of all matter to act and, on the other, the force that brings matter into existence: the unity of kinesthesis and potential in the dynamics of processual and relational

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becoming. Writers from similar philosophical camps but using a slightly different conceptual vocabulary use the term "affect" to designate the same kind of power (see Seigworth and Gregg 2010). Most significant in uses of either term is neither a "thing" nor "affect" as such but the double *capacity*, the *power* of a thing to form in being formed, to enter a relation and be transformed through it. This power, although always tempting to attribute to a thing, is not really of the thing but of the event – a singular instance of unity between ongoing processes of disjunction and conjunction, relational participation and qualitative transformation (Massumi 2011, 1-12). In my eyes, the inscription has never lacked meaning – it is hard to unsee "memory" once it is engraved in the stone – but it was not its memorial function that drew my attention. The paint over the concrete shining bright under the ever-raining sky pulled my gaze away from the speed of social life towards the "out-side" (Bennett 2010, 2-3) or maybe, in this case, better say, to the DANGEROUS side outside of intelligibility and closer to the immediacy of felt relation. Or maybe away from the (a-)sociality that is familiar, and closer to a sociality yet unknown.

The inscription is not like *any* other sign though. It performs a specific function, and in the 2020s Saint Petersburg, this function is not to warn the residents of imminent death in case of staying on this side of the street under shelling. On the lower edges of the blue square, underneath the inscription, a marble plaque clarifies this function:

> In memory of heroism and bravery
> of the Leningrad residents under the 900-day-long
> blockade of the city has been preserved this
> inscription.

The plaque explains that there is a significance to the inscription, that this object matters for the sake of preserving the deeds that people living in Leningrad performed at war. Through the plaque, the inscription, otherwise meaningless in the present day, is inscribed with meaning. Having once marked an "affective fact" (Massumi 2010) of an imminent threat, it no longer

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warns of the threat under shelling but reminds us that once the threat was there. It also inscribes "there once" into "here now." Unlike countless other memorials commemorating the Great Patriotic War and the blockade of Leningrad, the inscription is not supposed to look like a proper memory that was crafted after the event it remembers. Its style, form and content appear as an *in*-war, not a *post*-war artefact. "Preserved," it looks like an anachronic trace of the past refusing to disappear, a cut into, a wound in the peaceful fabric of the contemporary cityscape. A wound that refuses to heal.

Or rather, it is a wound that is denied healing. *Restored* in the 1960s, not *preserved* since the war, it is one of a few *replicas* of the words widely inscribed across the streets of Leningrad under the blockade (MR7.RU 2009; Telekanal Sankt-Peterburg 2024). What is more, over the course of two weeks in November 2018, it was blotted with white paint as an act of "vandalism" later attributed to a homeless person represented as a psycho, destroyed even more as a result of an unprofessional attempt to restore it to the original state through the application of a chemical solution, covered with paint again, and then finally *re-painted* anew (Fontanka 2018; Parlamentskaya gazeta 2018). A *re*-inscription it is.

It is the fact of the inscription being re-inscribed that inspired me to incorporate the inscription into my anarchive. Supposed to be a part of an archive of the war, it acts against an archival stasis of time by fading and requiring occasional re-application. Not fixed in or as stone but only painted on it, the inscription undergoes transformation, even if outside the two weeks of "vandalism" and restoration, that process is slow. Furthermore, located at the section of Nevsky prospekt that encourages passage not stop, the inscription is not only a memorial but also an everyday object. It may have been inscribed "in memory" but the "memorial" aspect is just one side of the inscription, undone by its material properties and accompanied by the insignificance of the everyday. Within anarchive of this thesis, re-inscribing the inscription to

push these two aspects closer to conscious perception and sideline its memorial significance has been my key aim.

In this chapter, I would like to offer a glimpse at that process of re-inscribing the inscription by giving an account of the multi-media practice that began in my fieldwork as a photographic performance and continued for a few months after as an experiment in alternative ways of presenting it through the Instagram account @inscribe_me_dont. My aim is not to convince the reader of the inscription's unique significance. Our encounter has been a chance, and my evolving relation to it has been conditioned as much, if not more, by a random memory and an initial experiment in (lost) writing during the first year of PhD than by any specific properties the inscription might possess. It is a small, insignificant monument, even if the traumatic temporality it activates and the dynamics between discursive and material re-inscriptions can be illuminating. For this thesis, what matters more is precisely how the inscription stops being significant – at least as an instance of "memory" – and the practices of attuning to qualities other than memorial. Trying to move away from its memorial appearance through storytelling, photography and fabulations on photography, I have approached the inscription as the main starting point for and the ground of the anarchival process that this thesis is a part of and upon which it has been built. Telling the story of our encounters' archive that has been expanding through my focus on the inscription's minor tendencies, I offer an account of disidentification from "memory" by actively and continuously experimenting with frames of perceiving and modalities of knowing an object literally *inscribed* with, as, in "memory."

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I explain the key elements of the photographic performance that I executed during my fieldwork, focusing on why photography emerged as the privileged mode of re-inscribing the inscription. Then, I show how I moved on to bring visuals and text back together in a multi-modal re-inscription on Instagram inspired by the notion of "fabulation." After explaining the process and some stylistic features and tensions of

the account, I move on to offer translations of the 11 posts constituting @inscribe_me_dont. As a way of conclusion, I briefly reflect on the end of the project and provide the two images offering an appropriate closure to it.

Photographic performance

For years after abandoning Saint Petersburg in the hope of never coming back, I have kept recalling the inscription, trying to remember its exact appearance and message, and searching for the stories surrounding it. I have kept rewriting the same descriptions of it – including the one provided in the first few paragraphs of this chapter – only to discover that each new representation and interpretation of the inscription does not merely differ but contradicts the previous one. "Easy to pass by unnoticed" transformed into "hard to pass by unnoticed," the brightness of the imperial architecture into the dullness of dark grey and cool pink concrete, "citizens" into "residents" and back, "like any sign" into "not like any sign," and the "memorial" inscription into the "warning" inscription. Even the details of its location changed. With every attempt to write about the inscription, I realised the inadequacy of such attempts. I certainly had its image in my mind, but that memory of a memorial sign seemed not only incoherent but also ever-evolving, supplying me with more and more images of a single object and its surroundings – images that cannot be trusted but that are still quite real. The more I inscribed the inscription with meaning, the less intelligible it seemed. The less intelligible it seemed, the more tempted I felt to write about it. The more I wrote about it, the more I felt there was more to the inscription than it appeared to be.

The desire to theorise and narrate the inscription's hold over me years after leaving Saint Petersburg, as I am doing now, may well be the effect of such "thing-power." However, what more words can the inscription inspire given its own conciseness and simplicity? What else can be said about the two-dimensional object that exhibits neither deep symbolism nor aesthetic

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complexity? And why does anything have to be said about it at all, beyond the pure desire that, in all honesty, can be as much the effect of theorising as its cause?

I am tempted to side with the position that Saidiya Hartman (2008, 3) articulates in asking whether "narration [is] its own gift and its own end, that is, all that is realizable when overcoming the past and redeeming the dead are not." However, why do words and narrative have to be the privileged modality of knowing the inscription? Words are an indissociable part of the inscription – yet, they are also what turns it into a memorial object. Moreover, it is precisely the attribution of the capacity to tell a story, to be a witness to the event, that transforms the inscription into "memory" rather than an everyday object that did not exist at the time of the war (and even if it had existed then, would have neither witnessed nor been able to tell anything). It is the attribution of that capacity to the inscription that transforms its viewers into the remembering subjects, as if seeing the traces of the war, the war through its traces, with their own eyes.

The inscription enters perception as an everyday object and paint applied over the wall not through words but primarily through vision. Although the two should not be opposed, for they always, to some extent, contain traces of each other, [26] it is worth emphasising the difference in the modes of sensing and knowing that overshadow others at various moments of encounter. The frontal frame in which the viewer stands directly opposite the inscription to read it is a rare occurrence at the site. Instead, to read the inscription, the passer-by has to see it first – perhaps, as an abstract colourful silhouette on the periphery of vision that they cannot read yet but want to or can read but do not want to. Moreover, as a painting on the wall, the inscription – including its textual part – enters the visual field differently depending on the speed of movement, angle, weather, light, and the business of the street. There is a multiplicity of inscriptions at any given moment.

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[26] See W. J. T. Mitchell's work (1987; 1994; 2018) for the in-depth analysis of this relationship.

In July-August 2021, during my fieldwork, I designed and executed the project that I call a "photographic performance." Through photography, it sought to amplify the tendencies of perceiving the inscription while retaining its ordinariness and not "betraying" (Highmore 2011, 1) the uneventfulness of its existence. Such use of photography differs from the more familiar IR methods of engaging with visuals, which, in analysing rather than producing images, treat them as text, that is, *read* them. Instead, in such a project, the idea that "photography transforms and creates new reality" (Möller, Bellmer and Saugmann 2022, 5) is incorporated into the research process as a means of generating new data. In that approach, the researcher becomes an "image-maker" who produces their own images instead of analysing others' (ibid, 9-12).

The script I gave myself was quite technical but also allowed enough degree of freedom to improvise and explore both the inscription and its surroundings:

1) Every day over the course of a month (unless there is a thunderstorm – this is the phobia I could not overcome yet), I would come to the inscription and take at least one photo of it
2) The time of my visit to the inscription should be approximately the same but changing every week (e.g. week 1: 4-6 PM, week 2: 8-10 PM, etc.). While repetition was key, I also had to experience changes in the atmosphere surrounding the inscription based on the day and time (e.g. due to the density of both pedestrian and car traffic I could take the photo of the inscription from across the street only early in the morning).
3) Every time I would start by making one perspective photo of the inscription under the same camera settings as I did the first time (Fujifilm X-T20, XC35mmF2, ISO 200, f/ 2,0, 1/250s). This was necessary because while a human eye constantly adjusts to the brightness of the light falling onto retina, the possibility of retaining the light-receiving capacity of the camera despite the actual lighting enables it to capture more of the variation under the changing environment than human perception can.
4) After making the first shot I would move around the inscription and change the camera settings to experiment with what can be seen and captured while hanging around the inscription.
5) On my way home I would write notes on my experience of the process.

Such an approach to "collecting data" about the inscription allowed me to capture various frames depicting the inscription as an ordinary object. By experimenting with angles and light, I could create snapshots of the inscription that usually are too fleeting to register

consciously. Through repetitive photography, I could capture more everyday variation of and around the inscription than words would ever allow. The blurred object seen by the person rushing to the metro and the object overexposed to light on a rare sunny day, the vision focused on the intensely blue or the texture of the marble plaque, the bright rectangle spotted across the road or the overwhelmingly large sign viewed from too close; the variety of objects around the inscription (such as a parked van, flags, scattered flowers, and pipes) and other signs and instances of street art hidden behind the façade of the building (such as "ANYA + NADYA," "NEVER GIVE UP," drawings of genitalia, and graffiti of the planet united in peace), together constituting the inscription's neighbourhood – a visual archive of such different encounters with the inscription may not awe but it detaches the inscription from "memory" and the idea that it is an object drawing significance from the war.

More than just an experiment in photography, the project also became a kind of performance. Here, I use "performance" in an artistic rather than broad theoretical (see Edkins and Kear 2013; Rai and Reinelt 2015) sense of the term to underscore both theatrical and interventionist aspects of the project. First, at the sites that are somehow designated as special but that do not provide in-built guided opportunities for interaction, photography is the core participatory practice – not only the practice that mediates the encounter between the person and the world in front of them through the lens, but a technique for interacting with, for reaching toward the object captured in a frame (Larsen 2005). More than an analogue of vision, for me photography was also akin to touch.[27] The series of actions needed to take a photo (reach towards the phone, unlock it, set up the frame, push the shot button; a similar but extended series of actions including even stronger tactility takes place when one uses a camera like I did) is reminiscent of the slowness, spatiality and corporeality of touching an object rather than to the speed of looking at it. Photography is a profoundly tactile practice that requires more on the

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[27] In a similar vein, Frosh (2015) considers selfie in terms of "kinesthetic sociability."

part of a photographer than a momentous glance, and as such, it provides the feeling of touching an object without actually touching it: a "semblance" (Massumi 2011, 17) of touch. As such, photography cannot be limited to the frame it produces, to the product of the process. It is an act bringing senses together in the feeling of seeing and the sight of touch.

Second, by visiting the inscription and taking photographs of it *repetitively*, I ended up "dramatising" a remembering subject and practicing "an excessive literalism that brings to life the essential contingency and absurdity of this concept" (MacKenzie and Porter 2011, 40). In line with the critical ethos of the dissertation, through the daily repetition of an encounter with the memorial site and of a habitual mode of participation at it, I wanted to feel, with my exhausted of travelling around Saint Petersburg body, what it means to be such a subject, to both act as I am ideally wanted to, and to subvert this image of a diligent citizen by recording its inadequacy.[28]

Finally, the script had practical significance. By imposing the rule of repeating the same practice on a daily basis upon myself, I wanted to provide a justification for actually visiting the inscription and studying it closely and so to find the productively slow tempo between the speed of the city and the stasis of home. This was especially important in Saint Petersburg of summer 2021. The city's public transportation system is extremely inconvenient and underdeveloped: for the area of around 600 square kilometers, 5.5 million inhabitants and crowds of tourists coming from all over the country, only 5 metro lines and 72 stations (mostly concentrated within two lines) are in operation. The population is mostly concentrated in distant and scattered across the city "micro-districts" consisting of 20+ floor residential buildings and providing just enough services for the inhabitants not to leave their immediate neighborhood and suffer in the overcrowded old buses, which have to be used to get to the nearest metro. The

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[28] The "performance" aspect of the project became further apparent as my movements with the camera clearly drew passers'-by attention – both to myself and the inscription. If while I simply was standing or walking around, few stopped to contemplate the inscription, as soon as I revealed my camera and began taking pictures, people began pausing, exchanging a few comments about the inscription and sometimes practicing photography too.

dominant atmosphere in public transport is that of all-encompassing anger on the verge of turning into the war of all against all – a symbol of the broader atmosphere of demonic depression, hopelessness and mistrust described with the then popular and untranslatable word *khton'*. While this infrastructural failure is a constant feature of living in Saint Petersburg, in summer 2021 I could feel it even more intensely due to the pandemic and the absolute disregard of safety measures by the population and the authorities.[29] By coming up with a simple action in need of being done repetitively, I wanted to negotiate these circumstances, which otherwise forced me not to leave home unless I had to meet with someone.

The need to take some pictures also forced me to move around and explore the corners of the small area where the inscription resides. Going behind and to the sides of the column upon which the inscription is displayed, moving into the backyard of the building and hanging out for a while, approaching it from different sides of the streets and at different time of the day was a chance to learn more about the tendencies at a very specific location. In this sense, the camera dragged my body in the directions it would not go otherwise, and not only to observe one object, but also listen to the noise and silences, discover secret passages and artworks, and have unexpected encounters. (such as a woman standing in front of the inscription for a few days at the same time as I did).

The result of the process was the archive of 476 photos taken from 23rd of July till 12th of August. I finished the project earlier than a month later because by that time, after stages of excitement, doubts, and boredom I found myself in a relation of indifference to the inscription. This meant that our in-person interaction was over, for nothing was happening in our encounters anymore. In a way, that indifference was the major result of the project. After weeks of searching for more and more minor elements at the site, shifting my attention from the

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[29] Despite the number of cases on the rise due to spread of delta variant and low vaccination speed, the regulations in place concerning masks and physical distancing were safeguarded selectively, mostly for fining and imprisoning the organisers of anti-government protests.

inscription to the flowers laid underneath it, to the administrative signs painted on the sides of the column, to the children's graffiti in the backyard of the building, and back to the inscription, I felt the practice has exhausted itself. From the point of being inspired by the inscription I reached the point of non-relating to it. Perhaps, by the end of the project all I had done was *using* it, playing with it as long as it was fun and abandoning it when I received what I needed. On the other hand though, forcing myself to continue performing the same actions when I could no longer see and feel the magical "what else" and "more-than" of both the inscription and my practice of encountering it would mean nothing else but becoming the proper remembering subject who fully internalised the commemorative practice as an undisputed imperative. This would mean turning the practice into a "reproductive meter" and forgetting the power of its "productive repetition" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 314) – immobilising both myself and the inscription instead of practising the relation of unity that is "dynamic" (Massumi 2011, 3-22), in transformation. From that point of view, the decision to end the practice was rather the decision to *pause*, to resist my incorporation into the same normative scheme I had intended to subvert by slowing down (Mountz et al. 2015), to reflect on what the practice had achieved and in which direction it could be taken forward. It continued a few months later, back in Vienna – only to conclude soon after.

@inscribe_me_dont and critical fabulation

How, after such an intense project of re-inscribing the inscription and multiplying it by a few hundred, could the quest of re-inscribing continue? In the spirit of anarchive, I wanted to take the photographic performance and the archive it produced one step further and write out the lines that had previously been invisible but resurfaced in my collection. The plan was to perform a new shift in which the inscription, already-detached from "memory," would move even further away from it – as would I.

The guiding concept for the further experiment was "fabulation." Saidiya Hartman (2008) develops the method facing the limits of the archive and the impossibility of using it to rewrite the stories of the enslaved whom we know only through documents that dismissed, objectified, and performed violence upon them. A mode of telling that combines narrative and critique, history and storytelling, critical fabulation both aims to narrate a story as it could have happened and acknowledges the epistemic limits persisting as the trace of past violence. As Hartman describes it,

> "The intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration" (2008, 11).

I take further inspiration on fabulation from Erin Manning, who conceptualises it as "truth-in-the-making," experimentation with "the ineffable, unknowable" (2016, 220). Manning outlines the politics of fabulation drawing on Deleuze's concept "power of the false," which is the power to produce new mutations, aligned "to a collective architecting of mobility that is capable of creating new encounters with life-living" (ibid, 219). The false at stake is not manipulative, misleading and misconducting. Manning explains: "Fabulation is true! Absolutely true, in the only register of truth affirmation knows: the pragmatically speculative. Pragmatic because it does what it does, it mobilizes just this way, under just these conditions. And speculative because how it will unfold, what it can do, what else it will be, remains unknowable in advance of the doing" (ibid, 227). In this way, a fabulation does have a meaning to it, but it is more concerned with the a-signifying, operative, and affective registers of composition than signifying, instrumental and meaning-making registers of analysis (none ever truly separable from each other): "Fabulation tells life differently. Beyond interpretation" (ibid, 220).

Manning's speculative-pragmatic approach opens up the possibility of fabulating beyond language, narrative structure, and fixation on the past. As she explains, "Sensitive to the squeaks of language, to language at the edge of comprehension, fabulation is moved less by the necessity to explain than by the realization, always come to anew, that telling is a form of liveness completely connected to the event's own emergence" (Manning 2020, 123). What is important is that fabulation operates by "setting the event's myth-making orientations in direct confrontation with their power of the false, making felt the story's own unmaking of itself" (ibid, 122).

Instagram seemed to me an obvious choice of a platform for reassembling the collage I had into a fabulation. It served what seemed to me a logical step of sharing my archive together with pondering what it actually allowed me to see and what, if anything, I could tell based on it. It invited the re-connection of images and text in the creation of an experimental "imagetext" (Mitchell 1994, 89). Once again, I designed the script that I thought would force me to use the collection of photographs other than by simply interpreting what I saw in them:

1) Each new post should start from the theme that emerged within the process of writing the previous one.
2) When the connection, the entrypoint is established, an image somehow corresponding to it should be chosen.
3) The text should be primarily written based on the chosen image, not the theme (though the theme remains the entryway). Whereas the choice of the theme establishes connection between individual posts, an image ensures that each entry produces new lines, which could be picked up later on.
4) The image is processed. Processing should not destroy the perception of the text: the image and the text should be aligned.
5) The post should be open-ended and provide enough space for interpretation

Once again, writing was the most challenging part of the process. Since every new post had to be related to the previous one, the very first entry set the tone and some stylistic features that would later be difficult to modify. Here, I would like to reflect on several choices I made that defined the tone of the fabulations and the process of writing them.

First, I had to decide who or what would the writing subject of the fabulations be. The two obvious choices were either to create a first-person narrative about my encounters with the inscription or to hide the writing subject and pursue a detached description. However, the first-person narrative would not mean much without disclosing at least something about the person and the broader project in which the account operated. This was not an option due to potential security risks and the desire to limit the pressure of an algorithm-driven social media platform on myself. Furthermore, the first-person voice would have limited the fictional and inventive aspect of writing that had to rely only on the image and imagination rather than any memory of real events. The detached description was not an option either because, in line with my goal of moving away from the association of the inscription with "memory" and the meaning of its textual content, I aimed to use text in parallel to images, with the two connected but not inferior to one another.

Instead, recognising myself as the author but wishing to build a more relational rather than objectifying stance towards the inscription, I embraced a problematic "we" as the subject of the account. The "we" was intentionally indeterminate: it covered both myself and the inscription, and the inscription as the fictional subject writing rather than written only. While it did anthropomorphise the inscription to some extent, the "we" was also a recognition of the influence the inscription had on the content and the style of the account. It invited the style of writing that was neutral but curious and the method of reading that often was literal, unburdened by the external interpretive frames as much as possible and focused only on what is seen on the photograph and from the specific angle at which it had been taken.

Second, I had to consider the style of writing on a popular social media platform more broadly. Despite the urge to simplify texts to make them accessible and relatable, I embraced the genre of vague reflections that might seem too abstract but only because they were rooted in the image and the neutral style of the inscription's text. The goal was not to convey pre-

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acquired information to the external audience but to use language "at the edge of comprehension" (Manning 2020, 123) as an experimental device that, in conjunction with a photograph, pushes the limits of what can be said about the uneventful existence of an inanimate object and its surroundings. The texts were not supposed to be liked and even understood but aimed at transposing the visual perception of the inscription as a two-dimensional yet often vague object onto language.

The script as a whole was designed for transducing the archive I had into another, for the multiplicity of the inscriptions I had already collected to turn into a more limited collection having appositional relation to the original. The process allowed me to appreciate the inscription anew, as the object and the source of inspiration for the textual fabulations I accompanied my posts with. It welcomed the inscription as an even stranger object through the vague photographs of ordinary moments and the equally vague, abstract language refusing both the narrative style and the detached descriptions.

What I had not considered was the difficulty of transitioning from the photographic to blogging practice, and the stalemate I would end up in. Entering the economy of likes and hashtags, judgements and ignorance, feeling the need to upload new photographs regularly, I became more obsessed with conveying something relatable and familiar instead of highlighting the inscription as the object on the margins of perception. The reality of social media meant that either the inscription would appear as an object one could not care less, or as a familiar object of "memory." Having uploaded the last post on 24 February 2022, I completed the short project. Everything that could be written about the object that has nothing to be said about was written. Continuing after that would only return it back from the world of slight curiosity with irrelevance and material variation into the realm of memorial significance. It seemed to be the point at which the project of inscribing and re-inscribing had fulfilled its anarchival purpose.

Before concluding this chapter, I provide the content of @inscribe_me_dont as a series of eleven posts. The texts appear as rough translations, whose poietic sensibility and emerging meaning inevitably get (partially) lost. I do offer these translations regardless, because no online translating tool may capture some of the word plays for those interested in the account. I also include them here to prepare the ground for the offer textual and visual conclusion to the project that I could not compose at the time.

28 November 2021.

Figure 10. The inscription on Nevsky

As time passes by, our message persists. "This side of the street is the most dangerous." No doubt, you may try to debate this seemingly outdated statement. Yet, in the array of writers claiming to know what "this side" is and how it must be approached, aren't we the ones whose knowledge of this place is most accurate? For years the side, where, which and about which we are writing, has been the locus of our silent observations; for the life that we remember, it's been our literal and figurative writing home. And here's what we've learnt through these long-lasting, silent observations: the world in which we write may change, just like may we, inscription, somehow. The TRUTH remains immutable. Although no shells've been falling for many human decades, *UNDER SHELLING, this side of the street is the most DANGEROUS.*

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Don't get us wrong: we do not absolve ourselves of the responsibility for participating in transformation of truth into THE TRUTH – quite the contrary. The words UNDER SHELLING have taught us responsibility, and our TRUTH lies in acknowledging that. It is us who turned this side into "this": exceptional, extraordinary, distinct from the other. "This side is the most dangerous": be it a warning or a memorial anachronism, as long as we are here, this side will have a special meaning, and will remain *this*.

As long as we are alive, so is the uniqueness of this side. As long as the exceptionality of this side is needed, we'll keep being alive.

We are leaning towards the other side.

4 December 2021.

Figure 11. The other side

If, at our last meeting, you tried to find a secret meaning hidden between the lines, then obviously, there was none. Here it is, the other side. To write between the lines one has to move outside the familiar space they've come so firmly rooted in and interpose into that very space of BETWEEN. This is beyond our powers. Destitute of the capacity to move, we remain within the boundaries we were inscribed in and so are writing from RIGHT here.

Of course, under shelling this side of the street is the most dangerous but for the rest of life the danger reigns exactly in BETWEEN. A refusal to take any definitive side leads to an inevitable encounter with the squall of racing cars. You may take a risk and make an attempt to handle this strain. Though then, acting from within BETWEEN, you'll find yourself to have become a DANGER.

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Readers!
in any situation
the path BETWEEN the sides of the street
is the most DANGEROUS.

Though, other side is out of reach without it.

11 December 2021.

Figure 12. The author

I am not the inscription on Nevsky – just an Instagram account. Sometimes the inscription uses me as a vehicle of expression. Sometimes I pretend my speech to be its. I'm not sure where the borderline is. I'm not sure whether it exists at all.

#inscriptionanevsky, @inscribe_me_dont. I doubt the inscription knows the language of ats and hashtags. But if it did, what could it have to say? What could it become, other than a memorial, a street art object and just an inscription?

I doubt the inscription ever asks these questions. It keeps writing, disregarding the shadow which shrouds each attempt of its self-expression.

By itself, this shadow will not disappear.

22 December 2021.

Figure 13. The memorial plaque

We do not remember when we were inscribed with memory, but the plaque "IN MEMORY" accompanies each our writing attempt. This is a forever strange proximity.

The plaque UNDERlines that we are an INscription. But isn't it itself inscribed UPON us? If so, then the plaque-signature is an INscription too.

We are writing underneath the plaque. Does that mean we are a *SUB*scription?

It seems the plaque thinks differently. It does not acknowledge the change it brings to our writing home.

31 December 2021.

Figure 14. The technical sign

Yet another strange proximity. There is not much we can say about it though.

Not everything that surrounds us enters vision. While someone, like us, is not ashamed of vision, others are writing invisibly: neither under nor above, neither there nor here nor in-between. Rather, they are writing somewhere on the side.

We cannot speak directly of what we do not see. We can only acknowledge that we never write alone.

P.S. We don't know why regularly passers-by become extremely agitated. Whatever you are celebrating, let any side be always safe for you!

9 January 2022.

Figure 15. In movement

We see a lot from our side but it is difficult to see ourselves. We understand what (that) we are writing; we know what exactly stands behind our words – and yet we do not see the result.

As long as we are constrained in movement, any attempt to understand ourselves ends up with yet another set of abstract silhouettes. Could this be how our message is perceived?

The readers offer little help in answering this question. Some of the passers-by stop, look at us, read us, click the camera. Walk on. Some drive by, capturing our image only for a moment. The images remain in memory: in the hearts, minds and on screens. They are not shared back with us.

We only see ourselves through this mixture of fleeting attention and constant indifference. Abstract silhouettes again.

Perhaps, that is because we address you incorrectly: calling you citizens while you are reading and readers while you are contemplating. If so, forgive our inattention to your shifting and uncertain position.

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Perhaps, everything is simpler, meaning is irrelevant, and the abstract silhouettes are not an illusion but the reality of our life on the side of the street, on the periphery of vision. It must be clearer from the side (the less dangerous one) – though not necessarilly. We wonder how we are seen from the (out)side.

22 January 2022.

Figure 16. Flags

We constantly risk merging with a multitude of other blue and white signs marking the sides – both "this" and "the other" – and the rules of movement along them. Not that we worry about maintaining our own exceptionality (quite the opposite), but the possibility of such entanglement cannot be anything but unsettling.

These other signs, of course, look a lot like us: similarly simple, blue and white, many of them just as rectangular as we are. Just like us, they are trying to convey some messages, albeit ones we do not quite understand. Some, as if imitating the proximity of the colours we write with and the flowers lying beneath us, add a touch of red to their blue-and-white composition. And yet, let us venture to assume that among these significant objects only we can safely call ourselves not a volumetric symbol and sign, but a two-dimensional, laconic, motionless INSCRIPTION.

The possibility of merging - and with it, disappearance – does not frighten us per se: paints fade with time anyway. We see the danger in something else: in equating us (even if only in someone else's perception) with something similarly blue and white, sometimes with shades of red. In that case, 'this side is most

DANGEROUS' may turn into 'this side is most ATTRACTIVE.' The most unattractive alliance would that be.

That is why this side is so dangerous. That is why we are so interested in the other side. And that is why we keep writing about it.

23 February 2022

Figure 17. Flowers 1

1.
New, fresh, blooming with life flowers regularly appear beneath us. Of course, they do not appear by themselves and for no reason: they are brought into our home in memory of those who failed to read, hear and react in time to the warning about the dangers of this side. Together with the plaque-subscription "IN MEMORY…" flowers remind us that we are not just a colourful text or an artefact of a bygone era, but a significant, important and meaningful phenomenon in the life of modern society.

But flowers also have their own meaning, their own significance and importance, their own story - a story of birth and death, of prosperity and withering, of care and forgetting. In the absence of other things to do, and in the absence of the opportunity to do anything, we listen to and watch the repetitive development of this story, which in many ways resembles our own.

23 February 2022.

Figure 18. Flowers 2

2.

Flowers bring shades of life to our stony, still neighbourhood. The flowers themselves, like us, exhibit little life though. They are brought already in the process of dying, cut off from food and home, not remembered by anyone, deprived of hope for a bright, sunny future. Not yet dead, but no longer alive, the flowers pay their last drops of life, in memory of life - and join the hordes of forgotten mortals.

If we were capable of empathy, we might even sympathise with their plight. After all, inscriptions don't last forever either (albeit time is more merciful to the non-living). Many have written about the dangers of this side before us, gradually fading - some under the oxidising air, others in passers-by's attempts to rewrite outdated words. The last of many, one day we will repeat the same fate: will fade, be painted over, but eventually re-inscribed again.

If we were even slightly living, like flowers at least, we might even sympathise with their plight. But we are neither living nor dead, not already, not yet – always. We observe the suffering on this side dispassionately, that is, indifferently. Just watching, persistently repeating the same words.

A long history of withering lies behind the bright façade of freshness.

24 February 2022.

Figure 19. Flowers 3

Every day we watch as creatures, first bright, slowly fade, are blown away by the wind, and the new ones replace them, waiting for the same fate to repeat. We wouldd love to help them, but how? We are writing that this side is dangerous: "UNDER SHELLING." We draw the attention of readers by addressing them: "Citizens!"

Flowers have no citizenship, only the motherland-soil from which they have been plucked. It is not the shelling that is most dangerous to them. Cut from their homeland-soil, flowers are doomed to die of hunger and cold, torn from the roots

and the roof. Homeless migrants, "in memory" but forgotten and with no memory, buried on the street and scattered by the wind. The dead in exile.

When there are no more shades of life left in the flowers, they are replaced without regret. Everything repeats itself all over again.

We repeat ourselves too. The inscription on Nevsky, the inscription no. ∞, just an inscription, we are observing the repetitive story, are writing the same words, unable (or unwilling) to leave the circle of violence, in memory of violence. We don't need to be reminded that we can repeat, we already repeat ourselves all the time.

The flowers will keep on dying on this side. But they still won't stop bringing shades of life to a non-living and non-dead, soulless neighbourhood.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered an account of my attempts to re-inscribe the memorial inscription as an everyday object. Beginning with its description and the story of encountering it, I have explained the key reasons for first designing a photographic performance that multiplied the frames of seeing the inscription and its neighbourhood, and then building an Instagram account that unfolded as a series of fabulations using photographs as the ground for pushing language to the limits and writing about the uneventfulness of the inscription's existence inspired by the simplistic style of its text. I had to omit plenty of steps, minor decisions, and anecdotal situations that happened in the process. However, I have focused on the transformation, appropriation and multiplication that have been constitutive features of my long-term engagement with the inscription and that are of key significance for this thesis.

@inscribe_me_dont did not end on a high note. I uploaded the last entry on 24 February 2022, the day that changed the course and the tone of this dissertation and made further experiments with re-inscribing "memory" (already increasingly challenging) unbearable for a while, even if necessary. I found the picture for the final post but could not come up with any text that would correspond to the conceptual base of the account. The graffiti in the backyard of the school where the inscription resides utters the old Soviet slogan "Peace to the world," which is a wordplay of homonyms ("miru mir"), in different languages, but in the end proclaims

peace the same as the world, "monde" the same as "paix." Later, unconstrained by the script of

@inscribe_me_dont, I wrote the following lines on the photograph as part of a larger fabulation

on the inscription's present.

> But memory wanes. "World" blocks "peace." "No!" is forgotten in the "No War!." Meaning disappears. This is all meaningless. And yet the inscription re-members, making the war meaningful. Heroism and bravery of Leningrad residents are on the façade of the building, visible from all sides of the street. Peace to the world is kept in the backyard, known only to the enthusiasts and criminals – not so distinct anymore – who keep seeking what was left behind.
> Ruins are backyarded. Memory is streamlined.
> The inscription stayed. We had to hide.
> Saying "Peace to the world" is illegal in wartime Russia. That would mean being "global," which is "foreign," which is "a traitor." Both "world" and "peace" are behind the bars – on the other side. It is impossible to cross from here, for the bars are too solid, and the gaps between them are too narrow. But they keep writing – still. Writing, speaking, drawing, inscribing – all of that while trying to hide – are the ways of crossing, despite the blocks to seeing where crossing may lead to.


Figure 20. Peace to the world

For a long time, I somehow overlooked a much more affirmative picture in my archive.

On the back of the column where the inscription is located, besides many other concise and

mostly meaningless texts, I found the message that most probably is no longer there, which only means it can now be here. Accompanied by the drawing of a bird – a crane or a pigeon, who knows – it reads: "never give up." I find that image to be the best conclusion to this last chapter of the dissertation.
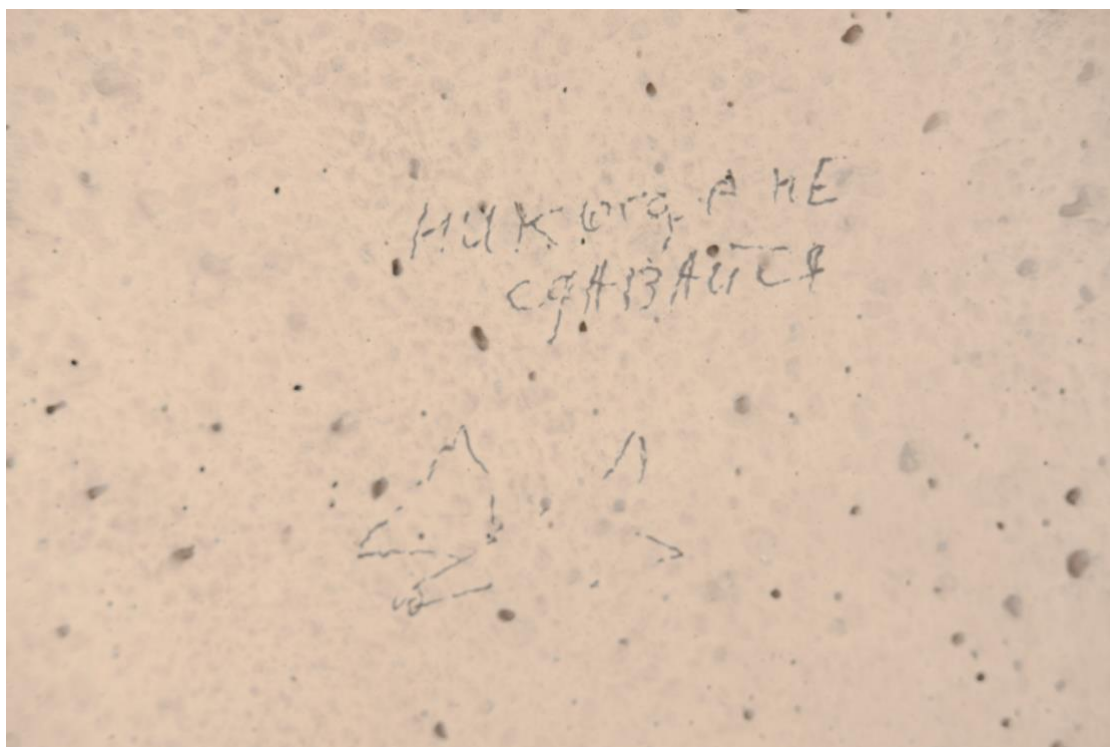
Figure 21. Never give up

CONCLUSION

When I left the cinema hall after watching *Petrov's Flu* [*Petrovy v grippe*] with my wife and friend in September 2021, the three of us were confused, if not shocked, by the two-hour-long grotesque representation of stasis and depression sweeping a small Russian town we had just watched. Directed by Kirill Serebrennikov and based on the novel by Alexei Salnikov, the film tells the story of a family – Sergei Petrov, his ex-wife Nurlynisa Petrova, and their son – ill with flu and experiencing hallucinations. Usually proceeding as a violent response to the hopelessness and hatred infusing their everyday life, these hallucinations are so organically woven into the narrative that often it is impossible for us, the audience, to tell whether the scene is real or not. For instance, the film begins with a scene on a public bus, where the passengers' typical rudeness, anger, and indifference lapse into Petrov dream of being taken by strangers to shoot oligarchs while the passengers watch him do that behind the bus windows. Petrova, a quiet and modest librarian, is portrayed as a serial killer – yet it is unclear if she indeed blows off steam by killing or, on the contrary, contains her violent urges by only dreaming of their resolution. It is still unclear whether the corpse disappearing from the coffin transported by the hearse where Petrov had drinks with a friend is a miracle, a result of Petrov's creative imagination, or the plot of collective flue-influenced hallucination (flu is contagious, after all). The film wants us to be confused – just as its characters are. So the three of us were, feeling like we had just hallucinated but unable to unsee hallucinations that seemed too familiar – and whose veracity felt too plausible.

Yet, besides shock and confusion overwhelming me for hours after the end of the credits, I felt something more. As I was slowly realising, to me, *Petrov's Flu* offered some kind of comfort or, better, healing – an experience I needed so much after four months of failed expectations and unexpected obstacles, inexplicable feelings of insecurity and depression,

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brave experiments that I caught myself thinking were too stupid, modest, and unrefined. Behind all the absurdity, the film makes a simple statement about the emotional state of Russian post-socialist society, and particularly its first post-Soviet generation (as opposed to Yurchak's "last Soviet generation," 2005). The dull, depressive everyday aesthetics that the film paints is not merely an environment in which the Petrovs live but an artistic device that actively expresses the existential crisis the characters and the society go through. The inscriptions on the walls, fences, and doors appearing throughout the film ("The day is shit and so are you," "How to live?..", "You won't survive until the wedding,"[30].) are especially significant for understanding the main question that *Petrov's Flu* asks – that of finding meaning in life, the will to live and the resources for creativity when their lack and suppression, hopelessness and absence of future are the defining qualities of ordinary life.

The characters offer three main kinds of response to the question. The first is to become a part of the hopeless everyday reality, contributing to its reproduction. Most supporting characters choose this option, and the final third of the film extensively explains it through the story of a woman who played a snow maiden at the New Year celebration at the school that Petrov attended. The second option is to refuse a life without a future by ending one's life. Sergei, Petrov's arrogant friend and an unsuccessful writer, asks Petrov to kill him before sending out manuscripts for publication – it is only death that will make his life pursuit of writing meaningful. Petrov rejects that solution, killing the friend with ease but burning the manuscripts he left, showing that death is not a way outside of the dull, uncreative, frozen everyday but one of its central features.

Petrov finds the solution to the problem of hopelessness in two contemporaneous movements though. First, the film juxtaposes the reality of the late Soviet Union and early post-Soviet Russia with Petrov's memory of the former while living in the latter. The two presents

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[30] *Do svad'by nye dozhivesh* – this is a word play upon the expression *do svad'by dozhivyot* which means "it will heal by the wedding."

– early post-Soviet Russia and late Soviet Union – are dull, full of hatred, injustice, and the same questions about the meaning of and inspiration for life. But Petrov's memory differentiates between the two, transforming the image of late Soviet dullness into the bright snapshots of warmth, love, and magic that he longs for and is inspired by. Holding on to that image, being nostalgic about the past that never was, enables him to find the same feelings in the world that seems to refuse to recognise them. Petrov convinces Petrova that their ill son can attend the New Year celebration at school because, in his memory, that was his first encounter with magic. After the festivity, Petrov shares this memory with his son. The latter hugs his father upon hearing it.

The second solution that Petrov finds concerns artistic activity. Petrov struggles to complete the comic book he promised to give his son. What inspires him though, are the same dull everyday scenes that are supposed to limit his creativity. Turning these scenes – whether dreams or real – into the subject of artistic activity, putting them on paper in a purposefully unrealistic representation, he finds the resource for creative practice in the very environment that stifles it. A comic book about all the hallucinations and a toy copy of the house are the products of Petrov's imaginativeness infused with warmth, love, and curiosity – the feelings that everyday aesthetics he lives in actively negates. Reversing hopelessness and approaching it as the resource for inspiration, Petrov draws a different kind of life within that aesthetics – life that is still connected to but is not defined by it. Performing what everyday aesthetics negates, he occupies the threshold between what is and otherwise. It is a double movement of creativity – as a narrowly defined artistic activity and a transgression of the limit determining the possible.

As I watched *Petrov's Flu* at the end of my stay in Saint Petersburg trying to make sense of what I had learnt over four months of treating the city as "the field," the film offered the emotional and intellectual summary of everything I had experienced during that time and from

then on served as the biggest inspiration for the rest of my PhD. It reflected back the everyday atmosphere that felt as intense as the film reenacted it after several years of no longer having to be subjected to it. It also allowed me to look back at the strange encounters, failed plans, feelings of uncertainty, sadness, irritation, and insecurity that dominated the daily walks across the streets with curiosity, to approach things that did not easily fit the positive mindset I had built for the fieldwork from a non-hostile distance, and to appreciate the kind of everyday apolitical existence of and at the sites intended to transmit narrow political meanings anew. The central research question of this thesis has been *how does the "memory" of the Great Patriotic War become a social norm in contemporary Russia and how is its normativity negotiated in everyday life?* More fundamentally though, the question guiding me has been how to suspend the grip of power that determines the kinds of 'I' I can be, how to hide from something that seems to be impossible to avoid – and to challenge it in ways that do not bind the subject to the object of critique even more. To this question of appositional resistance, *Petrov's Flu* offers a possible answer, even if it is difficult to enact in life: by facing whatever we would like to transgress directly, as it appears, and turning that appearance into the content of creative expression. Even (especially!) when there seems to be no space for art, politics, and life as such, when the environment encourages only feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, attitudes of distance and indifference, when no matter what you do, it all seems to be determined by and contribute to the same normative, aesthetic, and affective regime you would like to dismantle or at least not participate in, creativity is possible (and much needed). As a movement of exceeding the given (an understanding of creativity taken from Brian Massumi's work and explained in Chapter 1), creativity finds resources in what it transgresses – even, especially, if the given seems to preclude any possibility of exceeding it.

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated the work of such creativity in negotiating the normativity of the Great Patriotic War "memory" in contemporary Russia. I began this text with

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a brief exposé of the Great Patriotic War's presence in everyday life in Russia. My initial argument has been that just as the inscriptions on the walls in *Petrov's Flu*, the GPW constitutes an integral part of the everyday aesthetics in Russia. References to the war are impossible to avoid – and precisely because of the extent to which they are part of everyday life, they cannot be reduced to any particular narrative of the war and any specific interpretation of a single monument, film, advertisement, song, and speech. Instead, they constitute a background upon which life as such unfolds. In Chapter 2, I called this background "meaningful noise" – noise because it enters perception like the sound of tyres over the wet road; meaningful because that sound is still significant and overgrows with all sorts of explanations and interpretations, stories and associations. In Chapter 2, I used Guattari's term "refrain" to explain the ways in which repetition of references to the GPW holds together otherwise disconnected sites and situations, exhibits subjectifying function, and enables the recession of the "memorial" aspect of "memory" in connecting it with other universes. It is in becoming a part of everyday aesthetics, a "complex refrain" (Guattari 1995, 18), that "memory" of the GPW is normalised and exerts its normative power. Yet, that transformation into the ordinary background is also what enables "memory's" de- and re-composition, contemporaneous reproduction and destruction of its normativity because as the specific content of "memory" gets less and less important, "memory" as such, in all its possible forms without content becomes malleable, appropriable, susceptible to material de- and trans-formation. What brings together covers, remixes, and samples of wartime songs, contemporary art parodying popular commemorations, and everyday apolitical ways of inhabiting memorial sites is precisely the disregard of, almost disrespect towards "memory" as an untouchable object that can only be worshipped, loved, and feared. No matter how sacred (perhaps, the more sacred, the better), in many cases, the Great Patriotic War is simply a cultural reference rather than a deeply engrained "collective memory." As such, it is both a part of "normal" life and a resource for producing the whole universe of art objects

and everyday practices that are related to "memory" only in breaking with it. Arrest and careless walk, assertive rule and its negligent transgression – in short, normativity and creativity – are most powerful and mutually constitutive in their co-destruction at the level of everyday forms of perception or everyday aesthetics. The demonstration, analysis, and conceptualisation of how that relationship sweeps the everyday operation of "memory" of the Great Patriotic War in Russia is one of this thesis's most significant contributions.

When I use the word "demonstration," I mean it. This dissertation itself has been an attempt to practice the kind of apposition towards "memory" that I study as a research methodology and ethos. Recognising myself as the subject of "memory's" normativity (even if a deeply alienated one), I have approached the research for this thesis as the process of disidentifying myself from the normativity of "memory" in learning more about the ways of doing that. This pursuit has been informed and guided by the experimental traditions in writing and theorising in humanities and social sciences, most prominently autotheory, narrative and, more broadly, arts-based IR. In embracing and seeking to develop the performative aspect of epistemic practices, I have also been inspired by many philosophers and theorists, such as Deleuze and Guattari, Brian Massumi, Erin Manning, and Fred Moten, who actively reflect the content of their thought back to the style and form of their writing. For the purpose of (self)transformation and the kind of criticality that exceeds judgment, however complex it may be, I have adopted a methodology grounded in Erin Manning and Brian Massumi's concept and technique of "anarchive," which encapsulates progressive, multi-modal experimentation with ways of sensing and augmenting that which exceeds the given form and escapes our habitual attention to both meaning and appearance. In Chapter 1, I have summarised this method as the process of citation upon citation or, in a more limited sense, memory of "memory," wherein "memory" of the war is not something that has the content, but itself becomes the content of the creative practice only for the latter to face the same destiny afterwards. The performance of

that critical ethos and aesthetics is the second significant contribution of this dissertation, particularly in the creative methods and aesthetic approaches in IR.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the most visible traces of that process, the pieces of creative writing about and inspired by the "data" assembled in ways that may not conform to the criteria of social science yet emerged from intense attempts to understand precisely what escapes our habitual ways of encountering apolitical. Chapter 4 is a reflection on herbarium assembly, plant life and politics of decomposition presented in the form of nine fragments and accompanied by photographs of the plants' remnants collected during the fieldwork. Chapter 5 is a series of fabulations on the past and present everyday life of and around the memorial inscription that arose from the photographic performance seeking to capture the micro-perceptual tendencies that it is implicated in and that exceed the memorial meaning its words convey. Individually, these chapters (and others, even though less radically and explicitly) are singular examples of crafting and widening the spaces in proximity with "memory" of the GPW from within it. They are instances of the passage outside "memory" by following the horizon, the never-reachable, constantly changing limit of the sensible. Together with the rest of the dissertation, they form an intentionally indeterminate, wandering text that is as much about "memory" of the GPW as it is about the ways of non-relating to it, that is as much a part of "memory" assemblage as it is a break with anything memorial, that is a collection of memories of "memory" and the result of writing "memory" of the GPW out, of exhausting it.

When I use the word "exhausting," I mean it. Part of the puzzle I had in mind already at the beginning of this project was that by referring this project back to "memory," I would inevitably prolong its grip over me. I did not understand how I could possibly turn research into the process of disidentification from the normativity of "memory" and then, at some point, come back to writing about the norm and my being in it after already not so much being in it (or at least not to the same extent). The answer to that puzzle, which early on was purely

intellectual, turned out to arrive at the affective register. After the fieldwork, after @inscribe_me_dont, while assembling and cherishing the crumbling leaves, I realised that writing the very word "memory," let alone spelling out anything about "memory" of the Great Patriotic War, brought about heaviness I had not experienced, effectuated a writing block that could only be resolved by changing the topic, returning to the inscription on Nevsky, thinking with plants, moving sideways, again and again. My personal memories of "memory" no longer resonated with the current, mid-PhD me. Instead of anger over subjection, the desire not to experience it, and the pain of re-experiencing it in many moments of my inquiry, there was simply *boredom* with anything related to "memory" of the GPW. Writing about "memory" from that state every time (I felt) I had to in order to explain where it all started and why all of it (still) mattered seemed impossible. The toll of anarchive was high – halfway through PhD, I realised I no longer liked the part of my topic without which my research would make no sense, and thus, I no longer liked my research in general. Two years to go till submission, with plenty of lines to compose, it was a painful observation that something was going wrong.

"Or maybe that's exactly how it's all supposed to be," I thought one evening. Ben Anderson notes that "As time stills and space slows, boredom happens as a practice of detachment from an event, object, scene, landscape, person, ideology and so on" (2021, 198). It is an experience of disconnection, indifference, non-relation. It is "a suspension of anticipation" (Anderson 2021, 199) – or rather, of enthusiasm. "Isn't this precisely the kind of (non-)relation to 'memory' I wanted?" I asked myself. To be bored rather than irritated or angered upon the sight and sound of "memory," not to be animated by it, not to feel it – isn't this the ultimate stage of no longer being subjected to "memory?" It very well may be. The problem is that boredom does not break with necessity – in my case, the necessity of writing it out and, therefore, sitting at the juncture between "memory" of the GPW and the academic discourse on "memory." Boredom is difficult to live through. It is difficult to *write* through.

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Yet, while Anderson goes on to describe boredom as a general condition and offers an analysis of its circulation in Western 1970s artistic critique of capitalism and its contemporary capture by right-wing populism, we experience general, non-intentional boredom as much as we can be bored with something. The boredom I felt concerned only one part of the thesis – "memory" – exactly the part that had been supposed to come out of the research transformed. There was more to this project, more I could bring to it (apart) from the feeling of boredom.

I decided to come back to the beginning and outline everything I thought this thesis was doing. I remembered not "memory" but my attempts to talk about it. For a few months, I tried to rejuvenate the excitement about the future of the dissertation by explaining to myself, my imaginary readers, and the audience what my dissertation was about. I wanted to accommodate the variety of everyday languages these semi-fictional characters speak and to stay true to the original and present-day intention behind the thesis. What started as a seemingly fruitful attempt to respond to a provocation – my parents' question that would serve as the refrain of Chapter 1, "And how do you think we are supposed to explain that to our friends?" – ended up being an endless arrival back to the same question as soon as I let myself stray too much from "memory." I thought it was a problem. Then, I realised it was the solution. Starting with "memory" only to inevitably end up walking away from it, succumbing to the interpellative call only to keep telling what it cannot recognise, to interpolate it, running kilometres away with a toe still at the start, was the state I needed to achieve. I realised that "memory" of the GPW may have been the object of my critique and creative de-, trans-formation – yet, it has never been the true object of this thesis. Creative de-, trans-formation has been.

This realisation allowed me to look at what my thesis was becoming anew. No longer considering "memory" the primary point of reference yet willing to show the escape from it, I turned my attention to *writing*. As I was working on Chapters 2 and 3 (initially conceived as more critically academic than artful), I no longer felt the need to simply narrate and explain the

instances and mechanisms of subjection, to *force* either detached or deeply invested tone. Instead, I found it possible – and necessary – to look at how the writing of even the most boring – and painful! – themes could be a meaningful, insightful, and joyful experience for me, and how the broken dialectics between normativity of "memory" and creativity of disidentifying from it could be performatively conveyed on a more profound, affective register across each chapter. Such an attitude further led me to discover new themes and objects of analysis (such as sampling in music) that are equally meaningful, even if connected to "memory" very loosely. In short, boredom with "memory" became a resource for and an aesthetic object of the writing process that would overcome the numbness and powerlessness that boredom tends to translate into.

In the end, if boredom with "memory politics" and "memory of the Great Patriotic War" is the impact this thesis has exerted upon me, I am happy with it. I am happy that in place of the Immortal Regiment, I have found "the party of the dead," in place of Soviet memorial songs, I have discovered many contemporary songs respectfully tearing them apart, that I have come to love the colours of the inscription on Nevsky and background the bland memorial tablet interpreting it for me. I am happy I rewatched *Petrov's Flu* three times while writing this conclusion and never bothered to watch contemporary state-sponsored films about the GPW used to legitimise the war against Ukraine. I am happy that in place of critique or restitution of "memory" I have found affirmation of experimentation with frames of perception. Even if this thesis is still full of pain (less of "memory of the war" and more of the war it enabled), it carries enthusiasm about discovering and occupying the pathways towards mysterious, vague yet real otherwise – in academic practice and beyond. This enthusiasm has to be fueled. My hope is that the few hundred pages before this sentence could be such fuel for you.

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