Johanna Lindbladh (ed)

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CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES

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The Poetics of Memory in Post-Totalitarian Narration: Introduction

Johanna Lindbladh

Why use the concept the poetics of memory? Are we using it in order to underline our tendency to exaggerate the bright and happy memories of the past, while the grey, everyday moments in our lives tend to sink into oblivion, and traumatic events are repressed in our subconscious? Rather than referring to our nostalgic wish to poetisize the past, the use of poetics in relation to memory in this volume will be connected to the fact that individual and collective memory is enigmatic, fragmentated, intimately connected to our senses and feelings, and thereby in need of an alternative epistemology, challenging traditional definitions of knowledge and truth.[1] The philosopher Mary Warnock claims that memory is 'essentially emotional in character': 'Since it can be called knowledge, its object is what is true. But the truths are of the heart not of the head' (Warnock 1987, 90). Maria Holmgren Troy also refers to the emotional character of memory, referring to a specific 'mode of knowledge' that is 'non-cognitive, non-linear, and affective' (Holmgren Troy 2007, 50). One important aspect of this non-cognitive and affective character of memory is that it cannot be mediated objectively, like the mathematical truth 2+2=4, but has to be a part of the current context of remembering, the choice of words, metaphors, mode of narration and so on. In his last substantial work *Memory, History, Forgetting,* Paul Ricoeur describes memory in terms of a mental trip and claims, referring to Husserl, that memory cannot be represented directly, in a pure, unmediated way, but always has to be the result of a process of remembering, in which distraction, associative and wishful thinking, cannot be separated from the actual memory of the past. P. J. Eakin, a prominent researcher within the field of narrative identity, takes a similar standpoint, claiming that the truth represented by memory and autobiographical texts is the result of an intimate combination of fiction and fact. However, it is important to underline that Eakin does not wish to dismiss the claim of truth in an autobiographical text, but asserts the need to identify an alternative truth, a truth that he defines in terms of an 'autobiographical truth' (*Fictions in Autobiography* 1985).

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1. Having dismissed methods of psychology concerned with the ability to describe personal memory, the psychologist Martin Billing refers to Bergson, who considered authors and poets better suited to the task: 'As Henri Bergson argued, the conventional categories of psychologists are unsuitable vehicles for describing the fleeting, fragmentary and deeply personal qualities of inner experience: the skills of novelists or poets are better equipped for such a task' (Billing 2006, 18).

Like Ricoeur, Eakin claims that the intimate relation between fiction and memory could be explained by the fact that memory cannot be isolated to a fixed point in the past, but has to be considered both as a fragment of an actual perception in the past, and as the result of a narrative process, evolving in present time, a process which is intimately connected with the individual's attempt to create meaning in his or her life. Eakin writes: 'I shall argue that autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation [...]' (Eakin 1985, 3).

Hence the study of memory texts such as autobiographies, testimonies and diaries, has to be related to both the documentary and poetic genres. This double extraction of memory has resulted in a consensus within memory research, defining two main functions of memory. In his introduction to the anthology *The Poetics of Memory*, Thomas Wägenbaur defines memory on the one hand as a *storage* and on the other hand as a *story*. In agreement with current trends in memory research, he underlines the importance of the narrative and poetic dimensions of memory, in contrast to the memory's function as a storage of information from the past:

> The major achievement of memory is not to remember what has actually happened, but a constant distinction between recollection and forgetting. In some sort of internal monologue the brain constantly tests viable network patterns, it tests the functionality of its versions of reality constructions, i. e. its narratives (Wägenbaur 1998, 9).

This anthology is comprised of articles on memory with an anthropological, sociological, philosophical, psychological as well as literary theoretical standpoint. The poetics of memory is considered, on the one hand, in terms of art's specific ability to construct *true* images of the past ('autobiographical truth', 'non-cognitive', 'affective knowledge'), and, on the other hand, of the cultural and political process of selection, in which structures of power and political interests contribute to creating grand narratives and myths, i. e. 'poetical' patterns, inclined to affect both the collective writing of history and individual remembering. The anthology is divided into four parts, depicting four different theoretical and methodological perspectives within this field of research. The first part, 'Memory, narration and identity', consists of articles that examine the relationship between memory and identity, and to what extent memory is a narrative construction with its origins in the individual's wish to define a coherent identity. In the second part, 'Individual memory in relation to economic and political interests', individual memory is analysed in relation to cultural and political structures of power. The articles analyse various examples of the strong impact of the social environment on the activity of individual remembrance. In the third part, 'Memory and myth in the arts', the relationship between memory and art, the documentary and artistic genres is examined, raising such questions as: To what extent are memory and historical writing dependent on the artistic

depiction of the past? How does art affect our perception of reality? In the forth and final part, 'Memory and representation from modernity to post-modernity, from totalitarianism to post-totalitarianism', the epistemological development of representation is considered in relation to the definition of memory, individual as well as collective. The crisis of representation in the post-modern context is related to the political and social transformation within totalitarian and post-totalitarian countries such as China, South Africa and Russia. Questions are raised concerning the difference/similarity between modernity and totalitarianism, post-modernity and post-totalitarianism, focusing on the crisis of representation, on the one hand, and the increasing fascination with individual memory and historical documents on the other.

Memory, narration and identity

Questions frequently asked by Slavists interested in modern culture and literature in Eastern and Central Europe, revolve around the issue of identity in the post-Soviet era. The introductory article is devoted to this quest for a new identity in post-Soviet literature. **Marina Balina** analyses two Russian-Jewish childhood recollections published after the fall of the Soviet Union, namely Yuri Karabchievsky's *The Life of Alexander Silber* (1991) and Dina Rubina's *Apples from Shlitzbutter's Garden* (1992). In her article, Balina shows that both narratives are structured according to an antinomymic relation between a happy and unhappy childhood respectively, an antinomy that she traces back to childhood recollections from pre-revolutionary times, via Soviet time, and up to post-Soviet time. While pre-revolutionary childhood recollections in Tolstoy's spirit are depicted as paradisical, it became impossible in the Soviet era to relate a privileged childhood that referred back to pre-revolutionary times. Instead, unhappy childhood dominated Soviet autobiography and referred to Gorky's childhood recollections as a normative example. In her analysis, Balina claims that the frequently recurring silences and gaps, characteristic of Soviet autobiography, including Samuil Marshak's childhood recollections, illustrate the fact that authors were not allowed to recount a happy childhood from pre-revolutionary times. She describes this method of silence and incompleteness as a discourse that makes possible an alternative reading, namely a discourse that encourages the reader to read between the lines. The post-Soviet childhood recollection, in its turn, is described by Balina as an inversion of the Soviet autobiography. According to Balina, it is in the analysis of the collaboration and opposition between these various styles in Soviet and post-Soviet childhood recollections, that the painful quest for identity in post-Soviet literature needs to be examined.

The relationship between the narrative aspects of memory and the individual's quest for identity is also addressed in **Nicola King's** article, in which she analyses several childhood recollections, among them those of Richard Wollheim, Andrew Motion and Hugo Hamilton. In her analysis, King describes the problems of

representation, showing how the authors illustrate in different ways 'the (im) possibility of reconstructing the memory of childhood "as it really was"'. King points out the various literary strategies used by the authors in order to establish direct contact with the past. Their goal, according to King, is to overcome the time that has past, and to recall the original experiences from the past to the present, by creating a memory-text that is as pure and exact as possible. However, the authors do not succeed in their attempts, and the Proustian 'clean' and 'untouched' experience from the past remains inaccessible to them. Instead, the authors have to become reconciled with the fact that the 'original experience' no longer exists, and has become a part of the constantly ongoing narration that constitutes their lives and identity. From the standpoint represented by King's article, the question as to whether it is possible to recall one's childhood without the hindsight of a grown-up has to be answered negatively. However, the question as to *why* these authors try so eagerly to regain a pure memory of their childhood remains unanswered: What is the underlying reason for this eager wish to depict an image of the past 'as it really was'? Is it an expression of some kind of aversion towards the ever changing qualities of life? Could it be seen as a kind of protest against the irrevocable aspects of life? A chronophobic wish to stop time and actually recall the past into the present, not only as words and images, but as a reality?

These questions are also relevant in relation to **Johanna Lindbladh's** article, where she explores the representation of traumatic memories and the witness's ambivalent attitude towards the act of representation. In her analysis of Svetlana Aleksievich's testimony *Voices from Chernobyl'*, based on more than 500 interviews with victims of the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl', Lindbladh shows that the ambivalence towards telling can be traced both to Aleksievich's portrayal of the interviews, and to the aesthetic composition of the book as a whole. Lindbladh analyses this ambivalence of telling by referring to Dori Laub's theory of two opposite imperatives that tend to affect a traumatized witness: 'The Imperative to Tell' and 'The Impossibility of Telling'. While the first imperative indicates that the witness has to narrate the traumatic past in order to survive, the second imperative conveys the fact that the act of representation cannot 'bring back the dead'. In other words, it is the limits of representation that cause much of the witness's reluctance to tell, as does the fact that words cannot bring back an irrevocable past.

Individual and cultural memory in relation to economic and political interests

While Lindbladh examines the representation of suffering by taking her standpoint in the individual's perception of time and memory, **Vieda Skultans** deplores the representation of suffering in relation to the economic and political changes that followed the decline of the Soviet Union. Interestingly, Lindbladh and Skultans come to different conclusions. While Lindbladh suggests that the possibility

of representing suffering increases in relation to the decline of the Soviet Union, Skultans claims that more than fifteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the possibility of individuals to express grief has been reduced, compared to the period immediately following the social changes of 1991 and 1992. In a comparative study of interview material from two perioids of recent Latvian history – the decline of the Soviet Union 1991–1992 and more than fifteen years after the introduction of democracy and economic change 2006–2007 – Skultans explores how the political context has affected both individuals' depiction of their suffering and the perception of psychological illness within the medical profession. Skultans claims that during the first phase of independence (1991–92) individuals' grief was seen as a manifestation of national and collective identity, something that is expressed in the interviews by frequent references to other groups' suffering, such as biblical and literary references. This cultural memory functioned, according to Skultans, as a kind of comfort to the individuals who were suffering, and showed that they felt they were not alone in their grief ('ideas of shared destiny'). Sixteen years later, however, Skultans perceives a completely different pattern in her interview material, claiming that the former possibility of finding comfort in cultural memory had disappeared. Instead, the liberal market economy had developed a new interpretation of grief and psychic illness, namely not as an expression of social and economic circumstances, but exclusively as the result of the suffering individual's insufficiency and lack of willpower.

In another sociological study, based on interviews with people during the post-Soviet era, **Yulia Gradskova** examines the concept of femininity, taking her perspective from a study of motherhood, its conditions and shaping during the 1940s–1960s in the Soviet Union. In her article, Gradskova analyses interview material that she collected during the 1990s with a number of women who had been young mothers during the period 1940–1960. Gradskova organizes her material according to discourses on femininity and motherhood and her conclusion is that femininities were enacted through the intersections between social status, the economic situation, and the traditions or culture of the social environment. However, Gradskova draws attention to another aspect that partly challenges traditional discourses of motherhood, namely the fact that these women often had to guarantee the survival of their families, which resulted in a kind of entrepreneurship not always compatible with discourses of motherhood.

Like Skultans, **Irina Sandomirskaia** illustrates the impact of political and cultural power structures on the representation of individual memory. In her description of the intelligentsia's reception (and distortion) of the simple countrywoman Kiseleva's autobiographical notes from the period of glasnost' until the decline of the Soviet Union, Sandomirskaia shows how one individual's destiny becomes the scene of the intelligentsia's search for a new identity in post-Soviet Russia, and an alibi for its former life in the Soviet Union. Sandomirskaia interprets *Novyi Mir's* editing of Kiseleva's autobiography as the result of the liberal intelligentsia's ambition to swear

itself free from the crime of having accepted and adapted its life according to the Soviet myth. In Kiseleva's narration they chose to identify the life of a simple woman, whose naivity could testify to the possibility that an alternative value-ground could be preserved despite the ruling, Soviet myth. In their introduction to Kiseleva's writing, the editors of *Novyi Mir* appealed to the genuineness of Kiseleva's writing and emphasized qualities such as, 'authenticity', 'simplicity', and 'artlessness'.

Another example of how the memory of one individual has been distorted by the political interests of powerful groups in post-Soviet society, is presented in **Per-Arne Bodin's** article about the Russian soldier Rodionov, who was killed in Chechnya during the first of the wars, in 1996. In his analysis of material published on the web, Bodin illustrates how the memory of Rodionov has been distorted by no less than three dominant attitudes assumed by the Russian media which Bodin describes a war-hero discourse, the discourse of a soldier's mother, and a hagiographic discourse, whereby Rodionov was eventually declared a saint. Bodin demonstrates that in all three discourses the depiction of Rodionov's life and death is the result of powerful interests, manipulation, construction and make-believe, and he claims that none of these memory-genres could ever come close to the real person Rodionov and the life he actually lived. Thus, by taking his standpoint in the Russian media's narration of Rodionov, Bodin gives one example of how collective memories and speech genres generally function in post-Soviet Russia.

Memory and myth in the arts

The Russian state's pronounced interest in the conflict with Chechnya also constitutes the theme of **Fiona Björling's** article, which presents an analysis of Andrei Nekrasov's documentary feature film *Nedoverie*. *Nedoverie* is a political, documentary film that depicts the blowing-up of a nine-storey block of flats in Moscow as one of Putin's attempts to simulate an act of terrorism, in order to influence public opinion in favour of Russia's right to attack Chechnya. However, in her analysis Björling shows that *Nedoverie* has much in common with a feature film: 'it manifests expressive devices and a level of artistry in many ways typical of feature films, and thus it creates the tension, suspense and the emotional effect of a dramatic narrative'. One effect of the film's dramatic composition is, according to Björling, the fact that Nekrasov is able to examine new dimensions of the close connection between the political sphere and the personal sphere, an aspect that also constitutes an important theme in the film.

Natalia Bratova's article also concerns the relationship between film and reality in post-Soviet Russia, but with a focus on the 'Myth of St Petersburg'. Bratova claims that this myth constitutes a prominent part of Russian film in the 1990s. Focusing on Aleksei Balabanov's films, especially *The Brother*, Bratova shows that Balabanov has been influenced by this myth in his profession, but also that his films, in their turn, have contributed to a reshaping of the existing myth. Bratova shows that chaos, i.e. the negative aspects of the myth, starts to prevail over the idea of order in his

films of the 1990s. This is demonstrated by the fact that touristy gala images of the city are rarely shown. Instead, we find a Dostoevsky-inspired milieu and plot that takes place almost exclusively in the backyards of St Petersburg. Bratova also underlines the symbolic value of the fact that the main character in *The Brother*, Danila Bagrov, is himself strongly associated with St Petersburg in the film, and that he was proclaimed a new Russian hero both by the public and by the critics.

Audun J. Mørch's article depicts another myth of Russian history, namely the myth of the Russian Empire. Mørch examines this myth by taking his standpoint from the modern author Pavel Krusanov's novelistic trilogy *The Bite of an Angel* (1999), *Bom-Bom* (2002), and *The American Hole* (2005). According to Mörch, Krusanov is a conscious mythmaker with the declared aim of invigorating Russian imperial myth. In his so-called 'literary programme', Krusanov identifies two main objects of his prose: 1) to help create a 'new grand style' in Russian prose and 2) to explore the 'great man' (rather than the 'little men' of Gogol' and Dostoevsky). In his analysis of the two first novels in the trilogy, Mörch claims that Krusanov is serious in his messianistic task, while the final novel, with its grotesque depiction of the United States as an evil empire, as a monster which has to be defeated by Russia, should be read in the light of the carnival grotesque and the ambivalent laughter evoked in the reader by this bombastic text.

Memory and representation from modernity to post-modernity, from totalitarianism to post-totalitarianism

Anamaria Dutceac Segesten examines the political use of history in the history textbooks of two post-communist, Balkan countries, Romania and Serbia. Dutceac Segesten considers the history textbook as an instrument in the controlling of remembering and forgetting. She states in her analysis that only in recent years, after 1999 in Romania and 2000 in Serbia, did a true liberalization of the textbook market occur, with a relatively free and open competition among textbook authors and publishers. Nevertheless Dutceac Segesten confirms that the myth of national unity is similar in the post-communist period as it was during the communist-period in both Romania and Serbia, and when they speak of the representation of the self in history textbooks, both states provide school children with an unequivocal definition of the national character, always positively portrayed, with Serbia being more radical and aggressive in its language. As for the representation of the other, Dutceac Segesten claims that both historical traditions have some way to go before they will be in a position to write an inclusive and nuanced history of the multicultural societies they have inevitably inherited, a fact that leaves the general impression that the textbook authors are torn between two goals: to promote on the one hand the Romanian and Serbian national idea respectively, even at the expense of historical accuracy, and, on the other, to conform to international requirements and standards by including relevant information about other cultures.

Not only history textbooks, but also the individual testimony have gained an influential position in the post-totalitarian community. When the voices of separate individuals could finally be heard in the public room, this alternative kind of history writing was perceived as a hope that a true history writing might one day be achieved, free of official lies and myths. China is one example of a modernity, although still totalitarian, that is developing very fast; and parallel to this economic and technological development, there may be traced an increasing interest in history. **Michael Schoenhals** claims, unlike his more pessimistic colleagues on this issue, that the interest in history has not declined during the past few years in China, but that, on the contrary, it has increased. Taking as his point of departure a descriptive analysis of the documents found on the website *Oldbeijing.net*, Schoenhals gives various examples of the Chinese population's growing interest in history. Meanwhile, he also claims that medium of the internet has made it is possible to circumvent the censorship and publish archive material that testifies to assaults on the Chinese people in the past.

Like Schoenhals, **Oscar Hemer** also explores a country of modernity outside the European area, namely South Africa. Starting with an analysis of South African literature and its relation to the country's overwhelming social changes during recent decades, Hemer criticizes the commonly held idea that the postmodern condition is a global phenomenon. Instead, Hemer confines postmodernism to the time in history when Western European culture was forced to admit that the concept of modernity was too narrow and exclusive in relation to other cultures beyond the Western European understanding. Accordding to Hemer, postmodernism should be described in terms of a *pluralization* and *de-westernization* of modernity. A conclusion that follows from Hemer's argumentation is that there is no clear opposition between modernity and totalitarity, but that the concepts, on the contrary, are connected. The fundamental ambivalence in South Africa's modernity to which Hemer draws attention in his article is one example of this coexistence, a modernity in which the Apartheid system was an outspoken part of the modernist project. In his analysis of modern, South African literature, Hemer finds at least two main traits: The blurring of borders between fact and fiction, plus the recurrent theme of redemption and reconciliation.

The question of how the two concepts postmodernism and post-totalitarianism may be related is also discussed by **Charlotte Greve** in her analysis of the Russian avant-garde and its relation to the problem of representation. In her analysis, Greve examines the relation between art performance (event) and the photographic reproduction of this event (image), and then applies this analysis to the relation between reality and memory. While Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida* advocates the Platonian idea of the memory as an immediate representation of reality ('an imprint on a light sensitive surface'), Jacques Rancière claims that an experience is always political, since it must be distributed via a cultural and political framework. Greve claims that the representation within the post-Soviet avant-garde, more

specifically the documentary photography of the Collective Actions and the video-installations of the Escape-program, is politically loaded, and she asks whether this critical approach towards the problem of referentiality is more pronounced in a post-totalitarian context, compared to a postmodern and non-totalitarian one. With reference to Boris Groys and his statement that the Soviet language is more like fiction than based on reality, Greve asks whether this totalitarian experience has contributed to increasing the doubts surrounding true representation. On the one hand, Greve claims, false writing of history must have contributed to doubts concerning the act of representation; on the other, Greve states that it cannot be a coincidence that Groys mentions thinkers from Western Europe in his list of authors, poets and philosophers who have expressed doubts concerning the nature of representation.

The articles in this book consist of reworked papers from the conference *The Poetics of Memory in Post-Totalitarian Narration*, held at Lund University on 25–26 May 2007.[2] The editor wishes to thank The Centre for European Studies (CFE) for its generous financial support regarding the publication. Many thanks also to all the contributors for an inspiring collaboration.

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PART I: Memory, Narration and Identity

'Wounded Narratives': Jewish Childhood Recollections in Post-Soviet Autobiographical Discourse

Marina Balina

Referring to memoirs of childhood as a particular mode of life-writing that, according to Richard N. Coe (1984, 5), first began to crystallize as a distinctive literary form in the nineteenth century, many scholars of autobiography such as Valerie Sanders (2001, 204) agree that childhood experiences tend to be recalled either as paradisiacal or profoundly unhappy. This observation is accurate and true for the model of childhood autobiography accepted in Russian literature. Among the canonical works known to Russian readers from their earliest years are Lev Tolstoy's trilogy consisting of *Childhood* (*Detstvo*, 1852), *Boyhood* (*Otrochestvo*, 1854), and *Youth* (*Iunost'*, 1857); Sergei Aksakov's *Childhood Years of Bagrov the Grandson* (*Detskie gody Bagrova–vnuka*, 1856); and Nikolai Garin-Mikhailovksy's *Tema's Childhood* (*Detstvo Temy*, 1892) (Rudnev 2004, 14). These three works greatly contributed to increasing public interest in this form of reminiscence, by presenting the early years of the individual's life as the most important and decisive period. Exemplary of the genre, these recollections focus on the moral and spiritual development of a child who, with constant help and support from adults, is trying to find his way from the protective environment of the nursery into the turbulent world of real life.

In the new proletarian culture of the post-revolutionary years, with its demand for egalitarian treatment for all, the theme of growing up in the privileged surroundings of a noble family was unacceptable.[1] Accordingly, the whole body of works that treated pre-revolutionary childhood in positive terms was eliminated from the Soviet literature of the 1920s as being ideologically corrupt (Arzamastseva 2005, 272). Marietta Chudakova states: 'In order to replace "old" Russia with the "new", one had to cross out one's personal biographical past; thus, for many writers, a ban was placed on the theme of childhood' (Chudakova 2001, 327). I would like to

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1   For more details see Balina 2007.

argue that the pre-revolutionary childhood was not in fact rejected outright, but rather a new blueprint for this type of recollection was developed, requiring writers to present their childhood in accordance with an anti-childhood narrative, the standard of which was shaped by Maxim Gorky's *Childhood*, the first part of his autobiographical trilogy, published in 1913. Andrew Wachtel (1990, 131) describes Gorky's *Childhood* as 'the first Russian literary work to attempt to overthrow the gentry conception of childhood'. The 'happy, happy time' of a Russian gentry boy in Tolstoy's *Childhood* was replaced in Gorky's text with recollections of pain, losses, and, most of all, the social injustice that dominated the author's world, deprived as he was of the privileges of an upper-class child's existence. The childhood experiences of Alesha Peshkov, Gorky's autobiographical self, lacked every type of support, both within the family and outside it. In creating his anti-gentry model of childhood, Gorky set about composing his own myth of poverty, neglect, and abuse. This being accomplished, he established the new Soviet canon for depiction of childhood that became highly influential in Soviet Russian literature.[2] In his investigation of Gorky's anti-childhood, Wachtel (1990, 149) suggests that 'to some extent Gorky's model of childhood did attain mythical status, influencing the childhood memories of many Soviet literary figures and autobiographers'. Gorky's anti-childhood model served best to further Soviet ideology, and introduced a sharply defined political 'divider' into the arena of writing personal recollections. It marked prerevolutionary life as bad, abusive, and depraved in its treatment of underprivileged children, who from their earliest days inhabited a world of social inequality.

Thus, childhood as a subject of personal reminiscences did not escape the pressures of official history, which in general subordinated and controlled life-writing during the Soviet period. In her study of revolutionary childhood, Lisa Kirschenbaum (2000, 116) states, 'In the Soviet case, the Revolution and the revolutionary script with its vision of happy socialist children permeate accounts of childhood'. Thus, the model of the 'happy, happy childhood' had moved directly from the gentry's world into the world of Soviet Russia where children were given, as a popular slogan stated, 'all the best'. While the paradisiacal childhood became predominantly Soviet, depicted both in fiction (in the 'school novellas' of Alexei Musatov, Mariia Prilezhaeva, and Nikolai Nosov) and in autobiographical/biographical texts (Nikolai Kononov), the narratives of unhappy childhoods came to focus on the prerevolutionary experience (in the books of Al. Altaev [pseud. of Margarita Yamshchikova] and Sergei Grigor'ev, for example) or else shifted toward accounts of foreign, 'capitalist' childhoods, as in the works of Nikolai Tikhonov, Agniia Barto, Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky, Alexei Vershinin, and N. Kalma (pseud. of Anna Kalmanok), among others. It is important to note that this straightforward categorization of 'acceptable' treatments of childhood in narrative was frequently violated by authors. We find 'deviations' from the newly formed canon in, for instance, Alexei Tolstoy's *Nikita's Childhood* (1922), with its description of the happy experiences in a boy's life on a prerevolutionary estate,

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2   On Gorky and his autobiographical trilogy see Dobrenko 1992.

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and Leonid Panteleev and Grigory Belykh's *SHKID Republik* (1927), which tells the 'politically incorrect' story of the lives of two young 'delinquents' and of their struggle against Soviet bureaucracy.

Equally defiant against 'the rules' is Lev Kassil's *Konduit and Shvambraniia* (1930-1933), which brings its readers into the world of a child's imagination that quite often replaces a troubled reality, or Ivan Sokolov-Mikitov's 'Childhood' (1953), with its profound connection between a child's emotions and nature. Chudakova explains this disregard for the conventions by asserting that children's literature, although definitely a part of the Soviet propaganda system, was nonetheless one of the most liberal domains of literary creative expression (2001, 214). The critic insists that this special status of children's literature was a direct result of limitations of the Socialist Realist method. Since the themes and characters of Socialist Realism suffered from both ideological and stylistic 'infantilism', writers viewed children's literature as a more natural sphere for dealing with the requirements of the State-sanctioned method. According to Chudakova (1990, 242), children's literature was able to offer Soviet writers an alternative means of creative expression that literature for adult readers denied them. Autobiographical writings in the form of childhood recollections quite often represented a fragile balance between these two established narrative styles: the ugliness of pre-Soviet life and the happiness of the new Soviet childhood. Elsewhere, I have discussed the distinct conflict that arose in Soviet life-writing, especially in the 1960s and the 1970s, between the depictions of official history versus the presentation of a personal story. I believe that the same conflict was transferred into the narratives of childhood, where the required condemnation of the past damaged the very essence of individual recollections.[3]

Such is the case, for example, with two very popular 'childhoods' of the 'Thaw' period: Samuil Marshak's *At Life's Beginning* (1960) and Kornei Chukovsky's *The Silver Crest* (1961). In Marshak's case, the writer chose to maintain silence about certain important incidents in his life, which created obvious gaps in his reminiscences. These gaps form a peculiar dynamic within the linear narrative mode that Marshak chose for re-creating his childhood experience, and the narrative leaves the reader with a strange feeling of its incompleteness. If Marshak's primary anti-childhood device is omission, Chukovsky's is the reduction of events of his early life to one particular episode, his expulsion from the gymnasium in Odessa in 1893, on which he bases his 'unhappy' childhood. The first edition of Chukovsky's recollections appeared in 1938 under the title *Gymnasium*, and was later reworked into the larger text of personal accounts titled *The Silver Crest: My Russian Boyhood*, published in 1961. The 1938 edition of this autobiographical narrative starts with a direct quote from Article 121 of Stalin's Constitution of the Union of Soviet Republics (1936), which states that citizens of the USSR have the right to be educated: such an opening creates the necessary framework for the anti-childhood temporal model

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3   On the discussion of the relationship between personal story and official history in Soviet life-writing see Balina 2000.

by juxtaposing 'then' and 'now'. Both the gaps and omissions in the structure of Marshak's *At Life's Beginning* and the compression of life experiences in Chukovsky's *The Silver Crest* hint at the multilayered nature of these works, in which personal recollections are overlaid with anti-childhood attributes, leading to the creation of a palimpsest modality. The two narratives exist concurrently: much like medieval manuscripts, from which the original text was incompletely erased and upon which new text was subsequently written, the anti-childhood elements are superimposed upon the personal recollection layer. The act of reading texts created in this modality enatails excavating the underlying text of experiences and emotions and comparing them to the visible narrative.

I would like to suggest that in the post-Soviet childhood narrative, which reflects on the Soviet experience of its author, the process of layering is quite the opposite: in this case, it is the personal recollection that is overlaid on top of the elements of the 'happy' Soviet childhood model. Although this creates the same multilayered effect, the authors of these narratives have a different goal in mind: this superimposition helps them to camouflage their painful searches for self-identity. I believe that this 'flip-flop' structure of the post-Soviet personal narrative can be best demonstrated in childhood recollections by Jewish authors, since the subject of these stories, Jewish life during the Soviet area, continues to hold its novelty and to intrigue both readers and writers, especially in light of such fairly recent publications as Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Two Hundred Years Together* (2001).

I am in agreement with the notion expressed by the American Jewish historian Michael Stanislawski (2004, 176), who in his study of 'self-fashioning' in Jewish autobiography insists that 'whether written in Greek, Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, German, or French, or any other language, the dynamics of writing about one's self are … essentially the same'.[4] However, my primary interest is in the structural elements that composed the type of Jewish childhood story that long ago disappeared from the Soviet literary landscape, only to begin making its slow return in the last decade. My focus is on two autobiographical texts published in the early 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a period marked by high interest in the issues of self-identity and self-identification: Yuri Karabchievsky's *The Life of Alexander Silber* (1991) and Dina Rubina's 'Apples from Shlitzbutter's Garden' (1992). Both works represent, in my opinion, *periautography*[5] – writing about or around the self – in which, using Elizabeth Bruss's (1976, 10f) definitions, *the author **in** the text* is pushed to the periphery in the densely populated narrative, while *the author **of** the text* retains the central position from which he/she comments on the actions that *the author **in** the text* undertakes as the main protagonist of the story.

In his analysis of Jewish identity issues in contemporary Russian fiction, Mikhail Krutikov (2003, 253) stated: 'In the Russian parlance of the 1960s through the

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4   The most comprehensive study of Jewish autobiography can be found in Moseley 2006. Issues of Russian-Jewish memory, history, and identity are discussed in Zippenstein 1999.

5   This definition is coined in James Olney's study of autobiographical writings in Olney 1998.

1980s, Evrei – Jew – had a peculiar status, somewhere between a dirty word and a state secret'. He insists that literary works depicting Jewish characters or focusing on events of Jewish life, such as the novels *Babi Yar* by Anatolii Kuznetsov (1966) and *Heavy Sand* by Anatolii Rybakov (1979), were regarded not simply as literary events – they were political events, as well. For the Russian/Soviet reader searching for Jewish childhood stories, there were very few sources available. Just as the vivacious pre-World War II Jewish life had been destroyed, along with its multitude of Yiddish texts and the readers of this language, so too were the leading Yiddish-speaking literati eliminated in 1952. The newly-revived Yiddish magazine *Sovetish heymland* (*Soviet homeland*) in 1961 had a very limited readership due to the lack of knowledge of the language, and the translations from Yiddish into Russian in its annual literary almanac *God za godom* (*Year after Year*, first issued in 1985) were not very widely publicized.[6] The recollections of such Yiddish writers as Khaim Beider, Isaac Borisov, and Samuil Galkin were known to few, thus limiting the experience of the broader audience to three of the most influential life-writing texts existing in Russian: Alexei Svirsky's *Ruzhik* (*Redhead*, 1904, republished in 1957), Alexandra Brushtein's *Doroga ukhodit v dal'* (*The Road Moves Far Away*, 1956), and Samuil Marshak's *At Life's Beginning*, 1961. Although the Jewish undertones of the narratives by Brushtein and Marshak were obvious, probably a very limited readership knew that Svirsky's real name was Shimon-Dovid Vigdoros and that his adventurous character was a Jewish boy.[7] In the director Ilya Friz's 1961 film version of this novel, no reference was made to the origins of the main character. Although written before Gorky's Childhood, the novel fits into the anti-childhood model, given its obligatory description of life's hardships and the presence of an adult rescuer who helps the little 'tramp and thief' become a decent human being.

Brushtein's story about Sasha Yanovskaya, the daughter of a successful medical doctor who is loved and cared for by her big and loving family, also follows the anti-childhood structure: the focus of the narrative moves steadily away from Sasha's 'happy, happy childhood' to depict the misfortunes of her less privileged friends and to highlight turn-of-the-century political, social, and religious conflicts. While both Svirsky and Brushtein employ fictional *alter egos* to tell the story of their lives, the roles of these characters are rather different: Svirsky-Redhead is the primary character who advances the narrative, but Brushtein-Sasha is pushed to the side by the constantly growing number of participants in her story, thereby creating the effect of *periautography* discussed above. Though she is frequently an observer rather than an active participant, this position gives Sasha time to think and evaluate the world around her.

Marshak achieves this same effect – observation rather than participation – in his narrative, but he does this for a quite different purpose than Brushtein does. He

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6   On the complicated relationship between Soviet Jews and the state see chapter I, 'Jews and the Soviet Regime' in Zvi Gitelman, Musya Glants, & Marshal I. Goldman 2003

7   On Svirsky and his autobiographical fiction see Balina 2007.

is so completely preoccupied with careful filtering of his personal information that he intentionally creates a text replete with lacunae. He is therefore pressed to fill these inexplicable emptinesses, which he does with a multitude of voices: sculptor Mark Antakol'sky, composers Alexander Glazunov and Anatolii Liadov, literary critic Vladimir Stasov, Maxim Gorky, singer Fedor Shaliapin, and others. Although space here does not permit me to adduce other examples, these few should sufficiently demonstrate the repeating patterns in the development of Jewish childhood narrative that would become formative elements in other post-Soviet texts.

This type of 'peripheral vision' is widely employed in the recollections of Yuri Karabchievsky. In *The Life of Alexander Silber*, the author of the text, although very clearly identified in the narrative as 'I', observes this 'I' from a distance, and the author within the text is pushed to the very margins of the story: first entering 'childhood' as a seven-year-old, he steps aside to create space for another character, his stepfather, who becomes the focus of the story as well as the trigger of the boy's incredible hatred. The disgusting depictions of the old man in his worn and dirty underwear, methodically pulling off his socks and cleaning between his toes, occupy all the space that might otherwise remain for the recollections of a happy Soviet childhood. In fact, everything that is related to the Soviet collective experience – the school or the Young Pioneers camp, or indeed any type of activity traditionally celebrated in the Soviet model – turns out to be abusive and destructive. Little Silber is constantly beaten up and called a 'kike', and even his most cherished memory – of his father, killed in World War II – is taken away from him by the collective anti-Semitism of his fellow Pioneers. One of them, Samoilov, is especially 'instrumental' in torturing him. Confronting Silber's assertion that his father, like the fathers of many of the other boys, was killed in the war, he counters: 'Lost in the war, was he? Come on! Yeah, he was "lost", but he probably croaked from diarrhea. ... But if you really want to know, there were no Jews at the front. They sat at home, by the warm stoves' (Karabchievsky 1991, 11).[8]

The story of Silber's childhood is constructed in full accordance with the anti-childhood mode, full of deprivations and losses: the happy Soviet childhood is completely absorbed by personal pain, leaving little space for anything but private experiences. But these private experiences are equally painful for the growing child, since he feels just as unprotected at home. It is interesting to note that both of those spheres in the narrative, the public (the school) and the private (the family), equally betray the boy: teachers at school who permit the abuse, the stepfather with his constant insulting remarks in Yiddish that the narrator can hardly endure, and the boy's mother, afraid to disagree with her new husband and protect her son. The compounded negativity from both the public and private spheres threatens to totally destroy the boy. Nevertheless, Silber finds the way out of his anti-childhood within his Jewish world: his grandfather, 'the only wise man I knew' (103), shows him an

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8 «Поги-и-иб? И-иди болтать, тоже погиб – помер, небось от поноса. ... Да евреи, если хочешь знать, и на фронте не были, по домам на печках сидели».

alternative reality of his family's past in which there was no abuse or humiliation. The old grandfather does not own a thing but is eager to collect money for the poor (a zadaka box is in his room); he celebrates the Sabbath and prays to God; and this old, bad-mannered man is an example of perseverance for his frequently abused grandson. Karabchievsky writes: 'And only here – in this shack of a house with its crumbling walls – did I feel completely at home!' (115). Krutikov suggests that the grandfather figure becomes 'Alexander's Jewish role model', leading him to his 'newly discovered internal freedom' (Krutikov 257). This, in my opinion, is also reflected in the structure of the narrative: Karabchievsky's memory is bound neither by time nor by any other limitations; past, present and future in his narrative meld together in an unrepeatable experience of life that is his and only his. Concrete episodes are presented as parts of a puzzle that the author tries to gather together in order to achieve wholeness as a person. Under these circumstances, life-writing as a mode of self-expression becomes a vehicle for self-invention – or rather self-fusion, whereby the pieces of the author's 'quilted' identity finally come together.

Dina Rubina's 1992 autobiographical story 'Apples from the Shlitzbutter's Garden' attempts a kind of fusion that is supposed to bring together the many different scattered 'selves' that had become buried under the weight of the extremely chaotic events in the author's real life.[9] Rubina organizes the structure of her story as a travelogue: she recollects one of her trips to Moscow, during which, in order to help out an Uzbek writer friend, she agrees to take his politically correct piece to a Jewish literary journal that publishes works in Yiddish. The story unfolds as a map of the author's spiritual metamorphosis, but contains a huge amount of supplementary information, the narrative being constantly interrupted by recollections of the past. It moves freely from the present into the depth of her childhood memories (her grandparents, her childhood in Tashkent, her grandparents' own story, and many other seemingly insignificant events in her life), transporting the narrative from the horizontal space of geography (Tashkent–Moscow) into the vertical space of a spiritual journey through time (from the present day into her past life and that of her family) and memory. The reconstruction of identity in Rubina's story occurs in this vertical plane, resulting in her persistent question, «Чья я? Чья я?» ('To whom do I belong?'). The geographical loci of the story – Tashkent, Moscow, Ukraine – are determined by the author's spiritual journey to find her family's roots. The densely populated recollections suggest the periautography mode, although Rubina simultaneously fields multiple narrative perspectives, concurrently inhabiting both the center and the periphery of the story.

This constant switch from past to present, although fully reflecting the notion of the irregularity of human memory, creates a state of mild confusion: it is not immediately clear why the text is filled with such an abundance of characters, events, and intersecting stories. The story is deprived of any time reference: Rubina starts her narrative with a reference to 'those years' without indicating exactly which years

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9   On Dina Rubina's work see Adamovich 2004; on her post-emigration writings see Krutikov 2003.

were meant. Complete accuracy about dates is not at all essential, however, since that is not the point of these recollections, and by casually inserting bits of factual references to 'those years' throughout the text, Rubina makes the reader understand that she is referring to the 1970s, the years marked by the early Jewish emigration to Israel. Her Uzbek friend's manuscript that she takes with her to Moscow is written in Russian, and contains a story about a Jewish shoemaker who doesn't want to immigrate to Israel. Her friend is sure that his 'politically correct' story will be translated into Yiddish and published, since it 'condemns emigration and promotes internationalism'. While in Moscow, Rubina almost forgets to fulfill her task, but finally reaches the editor, whose room is rife with the smell of apples. The smell of these apples triggers her childhood memories, recalling to her the image of her Jewish grandfather. This is the first time in the text that a connection to the identity she is trying to disclaim is revealed. This revelation is accompanied by strong feelings of guilt. During her childhood, Rubina's grandfather had spoken very poor Russian and constantly mixed it with Yiddish, and she, for no obvious reason, had felt ashamed of this (Rubina 1994, 257):

> 'Sweetie [*Мамэле*], you *do* know why', my grandfather said gently from the depths of the shed, where the gold-colored dust was swirling about, trying to make me understand. 'It's because you crawled in through the window [*ин фортка*] and didn't mind your granny, that's why you can't go to the movies [*ты довки таки, ё ништ геен ин кино*]'.[10]

Years after her grandfather's death, the author, while in Tashkent, hears a similar speech pattern between two older women on the tram, and automatically feels the same shame as before. The Yiddish that in her childhood had accompanied the love and comfort given to her in the house of her grandparents is in her present-day recollection a painful reminder of her otherness and her sense of 'not belonging'. She recalls the feelings of discomfort she had experienced while hearing her grandfather speak.

Yet again, in the surroundings of the publishing house of the Yiddish literary magazine, hearing Yiddish being spoken in the editor's office makes Rubina panic, bringing back the childhood memories that she clearly did not want to resurface. She had not heard Yiddish for the last fifteen years and apparently thinks that she can no longer understand it. To her own surprise, she realizes at the moment of extreme anguish that she not only understands but also can reply in Yiddish (Rubina 1994, 256):

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10 «– Мамэле, ты же в курсе, – мягко втолковывал дед из клубящейся золотой пылью глубины сарая. – За то, что ты лезла ин фортка и не слушалась бабушка, ты довки таки, ё ништ геен ин кино».

> '*Yidn* [You Jews]! Either you take this peacemaker's material from me, or else
> let me the hell out of here!' ... When I realized that I had uttered all of this in
> Yiddish, completely without intending to, I felt my knees going shaky, and
> both windows started to lean towards each other, making a sort of wedge
> shape, and then flew up toward the ceiling; only then could I sense that they
> had caught hold of my arms, and were easing me onto a chair.[11]

The language evokes the memories of the author's Yiddish-filled childhood, and the vertical spiritual journey into the past directly impacts the style of the horizontally developing narrative. Thus, the author in the text – the author as character – takes the lead in constructing the story. Rubina recreates the Jewish link through a two-dimensional narrative: her own story, although in a highly scattered and disconnected fashion, unfolds horizontally, with the past and the present of her individual life-story interfering with each other constantly. The past of her ancestors (in this case, her Jewish family) is recreated in a vertical fashion, and goes straight to her Jewish roots: her grandfather and the editor had come from the same shtetl, and the editor had been in love with Rubina's aunt, Frida, who had been executed by the Nazis during World War II. «Во всех людях живёт ощущение предъязыка» ('The feeling of a protolanguage exists in all people'), writes Rubina (1994, 257). For her, it is Yiddish, the language that calls to mind her most intimate memories and helps her to reunite bits and pieces of her scattered identity. The visit to the editorial office of the Yiddish literary journal – a random event in her life that was not meant to be of any personal importance – acquires an almost existential importance, helping Rubina reconnect with the past that was severed not only by the government but also by her own desire to assimilate and forget.

The process of identity reconstruction shown in this story is by no means complete, since the author is clearly at the very beginning of her self-rediscovery. The need to write the story, however, and to address the issue of identity discomfort (not crisis), brings the author closer to solving her personal dilemmas. The process of autobiographical writing becomes here in fact what critic Suzette Henke refers to as the act of scriptotherapy, 'the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment' (Henke 1998, 2). Henke asserts that 'autobiography could so effectively mimic the scene of psychoanalysis that life-writing might provide a therapeutic alternative' (ibid., 2). 'Autobiography', she continues, 'has always offered the tantalizing possibility of reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject' (ibid., 5). The autobiographical recollections of childhood that Rubina and Karabichevsky share with their readers create a 'wounded narrative' (Cook 2001, 74) that becomes the first step on the road to self-invention for these

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11 «Идн! Или вы берёте у меня продукт этого миротворца, или отпустите меня ко всем чертям
собачьим... Когда я осознала, что, совершенно не намереваясь, произнесла всё это на языке идиш,
я почувствовала зыбкость в коленях, оба окна накренились, выстраиваясь журавлиным клином,
взмыли к потолку, и я успела только почувствовать, как, подхватив под руки, меня опускают на
стул».

writers and assists them in 'finding a place, meaning or identity for the self in a discontinuous, often alien, incomprehensible, and chaotic world' (Harris 1990, 25). As we have seen in these samples of Jewish childhood written during Soviet time, the Jewishness of characters was always pushed into the periphery, creating an obvious imbalance within the writers' identities. Jewish childhood in the context of post-Soviet reality has finally moved from the far-removed corner of the author's memory to the center, thus allowing autobiographers to reconcile with their troubled pasts. The anti-childhood and happy-childhood models have merged to create the unity of one's life, where 'good' and 'bad' contribute equally to the richness of human experience.

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Hindsight and Sideshadowing in Recent British and Irish Autobiography

Nicola King

In this essay I want to explore and analyse the ways in which the experience of childhood is recalled and reconstructed in language, and the extent to which the writers I discuss use, or attempt to avoid, the perspective of hindsight. Autobiographers of childhood are often praised for their recreation of the point of view of the child, but some degree of hindsight is, of course, inevitable: the writers I discuss express more or less explicit awareness of this, and, in some cases, deploy it to reveal the radical potential of their memories of early experience. Some of the texts I discuss blur the boundaries between autobiography and biography in that the writers concerned reconstruct the lives of parents and grandparents, telling, inevitably, part of their own life stories in the process. In these cases the deployment of hindsight raises rather different issues, and I discuss the ethical questions involved in reconstructing the lives of others.

I use the theoretical work of Michael André Bernstein (1994) and Gary Saul Morson (1994) on the narrative perspectives available to the writer of fiction or memoir to explore the texts I have found interesting from this point of view. The memoirs I focus on here are *Germs*, by Richard Wollheim ([2004] 2005), *In the Blood* by Andrew Motion (2006), and *The Speckled People* by Hugo Hamilton ([2003] 2004). I make briefer reference to Dan Jacobson's *Heshel's Kingdom* ([1998] 1999), Margaret Forster's *Hidden Lives* ([1995] 1996), Vikram Seth's *Two Lives* ([2006] 2005), Blake Morrison's *Things my mother never told me* ([2002] 2003), and Marianne Hirsch's account of her visit to Czernovitz with her parents (2003). These memoirs or auto/biographies were all published in the UK or Ireland in the last ten years, and are part of the publishing explosion of this kind of writing in those countries: as the novelist Lisa Appignanesi puts it in her family memoir *Losing the Dead* (1999), which attempts to reconstruct her parents' lives as Jews in Poland during the war:

> [t]his is the ultimate generation game. All my friends are playing it. We are suddenly interested in our parents' pasts which we feel are linked with our own buried ones […] we root around, often too late, in the family romance and sometimes excavate dark secrets' (Appignanesi 1999, 81).

Although the UK and Ireland do not fall under the rubric of post-totalitarian societies, I address the question of the potentially totalising, or more radical or subversive potential of memory in my exploration of the nature of hindsight, and the ways in which the writers concerned draw attention to 'side-shadows' (Bernstein and Morson's term), or moments when the past might well have turned out otherwise – as it might have done on many occasions for Appignanesi's mother, who 'passed' as 'Aryan' in Poland. Like Appignanesi, several of the writers I discuss do, more specifically, come from backgrounds affected by totalitarian rule: Jacobson's Jewish family came from Lithuania, occupied by the Nazis in World War Two and subsequently coming under Soviet control; Wollheim's father was a German Jew; Hamilton's mother was a young woman in Nazi Germany, as was Seth's Aunt Henny, and his (Hamilton's) father an Irish nationalist who experienced the British control of Ireland as more or less totalitarian. Forster and Morrison come from partly working class backgrounds characterised by family secrets: their memoirs of their parents and grandparents attempt to bring these secrets into the light of day, and I raise the question of whether this practice is always a liberating one.

I begin with the opening of Richard Wollheim's (2005, 9) recent memoir, *Germs*:

> It is early. The hall is dark. Light rims the front door. The panes of violet glass sparkle. The front door has been left open. Now I am standing outside in the sun. I can smell the flowers and the warmed air. I hear the bees as they sway above the lavender. The morning advances, a startled bird runs fast across the dew .

This precise and sensuous account of an early childhood memory continues until its climax when the child begins to walk forward, into the garden, trips and falls, the language then echoing the sequence of the fall: 'if I trip, and when I trip, and now at long last, the waiting is over and I have tripped, and I am, am I not? Falling, falling...' (Wollheim 2005, 9). This account, with its short sentences, simple vocabulary, and focus on the senses, creates the illusion that this is a memory untouched by later experience, as fresh and immediate as its original occurrence, although, as I shall explain in a moment, this impression soon modulates into a much more sophisticated account of the fall, of later falls, and what they meant to the narrator. But it still comes as something of a surprise to read later in his text, as he reflects upon the process of writing his memoir, that

> with a kind of refined cruelty to myself, I had, in the writing of the first paragraph in which the early fall is recounted, set myself a task that lacked all rationale, except that it blocked all progress. For I had decided […] that each sentence, beginning with the first sentence, which was three words long, would be one word longer than its predecessor, up to the moment when I trip, and then the words would stream out, one tumbling over another, like a body in free fall (Wollheim 2005, 124).

Wollheim does not explain any further the reasons why he gave himself this task, nor why he found himself unable to abandon it, although it hindered the writing of his memoir, he says, for 12 or 15 years. The long and breathless sentence that he refers to is an excellent example of the way in which early childhood memory, however 'fresh' and 'immediate' it seems to be, is inevitably inflected and possibly even altered by subsequent experience and also by the re-tellings of that memory. Much of this sentence is phrased as a question whereby Wollheim asks whether it was then

> […] that I did what I was to do on many later occasions, on the occasion of many many later falls, and I stretched out my hands rigid in front of me so that my fingers formed a fan, not so much to break my fall […] but rather to pretend […] that things were not so bad as they seemed, or disaster so imminent, and that this was not a fall but a facile descent through the air, which would leave me in the same physical state, clean, ungrazed, uninjured, that I was in before I tripped […]' (Wollheim 2005, 10).

Later experience of later falls inflects the reconstruction of the memory of this first fall: the garden setting, the repetition of the word 'fall', and the desire to remain 'clean, uninjured' constructs this also as a version of the first fall in Eden which here, I suggest, also marks the inevitable fall from the pure, direct language of the senses which Rousseau imagined and longed for as the language of the child, and the child who is imagined as living on in the adult. As Jacqueline Rose explains, in Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) 'the child is being asked not only to retrieve a lost state of nature, but also to take language back to its pure and uncontaminated source in the objects of the immediate world' (Rose 1984, 47). Wollheim tells us that

> For many years […] I loved to trace back to this isolated event, of which I know no more than I have set down, a number of the emotions that have patterned themselves over the subsequent years of my life. In doing so, I gave way to the most persistent of all these patterns: that the earliest identifiable self […] was the real thing, tap it and it rang true, so that any change I contemplated in myself would be a betrayal of myself by myself (Wollheim 2005, 12–13).

The belief that this early memory reveals his true and 'identifiable' self seems to have persisted despite the acknowledgement that the *writing* of that memory, and hence of that self, was constructed, long after the event, according to a strict and arbitrary rule – the rule of the length of sentences. Wollheim then goes on to describe a series of associations to this early memory which have persisted into later life, characterised by 'a long-standing resentment […] against places of repose', 'the lure […] of danger' and his 'shame […] at the unreliability of my body' (Wollheim 2005, 13, 15,16). However, he then acknowledges, 'I could – I must emphasize this word – I could

make all these associations to this first memory. But I have always realized that they would be mere associations after the fact, telling me nothing about the past, or why it has the power to repeat itself in the present' (Wollheim 2005, 18). He here draws attention, in an apparently trivial case, to the fact that subsequent associations to a memory, or attempts to interpret it, may tell us nothing, or may even distort, the 'original' experience – if, indeed, it is accurate to speak of 'remembering' at all. This is in spite of his later claim that '[t]his book, and my manner of writing it, should make one thing about my life clear: that everything I have lived through either has been completely forgotten or is as yesterday' (Wollheim 2005, 40).

This question, the (im)possibility of reconstructing the memory of childhood 'as it really was', is raised in a different way by Andrew Motion in his memoir *In the Blood*, a precise and detailed account of his childhood up to the age of 17, when his mother suffered an (eventually) fatal riding accident and his childhood ended. The book begins on the day before her accident and reconstructs Motion's activities, experience and memory of hearing the news of the accident, which took place when he was away from home, and the days immediately following it. He reconstructs his thoughts at the point when he became fully aware of the extent of his mother's injuries and the fact that she would not be returning home from hospital:

> […] my childhood has ended suddenly. In a day. No matter what happens to mum, nothing will be the same from now on. Then I'm thinking something else – no, not thinking. Wishing. I want to lock into my head everything that's happened in my life up to now, and make sure it never changes […] I don't want to explain it. I don't want to talk about it in the grown-up language I haven't learned yet. Maybe I don't even want to understand it. I just want everything as it was, when I saw the world for the first time. (Motion 2006, 16)

He then goes on to reconstruct that childhood, by and large, as it was when he first experienced it 'without the benefit of adult hindsight', as the jacket blurb claims. There is insufficient room here to analyse the text to show to what extent he succeeds in reconstructing his world as it was when he saw it 'for the first time': and in any case, the reader does not have access to this original experience. One technique he uses is to take the reader on tours of his immediate childhood environments – the houses he lived in, but especially the gardens and neighbouring fields and woodlands, his prep school – as he himself explored them when he first moved there, or on returning from absences. The reader gets the feeling that these landscapes and gardens have become part of the writer's mental landscape also, so that he can reconstruct them 'as they really were'. But there are moments when language or image (Motion is primarily a poet) do betray the workings of hindsight: he remembers lying in bed one night and thinking about his mother's frequent illnesses, wondering whether '[m]aybe things weren't so safe after all'; perhaps his parents felt as frightened as he

sometimes did, lying in the dark, listening to the cars pass and seeing their headlights on his bedroom ceiling. 'When I got out of bed and opened the curtains to look towards the Tree of Heaven' he writes, 'smashed bits of light were spreading across the lawn like a disaster' (Motion 2006, 67). This memory dates from the time before he was sent to boarding school at the age of eight, but is reconstructed using a simile informed by the perspective of hindsight – the bits of light are like the 'disaster' of his mother's accident which exiled him from the 'Heaven' of his childhood.

At the end of the book he returns to the moment of his desire to preserve his childhood intact and reconstructs a conversation with his brother, telling him: '"I'm going to keep everything. The whole of the past, locked up inside my head. Just as it was." "You can't do that", his brother replies. "Whatever happens next will interfere with it. And anyway, you'll want to understand it. That'll change it all"' (Motion 2006, 312–3). An observation is attributed to Motion's younger brother which sums up precisely the debate over the accuracy of childhood memory: 'Whatever happens next will interfere with it'. As Paul John Eakin says (Eakin 1999, 107), 'the overwhelming majority of autobiographers continue to place their trust in the concept of an invariant memory that preserves the past intact, allowing the original experience to be repeated in present consciousness'. Motion wants to remember and reconstruct his childhood without the shadow of his mother's accident and death, pure and untouched by this event: but it is, of course, this very event which prompts the desire for reconstruction.

The memoirs of Hugo Hamilton are a good example of the use of language to create the idea of the child living on in the adult. He begins his first memoir, *The Speckled People* (2003), an account of growing up in post-war Dublin as the son of a German mother and Irish father, with the statement: 'When you're small you know nothing' (Hamilton 2003, 1). His memoir uses the language and reconstructs the limited understanding of the child, but gradually incorporates knowledge and understanding which develop as his mother tells him more about her past in Germany and his father about the history of Ireland, and also via his later reading of his mother's diary, in which she 'locks up' the pain of her past. Hamilton writes: 'When you're small you can inherit a secret without even knowing what it is. You can be trapped in the same film as your mother, because certain things are passed on to you that you're not even aware of, not just a smile or a voice, but unspoken things too, that you can't understand until later when you grow up' (Hamilton 2003, 18) a process described by Lisa Appignanesi as 'transgenerational haunting' (Appignanesi 1999, 8). Hamilton does not, unlike Motion and Wollheim, link his memories to specific years of his childhood: the reader is never sure of the age of the child to whom the memories, and the language in which they are reconstructed, belong. This blurs the process by which memories are 're-remembered' and reconstructed over time, but also hints at the psychic truth of the fact that small children often 'know' things they are not supposed to know, that they have not brought fully into consciousness, and which they cannot fully articulate. The psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas (1987) has

coined the phrase 'the unthought known' to describe this mental state. I shall return to a significant moment of this kind of memory and knowledge from Hamilton's memoir at the end of my paper.

What I have been discussing by means of these examples from accounts of personal, individual memory is the perhaps rather obvious fact that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to write one's own life story without the 'benefit' of hindsight. It is impossible to completely bracket off the awareness and understanding of the remembering subject: indeed, at times in these memoirs the relationship between childhood experience and its later interpretation becomes itself the subject of the text. When it comes to reconstructing the lives of others, however, the operation of hindsight might prove problematic in a rather different sense. I move on now to discuss some examples of life-writing which Eakin has defined as 'relational autobiography'. He takes Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986) which I have also discussed elsewhere (King 2000), as one of his chief examples. More recently, in Dan Jacobson's *Heshel's Kingdom,* Blake Morrison's *Things My Mother Never Told Me,* Margaret Forster's *Hidden Lives* and Vikram Seth's *Two Lives*, the narrator-subject reconstructs the lives of 'proximate others' – parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. The self is not the ostensible centre of these texts, yet Morrison and Jacobson both reflect on the fact that their research and reconstruction of their grand/parents lives has made them realise how easily they themselves might not have existed. As I indicated earlier, I have found the work of Bernstein and Morson productive in the analysis of texts of this kind. Bernstein focuses on narratives of the Holocaust and Morson on the Russian novel. Both are concerned with the relationship between time and narrative, and with the question of how the historical or literary narrator uses his or her inevitable perspective of hindsight. One possible and frequently used strategy is that of foreshadowing, 'whose logic must always value the present, not for itself, but as the harbinger of an already determined future' (Bernstein 1994, 2). (The 'present' here refers to the present time of the narrative.) Backshadowing is 'a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come*' (Bernstein 1994, 16). The advantage of hindsight may give rise to 'backshadowed' narrative: Bernstein's chief example is Aharon Appeldfeld's novel *Badenheim 1939* (1980) in which a group of Viennese Jews who have been sent to live in a spa town seem oblivious of the fate which awaits them. Sideshadowing, on the other hand, is 'a gesturing to the side, to a present dense with multiple, and mutually exclusive, possibilities of what is to come' (Bernstein 1994, 1). Sideshadowing, he continues, 'helps us to reckon the human cost of an occurrence by reminding us of all that its coming-into-existence made impossible. The nonlives of the sideshadowed events that never happened are part of the emotional/intellectual legacy and aura of each actually occurring event' (Bernstein 1994, 14).

Dan Jacobson's memoir of his Lithuanian rabbi grandfather Heshel seems to me to

be informed by Bernstein's warning against the use of hindsight to judge the choices and actions of those who lived in the past, their own present, without knowing the future. In 1912 Heshel had the chance to emigrate to the US and take up the post of rabbi in Cleveland. His decision not to go could have meant the destruction of his family some 30 years later, had he not died in 1919, prompting the emigration of his widow and children to South Africa, where Jacobson himself was born. Jacobson has, he tells us, always been aware of this twist of history, and his own tendency to blame his grandfather for putting his family at such terrible risk – the point being, of course, that in spite of centuries of persecution, no-one could have foreseen in 1912 the coming to power of the Nazis and the implementation of the 'Final Solution'. Heshel's 'life and death (together!) were indispensable to my existence', writes Jacobson. 'Now I must try to make myself indispensable to his' (Jacobson 1998, 5), which he does by reconstructing as much as he can of his grandfather's world and life. Jacobson quotes Osip Mandelstam when he describes Lithuania as '[n]owhere […] a chaos, the unknown womb from which I had issued' (Jacobson 1998, 77). It takes a journey to Lithuania and to the places where his grandfather lived, and where the Jews of the country lived and died, to enable him to 'find myself grasping for the first time the full reality *to itself* of the obliterated community he had belonged to' and 'to understand for the first time how it could have seemed to him sufficient' (Jacobson 1998, 99–100). As Bernstein says (Bernstein 1998, 41): 'Each present, and each separate life, has its own distinct value that later events cannot wholly take away'. Jacobson's memoir is his belated recognition of the value of his grandfather's life and the world which he inhabited.

Marianne Hirsch (with her husband Leo Spitzer) has written an account of a visit they made with her parents to Czernowitz (2003). Hirsch's Jewish parents lived there during the war when the city was occupied by the Nazis: they moved into the ghetto but avoided deportation to the camps. Hirsch says that she had often heard stories about Czernowitz, a city her parents had never revisited after they left in 1945 and which Hirsch herself had never seen, and, in particular, of the moment when her parents turned away from the line of deportees and stayed in the ghetto instead. She discusses the complex nature of nostalgia for a place one has never known, which was the site of her parents' happy childhoods but also of their suffering and persecution. The site of their on-the-spot decision to turn right instead of left was also a geographical crossroads, and 'Marianne had always seen that place … as the life source from which she sprang: it led directly to her parent's marriage in the Czernovitz ghetto, to their survival during the years of war, and eventually to their emigration to Romania where she was born' (Hirsch 2003, 86). On their visit to the city, Spitzer, Hirsch and her parents locate the crossroads and stand there while the elder Hirsches, Carl and Lotte, narrate the story of their 'turning right' once again. A building at the crossroads now bears a commemorative plaque, marking the location of the ghetto. It was here that a line of horse-drawn carts was waiting on a Wednesday in October 1941 to take the Jews of Czernovitz to the railway station.

Carl had heard that some professionals were to be allowed to stay: he gave 100 lei to a soldier who allowed them all – eleven people from the two families – to go the other way, back into the ghetto. Most of them were subsequently given authorizations to stay and work in the ghetto, and survived the war. Hirsch suggests that their visit to the place where this event occurred, with their daughter and son-in-law, enabled her parents to 'gain a retrospective distance from that past. They could look back on it with the child who might not have been born had they taken a different turn' (Hirsch 2003, 91). The memory of this moment provides a 'side-shadow' of what might *not* have been. Hirsch also describes how the reliving of this event on the site of its occurrence affected her:

> We could more than visualize their journey: we could smell and touch that crisp October day, hear the commotion on the street, the rumours that were flying, participate in the split-second decision that they re-enacted at the crossroads with their bodies as they pointed and turned in one direction over the other […]. And as we walked about this landscape of memory, the streets became animated with the presence of people from that past: long-lost relatives, friends, neighbours, Lotte and Carl, young, in their twenties – ghosts emerging from the shadows between the buildings, conjured up by recall and narration, by our being there, by our presence and witness (Hirsch 2003, 91–2).

In less serious historical circumstances, Blake Morrison's research into his parents' lives reveals how easily he too might not have existed. Having already published a memoir of his father, after his mother's death and the discovery of his parents' letters written during their war-time courtship he decides to write a memoir of his mother, realising there was much he did not know about her and that, indeed, she had kept deliberately concealed. On the discovery of the letters, he writes: 'I thought it was miraculous to encounter my parents like this, when they *weren't* my parents, before they married or even knew they'd be together' (Morrison 2003, 94). As he reads – and reproduces a selection of – the letters, he realises how close they came to not marrying, that there were several fairly large obstacles in the way, not least the war, which they both survived. He and we know that they did marry, that their son Blake was born and grew up to be the writer now constructing this text:

> Unlike them, in their perpetual present, I knew what the future looked like – when the war would end, and where and how they'd spend the rest of their lives. This hindsight gave me an advantage, but also created a sense of responsibility. It was like being in charge of children (Morrison 2003, 94–5).

However, reading the letters also makes the 'sideshadow' of their failure to marry and his non-existence loom frighteningly large: 'I knew the ending, I keep telling myself: its OK, things will work out [...]. But trapped inside my parents' present tense I begin to panic. No future [...] it was dark in there. I couldn't see the light ahead' (Morrison 2003, 65). Morrison imagines himself here as 'trapped inside' his 'parents' present tense', bereft for a moment of the advantage of hindsight.

During her lifetime Morrison's mother had been largely silent on the subject of her Irish Catholic background, the size of her family (she had 19 brothers and sisters, including seven who died in early infancy) and the suspicion of tuberculosis in the family – all matters for shame or concealment in middle-class, post-war England. Morrison's deployment of the letters in his memoir gradually reveals the reason for the delay over their marriage – his father wanted her to give up her Catholic faith, which she eventually did, after the death of her parents. At one point the narrator is so exasperated by her passivity that he wants to shake her, only to bring himself up short with the realisation that he is 'a beneficiary for her capacity for surrender' (Morrison 2003, 259): he would not have been born had she not renounced her faith. The letters provide the hindsight which makes him aware of what had to be sacrificed – his mother even changed her name from Agnes to Kim at her future husband's request – in order for him to be born: it is Morrison's own life which also enables the recovery and reconstruction of hers.

His use of his parents' letters could be said to violate their privacy, and he is aware of this, but it also restores their voices and recreates the world and time in which they lived, the series of day-by-day choices they made which led to the future they could not at the time foresee. Vikram Seth, in his memoir of his Indian great-uncle and German-Jewish great-aunt, *Two Lives,* defends the use of his Aunt Henny's letters, discovered when he had completed the research for his uncle's side of the story, still knowing little about his aunt's early history, upon which she had also been largely silent. He reproduces many of the letters she wrote and received during and after the war, when she was in England and many of her family and friends – Jewish and non-Jewish – were in Germany. 'She writes to them', comments Seth, 'speaking in a voice that recreates her presence' (Seth 2005, 187). Seth says that he has 'sometimes wondered whether I should, even with Uncle's blessing, and even after her death, ranged so freely over her correspondence, some of which was intended for no eyes other than those of the recipient'. But, as he says, the letters help us to understand the lives of ordinary people caught up in the major events of their time, and the choices they had to make: Henny's correspondents include people who collaborated with the Nazis and sought to justify themselves to her after the war. Henny's mother and sister died in Germany, her mother in Theresienstadt and her sister in Auschwitz. Henny did not know what happened to them until several years after the war: the documents confirming their deaths were found by Seth in the trunk together with the letters. This would also have been Henny's fate had she not been found a job and a sponsor in England in 1939. Seth continues:

> It is to help bring Henny to life that I am flouting what I feel would have been her wishes […] It was from this collection of paper […] that I began to create for myself an image of Aunt Henny as she had been, only partly as I might have envisaged her, but to a great extent as neither I, nor even Shanti Uncle, could have imagined her to be. (Seth 2005, 188)

'I want them complexly remembered', he says towards the end of his memoir: 'Their lives were cardinal points for me, and I want to mark them true' (Seth 2005, 498). Bernstein (1994, 77) claims, following Walter Benjamin, that 'a significant existence need not imply either historical success or even the survival of one's works and name'. Seth, like Morrison and Jacobson, establishes at least the possibility of the survival of the memory of these 'ordinary' lives, extraordinary in their own ways.

In her memoir of her mother and grandmother, *Hidden Lives*, which, in its third section, shifts into her own autobiography, Margaret Forster reflects on the double perspective enabled by her research into the lives of her family and the time she spent in the northern English city of Carlisle, where they lived:

> The past […] did not seem a foreign country to me as I daily walked its streets. I passed over and over again the places where they had lived and worked and shopped until the empathy with them was so strong, and the recollection of my childhood self so sharp, that we all walked together. But that perhaps is the point of any memoir – to walk with the dead and yet see them with our eyes, from our vantage point (Forster 1996, 308–9).

This experience echoes that of Marianne Hirsch in Czernovitz, although Forster has to imagine the presence of her mother and grandmother, both dead by the time she writes her memoir. The experience of place and the weight of her research – into the city's archives, with family documents and through what she remembers of her mother's stories of the past – encourages 'empathy', so that she can 'walk with the dead', but, inevitably, she sees their lives with her own eyes, from her own 'vantage-point'. Her memories of childhood – she grew up in Carlisle – are also intensified by this return and provide the point of mediation between the lives of her mother and grandmother, and her own adult self who is doing the research and the reconstruction. Her research is incomplete, however: she never finds out exactly why her grandmother gave away her first, illegitimate daughter – or rather, why she broke off all contact with her and did not apparently try to get her back after her own marriage. 'Secrecy and suppression were part of the fabric of life for women who had illegitimate children then, and not to be able to know precisely why such secrecy was so vital robs me of the kind of understanding I want to have' (Forster 1996, 108–9). Knowing something is not, she implies, the same as fully understanding it. As a novelist, she uses her empathy and imagination in another text, the novel *Shadow Baby* (1996)*,* to tell one of the possible stories of her grandmother and her first daughter, a fictional sideshadow.

I shall finish with a key moment from Hugo Hamilton's memoir, a moment such as that imagined by Walter Benjamin as: 'a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past' (quoted in Santner 1990, 152). His mother tells him and his siblings some of the stories of her German past and childhood, but also writes a diary in which some of her more painful memories are locked away. Hamilton incorporates these stories into his own narrative whilst still maintaining the perspective of incomplete knowledge of the child. He tells his own simplified version of von Stauffenberg's assassination attempt on Hitler. The child-narrator reflects that Von Stauffenberg 'was forgotten and he might as well not have bothered […], because so many people were murdered by the Nazis that it's hard to think of anything else' (Hamilton 2004, 260). This dismissal of a moment of resistance in the past by reason of its failure could be countered by Bernstein's development of Benjamin's idea that 'what is required is an awareness of the richness of historical moments whose potential has not been exhausted simply because they were defeated' (Bernstein 1994, 78). The potential of von Stauffenberg's attempt was not, in fact, defeated: through his mother's stories and her diary Hamilton reconstructs the 'revolutionary chance' offered by this moment. Hamilton's mother's sister, Marianne, heard the news of the assassination attempt and the 'good' news that Hitler was unharmed when she was in an opera house in Salzburg. She stood up with folded arms and said, loudly, '"Leider"… "What a pity"'. She meant that it was a pity Hitler had not been killed: a woman sitting near her saved the day by also standing up and saying '*Ja, leider*: what a pity that such a thing could happen'. (Hamilton 2004, 259). Later, this woman tracks Marianne down, and when she hears that Marianne lives in an isolated house on the mountainside where the air is pure, she suggests that it would make a wonderful place for a guest house. At first Marianne does not seem interested in this idea, but thinks about it and then opens her 'guest house' which was, in fact a safe house for Jews trying to make their way out of Nazi Austria. Hamilton mentions the guest house and its famous post-war visitors near the beginning of the text, but not until near the end is the full story and purpose of the guest house reconstructed, 'thanks to the man with one arm and one eye who put the bomb in a briefcase', (Hamilton 2004, 266) and the woman who supported Marianne's moment of resistance in the opera house. As Santner puts it (1990, 153), this memory transmitted by his mother 'remains available as a sort of energy potential that continues to dwell in history'. As a young child Hamilton was bullied by other children for being German, and tyrannised by his father into speaking German or Irish, never English, at home. Growing up with these conflicting loyalties, at one point he identifies himself as Eichmann after being called by that name, and, wanting to be one of the 'fist people' rather than 'word people', tries to drown a stray dog in the sea. He believes he has killed the dog, but the dog turns up as he is being tormented yet again and threatened with 'execution' by the boys who have been bullying him. The dog provides sufficient distraction and Hamilton is saved, both from the other children and from the need to identify with the oppressor.

As Bernstein claims (1994, 37), 'it is totalitarian ideologies that are […] most deeply resistant to […] sideshadowing'. Von Stauffenberg's and Marianne's moments and acts of resistance provide the sideshadows which indicate that Hitler might not have succeeded, that the deaths of thousands of Jews might have been prevented, and which provide also the counter-examples to what Hamilton describes as the inheritance of shameful and painful memories and secrets, including the pamphlets his Irish nationalist father wrote about the 'Jewish problem' in Ireland, and his own childish identification with Eichmann.

As with several of the memoirs discussed here, Hamilton shows how the experience of the child and his later memory of that experience is imbricated in broader, more 'significant' historical experience and conflict. In this essay I have attempted to link the way in which individual writers reconstruct their memories of childhood – the poetics of memory – with the wider historical implications of particular modes of narrative – post- or anti-totalitarian narrative. I end with another quotation from Bernstein (1994, 7): 'Only the brightness of an actual event can cast sufficient shadow for sideshadowing to matter, and only the felt force of a life can give impetus to the counterlives that seize the imagination'. In this essay I have tried to show the 'felt force' of the lives under narration, and the ways in which the writers concerned have understood and represented the particularity of their experience.

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The Problem of Narration and Reconciliation in Svetlana Aleksievich's Testimony *Voices from Chernobyl'*

Johanna Lindbladh

The testimony as a genre is intimately related to the question of *mimesis*, that is the question as to how the relationship between sign and reference, language and reality, event and narration should be designated. The most obvious reason for this may be found in the fact that the testimony is a genre that claims to represent events that have taken place in reality. Lars Eckstein writes: 'The term "testimony" opens up the question of how historical events enter the realm of literature in the first place. The main challenge is that of mimesis: to what extent is it at all possible to imitate experienced events verbally and thus to memorialize adequately in written form?' (Eckstein 2006, xx). However, there is another aspect of the testimony that also contributes to intensifying the problem of *mimesis* in this genre, namely the fact that the testimony is used, almost exclusively, in the narration of the victims' story, that is, in depictions of traumatic and irrevocable suffering in the past. Eckstein uses the term 'mnemonic dilemma', referring to the author's increased demand for 'authentic commemoration', the writing the story of the suffering on the one hand, and on the other, the author's epistemological insight into the impossibility of mimetic representation: 'Particularly in cases of catastrophe, suffering and death, we experience the collision between an ethical imperative calling for undiluted, authentic commemoration of events and knowledge of the problematic nature of mimetic representation'. (Eckstein 2006, 13).

I agree with Eckstein regarding his assertion that the representation of suffering increases the demand for authentic commemoration, since these historical facts must not be allowed to fall into oblivion. However, there is another aspect to why the representation of suffering is so problematic, and I want to illuminate this in the current article. This aspect is related to the inherent *cathartic* effects of language and narration, cathartic effects that sometimes make it psychologically difficult for the witness to represent great suffering according to existing norms of language and narration. James E. Young claims in the introduction to one of his books about Holocaust testimonies, that a coherent narrative seems to imply that the witness has become reconciled to the traumatic events in the past, and that a discontinuous narration, on the contrary, could be seen as a way of expressing the inexcusable and irrevocable qualities of the witness's suffering in the past:

> For upon entering narrative, violent events necessarily re-enter the continuum, are totalized by it, and thus seem to lose their 'violent' quality… For once written, events assume the mantle of coherence that narrative necessarily imposes on them, and the trauma of their unassimilability is relieved… As a result, the more violently wrenched from a continuum a catastrophe is perceived to be, the more desperate – and frustrated – the writer's attempts become to represent its events as discontinuous (Young 1988, 16).

This means that at the same time as the witness and historian are ethically engaged to document and represent the suffering of the past, the cathartic aspects of narration must also be taken into consideration, leading to such questions as: How shall the events be related, considering the possibility that reconciliation might be impossible? Is it ethically and aesthetically possible to represent human suffering according to a narrative with a beginning and an end?

In the following, I shall apply these epistemologically and ethically intriguing questions to a testimony by Svetlana Aleksievich, namely *Voices from Chernobyl. The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* (*Chernobyl'skaia Molitva. Khronika Budushchego*, 1997/2006).[1] My thesis is that Aleksievich, despite the fact that she actually writes a testimony of Chernobyl' and thereby claims the need to represent suffering in words, wishes to underline the difficulties of narrating the history of suffering by using a polyphonic form of writing. By referring to current trauma theory, which claims that traumatized individuals experience a break in their consciousness of time, I assert that the polyphonic form used in this book, in contrast to a narrative, constitutes a form that is able to create a picture of the infinity and versatility of present time. I claim that Aleksievich is able to create a text that in some sense retrieves the past and brings it to life in present time, and thus contributes to underlining the irreconcilable aspects of the history of suffering.

Memory as storage and story

Within current memory theory, researchers are occupied with a distinction between two main qualities of memory, namely the storing and the narrating aspects of memory. In his introduction to the anthology *The Poetics of Memory*, Thomas Wägenbaur defines memory, on the one hand, as a 'storage' and, on the other, as a 'story'.[2] Wägenbaur describes the narrative qualities of memory as a complex process

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1   The English translation of the title is misleading as in that it lacks the literary qualities suggested by the original title in Russian. A more literal translation into English would be: *A Prayer for Chernobyl. A Chronicle of the Future.*

2   Eckstein accepts this distinction between story and narration and also refers to Aleida Assmann, who makes a distinction between, on the one hand, memory as *ars*, that is as a mnemonic technique, with its roots in 'Roman tradition of mnemonics', and, on the other hand, memory as *vis*, that is 'its identity-giving potential, directed at a specific historical reality' (Eckstein 2006, xiii and xv). While *ars* is a technique for memorizing, for storing information, *vis* refers to the narrative and identity-shaping qualities of memory.

of negotiation between different value-systems and frames of reference, a narrative process which, according to Wägenbaur, is more fundamental than the storage-function of memory:

> The major achievement of memory is not to remember what has actually happened, but a constant distinction between recollection and forgetting. In some sort of internal monologue the brain constantly tests viable network patterns, it tests the functionality of its versions of reality constructions, i. e. its narratives (Wägenbaur 1998, 9).

Within psychological science and psychotherapy, fragmented memories are considered to be a symptom of disease and unworked trauma. The intimate relationship between the fragment and trauma may be related to a discovery that has been made within trauma theory, namely that a traumatic experience seems to evoke a fragmented experience of time in the witness's consciousness. Cathy Caruth suggests that traumatic experiences cause something that may be described as a break in the individual's conception of time. It is, she writes, as if the extraordinary experiences occurred too soon, too suddenly, to be incorporated in the narrative consciousness of the individual. With reference to Freud's interpretation of Tasso's epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*, in which Tancred is haunted in his dreams by the traumatic memories of having killed his beloved Clorinda, Caruth writes (1996, 4):

> But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind – the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world – is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that, like Tancred's first infliction of a mortal wound on the disguised Clorinda in the duel, is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known in the consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. Just as Tancred does not hear the voice of Clorinda until the second wounding, so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on.

In other words, it is almost impossible for Tancred to store the traumatic memories of Clorinda's death in a temporal chain of events, in which the events are defined as belonging to a past that *has occurred* and that is *irrevocable*, since the events have changed the basic conditions in his life so radically.

Considering the fact that narrative structures in the brain help the individual to arrange experiences in time, placing events from the past into a narrative in

past tense, it is possible to consider the fragmentization of a testimony either as a symptom of the fact that the narrative system in the brain's storage process has been terminated, or as an expression of the individual's attempt to 'be true' to his/her fragmented experiences from the past. Psychologists even use the concept of catharsis to describe the healing process that takes place when the patient recollects his/her traumatic experiences as a coherent narrative. Suzette Henke writes in her book on autobiography: 'traumatic experience generates inevitable psychic fragmentation' (Henke 2000, xvi), while narration, in a complementary way, is capable of joining these fragments together, a process which in the end promotes reconciliation: 'It is through the very process of rehearsing and re-enacting a drama of mental survival that the trauma narrative effects psychological catharsis' (Henke 2000, xix). You could say that the narrative act becomes problematic for Tancred because of the fact that traumatic experience tends to fragment his perception of time, and therefore results in the individual's notion of belonging to two worlds (narratives) simultaneously, instead of one. One world consists of the witness's life unaffected by the traumatic experiences, while the other world consists of the new life after the extraordinary experiences that have changed the old perception of the world in an irrevocable way. For a reconciliation to come about, these two worlds have to be joined together into a coherent narrative, in which one coherent self perceives and narrates his/her experiences from one single angle.

'The Imperative to Tell' and 'The Impossibility of Telling'

Dori Laub has defined an imperative which, Eckstein's imperative notwithstanding, does not primarily attach the testimony to the demand for authenticity ('an ethical imperative calling for undiluted, authentic commemoration'), but arises from the witness's need for telling, namely 'The Imperative to Tell' (Laub 1991, 78): 'The survivor did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive'. Laub suggests that this ethical imperative primarily stems from the witness's existential need to tell his/her experiences to another human being, and thereby become reconciled to the past. However, during the process of reconciliation, when the witness tries to incorporate a traumatic experience into a coherent narrative (new identity), the witness will inevitably, according to Laub, be affected by the insufficiency of language. Laub describes this ambivalence in terms of a conflict between two imperatives, namely 'The Imperative to Tell' and 'The Impossibility of Telling':

> Yet no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory* and *speech* (Laub, 1991, 78).

Consequently it is in the tension between two strong desires in a human being, haunted by traumatic experiences, that a new and decisive aspect of the problematics of memory is concealed. While 'The Imperative to Tell' expresses a desire to leave the past behind, to remember and become reconciled with the past, 'The Impossibility of Telling' expresses reluctance towards telling. Instead of leaving the past behind, we could say that the witness wishes to *recall* the past into present time. While the first desire results in the need to tell – to narrate, to place the events in an irrevocable past – the second desire results in a reluctance to tell, since the fact of narration promotes reconciliation with the past. Laub illustrates this ambivalence with a tragic example of a witness who has surrendered to her ultimate desire, namely a woman who refuses to come to terms with the loss of her family during Holocaust. Instead of recalling her memories from the past, trying to find a new understanding of her life and identity after the great loss, she has chosen to *live* in the past, using her present family as a substitute for the lost family. Laub writes (1991, 78):

> In her present life, she relentlessly holds on to, and searches, for what is familiar to her from her past, with only a dim awareness of what she is doing. Her own children she experiences with deep disappointment as unempathic strangers because of the 'otherness' she senses in them, because of their refusal to substitute for, and completely fit into, the world of parents, brothers and children that was so abruptly destroyed.

Understood in this light, the epistemological and ontological question of *mimesis* and the relationship between text and reality also becomes a question with psychological and ethical dimensions, intimately connected with the individual's self-understanding and identity-shaping. This is demonstrated by the fact that the witness's ambivalent attitude towards telling is not based on a theoretical insight into the mimetical shortages of language, but an expression of the powerlessness that the witness experiences in relation to the *illusionary* closeness to the past that is created by language. Memory and language are able to represent the past, a mimetic act that can contribute to reconciliation, but it is still an act of representation of the past, not reality itself. The fact that the memory is a picture of something absent can be a very painful insight for the witness, and Laub describes this ambivalence as a kind of negotiation between two different worlds during a therapy session:

> The testimony cannot efface the Holocaust. It cannot deny it. It cannot bring back the dead, undo the *horror* or re-establish the safety, the authenticity and the harmony of what was home. But neither does it succumb to death, nostalgia, memorializing, ongoing repetitious embattlements with the past, or flight to superficiality or to the seductive temptation of the illusion of substitutions. It is a dialogical process of exploration and reconciliation of two worlds – the one that was brutally destroyed and the one that is – that are different and will always remain so (Laub 1991, 91).

In her book *Memory, Narrative, Identity. Remembering the Self*, Nicola King summerizes this dilemma in the following manner: 'There is no "as-yet undiscovered language of sincerity" which will recover the dead: the "unsayable" prompts the attempt to articulate, to represent, but writing cannot unbury or recover the presence of his absent parents' (King 2000, 126).[3]

Two testimonies in Aleksievich's *Voices from Chernobyl'*

All of Aleksievich's books are based on interviews with witnesses from Soviet and post-Soviet time. Along with two further books that are not yet published, her seven books are believed to make up a chronicle entitled *Voices from Utopia* (*Golosa Utopii*). The fifth book, *Voices from Chernobyl'*, occupies a special place in this chronicle, and according to Aleksievich it was the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl' that prompted the decline of the Soviet Union. This book is based on over 500 interviews with victims from the nuclear disaster, collected and edited over a period of ten years (1986–96). Aleksievich was motivated during this long period of work by the exceptional character of the Chernobyl' disaster. There was no available language that could describe the disaster, because nothing like it had occurred before. Aleksievich describes this period in Soviet history as 'the decline of a war culture' and also refers to clumsy attempts to describe the nuclear meltdown in terms of a war, a metaphor that appeared as ineffective as the tanks and machine guns that were sent to combat the radioactive radiation.[4]

Of special interest to my analysis is the fact that this 'decline of a war culture', to which Aleksievich refers, is reflected in *Voices from Chernobyl'* both stylistically and thematically. Stylistically, one can observe a sophisticated, literary account of the documentary material in *Voices from Chernobyl'* that does not exist in Aleksievich's earlier war books published in the 1980s.[5] A thematic change is also noticeable in this book, namely the fact that the individual's psychological and existential experiences are much more exposed than in her earlier books.[6] This also results in the fact that

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3   Leigh Gilmore claims that this ambivalent relation towards telling has developed into something of a consensus within trauma theory: 'Something of a consensus has already developed that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency. Yet, at the same time language about trauma is theorized as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma' (Gilmore 2001, 6).

4   Aleksievich describes her own memories of the first days at the zone in Chernobyl' in the following way: 'A man with a shot gun in the zone. Who would he shoot and whom should he defend? Was he supposed to defend us from the physics, from invisible particles? Shoot at the contaminated earth or the trees? This was the image of a war… This was the war culture collapsing in front of my eyes. (Aleksievich 2006 a, 4, *my translation*, J.L.).

5   Like *Voices from Chernobyl'* these books are based on interviews with eyewitnesses of major events in Soviet history: *War's Unwomanly Face* (1985) and *The Last Witnesses. A Book of Unchildlike Stories* (1986) depicting the Second World War and *Zink Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War* (1989).

6   This thematic change is also confirmed by the two concluding books of the chronicle, not yet published,

the traumatic experience occupies a central position in the book, both in Aleksievich's depiction of the interviews with individual witnesses, and in the design of the book's composition (chapter divisions, headings, genre, etc.).

Before I discuss the polyphonic composition of the book, I shall focus on Aleksievich's portrayal of two interviews, which occupy a specific place in the book as a whole. These interviews are related in two separate texts that bear the same title: 'A Solitary Human Voice' (*Odinokii chelovecheskii golos*). The first text introduces the reader to the book, while the second concludes the book. Another important aspect is that these two texts are placed outside the three main chapters, thus creating a frame around all the other voices.[7] In addition to their common title and strategic position, the testimonies are also united by their common theme. The reader meets two widows grieving over their deceased husbands, and both women talk about the intimate relation between love and death. The first of the two texts entitled 'A Solitary Human Voice' opens with the following sentence: 'I don't know what I should talk about – about death or about love? Or are they the same? Which one should I talk about?' (Aleksievich 2005, 5).

In both of the women's testimonies, the dilemma of telling, which Laub addresses in his article, becomes clear. On the one hand, the two witnesses have an urge to tell. They want to remember and create a meaning for their past in a coherent narration. On the other hand, both women want to preserve their right not to tell. This may be illustrated by Laub's description of the witnesses' ambivalence towards telling during a psychotherapy session, an ambivalence that is caused by the two worlds colliding: 'the one that was brutally destroyed and the one that is' (Laub, 91). Henke has chosen to describe this antagonism between the two worlds in terms of two different selves, standing in a complex relationship to each other, namely 'I now' and 'I then'. 'I now' is described by Henke as 'the narrator', the self who is about to retell a traumatic chain of events, while 'I then' is referring to 'the protagonist', the self who once experienced the traumatic past and who is the protagonist of the story told by the 'I now' (Henke 2000, 148). An important aspect of the therapeutic work consists in trying to make the witness overcome the experience of a break in time that the trauma has caused in his or her consciousness, by letting the 'I now' become rejoined with 'I then' in a coherent story. It is important to note, however, that this work does

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of which one bears the title *The Wonderful Deer of the Eternal Hunt* (*Chudnyj olen' vechnoi okhoty*). These books are both based on interviews with people about their relationship to death and love, while war, catastrophe and all-embracing social changes have to step back and leave space for personal, philosophical reflection.

7   Unfortunately, the list of contents in the English translation differs in many important aspects from the Russian original. The most important deviation is related to the fact that the two testimonies 'A Solitary Human Voice' constitute separate chapters in the original text, chapters that are placed on the same hierarchical level as chapter 1, 2 and 3, while only one of the testimonies 'A Solitary Human Voice' has been given this status in the English translation, although with the epithet *prologue*, a genre that does not exist in the original text. The second of the testimonies 'A Solitary Human Voice' is included in Chapter 3 in the English translation, something which results in a strange asymmetry, considering the symmetric frame that both chapters constitute around Chapters 1, 2 and 3 in the original text, being one introductory and one concluding chapter respectively.

not always succeed, something that Nicola King has confirmed in her analysis of the Polish-Jewish George Perec's novel *W or the Memory of Childhood* (1975): 'Perec refuses to construct a coherent narrative of the self out of fragments of memory and fantasy' (King 2000, 125).

In Aleksievich's testimonies, especially the two that I shall analyse here, the antagonism between the two respective selves is pronounced. It seems as if the act of telling is connected with a deep sense of guilt, experienced by the witnesses interviewed by Aleksievich. Sometimes the 'I now' (the narrator) puts blame on herself for telling about the past ('the impossibility of telling'), sometimes the 'I now' blames 'I then' (the protagonist) for the lack of hindsight to which 'I now' has access.[8] As an attempt to preserve the witnesses' reluctance towards telling during the interview, Aleksievich chooses not to cut out the witnesses' hesitations surrounding the act of telling in her final depiction of the interviews in the book. These meta-comments play a central function in the testimonies, illustrating the feeling of guilt experienced by the 'I now', as she tries to transform 'I then' into a protagonist in a coherent narration.

Compared with the woman in the second text, the woman in the first text is more inclined to put the blame on the 'I now'. It is as if she felt that the 'I in the past' possesses a truth beyond words, and that the 'I now' commits a crime as soon as she tries to describe these experiences in words: 'He was choking on his internal organs. I'd wrap my hand in a bandage and put it in his mouth, take out all that stuff. It's impossible to talk about. It's impossible to write about. And even to live through. It was all mine. My love' (Aleksievich 2005, 19). In another part of the interview the 'I now' says: 'the colour of his face…his body…blue...red...gray-brown. And it's all so very mine! It's impossible to describe. It's impossible to write down' (Aleksievich 2005, 12). When the witness cries out: 'It's impossible to describe. It's impossible to write down', she could of course be objecting to the fact that Aleksievich is going to publish her story. However, one must not forget that all the testimonies in the book are the result of Aleksievich's interpretation of the original interviews, which means that they are a literary construction of the interview, not a documentary transcription. All parts of the book are consciously chosen by the author to illustrate something of importance, and Aleksievich would probably not have wanted to emphasize the fact that she was going to publish the witnesses' stories without their permission. Interpreted as rhetorical phrases, the statements underline the impossibility of expressing the husband's suffering in words. It is as though the witness feels that the extraordinary quality of the experiences cannot be properly reproduced in a narrative.

Like the first witness, the second I-narrator also comments on the difficulties of talking to Aleksievich about the past: 'I can't tell about all of it, I can't talk about all of it. I don't even understand how I stayed alive' (Aleksievich 2005, 225). However,

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8   The concept of 'hindsight' is also used in this volume by Nicola King, who describes various attempts by autobiographical authors to escape what she calls 'the benefit of hindsight'.

in comparison with the first witness, the second witness seems to put less blame on the 'I-now' when she tries to narrate her memories of the past. This is a witness who wants to narrate, trying to find the right words for the traumatic experiences in the past: 'I won't remember anything I wouldn't want to talk about. But everything happened. I looked very far, maybe further than death' (Aleksievich 2005, 231). In contrast to the first witness, this woman wants to go on with her life, and has left the traumatic past behind her to some extent. Nevertheless, she emphasizes that this reconciliation with the past was a painful process. To make this journey through time, she was forced to see 'further than death'.

Considering the fact that traumatic experience causes a break in time in the witness's consciousness, it seems natural that one of the two selves is affected by guilt. While the first witness imposes guilt on the 'I now', the second witness is more inclined to impose guilt on the 'I then'. This also becomes clear when the 'I-narrator' discovers that 'I then' is naive, in that she does not possess the hindsight to which 'I-now' has access. One example of this is when the woman describes her own and her husband's naivity when they were confronted with whether her husband should go to the nuclear reactor in Chernobyl': 'And then – this fear came over our mothers, his and mine, but we didn't feel it. Now I wonder why. We knew where he was going. I could have taken the neighbour boy's tenth-grade physics textbook and taken a look. He didn't even wear a hat' (Aleksievich 2005, 226).

Polyphonic timelessness – a method for recalling the past into the present

Interestingly, this ambivalence towards the act of telling is mirrored in the book's aesthetic composition. Aleksievich has described her book as a 'polyphonic confession-novel' (*polifonicheskii roman-ispoved')*, an appropriate description of its genre. The testimonies are narrated in a first person narration, which means that Aleksievich has chosen to lend the interviewees her own voice. This 'I-narrator' is related either as a monologue (*monolog*) or as a choir (*khor*). In the monologue, the interview is presented in its entirety, while the choir is composed of voices from various interviews. In the choir, it is unclear where one voice ends and the next begins.

I would claim that the polyphonic structure in this book underlines the imperative that Laub defines in contradiction to the 'The Imperative to Tell', namely 'The Impossibility of Telling'. Laub explains this impossibility of telling against the background of the witness's difficulty in leaving the traumatic experiences behind him/her and moving on with his/her life. I suggest that the parallel voices in a polyphonic structure could be seen as a metaphor for present time, in which the multitude of parallel voices indicates a past that is heterogeneous and a future that is unknown. The events in a polyphonic structure therefore maintain a relativity in relation to time and space, while the reader is confronted by many different perspectives and

voices that exist in parallel, at the same time, instead of by a chain of events that has taken place at a given time and in a given place in a narrative. One could say that the book appeals to the future and to a *possible* reconciliation with the past, rather than expresses the intention to discover the ultimate *Truth* about the past. This suggestion is supported by the book's original Russian title – *A Prayer for Chernobyl'. A Chronicle of the Future*. Aleksievich implies that she cannot tell us the historical truth about Chernobyl', but that she *must* utter a prayer for Chernobyl's victims.

The next question is: Is Aleksievich's text polyphonic in the Bakhtinian sense? Mikhail Bakhtin claims that the key to Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels can be found in Dostoyevsky's depiction of characters with a highly sensitive and developed consciousness. With the help of this consciousness, the characters oppose any attempt from the outside to define their personalities and characters according to a final description. As a result of this polyphony of voices and consciousnesses, Dostoevsky's novels form, according to Bakhtin, a universe of possibility and relativity, in which various perspectives confront, but never result in a final solution.[9] It is important to underline the fact that this polyphony should not be interpreted as a form of dialogue, a view that has wrongly and in a routine manner become the hallmark of Bakhtin's polyphony: a never ending dialogue.[10] Instead, Bakhtin's polyphony creates an aesthetics that resists both dialogue and, not the least, narration.

Even though Bakhtin himself is far from providing a clear definition and consistent usage of the concepts dialogue and dialogicity, it is crucial not to confuse the two concepts. While dialogue is a discourse directed towards consummation (the other person's answer), dialogicity is a discourse which avoids consummation, since it takes place in one individual's consciousness. Peter Alberg Jensen even claims that the dialogicity actually stands in direct opposition to dialogue, a claim that he illustrates by means of an analysis of the Underground Man's dialogicity: 'The dialogicity of his [*the underground man's*, J.L.] speech makes it impossible for him – for his *self* – to be present simultaneously with the *other*; the dialogicity takes him more or less *out of place*, out of the present moment; it makes him not absent-*minded*, but absent-*worded*' (Alberg Jensen 1999, 54). Caryl Emerson also opposes the tendency to confuse the aesthetics of polyphony with the discourse of dialogue. Emerson describes Bakhtin's theory on the polyphonic novel both in terms of being anti-dialogic and anti-narrative: 'In the "plotless" polyphonic novel, my self has my idea, your self has yours […]. Bakhtin's polyphonically designed selves too often pretend to a need for dialogue where in fact there is none' (Emerson 2000, 32).

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9 Bakhtin writes: 'It [*the polyphonic novel*, J.L.] is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other' (Bakhtin 1994, 18).

10 This delusion could be due to the fact that Bakhtin himself avoids a final definition of the difference between dialogicity and dialogue. Peter Alberg Jensen has shown that Bakhtin in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* randomly uses the two concepts dialogicity and dialogue as if they were 'if not synonymous, then intimately related' (Alberg Jensen 1999, 42).

Understood from this standpoint, it is not the dialogue between various voices that becomes the defining definition of polyphony, but the existence of many parallel voices within one and the same piece of art, voices that cannot be subordinated to a monologic, narrative account. The fact that the voices in Dostoevsky's novels often meet in an attempt to communicate, unlike in Aleksievich's texts, thus becomes of subordinate meaning in my analysis. It is not Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's novels that underlies my theoretical position, but his definition of an epistemology which is polyphonic – a structure of knowledge in which many parallel voices do not become subordinated to one monologic, narrative voice.

Narration and polyphony

Instead of forcing the individual voices to subject themselves to a monologic form of narration, Aleksievich creates an alternative kind of narrative. This is done by making Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the novel represent a narrative structure. The first chapter, 'The Land of the Dead' (*Zemlia mertvykh*), may be seen as a representation of past time. The chapter consists of interviews with people who still live on the contaminated area. These are mostly elderly people who refuse to leave their homes and choose to live in the past. The second chapter, 'The Land of the Living' (*Venets tvorenia*), depicts present time. The chapter relates interviews with miggle-aged people. They have children and a career, and find themselves in the middle of life, while the third chapter, 'Amazed by Sadness' (*Voskhishchenie pechal'iu*), consists of interviews focused mainly on the future and the question: what will happen to the Soviet society after the Chernobyl' disaster? In addition to the titles and themes of the three main chapters, there is another aspect that reinforces the narrative line in the book, namely the composition and title of the two genres 'the monologue' and 'the chorus'. Each chapter consists of about ten monologues, concluded by a chorus. The chapter of the future is concluded by a 'Children's Chorus' (*detskii khor*) – the symbol of our future. The chapter of the present time is concluded by a 'People's Chorus' (*narodnyi khor*) – representing the present generation, while the chapter of the past concludes with a 'Soldiers' Chorus' (*soldatskii khor*): a chorus of young soldiers, forced to decontaminate the infected area around Chernobyl'. They went to the grave with the fall of Soviet society and the 'fall of the war culture'.

As noted previously, the two testimonies 'A Solitary Human Voice' create a frame around the three narrative chapters. They are given the same status as the three narrative chapters (Chapters 1, 2 and 3), one introducing the reader to the book and the other concluding the book. This composition could be seen as a reinforcement of the polyphonic structure of the book, in that the two individual confessions are solitary, individual, and placed *outside* the narrative composition of the book. However, there is another aspect of this composition that actually seems to underline the narrative structure of the book. This is the fact that the woman in the first testimony, by resisting the narrative form and putting the blame on the 'I now',

by trying to create a narrative of the past, seems to prefer a life in the past, while the second witness, on the contrary, wants to put the past behind her, blaming primarily the 'I then' for her naivety. Just like the elderly people interviewed in the chapter 'The Land of the Dead', who refuse to move from the contaminated area, the first witness refuses to put the past behind her. The woman in the final text, however, has already put the past partly behind her, and by narrating the past, seems to be able to move on into the future: 'It feels like another life now' (Aleksievich 2005, 225). As to the fact that the woman in the first text opens Chapter 1 – a chapter devoted to the past – and the woman in the second text concludes Chapter 3 – a chapter devoted to the future – it is tempting to interpret this composition as a deliberate strategy for strengthening the narrative structure of the whole book.

However, the ambiguity between narration and polyphony does not have to be resolved. On the contrary, this ambivalent composition could be seen as an aesthetic devise for symbolizing the ambiguity in a human being's urge and existential dilemma to tell through narration on the one hand, and on the other, his or her wish to recall the past through polyphony, a position which finds support in Laub's theory on the ambiguity between the 'The Imperative to Tell' and the 'The Impossibility of Telling'.

Conclusion

Instead of describing Aleksievich's testimony against the background of a discussion of the mimetic relationship between language and reality, I have taken my point of departure in the ethically and psychologically troublesome ambivalence often experienced by witnesses of traumatic events. On the one hand the witness has an urge to tell ('The Imperative to Tell'), yet on the other this urge is contradicted by a feeling of not wanting to tell ('The Impossibility to Tell'). In this context it is important to note that narration can have a cathartic effect in the witness's relation to a trauma, but that it can also evoke a feeling of falseness and improperness in the witness's mind, since the narrative is only a picture of an absent past and can by no means bring back the dead.

In my analysis of Aleksievich's testimony, I have shown that this ambivalence in relation to the narrative depiction of the past can be found in both the two women's voices entitled 'A Solitary Human Voice', in which the collision between the two worlds – 'I now' and 'I then' – is obvious, as well as in the aesthetic composition of the book as a whole. By relating her material in an anti-narrative and polyphonic form, Aleksievich is able to show respect for the witnesses' suspicion of the narrative act, at the same time as she recognizes what Eckstein describes as the testimony's 'ethical imperative calling for undiluted, authentic commemoration' and Laub describes in terms of the 'Imperative to Tell'. This imperative is also emphasized in the title of the book, in which the use of the concept 'prayer' evokes not only a religious context but also the confession during psychotherapy, as well as and the use

of 'prayer' as a metaphor for overcoming anxiety and possibly being reconciled with the unforgivable.

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PART II: Individual Memory in Relation to Economic and Political Interests

Voices Found and Lost. Illness as Metaphor in Post Soviet Latvia

Vieda Skultans

Latvia, like the other two Baltic States has undergone rapid and painful processes of economic transformation since independence in 1991. However, these changes do not stand alone: they affect all areas of individual and social life, including languages of the self and the poetics of memory.

I shall argue that different historical epochs make available different cultural frames or imaginaries for life, and in particular, for sorrow, and that these are just as important as the contingencies and afflictions of individual lives. This is not to argue that such imaginaries have the same significance for every member of a society. As Claudia Strauss argues, we need to distinguish between 'socially shared symbols, individual's specific imaginaries and the realities beyond the symbol' (Strauss 2006, 329). I shall take as my material extracts from life histories recounted to me on the eve of independence in 1991 and 1992 and compare them with stories recounted to me in 2001 and now, i.e. between 2006 and 2007, some sixteen years later. Then, as now, stories were collected from volunteers responding to my newspaper advertisements. Thus my work focuses on the 'imaginaries of real people, not the imaginaries of imagined people' (Strauss 2006, 339).

My advertisement printed in the newspaper *Diena* (Day) in the summer of 1992 invited people who felt that their nerves had been damaged by the social and historical circumstances of their lives to write to me. Altogether I received some sixty-three letters and met with nearly all the letter writers. What impressed me most about these oral recitations was their literariness and rhetorical persuasiveness. Although many narrators said that they had not told their life histories to anyone before, these stories came across as rehearsed, making use of folkloric structures and themes, set in 'adventure time' and featuring unexpected coincidences and sudden meetings, yet always returning home to an eternal farmstead. Above all life was recast

as a quest, thus retrieving some sort of moral agency for lives denied many of the freedoms taken for granted in Western democracies. They employ all the techniques of classical oratory including ellipsis, silence and repetition. It is with the help of such oratorical devices that knowing is translated into telling (White 1987). However, Hayden White sees narrative as somehow able to transcend cultural difference, as the following quotation suggests:

> Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution of general human concern, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific. We may not be able fully to comprehend the specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another culture, however exotic that culture may appear to us (White 1987, 1).

My position by contrast sees narrative as drawing upon older culture-specific schemas and requiring as much interpretative effort as other forms of ethnographic work. A few extracts will convey the poetic and culture-specific dimensions of these accounts.

This is Milda, a country woman from Drusti in Vidzeme, aged eighty at the time of the interview:

> We travelled forty days and nights in cattle trucks. At night we were guarded by Alsation dogs. There were benches in two tiers for sleeping like salted herrings one next to the other. I had nothing with me to eat. We were given something to eat on the way. But we arrived in such a place in Russia where we were short of bread, water as well. And it is standing still and not moving forward. We were women there. We were hungry the first day, we were hungry the second day, on the third day we were no longer hungry, only thirsty. But there is nothing to drink. And there were such cold nights. We would scratch the frost with our fingers. Not all of us reached our destination. The more hardy of us women survived, but the younger ones...

The literary qualities of this account stand out. But maybe the biblical allusions are worth emphasizing. Forty days and nights have both Old and New Testament associations: the Israelites were forty years in the desert and Jesus was forty days in the wilderness. Three days of hunger and thirst recall the three days between Christ's crucifixion and his resurrection. Thirst inducing salted herrings brings to mind the vinegar which Christ was offered to drink. However, by giving this biblical frame to her personal suffering Milda does not erase her suffering but brings it into sharper focus. The journey to Siberia would have taken many weeks of stopping to

wait for directions and starting again, but it is nearly always remembered as taking precisely forty days, thereby drawing upon biblical associations with the wilderness, banishment and trials.[1] The narrative is also underpinned by what it leaves out, by its implicit claims. 'We were women there' suggests the difficulties which younger, menstruating women might be experiencing. 'Not all of us reached our destinations' conjures up images of death more powerfully than directly recounting the numbers dead.

And this is Milda's account of her return to Latvia after four years imprisonment in a prison camp:

> It was exactly 1950. The ticket was free. I had some money too. We spoke Latvian being all Latvians together. I couldn't speak Russian. Now the camp gates are open and I'm shown 'Go there'. I go to one place and my ticket isn't accepted. I go to a second it isn't accepted. At last it's accepted in a third place. I sit down and think 'Madness, how do I know where to go?' The train moves a bit and then stops. Moves a bit and then stops. I am on my own. Everyone else was given at least ten years. Nobody had as short a time as me. I was the first to be set free. Because nobody proved my guilt… I didn't know the language. And then I though 'Dear God! Give me some companion who would take me to Moscow, to Riga!' Once I got to Riga I would know from then on. I must have looked terrible. Two young people got into the carriage. Russians, of course. And they gave me such a look. I was sitting there alone. It wasn't a cattle wagon. It was a carriage for humans. I look. They are coming back; they sit down opposite me and start to speak to me. I tell them I don't understand, but they don't give up. One of them has been in Riga during the German period and he knows a few words of Latvian. And they were on an official trip to Moscow. And that time we were travelling forty days and nights to Komsomolsk and we get back to Moscow in twelve days. They brought me back to Moscow and showed me the Moscow-Riga train. God has listened to all my prayers.

Again Milda's narrative is structured around biblical themes and stories. The figures three, twelve and forty make an appearance again. At risk of over-interpretation, the two strangers suggest the apostles and their failure to recognize Jesus. Milda's narrative partly supports the position articulated by Shank and Abelson that new experiences are turned into stories with the help of existing cultural scripts (Shank & Abelson 1995, 21): 'Our old story is the means of understanding the new story, so over-powering the new story that we remember little of it. In this sense we cannot understand anything new'. However, Milda is forced to come to terms with new

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1   Trains made up of freight wagons carried between 1,000 and 3,000 prisoners. The journey to the Far East could take up to two months. Such journeys were shrouded in the utmost secrecy and directions for travel were revealed bit by bit until the final destination, hence the need for regular stops in transit. (see Rossi 1989, 182).

and terrible experiences, but she enhances their impact on the listener and her own ability to come to terms with what has happened by drawing upon the structure of biblical stories.

My other informant is Uldis who was fifty-nine at the time of our encounter in 1992. He had spent many years both in prison camps and in psychiatric prisons. However, the passivity which was enforced upon him in these circumstances is reversed in his memories of an active and courageous childhood. Uldis gives an account of what we might, following Freud, call a screen memory. In Freud's own words (1966, 43):

> The indifferent memories of childhood owe their existence to a process of displacement; they are substitutes in mnemonic reproduction for other impressions which are really significant. The memory of these significant impressions can be developed out of the indifferent ones by means of psychical analysis, but a resistance prevents them from being directly reproduced. As the indifferent memories owe their preservation not to their own content but to an associative relation between their content and another which is repressed, they have some claim to be called 'screen memories', the name by which I have described them.

Thus the value of a screen memory lies not in its own content but in its relation to other later memories. In 1945 Uldis's grandfather, cousin and godmother were deported to Siberia, in 1949 his other godmother was deported. Uldis's own first experience of Siberia dramatically reverses the later order of events. The initial account substitutes for later experiences which he is unable to reclaim. It is emblematic of the purposeful and free identity, which he wishes to project:

> I had dreams, I read like my contemporaries in those years – Mayne Reid and Cooper and Jack London. I badly wanted to see Africa, America, Indians, parrots, elephants and monkeys (laughing). Like all such boys. But then the war ended in 1945. In 1945 I joined to street fighting, I witnessed all that. In 1945 the swift deportation started. Especially local deportations. From our family my godmother, my cousin, my grandfather Ansis Vērsis, Indriķis' son, they were all deported in 1941. Ansis Vērsis had been a shoemaker, a craftsman and he too was taken. As a budži (kulak), just because he was living at the time with his daughter. He'd come up from the country to stay with his daughter for a while. He too was taken. And look in 1949, my father's other sister, my second godmother was taken, she was deported straight from Kabile as a farmer-landowner, although they only had thirty hectares. Well, let's return to the theme. As I said, I badly wanted to see America and Africa. I thought about it a lot. I thought about running away. I started walking around the Andrei docks, export docks, to see if I could sneak onto a boat.

I was prepared. But then a word started circulating among local inhabitants which has as its synonym fear, a fearful word – Siberia. Siberia was uttered by many people almost in a whisper, in a half voice and always looking back over their shoulder. Well of course I as an adolescent – how old was I then? I was about eleven, twelve years old then. It started to interest me. What is this Siberia? Why is it mentioned in this way? And the opinion was around that people did not return from Siberia. Those who got to Siberia stayed there and perished. And then I exchanged Africa and America for Siberia. I took more of an interest in Siberia. Because in queues, wherever people met, Siberia was mentioned. And particularly among us, when relatives or friends or colleagues visited conversations frequently ended not as now with traffic accidents or illness or sex but with Siberia. I listened to all that quietly. And you see if there had been a good pedagogue around he might have noticed that something was happening to me. But my family didn't notice it. And so I decided I had to exchange Africa and America for Siberia. What was it? I decided that I had to see it with my own eyes.

Later in the conversation Uldis continues:

And so in 1947, when I had turned thirteen, I had no money at all, nor any documents, I only took a little cup of sugar with me – I had a little white cup – and a loaf of bread. And I tried to sneak onto the Moscow train, the Riga–Moscow train and so I succeeded and reached Moscow. Well, of course I was very dazed at first – I'd never seen such a large city. And besides I was very hungry. I had no money and no documents. And my spirit sagged. And then what? Then I remembered *Annele*, I remembered our *Brigadere*, I remembered *Sprīdītis*, because at one time I myself had played the part of *Sprīdītis* at school and also in the Drama Theatre when there was a children's production.[2] I myself played Sprīdītis. Because Sprīdītis had tremendous courage when he was allowed to recuperate a tiny bit. And I had taken some postcards with me with views of Riga to cheer up my godmother and remind her of Riga and her homeland. And so I decided that perhaps I could trade the postcards. And I sold them and then I could get something to eat again. And then I thought, 'No, I have to continue my journey'.

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2   *Sprīdītis* is a fairy tale play written for children by Anna Brigadere and first published in 1903. *Sprīdītis* has many of the elements of a conventional quest plot. It tells of an orphaned boy whose father remarries and who is hated by his step-mother. He decides to leave the farmstead and go into the forest in search of wealth and happiness. He meets Wind Mother and Forest Mother (Latvian deities) who give him a magic whistle and a magic stick. He next encounters a king who fears his youngest daughter will be carried off by the Devil. Sprīdītis overpowers the Devil with the help of his magic whistle. In fulfilment of his promise, the king offers Sprīdītis gold and marriage to the princess. Thus far Sprīdītis conforms to the quest plot. However, the play ends in a specifically Latvian way. Sprīdītis finds the princess Zeltīte arrogant and venomous and rejects the offer of marriage and the gold. He chooses not to stay in the foreign kingdom, but returns to his farmstead and is welcomed back. He has changed and learnt to value his farm and family.

Such aesthetic structures also serve to break down the loneliness of the experience by giving the personal account a framework used by earlier story-tellers. Above all it is the idea of destiny, which weaves together individual and historical experience, freedom and necessity. Closely connected to ideas of shared destiny is the idea of damaged nerves. The old Soviet diagnostic system classified damaged nerves as a disorder of the autonomic nervous system. Such disorders became activated at the interface between the bodily self and its social environment. Social irregularities were experienced literally by ordinary people as bodily irregularities such as, for example, palpitations, sweating and shortness of breath. These forms of nervous suffering were seen as almost uniformly distributed throughout the population and connected people to one another rather than setting them apart as subsequent diagnoses were to do. Thus, just as the earlier narratives incorporated shared cultural models, so too the shape of individual suffering incorporated connections with others. In admitting to damaged nerves people were acknowledging their proximity to one another and the similarity of their experiences, shaped as they were by the grand narratives of history. The language of damaged nerves constituted both a form of everyday resistance and a form of solidarity. People, including doctors, would frequently say, 'Of course, I suffer from damaged nerves, in our society who doesn't?'

During the most recent period of my fieldwork (2006–2007), these earlier ideas appear to have sunk almost without trace like the lost continent of Atlantis. In the context of discussions about Latvia joining the European Union, the principal Latvian newspaper *Diena* published an article entitled 'Europe Does Not Want to See Our Tears'. The gist of the article was that Latvians should embrace the future rather than dwell on the past if they wish to acquire EU membership. The focus of diagnostic attention has also changed: from disorders of the autonomic nervous system to illnesses that are construed as intrinsic to the individual, such as panic disorder and depression. The crucial difference is the perceived locus of the disorder. Now psychological distress, rather than signifying a shared national identity, provides yet another criterion for emphasizing social inequality and division.

However, with the privatization of misery, a narrative disconnection has also appeared. By narrative disconnection I mean a frequently encountered situation, in which the experiences of many ordinary people cannot find an available narrative form without denying or distorting the experiential meaning of lived experience. This position has some similarities with that of Russian ethnographers, such as Oushakine and Naumova, who argue that there has been a loss of meta-language and with it a lacuna has opened up in discourses of the self (Oushakine 2000, 1010). Sergei Oushakine poses the question 'What happens – subject-wise and discourse-wise – when such (discursive) production of subjectivity fails to produce a subject?' (Oushakine 2000, 993). These incomplete subjectivities are rather like Victor Turner's description of the silent ritual passengers during the liminal period (Turner 2004, 85). The idea of liminality in this usage originates with Van Gennep but has been elaborated and exemplified in the writings of Turner, who argues that the ritual

performance of changing identities involves a period of being outside structures, of communitas. Among the characteristics of this liminal period are the submissiveness and silence of the ritual voyagers. They are treated as a tabula rasa waiting to be instructed in their new social roles. However, my answer to Oushakine's question, based on my recent ethnographic work in Latvia will be somewhat different from his, since he simply registers an absence. By contrast, my argument is that there has been a proliferation of languages of the self which promote personal agency and opportunity in the face of blatant lack of opportunity. This kind of language has been aided by the rapid growth in numbers of medically qualified psychotherapists, psychotherapists without medical qualifications, hynotherapists and various healers.

This new professional contingent corresponds to what the sociologist Nikolas Rose calls the 'psy-technologists'. Briefly, Rose argues that the so-called psy-technologies play a formative and indispensable role in bringing about and consolidating a neo-liberal market economy. Rose argues that liberal democracy, self-governance and the psy-technologies form a mutually reinforcing logical triad without which democracy cannot exist. He writes: 'To rule citizens democratically means ruling them through their freedoms, their choices, and their solidarities rather than despite these' (Rose 1998, 117). However, these democratic selves do not appear of their own accord; they acquire their particular shape and characteristics through dialogue with psychotherapists, counsellors, psychotherapeutic literature in magazines and pharmaceutical booklets and finally popular problem programmes on television. Rose's arguments diverge from the findings of the recent Russian ethnographers referred to earlier. In singling out the social creation of freedom and free individuals, Rose is undermining, in effect, the very possibility of freedom and suggesting its illusory nature. On the other hand, the Russian ethnographers claim that the new regime has failed in one of its principal tasks, namely, to provide a distinctive language of the self, 'of finding – to borrow Orwell's term – a "newspeak" to be associated with' (Oushakine 2000, 993). Thus young Siberians are trapped in a state of transitional silence. By contrast, I would argue that although in the Baltic States a language of individual freedom has been disseminated, the reality of the transitional economy does not facilitate its use by individuals.

Of course, psychotherapeutic language is very diverse but in Latvia it has not yet diversified to the extent that it has in other Western countries, and it may be characterized by its emphasis on individualism and individual biological deficit. Psychological distress is conceived as either brain insufficiency, or character insufficiency, or willpower insufficiency. So there is a language of the self, and it is widely used but it is not one which promotes self-worth or connectedness to others. Indeed, it is socially divisive not only between individuals but also between regions.

The conceptual triad alluded to of willpower, character and self-improvement fits uneasily with the self as experienced. So why is the therapeutic commitment to the idea of unlimited individual freedom unhelpful? Let me quote John Stuart Mill: 'Our internal consciousness tells us, that we have a power, which the whole outward

experience of the human race tells us that we never use' (Mill 1979, 447). The power of the will is put to a curious test in Latvia. If we look at the alleged geographical distribution of the will we arrive at a curious epidemiology where willpower is lacking in economically disadvantaged parts of the country and concentrated in economically more thriving areas. When I pointed this out at a seminar attended by nearly forty medically qualified psychotherapists, they clearly thought I was advocating a kind of social determinism of the highest order.

Let me give an illustration of a clash of discourses from a consultation recorded in the summer of 2001.[3] The patient is aware that he is living in a capitalist society where, to borrow a telling phrase from Richard Sennett, 'sharp endings rule' (Sennett 2003, 122).

> Patient: Fundamentally I had problems with work. Ours is a changeable situation. At the moment, for example (pause). It's very interesting that last year I came because of problems at work and as a result depression set in, nothing interests me and it's difficult to get involved in anything. And now after a year I am in exactly the same situation, except that the firm where I worked (pause). Well, they just made me redundant without a reason. I asked them, 'What's the reason?' There's no reason. I've got no protection. At present the social security systems are insufficiently developed. A person is very vulnerable.

> V.S.: I've read somewhere that there are some sort of contracts that guarantee work circumstances to a certain extent. Did you not have a work contract?

> Patient: No there is no work contract. But the work contract, any contract can be got round with a regulation. So that a reason can always be found for getting around (pause) by using the appropriate section of the regulation. So that any person, no matter what his education can be judged irresponsible towards their job.

> Doctor: That could be. Let's take it calmly.

> Patient: And there are lots of reasons like that.

> V.S.: Maybe the contracts aren't worth the paper they're written on.
> Doctor: In fact, they don't protect the person in my view. It's as Valerijs says, it can be worked out so that when you first read it you don't think there's anything that could be used against you.

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3   Doctor H. very generously allowed me to sit in on her consultations and to tape record them with the patients' permission. These were held in a private clinic in central Riga. If there was a pause in the consultation or if the psychiatrist left me alone with the patient I would often initiate a conversation. Fieldwork in the clinic was carried out during the first half of 2000.

Patient: That's one thing. And the other is that a person comes to be in a position of great dependency on their employer. At that moment when he's found a job he's willing to agree to any conditions.

V.S.: And how is your health?

Patient: My health... thank God. Well, it depends in what sense. I suppose in one sense it's good and in another sense it's so (pause). Well thanks to the medication, of course, it's good. I'd stopped. I told you I'd stopped taking the medicines. It must have been a week. And then I felt straight away that black thoughts started to crowd in upon me. I started to feel bad. I didn't think that would happen because I thought I was going to be dependent on medicines forever.

Doctor: That's not dependency, Valerij. That's not dependency.

Patient: Yes, but I am dependent right now.

Doctor: No, it's not dependency but insufficiency. It's insufficiency. It's the same way, for example, that you can have cardiac insufficiency, or lung insufficiency or liver insufficiency, so you can have insufficiency of the brain synapses. Or more accurately the mediators of the synapses.

Patient: But is it temporary?

Doctor: It is temporary. No, rather it can be compensated for. Temporary is perhaps not the correct description, it is compensatory.

Patient: Does that mean that I shall never be the same as I once was?

Doctor: Why do you say that? If it is compensatory then you can compensate for the condition. It can be improved and maintained. But it needs long-term... well it needs a long-term foundation so to speak. Well just as for any insufficiency. Because that's how it is in fact. And that's what we spoke about earlier – why these disturbances recur. Because there are micro-organic disturbances. And as we know – the organic does not get better by itself. It returns and it can only be compensated for. That's why I compare it to weakness and insufficiency. It's to do with the mediators of the synapses.
Patient: But if all the circumstances are favourable, then perhaps one can recover from that?

Doctor: Yes, then you need that compensation.

Patient: Well, for example, what do favourable circumstances mean? Literally one month ago favourable circumstances started to develop when I achieved a more or less normal financial situation – well, according to today's standards anyway. I sat down with my wife and we sorted out our budget. We knew we could cover this and this and this. And that went on for a week and I was in a very good mood and I was already starting to plan. I started to think about tomorrow. On Monday I arrived at work and I had totally unexpected news – I was told I had to look for other work. And immediately I stopped thinking about tomorrow. So about tomorrow... I have just today. I no longer have a tomorrow. So to speak.

Doctor: Well, that's quite right.

Patient: In the stress situation I was in I felt (trails off).

Doctor: Yes, quite right.

Patient: My only complaint is that I'm terribly sleepy.

Doctor: Sleepiness?

Patient: Yes.

Doctor: Throughout the whole day? (simultaneously answering the telephone). I can tell you from my experience that you don't need to be afraid of everlasting dependency. These abnormal social circumstances.

Patient: Yes, but they're ongoing. And who knows when they'll end. And I'm of an age when (pause). I take it very seriously. For example, if I were thirty I wouldn't worry. But I'm forty-five years old and I see the market principles at work. The market doesn't work in my favour. So why should a firm take on a forty-five-year-old specialist who will take half a year to get on top of the new environment if they can take a young person in whom they will invest time and who will serve them a sufficiently long time (pause). For many firms the experience isn't even necessary. Of course, it is necessary, but it's easier for them to teach a young specialist (pause) well each company has its specific style. And each has its characteristics. And so they take on this young specialist and shape him as though he were clay according to their needs. And an experienced person who brings not only his experience but also his demands is more difficult to shape. And that's why they're not willing to take him.

V.S.: And what is your speciality?

Patient: My greatest problem is that I have no speciality. I have no specialist education. I am a manager, a middle-rank manager. So that in principle it makes no difference what I organize, I can organize anything. It's not important, perhaps even medicine.

Doctor: So we're discussing sleepiness.

Doctor: Well you see (pause). You must understand that you shouldn't put demands on yourself. Otherwise you won't be able to start your internal motor. You can't buy strength in a shop. Unfortunately, even though many would like to. Surprisingly, many people want to.

Patient: Well maybe if we develop in the capitalist direction, they will be able to buy strength.

Patient: Maybe I should go to an endocrinologist to get more energy?

Doctor: Why? What will he give you?

Patient: I think (trails off).

Doctor: Will he give you the strength capsules?

Patient: Well, I don't know (pause) strength capsules (pause) you see there's an interesting thing. I have quite a suspicion that I may have hidden diabetes.

Doctor: But why don't you check it out?

Patient: Because suddenly there is a moment when I feel really well. It's wonderful. I feel that I'll be able to do everything. And literally half an hour later the other extreme sets in – my hands start to shake and I run to get something to eat.

Doctor: That's not diabetes, that's hypochondria.

Patient: What's that?

Doctor: Hypochondria.

Doctor: If there is anything else let me know. If anything is unclear? Yes?

What we have here is a conflict between the social opportunities, the perspective, if you like of the patient and the contradictory discursive positions of the psychiatrist none of which promote self-worth and agency in the patient. The psychiatrist is advocating an economic language of deficits and compensation, at the very same time as a language of effort, character and willpower.

There is a big difference between the kinds of aesthetic structures that Latvians used to plot individual suffering around the time of the dissolution of the Soviet empire and the structures that appear to be available to them now. As Elizabeth Spelman argues, 'Some ways of focusing on and framing suffering seem particularly well geared to affirming the dignity and humanity of sufferers even as their experiences threaten to crush or diminish them' (Spelman 1997, 1). Conversely, other ways of framing sorrow are by their very nature crushing and demeaning. I am arguing that during the transition from Soviet society to independence and its accompanying neo-liberal government there was an epiphanic moment that gave dignity to sorrow. But just a few years later sorrow was given an economic and medical framework that intensified misery. Whereas damaged nerves implicitly recognized shared experience, the diagnosis of depression set one person apart from others by virtue of their possessing an illness. Dr. H. does not connect Valerij's unhappiness with his uncertain economic prospects, which might enable him to see that such problems were shared by many others, but rather gives him a diagnosis of depression and relevant medication. The language used by psychiatrists to urge patients to take charge of their lives, to become managers of their lives, could be used with few alterations to instruct people in how to manage a business.

Piers Vitebsky has described the Soviet Union as 'the most psychologically intrusive empire the world has ever seen' (Vitebsky 2005, 382). I do not wish to dispute his evaluation, but I would argue that Soviet intrusiveness was more easily recognized and could, therefore, be challenged. The techniques of neo-liberalism are more subtle and disguised and, therefore, less easy to identify and resist. They are, nevertheless, powerful tools in the domination of the soul. One of my informants said, in replying to my newspaper advertisement: 'Life is difficult and I want to know why it is difficult'. He had a small-holding in Vidzeme, having previously worked for a firm setting up security systems. His wife was working in a factory in England. But among the books he had on loan from the library was a translation of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation,* so I think he was looking in the right direction for answers to the painfulness of his life.[4]

In an equal and democratic society there should be 'a community of pleasure and pain'. But as Spelman points out there is an economy of attention and 'Not everyone's pain deserves notice' (Spelman 1997, 47). This is particularly so in Latvia and if pain is given notice it is at the cost of loss of agency and self-worth. So, I

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4   Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) argued in *Simulacra and Simulation* that in the post-modern world copies have replaced their original objects and that people are seduced by a simulated version of reality. My informant's interest in this work suggests that he has doubts about the representation of the new capitalist world he has entered.

would argue that a new meta-language has appeared, but it is not one that makes for a comfortable identity nor one that promotes free agents as Rose argues, except in a perverse sense.

So by way of a conclusion I would like to summarize the key features of my argument. Firstly, the three locations in time from 1991 to 1992, ten years on during the first half of 2001 and five years on again in 2006 to 2007, provide evidence not only of the speed with which languages of the self can change but also of the speed with which earlier languages may be forgotten. For example, taped interviews with the same senior doctor conducted in 1992 and 2002 spoke of radically different conceptions of selfhood, normality and illness. Moreover, these differences were not remembered and even denied. Doctors, whose voices I have on tape, simply denied that they had claimed illness to be the norm or that neurasthenia had affected the majority of the population (Skultans, 2007). A kind of social and personal amnesia seems to have taken hold in order to promote the medicalization of sorrow and to gloss over economic inequality and social injustice. The role of sorrow as a marker of national identity created what I call an epiphanic moment, when Latvians spoke of their shared travails and in August 1989 joined hands with Estonians and Lithuanians to form a human chain some six hundred kilometres long marking the border with Russia. This public display of past suffering was articulated in the language of a history shared by the three Baltic countries. My extract from the interview with Uldis illustrates how despite the terribleness of his later experiences in psychiatric prisons and the Gulag, he is able to construct a powerful narrative identity by using folk motifs to frame his life story. By contrast the new capitalist language of economic freedom, which superseded the 'singing revolution' infiltrated the language of individual distress and made psychological distress far more shameful than it was when neurasthenia reigned. Valerij's consultation from 2001 testifies to the discomfort and absurdity of trying to encompass socially and economically caused problems with an individualist medical language awash with economic terms. In summary, voices come to be heard, disappear and then reappear again in forms that speakers themselves may find uncomfortable and do not recognize.

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Remembering Soviet Everyday Life – the Burdens, Happiness and Advantages of Maternity in Soviet Russia in the Late 1940–1960s

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This article is dedicated to women's memories of everyday life in Soviet Russia and is based on my dissertation research – *Soviet people with female bodies: performing beauty and maternity in Soviet Russia in the mid 1930–1960s* (2007).[1] When planning my research I regarded oral evidence as a very important source, particularly because I was interested in the personal aspects of dealing with maternity and in the local and social differences in constructions of femininity. Oral evidence is also indispensable when analysing how dominant discourses of the media and advice books are interpreted, reproduced and resisted through everyday practices.[2] In my research on memories I was inspired by Carmen Sheide's idea of not being too much concerned with differentiating between truth and fiction, but, rather with analysing stories by paying attention to such aspects as turning points, (dis)continuities, identities, taboos, meta-narratives and objects of reference (Scheide 2004).

My practical method of carrying out the interviews could be described as a form of 'kitchen conversation'. 'Kitchen' has many meanings here. First, it is a traditional female sphere, where woman is assigned by a society (*Kirche*, *Kinder*, *Küche*) but at the same time it is a space of a certain empowerment, place where a woman may use her imagination while cooking or demonstrate her importance. On the other hand, according to the Russian feminist, Tatiana Goricheva, who was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1979 after she and her friends attempted to edit an independent women's magazine, the whole of Soviet society could be seen as a 'pseudomatriarchal anti-utopia, because it is not a society, but one big kitchen' (Goricheva 1981, 9).[3] Thus, analysing Soviet society as such could be seen as scrutinizing both gendered power and the complex connections between the public and private spheres. I saw

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1   For my dissertation I analysed discourses of women's magazines and advice publications as well as oral history material. Alongside the printed materials my research was based on 21 interviews with women born between 1919 and 1947 from three cities in the Russian Federation – Moscow, Saratov and Ufa. Each of these cities has its own specific problems and characteristics. Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union, was the most dynamic city in the period under scrutiny. Saratov was the provincial centre of an important agricultural region. And finally Ufa, a small city in an agricultural province in the Urals, had had the status of the centre of the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic since 1919. The women interviewed were mainly, but not exclusively, of Russian or Bashkir ethnic origin.

2   The complexity and change in discursive models are discussed in my dissertation (Gradskova 2007).

3   «Псевдоматриархальная антиутопия, ибо это не общество, а одна огромная кухня».

the 'kitchen conversations' as relatively free discussions reminiscent of everyday talk (Ries 1997), woman to woman discussions of everyday life where stories about oneself were interspersed with stories about others, where topics were changed intuitively and emotions and body language were candid. The conversations lasted from two to four and a half hours and concentrated on the informants' life experiences before the end of the 1960s. All but one of the interviews were conducted and tape-recorded in informants' homes; interviews were transcribed; about half of the interviews included presentations of family photos with comments. Because of the ethics of collecting personal information and guarantees of its confidentiality my informants will remain anonymous and be referred to only by initials; the names of some cities have also been removed or altered.

How did the interaction between myself and my informants function? On a certain level, as is the case with the study of the lives of Soviet teachers by Elena Trubina, I could say that 'my own position in the theoretical discourse and everyday structure provides me with the possibility of seeing from "inside", the main gain of which is an initial good-natured inclination toward the interviewee and a readiness to find meanings that depart from the usual categorical distinctions' (Trubina 2002, 21). This was probably due to my female body and gender, the fact that I have a family with children, and a background, as someone born and raised in the Soviet Union, similar to my informants. Being younger, I have obviously not experienced the history that they lived through; the history that they were able to retell from their roles as parents or grandparents. However, it is very easy to underestimate the obvious differences between us, which at certain points in the conversations made me seem more like an outsider because of the numerous differences in our respective backgrounds. Whether an informant had children or grandchildren of my age, or not, and the nature of their relationship with them, was likely to have a considerable influence on how they communicated with me.

As to my analysis, it is important to mention that I was examining their accounts through the prism of my own experiences. I was born and experienced school and university education in the Soviet Union; I have witnessed and participated in the Soviet culture of silence and I am familiar with Soviet discourses. But, I am also a post-Soviet individual and have therefore experienced the Russian 'sexual revolution' of the 1990s, the advent of Russian consumer society and, at the same time, have been a mother who has had the opportunity to compare maternity services in post-Soviet Russia with the maternity services in Sweden. I am also living through the ethnic and religious revival that is affecting my friends, being very much aware of my Russian ethnicity and not practicing religion as well as of the interpretation and communication-related benefits and limitations of such a position. Thus, I was attempting to apply my experiences to 'reading the transcripts' from a variety of perspectives.

When analysing the stories of my informants about their experiences of maternity, I was also able to identify many differences in constructions of femininity, as well

as to discover several ways in which women dealt with Soviet discourses on beauty and maternity.[4] In order to pay attention to differences, I used the approach of 'intersectionality' (Lykke 2003, 47–57; Lykke 2005, 7–19) taking categories of social status, ethnicity, geographical location, and education as fluid and co-constructing rather than as fixed. Since the length of this article does not allow me to examine all the aspects of these practices, I will concentrate only on certain aspects of maternity practices – mother's everyday life while caring for a small baby.

After returning home from the maternity hospital, where women were considered to be in a very special position and in need of medical control, 'normal' maternity began in earnest. What did this mean for a woman? How did it correspond to her previous expectations and her views of herself? What problems did women see as important and how did they deal with them? What constructions of femininity were created through stories about being mothers of small children? How far did various maternity practices differ? How did the discourse about woman's 'natural predestination' to be a mother, in order to have a happy life, and the discourse of the 'state's care' for mothers influence their memories? Here I shall mainly look at the intersections between femininity and women's self-identification as being or not being professionals and breadwinners, with or 'without education', as well as between femininity and the different meanings ascribed to belonging to a certain tradition (ethnic, religious, social or cultural).

Central to this article are the stories told by four women born in the 1920s and the 1930s – J (1924), D (1927), K (1932) and O (1935) – who had their children mostly between the mid- 1940s and early 1960s in Saratov, Moscow and Ufa (the children of J were born in 1946 and 1962, D's child in 1954, K's children in 1957 and 1960, O's children in 1955, 1957 and 1966). Three of them were already working before they had their first child. J was a municipal accountant in Saratov, D was working as a communication's officer at the state security service in Moscow and K worked as a seamstress. D was the only one of the three informants to graduate from an institution of higher education (Moscow institute of communication). K finished only primary school, while J finished secondary school and then received a short vocational training. O had just finished teacher's training before giving birth to her first child and had her second child while still being a student at the Ufa pedagogical college.

The case of D is particularly interesting. Among my informants she was the only single mother, who also never married. Like the majority of my informants she began from an understanding of maternity as crucial to normal femininity, but she seems to have regarded maternity as more important even than marriage. When we talked

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4   In my analysis of the interaction between the discursive sphere and everyday tactics, I follow the approach developed in works by Michel de Certeau. I use his exploration of the potential of 'practitioners to employ spaces that are not self-aware' and analysis of how ordinary people can evade discipline through certain 'many-sided, resilient, cunning and stubborn' procedures (Certeau 2000, 102–105). With respect to the Soviet context this approach was further developed by Natalia Kozlova (Козлова 2005).

about abortion, D said that she could not even think of having an abortion, nor of 'humiliating herself' by asking the father of her child to marry her. On the one hand, D presented her single motherhood as embedded in the post-war situation when the male-female disproportion in the population was particularly visible.[5] On the other hand, having a child was highlighted by D as a rewarding activity; she also stressed that she received understanding and support from her social environment for her being a single mother:

> It was impossible to have an abortion at that time, but maybe I didn't need it anyhow. I had a business sense, if you can call it that. My mother also told me: you have reached the age – I was 26 at that time – to have a child. Who can say what your life would turn out!? And the military men whom I worked with, they were wise. They told me: – Do not worry [about not being married], who can know how your life will be, may be you will never get married? There are few young men of your age. Almost all of them died in the war. [They told me, *my comment*, Y.G.] – But if you have a child it means you have a family. And it was true, it became like this.[6]

With respect to maternity practices, D had 'a business sense', or what I would call rather 'entrepreneurial' which provoked my interest. She was aware of the possibility of receiving additional money and improving her living conditions by raising a child as a single mother. In this case, therefore, D seems to lean on the discourse on social motherhood, and particularly that part that referred to state support for mothers. In fact, D and her mother received a new room – 'I got myself a lodging'[7] – in less than a year after the child was born, while without the child they would have waited for a new home for several years. On the other hand, D's 'business sense' does not mean, however, that she was dependent on state support, as one might expect. On the contrary, she presented herself as enjoying a certain degree of independence because of her high level of professional qualification and her prestigious work place. As we already have discovered, D worked as a communication officer in the state security service (she called it the KGB).[8] Thus, she relied on the state as an important partner in her maternity, but she did not expect money for survival. She was simply well aware of her rights as a single mother.

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5   According to Göran Therborn, in the late 1950s 14% of birth in Russia were outside of marriage (Therborn 2004, 167). According to Kurganov's data (Курганов 1968, 198), the number of single mothers in the USSR was: 2 050 000 (1950); 3 135 000 (1960); 1 831 000 (1965).

6   «Аборты раньше нельзя было делать, но, может, и не нужно, у меня и мысли не было. Мысль была коммерческая, можно сказать. Мне и мать сказала: у тебя такие годы – мне уже 26 лет было. В общем-то, ты должна иметь ребенка. Неизвестно, как вывернется судьба. А военные у нас мужчины были, вообще мудрые были мужики, они говорят: Д, не беспокойся, еще неизвестно, как у тебя сложится жизнь. Ребят вашего возраста мало, их перебили, может, замуж ты и не выйдешь. А вот ребенок у тебя будет – это семья. И действительно, так оно и вышло». *All the translations from Russian into English are mine, Y.G.*

7   «Как я себе выцыганила жилье-то?!»

8   The state security system changed its names several times (KGB acquired its name only in 1956).

Even if D, however, tried to appeal to two dominant Soviet discourses, one on the 'naturalness' of woman's desire to have children and the other on social motherhood, later on in our conversation she admitted that the fact that she was a single mother was probably a reason for her being dismissed from her position in the KGB a couple of years later – although the people around her seemed to have accepted her status. Thus the 'normality' of motherhood like D's, although there were two important discourses in existence to support it, was still not fully accepted and could easily be challenged through other everyday practices.

What, then, did the maternity practices look like according to D's life experience? From our conversation it seems clear that being the bread-winner and breastfeeding were particularly important parts of her performing maternity in a satisfactory way, while the childcare was transferred to her mother, who lived with D (in the only room they had) and took care of the child from her third month. D was particularly expressive when describing the breastfeeding. Thus, it seems to have been very important to her, and she refused to follow the doctors' advice to throw away her first drops of milk ('the most tasteful' according to her) and she did everything possible to continue breastfeeding even when she was working. In order to manage this she would put milk for the child between the windowpanes every morning to keep it cool (before the 1960s refrigerators were rare commodities in ordinary households) and her mother would feed the baby while she was away. She was unhappy when the baby refused to suck from the breast when she was nine months old; D even blamed her mother for this, accusing her of having made too wide a hole in the bottle's teat.

At the same time, D was eager to talk about herself as a professional woman with the qualities of a good breadwinner. She did not need economic help from the maternity hospital, i.e. help aimed at unmarried women or women in a particularly precarious economic situation. D said that her salary was enough for her and her baby. D's identification with the role of breadwinner became particularly visible from her story about her responsible position as a hydro-communication engineer (which became her new profession after she was dismissed from the KGB). When she talked about her professional work D stressed qualities that are usually attributed to men: physical strength, self-restraint and the capacity to perform work in spite of tiredness. This way of presenting professionalism was further enhanced when she talked about her love of sports and body training.

Thus, we could say that in the case of D, her femininity was constructed through maternity in defiance of her identity as a professional, physically strong and well-trained person. Maternity in D's case did not only mean giving birth to a child, breastfeeding it and taking good care of it, but it also meant securing the child's material well-being. It could be said that her interpretation of maternity included work outside the home.

D's story of a woman who never married and belonged to the officially registered 'single mothers' may be seen as an exception among my informants. Let us therefore

examine the stories of my three other informants and their experience of maternity in the 1940s-1960s in order to see in what ways they differed from that of D.

J from Saratov was in a rather similar situation to D with her first twins, in the sense that she was not officially married to the biological father, who abandoned her soon after the children were born. However, J presented him as her 'first husband' who later found the family he has been separated from by the war. J lived in a provincial town where the moral control of women's behaviour was rather strict; also, she seemed to have religious motives which meant she was not proud of being a single parent and the only provider for the family.[9] In our conversation she complained a lot about the difficulties, instability and insecurity of the war and post-war situation.

Like D, J also had to bring up her first two children while living only on her salary as bookkeeper and with the help of her mother who left the countryside especially to assist J. However, because of her poor educational qualifications and modest salary, J did not enjoy any special privileges. She referred to her boss as showing 'understanding' by allowing her to be late for work in the morning (something that was basically considered a crime at that time). J was proud of herself for being an accurate and well-performing worker, but her job was far from being a source of high professional and social status.

Because she had her twins at a time when food provision was especially harsh (1946) J could not fully enjoy breastfeeding (the milk was not enough for two), so she had to buy a small bottle of milk for each of her children in the market every day, where it was very expensive. J said she was not offered any state help with breast milk substitutes. In spite of all her efforts one child died from pneumonia at the age of 11 months.

As in D's story, J's mother was described as an 'obvious' helper, who took responsibility for taking care of the children. Consequently, J blamed her mother for the death of one of the twins, who had caught a bad cold.

The arrangements with J's next child were different, basically because J's family situation had changed considerably. She was now married but when her daughter was born (when J was 38) her mother died. In this situation state care was the only support on which the family could rely. J continued working, while the child was sent to a day care centre to which the family gained access via J's work in a local district administrative office; later on the child was sent to a childcare centre for five days a week. J explained that her daughter stayed for five nights in the centre during the wintertime, when it was too cold to pick her up and bring her home again all the way from the centre. J and her husband shared the duty of taking the child to the centre and back. Thus, in J's life experience (when the youngest daughter was born) state support was a more important factor in her childcare arrangements than in the case of D, despite the fact that D was a single mother and J was married when the daughter was born.

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9   J told that she did not want to persuade her 'husband', who was sending her money short time after she gave birth, to continue supporting her. At the same time, she was not officially married (and could not apply for alimony) and was not officially recognized as a single mother.

However, in the case of J, the influence of the Orthodox Church played a certain role (compare D who did not seem to be influenced by religion in her everyday choices). J said me that she had all her children baptized, but when she talked about her younger years and about leisure time she did not seem to have been participating in any Christian rituals. When J wanted to baptize her twins after the war she did not seem to have encountered any problems, but when she had her older child baptized at the beginning of the 1960s, the family ran into problems that were only solved after they appealed for respect for older people's habits:[10]

> [–Did you also have your first son baptized?] –Yes, he is baptized. My mother also insisted on it. Because they are old people and we did it for show respect. But at that time we did not have any problems with baptism. It was 1946, he was still a baby. Both of them were baptized when they were about 3 months old. But now, in 1962, when we came to the church the priest made us make an application. We signed it and were told when to come back. And we came back. And she was baptized in the font. [...] Thus, we baptized her. And about one month later, two women came to our house. By chance I was at home. [Pause] We baptized her very well, all the rituals were performed. Two women came, they were not very young. They started to ask me: did you have your daughter baptized? Yes, we did. How could you do it? I answered that we had written an application, her grandmother had asked us to do so. And that I could not refuse. How could I refuse to fulfil the wish of an old woman? I told the women: She is religious; she goes to church frequently. The church is open. So, why should not I [have her baptized, *my comment, Y.G*]? We are not Communists. So, we decided to have her baptized. These women spoke with us, wrote down everything they needed and never troubled us again.[11]

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10 While visiting a church and following Christian celebrations was viewed as acceptable for old and poorly educated – 'not sufficiently cultured' – people, priests were not allowed to perform any rituals or celebrations with respect to young people and members of the Communist party.

11 «[–А первый сын у вас крещеный?] –Тоже крещеный, да. Тоже по настянию моей мамы. Потому что они старые люди, чтобы их уважить. Но в то время никаких эксцессов не было при крещении. Это был 46-й год, он еще младенцем был. И ту, и другую месяца в три крестили. А сейчас, в 62-м году нас заставили написать заявление. Мы написали, подписали и нам сказали, в какой день прийти. Мы пришли. И ее купали в купальне. […] А через месяц-полтора пришли к нам две женщины, я как раз была дома. [Пауза] Окрестили хорошо, все обряды. В общем пришли две женщины, не такие уж и молодые. Начали спрашивать меня: вы крестили девочку? Крестили. А как? Написали заявление, говорю, попросила бабушка. А я не смела отказать. Как я могу старому человеку отказать. Она верующая, все время в церковь ходит. Церковь открыта. И почему же этого нельзя? Мы не коммунисты. Мы решили окрестить. Мы поговорили, они все записали, что им нужно, и больше нас не вызывали».

Thus, in summarizing J's story about maternity one could interpret it as indicating that for her maternity meant doing everything possible for the children's physical survival. In her case survival was inconceivable without J working outside the home or, likewise, without the help of J's mother.[12] Maternity simply required all J's energy and free time.

The survival theme was very evident also in the story of K from Saratov. In contrast to D and J, K had her first child later than the others and was not influenced by the post-war gender imbalance in demographics. She was happily married. K's child was born soon after her marriage, which fully corresponded to a widespread rural tradition. Since she was experiencing an easy delivery and was able to breastfeed, K's femininity was confirmed as 'normal'. She enjoyed the physical beauty of her children and liked to show them off. However, even if the children had a father, he was mentioned infrequently in K's story about her maternity. K's husband was not the main breadwinner in the family, because his salary was simply too small to support his wife and children. However, since children were considered to belong to women's sphere, the husband's minimal role in childcare did not seem to be questioned in K's story.

K worked as a seamstress (and then, after her second child was born, as a cleaner). Her salary was essential to the family's economic survival, but, in contrast to D, K seems to have experienced her work at that time more as a burden than an opportunity (in contrast to her younger years when she was a Stakhanovite). K's situation was particularly difficult because her mother, who had to take care of K's ailing father, was not able to help K with the children. Also the bad relationship that K had with her mother-in-law was a problem (according to K she did not look after the children carefully enough; once a child was seriously burnt while playing with the stove). However, she managed to mobilize available social resources well. By using her personal connections she and her husband found a day care centre for their first child when she was 10 months old:

> [–Was it easy to find a place in the day care centre?] –It was very difficult. I knew one woman, she was the chairwoman of the factory [trade-union, *my comment*, Y.G.] committee, A.V. [she was called, *my comment*, Y.G.]. And before that she worked in the bread factory with my elder sister and then she became head of the trade union committee in our sewing factory. She helped me to get F [the daughter, *my comment*, Y.G.] into the daycare centre. She helped me to write letters stating that I lived in that municipality, she wrote everything – applications, letters. I went… [Pause] We went together with my husband to the district education office. She [the daughter, *my comment*,

Y.G.] had just started walking. And she was already running. She started to walk early. They looked at her, and said that she was a nice girl and she could walk – and accepted her. So, 10 months after the birth I went back to work and worked until 1960. I was a seamstress and had level 6 qualification.[13]

K also got help from friendly neighbours when she finally had to stay at home for two years after the birth of her second child (it turned out to be too difficult to find childcare for both children):

> And then, after I had Z [name of her second child, *my comment*, Y.G.] I stayed at home. I never went to work there again. So it was. It was difficult to find a place in the nursery, and I needed a kindergarten and a nursery. No way. Thus, I stayed at home, I stayed at home for two years. […] And after I had Z I stayed at home with them. I said to myself: I won't go through all this again [to get a place in the day care centre, *my comment*, Y.G.]. A woman next door, God bless her, helped me. One day she would give me cucumbers, another day potatoes.[14]

Even if K liked having children, she used the most common method of birth control at the time. She lowered her voice during our conversation, when she told me about the three abortions she had between the first and the second child. Like J, K also had her children baptized explaining the action by saying, like J, that the older generation (in this case her husband's parents) wanted it and their opinion had to be respected.

Thus, on the one hand, K's presentation of maternity appears rather 'traditional'. She 'naturally' had a child after she married, and she relied on her husband's salary when trying to solve problems with childcare. She also performed the necessary Christian rituals. On the other hand, her performance of a 'normal' femininity also involved practices of abortion, state childcare and waged work that made her reliant on the discourses of state care for mothers.

If we turn to the story of O, we see that it resembles K's story, since O also had a husband. He, like K's husband, was not involved in caring for the child. O also resembled K in that she followed the discourse on the naturalness of having children soon after marriage. She also respected the religious traditions of her family

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13 «[–Легко тогда было в ясли устроить?] –Тяжело. Это председатель завкома, А.В., она раньше работала на хлебозаводе с моей сестрой старшей, а потом работала председателем профсоюза у нас на фабрике швейной. Она помогла мне устроить Ф в ясли. Написала, как будто я живу в этом районе, все написала, заявление, письма. Я пошла, [пауза] мы с мужем ходили, с Ч, в районо. Она у нас уже ходила. Бегала, она у нас быстро побегла, пошла. Они посмотрели, девочка хорошая, бегает – взяли. Через 10 месяцев я пошла работать, и вот до 60-го работала. Швеей была. 6-го разряда».

14 «А потом З родилась в 60-м. Я уволилась и больше туда не поступала. Так получилось. В ясли не оформишь, и в садик надо и в ясли, и никак. Дома сидела. Два года я с ними сидела. […] А потом, после З я с ними сидела. Говорю, не буду добиваться. Соседка, дай бог ей здоровья, помогала мне. То картошки даст, то огурцов наложит».

and celebrated her marriage at home through rituals according to Islam. Still, O's presentation of her maternity differs significantly from J's and K's stories. O valued education as a particularly important instrument of social mobility as well as a source of personal pride. Thus, in spite of several complications connected with her delivery, O decided to begin her studies at the pedagogical college only two weeks after she had her child.[15] As in the case of D, breastfeeding was O's most important contribution to the care of her child:

> That's how we lived. My daughter was about two weeks old and I started to study. It went like this: I sit in with one class and some part of the second. Then I run home to feed the baby, it was 20 minutes from home. I feed her, and then again [I go back to school, *my comment*, Y.G.]. I managed to be back when the third class started… Somehow I managed [to go on studying, *my comment*, Y.G.].[16]

The other childcaring tasks were taken over by her elder unmarried sister, who moved from the countryside to live with O in Ufa. However, the sister who was portrayed as an 'unlucky' woman from the viewpoint of 'normal femininity' (she never married, supposedly because of to a physical defect, a hunchback) became overtired from the work with the baby. And when O had her second child before she had graduated from the pedagogical college, her sister left in protest for some time.

O told me that she was not very happy about her husband taking very little part in the childcare. She explained his absence by his involvement as a postgraduate student in the social activities at the college.[17] Later on, according to O, he was so occupied with his scientific work that he was excused from taking part in the housework and the bringing up of the children. We also may suppose that O's acceptance of her husband's lack of help was connected partly with the ethnic/religious tradition as when O had to fetch water for the household from a distance of several blocks from her house soon after she came home from maternity ward after a delivery with complications.[18] But, in this case, the main excuse for the husband's absence from the household chores was rather his well-respected social position, since being a postgraduate student in Ufa in the 1950s meant the promise of upward social mobility in the future. Thanks to him the family was able, for example, to easily find public childcare for the three children.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that femininities created through maternity

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15 O was taking her college entrance exams while in the last stage of her pregnancy.

16 «Вот так вот и жили. Ну и вот дочери моей уже недели две и я начала ходить на занятия. И вот так: одну пару сижу, потом вторую пару сижу – бегу домой, 20 минут от дома. Кормлю ребенка, потом опять. И успевала на третью пару. Приду, вот, на третью пару и как-то так вот».

17 'Social activities' (*obsjtjestvennaia rabota*) was part of the Komsomol and Communist party's activity and usually involved communist indoctrination. This work was important for achieving a higher social position.

18 Fetching water was a female occupation according to Bashkir tradition.

practices during the 1940s and 1960s were connected with complicated normative practices. Indeed femininities were enacted through the intersections between social status (dependent also on a present, or expected future profession), the economic situation of a women's family and thirdly, the tradition or culture of the social environment to which the woman belonged. The economic situation included not only living conditions and salary, but also the availability of an extended family and its willingness to help the mother. The stories I have studied also demonstrate that during this period the state support for mothers of small children was considerably lower than what one might have expected according to the robust state discourse on 'care for mothers'. In order to guarantee the physical survival of the child, to manage breastfeeding and childcare and to be able to practice 'real' maternal love, the women had to develop what I would call entrepreneurial skills and mobilize all possible resources. In so doing they were frequently subverting the dominant discourses on maternity by readjusting or misusing them. If we take the discourse on social motherhood, for example, we can see that it was used by some women for improving their living conditions, as in the case of D, while the discourse on motherhood as women's natural predestination was used to secure help with childcare from the part of female relatives, as in the case of O or D. Furthermore, maternity, being very important for the performance of femininity as such, also absorbed elements of somewhat contradictory normative practices, including religious rituals and abortion.

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The Poetics of Memory as the Politics of Reading: Fourteen Episodes of Remembering

Irina Sandomirskaia

Memory from the In-Between

This story is an attempt at a genealogy of reading and an analysis of the poetics of memory from the point of view of its interpretation by the reader of an autobiographical manuscript, a piece of private testimony that claims to contribute to, or even to rewrite the grand narrative of history. I am looking at the poetics of memory as the result of the work of interpretation and as created by the allegories produced by the reading eye, not by the writing hand (de Man 1979, 3–20). Such archaeology yields an understanding of the condition of collective memory in the community of readers and produces a number of diachronic cross-sections in the stream of the public discourses of the past. For this purpose, I am suggesting a short excursus into the history of one textual artefact. Its production spans the period of the 1970s–1980s; its content, however, covers the whole of Soviet history, from its origins in the early 1920s – the time when the writer was a child – almost to its end, until Gorbachev's perestroika on the very eve of the fall of the USSR.

Evgeniia Grigor'evna Kiseleva (1916–1990), the author, was at the time of writing already an elderly woman gradually aging further as her writing progressed over the years, a retired cleaning lady from a small coal-mining town in the Donbass region. In her childhood in the 1920s, she had received four years of education at a Ukrainian-language elementary school and had lived all her life since then in a semi-industrialized small-town workers' district. The producer of the autobiography was in every way a representative of the in-between, the neither-here-nor-there of Soviet identity. A Russian woman once given a modest share of literacy in Ukrainian, she existed in an interstice between the Russian and the Ukrainian languages speaking and writing the sociolect of the culturally mixed underprivileged in the Russian-populated areas of Ukraine.

In that small-town workers' ghetto, Russian and Ukrainian peasants had been once gathered together in the effort of hasty modernization during the Stalinist industrialization campaign. Mass famines and police violence were quite instrumental

in the acceleration of this transformation, as incomplete as it turned out, of peasants into workers. Once relocated to towns and in search of food and employment, these peasants later found themselves confined there, as the way back into the peasant community was soon cut off by even more police violence in the modernization of the village. Kiseleva's in-between-ness in terms of class (no longer a peasant but not a worker either with a proper proletarian consciousness) was further complicated by her gender and the respective limitations on the choice of profession: as a woman, she could not claim the heroic (and well-paid) role of the worker in the mine, but could only assume a position in the service of the proletariat, working at the workers' canteen, at a food store, or as a cleaning lady in the garage.

In spite of her scanty education, she claimed and never doubted her entitlement to a share of *kul'turnost'* and the democratic right to public expression on an equal footing with the educated ones. It was still more provoking for the subsequent reader of her notes (when the notes finally did find a reader, which did not happen instantly) that such a culturally disabled writer should insist on producing a manuscript and, moreover, should further insist as she did on making the manuscript public and widely known, preferably to be reworked into a film. Kiseleva the naïve writer never doubted either the value of her story or the proposed reader's readiness and ability to identify with her experiences.

The milestones of Soviet history appear in Kiseleva's memory to be almost invisible, as if lost among the endless trivia of a long life: everyday survival in a peasant family in the 1920s and then a worker family throughout the 1930s–80s; the personal experiences of industrialization, cultural revolution, and collectivization; the historical upheavals and the biopolitical interventions of the state (such as wars, famines, and mass extermination during the Terror) and how the everyday subject copes with all these; first and foremost, the disastrous experiences of a mother, wife, and daughter in the Second World War, the horrors of the Nazi occupation in southern Russia and Ukraine; and, as a consequence, the uneasiness of the relatively peaceful Brezhnev times as she expects a new war to start any minute and ascribes all family troubles of the present day to the devastating effects of the past war. The war haunts Kiseleva throughout her life, and it is through the prism of the war that she interprets her past, present, and future – her own, as well as those of her whole country, the USSR.

I became a minor participant in these events more than twenty years ago in the quite specific circumstances of post-Soviet instability and I cannot guarantee that my memory has retained them intact. My co-author, the social philosopher and anthropologist Natalia Kozlova who once invited me to participate in the publication of Kiseleva's book (Kozlova & Sandomirskaia 1996) and who had been involved in the story in a much deeper and more informed way, died several years ago. Kiseleva herself had been writing her notes with the explicit purpose of having them eventually transformed into a film or, even better, a TV series. 'This is what I want the movie to be called…', she says in her manuscript, but her attention characteristically switches

to something else and she forgets to give the reader the title itself. As I now recollect the story of the publication and reception of Kiseleva's manuscript, my story, as I remember it, also acquires a likeness to a movie, unfolding in a number of disjointed but related episodes.

'This is what I want the movie to be called…'

Episode 1

In the mid-1970s in the small industrial town of Pervomaisk in Voroshilovgrad region, in a one-room apartment, an elderly woman, Evgeniia Grigor'evna Kiseleva, a retired cleaning lady, twice a widow, mother and grandmother, was living her insignificant life in total loneliness, shared only by a radio and a TV-set. In her solitude, she was watching the typical TV-production of the period, the endless series about the Great Patriotic War, the bloody carnage of the civil population by the Nazi occupants, and the heroic struggle of the Soviet partisans during the occupation under the leadership of the underground Party committees. She was also listening to the radio, which was transmitting military marches and dedicating them to veterans and heroes of the war. At some point in time Evgeniia Grigor'evna started wondering why no one dedicated military marches to her, the widow of a Soviet officer and the mother of two sons, the Motherland's potential soldiers. She had managed to keep those two children alive amidst the calamities of war, a truly heroic deed. She was also the daughter of two handicapped elderly people, for whose survival she had desperately struggled during several months of the occupation of the Donbass while the whole family – two children, one of them newborn, two sick old people, and herself – spent forty days in hiding in an empty underground food store. She had fought for the life of her family no less valiantly than the heroes of the Soviet Union in question had fought for the life of the Socialist Motherland. She also started wondering why her own life should not become a TV-series. Personally, she could see no difference at all between the characters on the screen and her own history, between the ideological message of the historical narrative as broadcast by the TV studio and her own convictions.

In order to correct the historical error, as a result of which her personal history had been left unappreciated by the grand narrative, she made up her mind to write it down in her own words, as best she could, and send it to a film studio. Evgeniia Grigor'evna sat down to work and eventually produced three notebooks of handwritten, half-literate, and hardly legible text, partly memories, partly diaries. She then sewed them up inside a pillowcase and mailed it off to the Gorky film studio in Moscow.

Episode 2

When it reached the film studio, the pillowcase was passed to the department of correspondence with the general population, where contributions were collected from amateur film-makers and self-appointed film critics from the audience. Here, it was supposed to be sorted, registered, looked through, politely rejected, and sent away to an archive. Now, what actually happened to the content of Evgeniia Grigor'evna's pillowcase was something else.

Working as a literary editor at the department was a young woman author named Elena Ol'shanskaia. While trying to find way into the world of literature, she was earning a living by accepting occasional menial jobs and struggling at the same time to publish her own texts. It was she who became Kiseleva's first reader. Herself an aspiring creative writer, she recognized the passion and the will to be published in the scribbles of the unknown semi-literate autodidact. Ol'shanskaia decided to have Kiseleva's manuscript published. And indeed, it was difficult to resist the appeal of the text, coming as it did from virtually nowhere, as artless and powerful as it was in its naked, raw truthfulness. The younger woman rewrote Kiseleva's scribbles on a typewriter to make the text presentable to the publishers; she gave the text a structure and a kind of balance, working very hard at the same time on preserving its spontaneous expression. Kiseleva's manuscript thus became an *objet trouvé*, an object found in nature and transferred by a professional into an oeuvre. With the manuscript thus upgraded in hand Ol'shanskaia started campaigning for its publication.

All this was happening in the mid- and late 1970s, the time when the literary movement of *derevenskaia proza* (novels about peasant life) in mainstream literary production was at peak of its popularity. The urban liberal intelligentsia had developed a fashion for collecting rural everyday objects such as old spinning-wheels, leaking samovars, and icons. The acquisition of a simple *izba* somewhere away from Moscow in an almost depopulated village was not only a smart economic investment, but also a gesture of disrespect towards the *nomenklatura* with their *dachas*. Peasants were imagined to have remained unspoiled by Stalinist civilization and communist ideology. It was then that Kiseleva's naïve writing made its first public appearance.

Episode 3

In spite of the apparently benign circumstances Ol'shanskaia's search for a publisher or at least a reader among the elite of writers and film-makers in Moscow went on for almost 15 years without any success. It transpired that the elite was quite prepared to design their own privileged lifestyles according to their own imagined ideal of the patriarchal Russian *narod* (folk), but they were not at all willing to share the privileges of official publication with an obscure retired cleaning lady, a living representative of the living, not imagined, Soviet masses. According to Ol'shanskaia's own story, not a single one of these *maîtres* ever took the trouble to even glance at the text. Samovars and icons notwithstanding, a text produced by the closest likeness to the *narod* ever

available to them did not respond to their aesthetic expectations. It did not work as a piece of *derevenskaia proza*. Nor did the truth of Kiseleva's experience strike anybody as exactly *the* truth. Kiseleva's intentions were read as symptoms of senility, her style appearing to the significant, powerful others as a gross misuse of Soviet literacy, her truth sheer madness, and her desire to publish typical graphomania.

Episode 4

Time passed, and there came Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost', a veritable revolution in discourse. With the abolition of pre-publication censorship by the 1990 law on the press, the literary field was flooded as though some secret locks had been swung open, by textual production that had been repressed during the 70 years of Soviet power. This flood was driven by the gigantic energy of a unanimous collective will to history, the will of the reading public and the cultural workers to reclaim the historical truth of the still existing but already crumbling USSR. Secret archives and restricted library stores containing censored writing were literally exploding from within.

While *derevenskaia proza* had lamented the 'excesses' of Soviet urbanization without questioning the foundations of the system, perestroika challenged the holy of holies: the ideological leadership of the Party, the Soviet regime in general. A new truth was being sought, and no longer in the collectible artefacts of rural life, but in documents and archives, official as well as private. For the first time, memory appeared on the stage of public debate – and immediately caused polarization and controversy, with the radical right organization *Pamiat'* (Russ. Memory) at one end of the political spectrum and the democratic historical association *Memorial* at the other. Memory became a powerful agent of change, a weapon in the struggle against a falsified, corrupt, and prostituted history.

Each month, the most influential central thick literary magazines carried a new range of newly rehabilitated names, each representing the highest level of literary innovation, each formerly silenced completely or known marginally as a heavily censored corpus of writing. There was scarcely enough time to read, and certainly no time to comment on or even think about these newly discovered, complex literary universes. In the gold rush of archive publications during the time of perestroika, there was little time to negotiate between the habits of reading and knowing, on the one hand, and the dramatically new languages that had all of a sudden exploded in public, on the other.

Episode 5

It was during that time that Ol'shanskaia finally managed to mobilize her personal acquaintances in the literary world and force Kiseleva's manuscript into the very narrow circle of literati and critics associated with *Novyi Mir* literary magazine.

Here, she persuaded a well-established *Novyi Mir* contributor to read through the manuscript and to write a positive internal review. A couple of years later, in 1991, when *Novyi Mir* had already exhausted its portfolio of repressed and rehabilitated authors and found itself facing a severe economic and ideological crisis at the very dawn of the Yeltsin era, the publication of a fragment finally took place. It was based on the edited version of the original manuscript that had been produced by Ol'shanskaia some 15 years earlier. Very heavily re-edited, considerably reduced, and recomposed by a *Novyi Mir* literary editor, the text was finally published under the rubric of 'documents of life' with a short introduction by the above-mentioned well-established contributor. The introduction appealed to the genuineness and artlessness of Kiseleva's writing, which was characterized as genuine (*настоящее*), authentic (*подлинное, аутентичное*), simple (*простое*), and artless (*безыскусное*), to the sacrificial image of Kiseleva as a member of the *narod* and a victim of Soviet history, as a spontaneous folk genius (Kiseleva 1991, 9).

The introduction also claimed that the 'document' was being published as it was, without editorial interventions but with the application of 'montage that is always necessary in such cases' (*ibid.*). I later spent several months trying to unravel the tight network of corrections, improvements, rephrasings, reductions, etc., which had the text of the manuscript by the literary editors of *Novyi Mir* and trying to understand the rationale behind them (Kozlova & Sandomirskaia 1996, 245–255). This became my first practical confrontation with Michel Foucault's order of discourse as it was implemented by the work of the editor, the agent operating on behalf of a powerful literary institution, as she was normalizing not only Kiseleva's language, but above all the writer's memory and identity.

Being accepted for publication in *Novyi Mir* meant that Kiseleva's writing had to be manipulated in order to fit the *dispositif*: a well-established, mildly oppositional thick literary magazine for well-to-do educated liberals. It also meant that the manuscript had to be transformed from a found object (as it had been constructed by the institutionless Ol'shanskaia) into a fetish; even though the publication claimed that no editorial intervention had been made, the *dispositif* inevitably left its imprint on the body of Kiseleva's writing by re-inscribing it with its own ideological script.

As though the editor were performing her 'necessary montage' using Foucault's *Order of Discourse*[1] as a guidebook, the editorial revision of the manuscript for publication included its evaluation in terms of sanity/madness (the most 'senile' fragments of the text were rejected). The publisher also revealed a 'will to truth' by selecting the episodes which appeared more likely to have happened in reality. *Novyi Mir* selected what suited its idea of historical truth (for instance, Kiseleva's sufferings during the war) but rejected what Kiseleva herself thought to be equally historically truthful (for example, her descriptions of everyday drunken conflicts, wife battery,

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1   Originally, *L'ordre du discourse* (1971), Michel Foucault, 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language.* Transl. from the French by A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York, 1972, 215–237.

ethnic unpleasantness, and illegal exchanges such as theft). *Novyi Mir* framed the text with its own commentary profusely saturated with evaluative adjectives. The 'necessary montage' included a total disciplining, an unconditional normalization of Kiseleva's substandard grammar and vocabulary. What is more important, the *Novyi Mir* editing manipulated the identity of the writer, by suppressing her remarkable social competence as a long-time inhabitant and experienced agent in a small-town working-class community. Instead, the narrative 'I' of Kiseleva was edited in order to give her an innocent, folksy, patriarchal sentimentality. In the publication, she became a rough diamond, a gold nugget of popular wisdom and poetry found in the scrapyard of culture, a glimpse of popular creativity in the drab Soviet reality. She was constructed as a passive object of manipulation by the regime. In her original, meanwhile, Kiseleva appears, on the contrary, as a shrewd player of Soviet social games, an active and creative maker of her own and her family's survival, and a clear-sighted observer (See Kozlova's analysis in Kozlova & Sandomirskaia 1996, 43–87).

Episode 6

The *Novyi Mir* publication in 1991 produced a sensation among the (at that time still) numerous *Novyi Mir* readership and received a prize as the best publication of the year.

By that time, Kiseleva had been dead for a couple of months. Her posthumous glory, however, turned out to be quite short-lived, since in the early 1990s the fortunes of *Novyi Mir*, the mouthpiece of enlightened Soviet liberalism, ultimately and irreparably declined. Kiseleva's original manuscript, those same three handwritten notebooks, was assigned to the Popular Archives, a newly established document depository where unremarkable common people could leave their photographs, diaries, and oral histories for posterity.[2] Kiseleva's manuscript was duly filed and registered and, since the Archive did not have sufficient staff or money for any systematic cataloguing, it was stored, together with hundreds of other files, on a shelf under the heading of *Ortodoksy*, '(Soviet ideological) Orthodoxes'.

Episode 7

Here, a couple of years later, it was rediscovered by Natalia Kozlova who was single-handedly working on a mammoth project of writing an anthropological study of Soviet everyday life.[3] She had conceived the project during the very height of Yeltsin's

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2 'The Popular Archives' (Tsentr dokumentatsii Narodnyi Arkhiv (TsDNA)) were created in 1988 by an initiative of the Moscow Historical Archival Institute with the support from the Soros Foundation, see http://www.shpl.ru/project/sam/sam_p2.htm, downloaded January 15, 2008.

3 See Козлова, Н. 1996, *Горизонты повседневности советской эпохи: голоса из хора*, Москва; Козлова, Н.,1998, *Социально-историческая антропология,* Москва; Козлова, Н. 2005, *Советские люди: сцены из истории*, Москва; Kozlova, N., 1998, On the Cognitive-Normative Mapping of Soviet Civilization: the Space Beneath, in: M. Bryld and E. Kulavig (eds) *Soviet Civilization between*

reforms. That had been a period of transformations dominated by severe shortages of food and continuous fear of civil war, accompanied by the enthusiastic, sometimes desperate flight of the intelligentsia from the collapsing state-run institutions of science and culture into the wide open space of individual entrepreneurship, or in search of new, more powerful employers. It was also at that time that the young and weak sphere of public politics, as it had been constituted during the timid freedom of Gorbachev's reforms, started to evaporate under the pressure of political technologies.

The neoliberal propaganda of that time developed a rabid hatred of the *sovok*, the 'Soviet mentality' in the former Soviet citizens.[4] This label was attached to everybody who was less successful in the new circumstances, who clung to the Soviet experiences, resisted capitalist innovation, and stubbornly continued, for lack of a better alternative, to survive hyperinflation on the minute and irregularly paid salaries in the state-run sector. *Sovok* (to whose ranks Natasha and I also belonged) was seen as the evil residue of Soviet civilization in the 'mentality' of the 'electorate'. *Sovok* stood in the way of capitalism and neoliberalism and needed to be got rid of.

Episode 8

It was exactly this hatred of the new 'freedom' for the *sovok* people that first made Natasha suspicious of the project of reform as it was been implemented. She did not believe in miraculous transformations, nor, as a social philosopher, did she agree with the new capitalist *nomenklatura's* usage of words such as 'freedom', or 'democracy'. Neither could she accept the arrogance of the new ruling class that sought the devaluation and eventual extermination of any memory, any hard-won experience of the Soviet subject. It was then that she conceived her anthropology of Soviet everyday life, and it was then, while digging through the files containing diaries, photo-albums, and correspondences of other *sovoks* at the Popular Archives, that she came across the original manuscript of Kiseleva's autobiographical writing.

It should be added that this was also the time when post-Soviet poststructuralist scholarship was discovering Bourdieu, de Certeau, and Foucault. The result of Natasha's reading of Kiseleva through this triple theoretical prism was staggering: it was all there, and in a much stronger, much more evident and dramatic way when compared to the examples provided by these three intellectual stars in their own observations of Western society. Seen through the prism of poststructuralist theory, Kiseleva appeared more modern than modern. As acutely modern and not at all patriarchal, and in a way that had not been perceived earlier, there also appeared

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Past and Present, Odense, 95–114; Kozlova, N., 2006, The Diary as Initiation and Rebirth: Reading Everyday Documents of the Early Soviet Era, in: C. Kiaer and E. Naiman (eds), *Everyday life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside.* Bloomington & Indianapolis, 282–298.

4   *Sovok* is a derogatory abbreviation from *homo sovieticus*, both terms invented and launched into circulation by Aleksandr Zinov'iev in his political pamphlet *Gomo Sovetikus* (1982, English translation, Alexander Zinoviev 1985, *Homo Sovieticus*, London).

in this new critical reading those determining factors through which the identity and subjectivity of Kiseleva the *sovok* had been produced: the Soviet project of acculturation and the Stalinist civilizing process, urbanization and the adoption of urban everyday politics by the former peasants; the formation of informal economies and the elaboration of strategies of survival during famines, wars, and in prison camps; the evolution of power games on the arena of everyday life, and the development of the agency of the Soviet subject through discipline and punishment under the close political and biopolitical control from above.

Episode 9

Against the background of such theoretical and cultural resources, the previous attempt by the liberal *Novyi Mir* to domesticate Kiseleva's writing by inscribing it with ideological signs of patriarchal traditional values now appeared quite manipulative. As Natasha took up the project of publishing Kiseleva anew and in full, she now found herself confronted by double opposition: the hungry logic of the new capitalism with its cannibalistic 'market-oriented values', on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the haughtiness of what remained of the liberal intelligentsia and their values of Soviet high diction understood in terms of culturedness, but primarily understood in terms of linguistic normalization.

Episode 10

Giving a voice to a silenced, neglected memory: this was a project of rehabilitating history and potentially changing its course so characteristic of that time, the early 1990s, an epoch of unprecedented emancipation barely initiated by the defeat of the 1991 coup attempt and already, as early as 1993, overshadowed by Yeltsin's storming of the Parliament.

The work we did was that of transforming Kiseleva's handmade writing from Ol'shanskaia's privately cultivated found object and from *Novyi Mir*'s elitist fetish, into an object of deconstruction, a ready-made object. We removed it from the realm of modernist aesthetics and placed it in the domain of avant-garde politics. It was a radical gesture for Natasha and me, both of us highly disciplined academic women, to do what Natasha invited me to do. The idea was to publish Kiseleva's text in full and without any corrections, to show respect for her mode of expression, and to elevate her idiom from substandard non-cultured sociolect into a language in its own right. We also believed in the extreme importance of Kiseleva's evidence as a source of absolutely new historical and philological knowledge. It needed to be published precisely for these reasons, for the benefit of future researchers, with a theoretical introduction.

We re-exposed it as a piece of scholarly, historical, and artistic value, and as an important cultural artefact. The politics of representation of her writing was for us

of utmost importance. By carefully and minutely reclaiming Kiseleva's writing in its every tiny idiosyncrasy, Natasha and I sought to make a critical gesture towards the *dispositif* of high diction, culturedness and grammatical correctness, the place where social norm and linguistic norm, political regime and the regime of representation meet in one object: the Book. Kiseleva's text never managed to become a film, but with our help she could at least become an academic monograph.

Episode 11

First in the hand-written copy (Natasha's single-handed heroic deed in the name of knowledge: the archives did not possess a copying machine) and then in the typesetting of the original manuscript, special care was taken *not* to correct a single letter, nor a single spelling mistake, nor to insert a single comma, nor violate a single syntactic construction produced by the author. This was a work of conscientious reconstruction comparable to that of the restoration of ancient fragments and palimpsests, for example, Sappho. For ourselves as researchers, it was an experiment in critical introspection, training in the de-automatization of the habit, since the hand of an educated writer inserts commas mechanically, and it was precisely this mechanicity of normalization that we wanted to challenge in the work of the intellectual, – in our case, in our own work. Returning the manuscript back to its own self, restoring it back to its originality required considerable expert assistance. Thus, a professional proof-reader was engaged in the preparation of the typescript to compare our working copy with Natasha's hand-written copy. For the proof-reader, this work of *not* correcting proved quite exasperating and time-consuming, but her respect for the document and her solidarity with Kiseleva and with us prevailed over her sense of grammatical propriety. The copy was further prepared in the way philologists prepare standard editions of classical texts, with manuscript lines numbered, illegible fragments highlighted, and page numbers in the original in square brackets. It was thus prepared for further comments from future scholars. In our own introductory notes (Natasha wrote a socio-anthropological commentary, I wrote a semiotic one), the language of Kiseleva's work was given the highest prominence; her alienation from, and her indifference to, the grammatical norm were argued to be no less important for the understanding of her subjectivity and identity than the critical terms of class, ethnicity, and gender. The normalizing work of literary editing was also analysed in detail.

Episode 12

Later on, both privately and publicly, we were accused of having stolen Kiseleva's identity and of publishing her production under our own names (e.g., the *Novyi Mir* review of the publication in C. K. 1997). The meticulous and time-consuming work of textual restoration and the theoretical reconstruction of its context were ignored by

our critics as insignificant. The 100 pages of commentary (out of a total of 255) were not taken into account as original research. And indeed, even though we did return Kiseleva her voice and even her handwriting, a sample of which was reproduced on the cover of the book; even though the name of Kiseleva is mentioned several times on every page of the introduction, it is conspicuously absent from the book cover. The late Kiseleva was for both of us indeed a living person, but her manuscript was anthropological material recovered by research. Thus, Kiseleva herself as the author of her life and her writings remained hidden between the covers of an academic edition.

The book never happened as we wanted it, of course. The publishers were going bankrupt, the paper cost millions, the Popular Archives were being thrown out of their sewage-flooded premises, wages were not being paid, and hyperinflation was raging and devastating the ranks of bookstore customers. What we did publish is ultimately an under-edited, underwritten, under-proof-read compromise, but one thing is certain: it does contain a complete version of Kiseleva's manuscript, its form faithfully preserved as it was written (apart from the typesetting), its lines numbered, its grammatical and other 'mistakes' preserved as they originally were, and not a single extra comma inserted. When the book ultimately went out of print, Natasha and I mobilized all our resources and purchased the whole of the printed stock, because we felt bad about the publisher suffering economic distress through issuing a book no one would buy. The copies we had in our possession vanished among friends and relatives and disappeared from circulation. A second edition proposed by the publisher after Natasha's death never attracted any interest, either financial or scholarly.

Episode 13

Yet still, it did have an effect. Both Natasha and I revisited Kiseleva many times in separate publications later on (Sandomirskaia 2001, see also a short bibliography of Kozlova's work where she returns to the Kiseleva manuscript [see footnote 3]). The book (together with Natasha's teaching at the Department of Philosophy at RGGU) did inspire a new discipline of post-folklore studies as well as enthusiastic followers among younger qualitative social scientists and anthropologists, who set out searching for, collecting, and commenting on similar documents of everyday life, and not only textual ones. Somewhere in the process, Kiseleva's text in its full version as it was presented in our book was even translated into French and issued out by a publisher in Paris (Etcherelli 2000).

Episode 14

As for Natasha herself, she died several years ago and seems to have also disappeared without trace. The memory of Natasha's life is inscribed in standard letters on a

standard marble plate covering a standard niche of the Khovanskoie cemetery in Moscow, a cemetery for the less fortunate and less privileged, the members of the caste of the *sovok*. She is buried next to people who could be characters in her writing, the subjects of her research, the agents of Soviet everyday life. As she had lived their life during her lifetime, so she died their death when her time came, and shared with her characters the inconspicuous, low-budget burial place as allotted to them by their country.

When I look at the picture of her burial place, it is not at once that I discern her name among the names of those *sovoks* who share the same columbarium under the open sky, in the *requiem aeternum* of the brand new garden of remembrance for the less privileged subjects of the new Russian neoliberal economy. Everyday life has eaten up Natasha's existence and transformed it into just an ordinary name among the thousands of ordinary names of her potential heroes. In this choice of burial (a forced one, but still a choice), I can identify a statement, a gesture of identification. It is a statement of identity between the writer and her character; the researcher and her subject; between Mikhail Bakhtin's *avtor* and *geroi*; between the *auctor* and the *actor*, the social philosopher and the social agent, the two language-game players in the practices of everyday life.

The Poetics and Politics of Remembering

I am revisiting this episode for the purpose of elucidating how reception elaborates its own allegories and figures in the process of reading the scripts of memory, and how memory or oblivion consequently emerges out of this dialogue between writing and reading. In the final analysis, it is invariably the reader, not the writer, who has the power to acknowledge the content of the writing, and thus to confirm and legitimate it precisely as memory: not as the empty speech of a traumatized psyche, not as graphomaniac illiteracy, nor as the work of an insane imagination. The work of such confirmation/legitimation is performed anew every time the piece of writing enters a new group of readers, a new historical context, and a new *dispositif* of symbolic power.

Kiseleva's manuscript first emerged in the aftermath of perestroika and glasnost', and it is primarily the after-effects of these that constructed the circumstances of how the manuscript was read and interpreted, what allegories such reading produced, and what was the inter-textual backgrounds against which different readers were making sense of the script. Understanding the poetics of memory in the fashion suggested by Paul de Man as allegories produced by reading, we also explicate for ourselves the hermeneutic climate of the period of perestroika and glasnost', as well as the symbolic revolution that lies at the very origin of all writing and all reading, all memory and all history, as my generation of reading and writing post-Soviet subjects constructs them.

The reader of the glasnost' period lived in the constant expectation of a historical revelation that would overturn the falsified past. At the end of the Soviet era, as the official truth of the regime was rapidly losing its authority and the official discourse could no longer hold together under the weight of the collapsing system, new historical evidence was expected to reveal themselves as a truth that would be self-sufficient and self-evident, without those rhetorical 'hindrances' which were especially annoying in the official Soviet discourses, without censored silences and euphemisms, without the doublethink and the newspeak. The 'common woman' Kiseleva was yearning for such a bare truth as strongly as the enlightened cultural elite. 'The reader will read, and he will understand', she repeats a number of times in her manuscript. In the end, both the 'simple' writer and the sophisticated reader were disappointed: Kiseleva, by not finding any immediate response or interest in the reader or, actually, any reader at all during her lifetime; the reader, by not finding any direct evidence of any radically different past in Kiseleva's testimony – a past that would cancel the Soviet historical myth once and for all and thus redeem the cultured Soviet reader from the guilt of having collaborated with this myth.

The evolution of reading as I traced it above faithfully reflects, in my opinion, the dramatic process of the invention of a new past after the collapse of Soviet doctrine and after the demise of glasnost', the last intellectual project of Soviet modernity. The role of glasnost' in the transformation of the intellectual's modes of reading and knowing, by opening new languages, new objects, and new textures to historical interpretation, has not as yet been appreciated to the full; neither has the experience embodied in memories thus written and read yet been explicated, exhausted, or fully appropriated. As before, so too nowadays Soviet memory, its figures and symbols remain an enigma: a powerful source of unpredictable potential change in what we choose to know and remember about the past. It is also a source of change for the past itself, as it is remembered or forgotten by us.

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How to Remember a Dead Soldier

Per-Arne Bodin

The wars in Chechnya (the first in 1994–1996 and the second beginning in 1999) have been a traumatic experience for both the inhabitants of that republic and for the Russians. From the Russian perspective, one of the most discussed cases in connection with these wars has been the death of one soldier, Evgenii Rodionov. He was killed in Chechnya in 1996, during the first war, after having been taken prisoner while he was guarding a border checkpoint, allegedly because he refused to become a Muslim and take off his cross, which he wore around his neck.

The story of Evgenii's death has been narrated and commented on in the mass media, and is widely known across Russia. I will argue that his life and death have been related in the Russian public sphere using three different discourses: a war-hero discourse; the discourse of a soldier's mother, and finally, a hagiographic one. These discourses use different fragments of memories, and thus the death of the young man is remembered in three different ways. In the present paper, I will outline these three discourses and analyse some of their constituents, as well as the interference between them. I will focus on certain important mechanisms in collective memory-making in post-Soviet Russia.

I share the standpoint of Maurice Halbwachs (1992), who claims that memories, when expressed orally or textually, are always put into a social framework of linguistic and social expectations. They are examples of different speech genres (to use Bakhtin's term) in the field of memory; perhaps they could be called memory genres (Bakhtin 1996, 159–206*).* By memory discourse I mean a narrative about something that allegedly happened in the past, a phenomenon defined by society, culture and language, which comprises a special manner of narration, style, choice of details and persons, and, not least of all, a conscious or unconscious forgetting of aspects of the 'real' parts of memories. I am not going to focus on the individuals who have created these discourses, but rather on their construction and circulation, as well as on the mixing and confrontation between different discourses (Foucault 1977, 113–96).

In the case of Evgenii Rodionov, the situation is complicated by the fact that the memories are mediated through the mass media and the Russian Orthodox Church. Evgenii himself did not leave behind any texts when he died, except for some letters and a poem to his mother. His mother Liubov' has not written anything herself, either; she has only expressed herself to journalists. The social framework will thus become even more significant, and the 'real memories' and the 'real events' will recede further into the background than is usual in memory discourse production, coming

as they do from two sources with such a strong formative or manipulative capacity. All examples in this study are taken from web-based publications. The material here is both voluminous and extremely varied. Today the web is widely and regularly used in different spheres of Russian political, cultural and religious life, but there is also a risk that marginalized groups may receive much more specific weight in studies based mainly on material from the web. It is easier and much less expensive to publish material on the web than to print it. The power of editorial censorship is also much weaker on the web than in printed texts. The discourses may thus be more exaggerated than if we were to have the full picture provided by different materials.

The war hero

The first discourse considered in this paper is the war hero's discourse. In some of the publicized texts, he is remembered for his military feats. Evgenii and his three comrades, who guarded the same checkpoint between Chechnya and Ingushetia, gave their lives for the defence of Russia against the Chechnyan bandits. He and his comrades were ideal soldiers. Unlike other young men, they had not tried to evade military service, they did not drink, they had no contact with women and were chaste – 'devstvenniki'. They fought for Russia. Evgenii's picture in camouflage uniform is constantly reproduced.

Evgenii Rodionov as a soldier

He is even mentioned by the daughter of the famous Second World War hero Marshal Georgii Zhukov in an interview, as well as in this statement made by the nationalist historian, N. N. Lisovoi (2006):

> Every Russian soldier, whether he fought in Europe or in Central Asia, knew that he carried the Orthodox faith to the world. The main thing for him was not to deny his faith. In our days in Chechnya, a Russian soldier, Evgenii Rodionov, was tortured but did not deny his faith even under torture. In the days of Skobelev, there was also a soldier who perished for his faith. He was flayed alive. Perhaps this solider was illiterate, but he knew that he was a citizen of Great Russia.[1]

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1   All translations of the Russian and Church Slavonic texts: Per-Arne Bodin and Julie Hansen.

Каждый русский солдат, воевал ли он в Европе или в Средней Азии, знал, что он несёт в мир православную веру. Главным для него было – не отступиться от веры. В наши дни в Чечне был замучен русский солдат Евгений Родионов, который под пытками не отказался от своей веры. Во времена Скобелева тоже был солдат, погибший за веру. С него живым содрали кожу. Этот солдат мог быть неграмотным, но знал, что он – гражданин Великой России.

Evgenii himself is often compared, as in this example and in the following, compared to Foma Danilov – a Russian soldier killed in Turkmenia in 1875 under similar circumstances: 'The feat of Evgenii Rodionov in our time is similar to the feat of the soldier Foma' («Подвиг Евгения Родионова в наше время подобен подвигу воина Фомы», (Azarov 2006)). The story of Foma has become famous because it was related by Dostoevsky in his *Diary of a Writer* (Dostoevskii 1983, 12–17).

Evgenii's fate is seen as part of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, and he is thus considered to have given his life for the same cause as Foma Danilov (Azarov 2006):

But Evgenii demonstrated why there was a war. What was happening in Chechnya was like a cancerous tumour. And it is no coincidence that so much effort was dedicated in the 19th century to the suppression of the Caucasus. The Caucasian war lasted for forty-six years precisely because it is impossible to tolerate bandit enclaves on one's frontiers.

А Евгений Родионов указал причину, из-за чего идет война. То, что происходило в Чечне, это раковая опухоль. И не даром столько сил было положено в XIX веке на завоевание Кавказа. Сорок шесть лет шла кавказская война именно потому, что нельзя было у себя на границе терпеть бандитский анклав.

The heroizing finally assumes enormous, hyperbolic proportions: Evgenii is not only one of the heroes, he is *the* hero of the Chechen war. As stated in the article 'Call me the Quiet Motherland' (2000–2007): 'An accomplished feat is not in vain. […] Perhaps no one has done more in this war than the soldier Evgenii Rodionov'. («Совершенный подвиг не бывает напрасным. […] Может быть, никто не сделал на этой войне для России больше, чем солдат Евгений Родионов»). Evgenii has been posthumously honoured with more than ten different medals for his military feats, a very belated honour begrudgingly bestowed on him by the military authorities. Even more significant is the following story told in connection with him (Balabanov 2002):

Once a veteran from the Second World War visited Zhenia's grave. He took off his sign of distinction from the war front – his medal 'For bravery', and placed it on the gravestone and said to Liubov' Vasilevna: 'I, my daughter, know what war is. And I consider him to be worthy of this medal. He saved the soul of Russia!'

Как-то на могилу к Жене приехал ветеран Великой Отечественной. Снял с себя фронтовую награду – медаль «За отвагу», положил на могильный камень и сказал Любови Васильевне: «Я, дочка, знаю, что такое война. И считаю, что он достоин этой медали. Он душу России спас!»

His feat is thus directly related to the Second World War, which is still of central importance in the Russian collective memory. His heroism is hereditary. Evgenii is thus connected both to the military endeavours of the tsars in the 19th century and to the Second World War, both of which are cultural signs of enormous importance in the Russian cultural and political context. In one text, all three discourses can be traced (Shkurko 2005):

Evgenii did not betray his mother, his Homeland or his faith. The posthumous order of bravery, a memorial plaque calling him a heroic frontier soldier at the entrance of the school where he studied, his classmates' remembrance of him, and the grave of her son in native soil – this is all that remains for his mother. What then gives her the strength to continue living, with her terrible truth about the Chechnyan war? […] 'Of course it is hard for me that my son has died. But the fact that he remained a worthy son of his Homeland, that he did not deny Christ or the Orthodox faith, consoles me. I do not know if I would have survived if he had acted otherwise'.

Евгений Родионов не предал ни мать, ни Родину, ни Веру. Орден мужества посмертно, мемориальная доска героя-пограничника при входе в школу, где он учился, память одноклассников и могила сына в родной земле. Это все, что осталось у матери. Что же дает ей силы продолжать жить, оставаясь со своей страшной правдой о чеченской войне? […] «Конечно, мне тяжело, что сынок погиб. Но то, что он оказался достойным сыном Родины, не отказался от Христа, от Православной Веры, меня утешает. Я не знаю, как бы я пережила, если бы он поступил иначе».

The discourse of a soldier's mother

The discourse of a soldier's mother is touched upon in the above quotation. This discourse can be studied more generally, for example in the texts and statements issued by the organization 'Soldiers' Mothers' and in the work of Anna Politkovskaia (2001). In this discourse, the mother stands in focus as much as her soldier son. The story relates callousness, deception and even criminal behaviour on the part of the military authorities. The enemy is as much the Russian army, and also the Russian civil authorities, as the real opponent, in this case the Chechnyans. It is the story of the life and death of a son. The urge to victimize the hero and the hero's mother is as strong in the case of Evgenii as in this discourse in general.

The ingredients of this discourse in the case of the soldier Evgenii are as follows: The idea of the checkpoint in that particular location, manned by only four soldiers, was a mad decision on the part of the military. The officers in the neighbouring camp did in fact hear the screams of the four men, but did not dare or did not want to come to their aid, because they did not have time for such an operation. They were busy having a Valentine's Day celebration. When Evgenii was taken prisoner, the military authorities falsely reported to his mother that he had deserted. Only she understood that this information was incorrect. She sold her flat to travel to Chechnya where she received no support from the military; on the contrary, they behaved in an arrogant and irritated fashion when she inquired about the fate of her son, telling her that they had much more important tasks to attend to. She lost her faith in her own people and went to the Chechnyan side; she paid the Chechnyans for the information and was given the facts about his death and burial site. The officers' indifference is perhaps the most infuriating part of this narrative. Evgenii's mother even publicly denounced Aleksandr Lebed', one of the generals in charge, on an occasion when he was awarded a medal (Iur'ev 2005): 'Liubov' Vasilevna turned to the crowd: "To whom have you awarded a medal? He is covered with blood from head to toe. He betrayed one and a half thousand soldiers in Chechnya."' («Любовь Васильевна обратилась к толпе: „Вы кому медаль дали? Он же с ног до головы в крови. Он же полторы тысячи наших солдат в Чечне оставил"». This is not a denunciation of the Chechnyan military leadership, it is directed against the leaders of the Russian military forces.

Eventually, she found the body of her son and then finally his head, and the narrative of her difficulties in getting the body back to Russia is related. She attacks the generals again, threatening to burn her son's body outside their headquarters if they do not provide her with transportation. In the end, the narrative becomes quite absurd, though perhaps true: it tells how she had to transport the head of her son in a bag on the train, and the conductor discovers the contents of the bag because of the bad smell.

The patriotic details are almost completely absent; the narrative concerns the tribulations of a poor mother. The Russian officers are certainly not heroes, although

Evgenii is a hero to some extent, but the main hero is his mother. The photographs show his mother at the maternity hospital with baby Evgenii in her arms, or outside taking part in a demonstration in the winter, wearing a scarf over her head. The discourse is very personal, sometimes even intimate.

Evgenii Rodionov as a newborn baby in his mother's arms

Evgenii Rodionov's mother at a demonstration

The hagiographic discourse

Attempts have been made in nationalistic circles to canonize Evgenii, and there now exists a rather voluminous hagiographic discourse: vita texts, hymnography (both Akathistos and service texts for the Vigil and the Liturgy) in Church Slavonic, and icons are dedicated to him. This is another sort of memory discourse pertaining to religious rituals. As Jan Assmann (2006, 11) has noted in his studies on cultural memory, ritual is the most fundamental medium of binding memory not only to the past, but to a timeless cosmic order.

The texts and icons are modelled on an Orthodox hagiographical discourse.[2] The key point in this discourse is, certainly, the moment when Evgenii refuses to take off his cross. In the hymnographical texts, he utters these solemn words to his foes, here called the hagarians, the usual name for Muslims in Church Slavonic (Akathistos 2006):

> The beastlike tormentor wanted to estrange you, most glorified Evgenii, with fawning words from the true God, and tempt you with the evil faith of the hagarians, but bravely did you resist, saying: 'I will not change my faith in Jesus Christ, my God, and I will forever sing to him and to the Father and to the Holy Spirit and forever I will sing: Alleluia'.

> Хотяще зверонравному мучителю льстивыми словесы отвратити тя, прехвальный Евгение, от Бога Истиннаго и в зловерие агарянское тя соблазнити, мужественне противостоял еси, глаголя: «не изменю веры моея в Иисуса Христа, Бога Моего, Ему же со Отцем и Святым Духом присно пою и во веки пети буду: «Аллилуйя!»

In this discourse, Evgenii's mother is of much less importance – in the hymnographical texts and icons, she is, for the most part, absent.

Many nationalists are working for the canonization of Evgenii. Aleksandr Prokhanov, one of the most prominent nationalist politicians and a famous writer, has called him 'the first in the iconostasis of the Fifth Empire', thus referring to the new Russian superpower of which Russian nationalists of various kinds dream. Evgenii's life and death is part of a different history in opposition to the official one, a history beginning with El'tsin's attack on the White House (Prokhanov 2006): 'Out of the fire of the House of Soviets, out of the ashes of those burned on the barricades, out of the hopes of heroes later arose Evgenii Rodionov – the first in the iconostatis of the "Fifth Empire"'. («Из пожарища Дома Советов, из пепла сожженных баррикадников, из упований героев позднее возник Евгений Родионов – первый в иконостасе „Пятой Империи"»).

A story is told about a birth, life and death full of signs of holiness and divine predestination. Here his biography is turned into hagiography. In the search for the memory of a holy life, the interest in verifiable facts is lost to an even greater degree than in the other discourses.

This discourse thus abounds in hagiographical topoi. Let us look at some examples. Something special happens when he is born – his mother sees a falling star (Grigor'eva 2003):

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2 For the form and content of Byzantine vitae in general, see Sergei Hackel (1981), for the Slavonic vitae, see Jostein Børtnes (1988) and for Latin vitae, see Peter Brown (1981).

When the baby uttered his first cry, Liubov' Vasilevna looked out the window for some reason. There, in the nocturnal spring sky, a star was slowly falling and trailing a long shiny ribbon. 'This is a good sign', said the midwife who saw the anxious gaze of the woman who had just given birth. 'You will be happy, and the lad, too...'

Когда младенец огласил мир своим первым криком, Любовь Васильевна почему-то взглянула в окно. Там по ночному весеннему небу медленно падала звезда, оставляя за собой длинную светящуюся полоску. «Это – добрая примета», – перехватив настороженный взгляд роженицы, успокоила ее акушерка. «И ты будешь счастливой, и паренек твой тоже... »

He is depicted as a kind boy, and his baptism is also seen to have a special meaning. Only after this sacrament was performed did he begin to walk (Grigor'eva 2003):

And really, the desired child brought enormous happiness to the home. Calm, tender, with a kind and serious little face. He was almost never sick, he seldom cried at night, he ate well. Only one thing gave cause for worry – the lad did not walk for a long time. He began to walk only when he was one year and two months old, after his parents, on the advice of the grandparents, had him baptized in the nearest church.

И действительно, желанный ребенок принес в дом огромную радость. Спокойный, ласковый, с милым серьезным личиком, он почти не болел, редко кричал по ночам, хорошо кушал. Тревожило одно – малыш довольно долго не ходил. Пошел только в год и два месяца – после того, как родители, по совету бабушек и деда, окрестили его в ближайшем храме.

Evgenii's decision, which began in his teens, to wear a cross around his neck in spite of his mother's advice, is another topos in this story. His visits to the Trinity Church in his home town of Podol'sk are also seen as a sign of Evgenii's devotion to the Holy Trinity.

Hagiographic texts, as well as hymnography and icons have thus been dedicated to him. The other soldiers who were with him are hardly mentioned at all, or mentioned only as 'the ones being with him' ('izhe s nim'). He is locally venerated, as is the term when the Church has not confirmed a canonization.

In this discourse, he appears as God's soldier, and almost all details of modern life are erased. Here, the enemies are not the Chechnyans but (Sidorov 2005): 'the insurrectionist who rose up against peace and calm in the Russian land'('miatezhnik, protivu mira i pokoia v Rossistej strane vostavshie'), 'beastlike godless people'

('zverepodobnye bezbozhniki'), 'mutinous men-hating beings' ('miatezhnye chelovekonenavistniki') or 'demons' ('besy'). The alleged fact that the officers did not try to help or rescue the four soldiers is transformed into the treason of Judas (Sidorov 2005): 'The treachery of Judas did you taste before being brought to death, O holy martyr Evgenii, you indeed did leave the beautiful valleys of our earth and chose more beautiful ones, which are in God's kingdom'. («Измену и предательство Иудино пред умервием твоим испытавый, святый мучинече Евгение, ни во что же красное юдоли нашея земныя оставил еси, избрав краснейшая, яже во Царствии Божеи суть»). The theme of treason is of crucial importance in all the hymnographical texts dedicated to Evgenii.

The date of his death – he was killed on his nineteenth birthday – is accorded special significance (*ibid.*): 'We now celebrate the triumph and joy of your day, O martyr Evgenii: it is the day of your birth on earth, and also the day of your rebirth in the eternal life'. («Торжества и радости твой день, мучениче Евгение, празднуем ныне: день бо рождества твоего есть на земли, якоже и день возрождения твоего в живот вечный»). From a divine perspective, his death is a triumph, and the loss on earth of the four soldiers is turned into a heavenly victory. Here, the chaos of the discourse of the soldier's mother is transformed into the harmony of a divine narrative. Every known fact of his life is filled with divine meaning.

Evgenii's name is also of special significance, as is the case in many other vitae texts (Dubova 2006): 'Evgenii means noble' («Евгений – значит благородный»). Also a parallel to his death may be found in the martyrologium: there is another soldier of the same name who gave his life for his Christian faith (Iur'ev 2005):

> The body of Evgenii was brought to his home on the 20th of November 1996, the day of remembrance of the martyrs of Melitea. They were Christian soldiers in the Roman army, and they were beheaded because they refused to renounce Christ. One of the 33 soldiers bore the name of Eugenius.

> Тело Евгения было привезено матерью на родину 20 ноября 1996 года, в день памяти мучеников Мелитинских. Они были воинами-христианами Римской армии, и за отказ отречься от Христа им отсекли головы. Один из этих тридцати трех воинов носил имя Евгений.

Prayers to him have been answered, as in this case related by a priest, albeit difficult to take seriously (Azarov 2006):

> Sometimes simply fantastic things happen. There was one such event. Our car got stuck in the Mongolian steppe, and its wheels were spinning. The driver said to me, 'Batiushka, could you perhaps say a prayer?!' And I said the

prayer, 'O, martyr Evgenii, help us'. Suddenly, the lorry jerked and drove out of the hole and continued further, although the wheels had been spinning for more than half an hour before that.

Порой происходят просто поразительные события. Был такой случай. Наша машина застряла в монгольской степи, буксует. Водитель говорит мне: «Батюшка, может быть, вы помолитесь?!». И я прочитал молитву: «Мучениче Евгение, помоги нам». Вдруг КамАЗ дернулся, выехал из этой ямы и двинулся дальше, хотя перед этим мы более получаса буксовали.

Icons have been painted and miracles have been reported in connection with prayers before these icons. There have been reported cases of myrrh miraculously dripping from an icon depicting him as a saint. Churches have even been built which are dedicated to him in actual fact, although formally they are dedicated to the saint Eugenius of Melitea, because Evgenii Rodionov has not been officially canonized. Many miracles have also been reported from his grave. The small cross he carried has become a special object of veneration. On a well-known icon he is depicted as a young man with a cross in his hand.

Evgenii Rodionov as a saint, dressed in both camouflage uniform and angelic robes

The interconnection between the discourses

These three discourses are in general separate from each other, but there are some exceptions. Certain components are used in all three discourses: the assault, the imprisonment, the cross and the killing. These items connect all three discourses. Sometimes, though rarely, and therefore of particular interest, the discourses intermingle, as in reports that soldiers now pray to him using not the long form of his name, 'Evgenii', as tradition demands, but the diminutive and colloquial 'Zhenia', thus connecting the heroic (and comradely) and The hagiographic discourses (Azarov 2006): 'The lads here are interesting. They do not say "the martyr Evgenii", but Zhen'ka, as if they were talking about someone alongside them in the barracks. They come and say, "We must pray to Zhen'ka."' («Мальчишки у нас интересные. Они говорят, не „мученик Евгений“, а Женька, как будто речь идет о том, кто рядом с ними в казарме. Приходят и говорят: „Женьке помолиться надо“».

He is sometimes depicted in icons in a chiton, which is the usual dress of a saint, although in many cases the chiton is mixed with his camouflage uniform and his Kalashnikov. To depict a modern uniform in an icon is an anomaly; in other icons reproducing Soviet and post-Soviet events, uniforms are highly stylized.

In the Akathistos hymn to Evgenii, the refrain is 'rejoice, O martyr Evgenii, the invincible soldier of Christ' ('raduisia, muchenitse Evgenie, voine Khristov nepobedimyi!'). When read in the context of the first discourse, this can mean the victory of the Russian army, rather than a victory against evil, as in the hagiographic discourse. Chechnya is mentioned by its geographical name several times, which is exceptional, as the hymns are often extraterritorial, or otherwise very general in their geographic references (Akathistos 2006):

> rejoice, you did not dishonour your Fatherland before the world and the people; rejoice with the nobility which is your name and with which you confirmed the just cause of our army; rejoice, you who shattered the councils of them who destroyed the peace in the land of Chechnya and who wanted to destroy the Orthodox faith.

> радуйся, честь Отечествия твоего пред миром и люди не посрамивый; радуйся, благородством, емуже тезоименит еси, правое дело воинства нашего подтвердивый; радуйся, советы разрушителей мира во стране Чеченстей, покусившихся на веру православную, расстроивый.

This part of the Akathistos to Evgenii is no longer a religious text, but rather a propagandistic one. The glory of the Fatherland in not a part of the hymnographic discourse.

A juxtaposition of the discourse of the soldier's mother with the hagiographic can be observed in a painting featuring Evgenii, whose face is depicted on a cross with

Mary standing beside it. There is a parallel between the mother and the Virgin, and the artist compares this motif with 'Do not weep for me, Mother', a hymn sung on Holy Saturday as a word of consolation from the dead Christ to the Theotokos, the Virgin, as well as with the Entombment (Balabanov 2002):

> The basis of the picture 'The dormition of a soldier' recalls the plot of Russian icons of the 'Entombment' type (from the end of the 15th century). Here there is yet another motif from icon painting, which entered the Russian Orthodox tradition from the ancient Serbian icon, 'Do not weep for me, Mother!'

> В основании картины успение воина напоминает сюжет русских икон «Положение во гроб» (конец XV в.). Здесь присутствует также еще один мотив иконописи, пришедший в русскую православную традицию из древней сербской иконописи: «Не рыдай мене, Мати!»

A special juxtaposition of the discourse of the soldier's mother with the hagiographic is contained in Evgenii's mother's comment that she is not interested in icons, but in having him alive and by her side. The mother denounces the hagiographic discourse in a very touching way (Grigor'eva 2003): 'I need my son alive and well. And I would like our home to be full of grandchildren. And they all give me icons. I already have more than 90'. («И сын мне нужен живой, здоровый. И чтобы дом полон внуков. А мне все дарят иконы. Их у меня уже более 90»).

Memory and power

The three different memory discourses analysed in this article often exist independently of one another, yet they are sometimes interconnected or mixed in different ways. The story, or stories, about Evgenii have also been criticized – for example, by the commission of the Russian Orthodox Church dealing with canonizations. The commission has stated that they have had difficulty in verifying the truth of the stories. Others have pointed out that the central part of the story, that is Evgenii's death, comes from a single source, a leader of the Chechen group who killed him. This leader has since been killed as well. Rodionov was definitely not a saint, he was an ordinary man with an ordinary biography. This is the standpoint of the church (Shabutskii 2002):

> Icons were painted and an Akathistos was composed to 'the holy martyr-soldier Evgenii'. It was not long before there were reports of miracles. Certain difficulties arose only in connection with the writing of the vita. Evgenii was an ordinary chap with an ordinary biography, and no one who knew him could remember any particularly pious acts.

Были написаны иконы и составлен акафист «святому мученику
воину Евгению». Не заставили себя ждать и сообщения о чудесах.
Определенные трудности возникли только с написанием жития.
Евгений был обычным парнем с обычной биографией, и никто из
знавших его не может вспомнить каких-то особенно благочестивых
поступков.

Memory is connected with power, and the first and third discourses, i.e. the hero discourse and the hagiographic one, are a kind of traditional collective memory-making. The second, the discourse of the soldier's mother, may be connected with popular memory in Foucault's understanding, or as a counter-memory (Foucault 1977, 113–96), a term sometimes used with regard to the reckoning with the Soviet past in contemporary Russia. Yet, even the first and third discourses can be connected with popular or counter-memory. The military has not been eager to accord him hero status. On the contrary, as we have noted, the posthumous medals have been awarded begrudgingly. Rather little evidence of his heroism can be found. The Russian authorities have not been interested in the death of the individual soldier; they are interested in heroic and successful feats performed on behalf of the Fatherland.

Evgenii, on the contrary, is a hero in the eyes of Russian ultranationalists of the marginalized kind. He is not acceptable to the establishment in the role of a hero. He has not been canonized by the Church, and those priests who consider him a saint are being condemned. When a requiem, a *panichida*, was celebrated in his memory, the priest had to be brought in from Ukraine and another jurisdiction. It is said that he has not been canonised by the Church but by the people. One of the ultranationalists has called the article quoted above, which expresses the official view of the Church and states that there is no evidence to support the canonization of Evgenii, blasphemous. Strangely enough, in the discourses on Evgenii, the ultranationalists come close to that of the soldier's mother. In a poem written by one of the ultranationalists, the official Church is heavily criticised for its decision not to canonize Evgenii, while Evgenii is elevated to something of a Christ figure. Christ walks before the Russian soldiers in the same way as Christ goes before the Red Guard in Aleksandr Blok's poem 'The Twelve' (Simonovich-Nikshich 2004):

And let it be known that there's a Miracle in this world,
That not everything in Rus' has been sold,
That having conquered Death, from thence
Zhenia now brings us Resurrection.

That there remains for us something sacred in this world,
Like these branches of weeping birches,
That the Russian soldiers will return to us,
With Jesus Christ himself at the fore.

И чтобы знать, что есть на свете Чудо,
Что на Руси распродано не всё,
Что победивши Смерть теперь оттуда
Нам Женя Воскресение несёт.

Что есть на свете нечто, что нам свято,
Как эти ветви плачущих берёз,
Что к нам вернуться Русские солдаты,
И их возглавит Сам Иисус Христос.

Memory and counter-memory

Official memory-making has no use for Evgenii. Why is this the case? There is perhaps no need for a hero soldier in Russia today, and the discourse of the soldier's mother is certainly of no interest to the political establishment. The official Church has other saints on the agenda – for example, Admiral Fedor Ushakov who was canonized some years ago. The three discourses of the soldier Evgenii form the counter-memory of marginalized people without power in Russia today. What we may observe throughout our analysis is that almost no one is interested in finding out the facts about Evgenii and his death. All parties focus on forming memory discourses and no one seems to be interested in one of the most important discourses – the discourse of truth and of answering the question of what really occurred.

A parallel to the story about Evgenii are the discourses which circulated during the Vietnam War. That war was also contested by broad groups of Americans, as well as by people all over the world. The Vietnam War had also been poorly legitimized, which resulted in both a process of forgetting and a victimization of the veterans. In this case monuments were created, yet attitudes to memories of the war have been very traumatic (Ikui 2004). In the case of the Chechnyan wars, the Russian government was reluctant to acknowledge their existence both in the international arena and inside the country. The war was viewed more or less as a police action against bandits and terrorists (Morozov 2002). Virtually no official memorials have been erected by the government to the soldiers who have perished in Chechnya. This is one explanation for the great role that the figure of Evgenii has played in Russian society in recent years; the cult of Evgenii is a compensation for the lack of official memorial monuments.

In a recent book Elisabeth Castelli (2004, 172–96) has studied the topoi of vitae in the early Church. She concludes with a case in which a girl, Cassie Bernall, was murdered by a maniac in a school massacre in the USA. Rumours spread that the murderer had asked her if she believed in God and then shot her when she confirmed her belief. The story and the rumours surrounding it led to the development of a sanctification of the same sort as in the case of Evgenii. This proves that martyrizing mechanisms are active not only in the Orthodox context, but also in a Western

Christian one. The difference is that in the Russian Orthodox tradition the genres are more numerous and the specific traits more explicit.

Conclusion

The case of Evgenii Rodionov is an example of how collective memories and discourses function in post-Soviet Russia in a mass-medial age. All three memory genres are public ones and demonstrate some of the mechanisms of memory and collective memory. One fact is evident in spite of this. A young man has died. This is a tragedy beyond all discourse. Death is not mediated, but real. Memory is manipulation, construction and make-believe. What then is the truth about Evgenii Rodionov? Perhaps the truth may only be found in the words at the end of the Orthodox burial service: 'Vechnaia pamiat' ('Eternal memory'), which might be something quite different from any of these three discourses.

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PART III: Memory and Myth in the Arts

Mistrusting the Past. Andrei Nekrasov's Documentary Composition *Disbelief* (*Nedoverie*)

Fiona Björling

Introduction

After a brief and all but subliminary shot of wreckage and a rescue operation, Andrei Nekrasov's documentary film *Disbelief* (2004) opens with the camera trained on an attractive residential street in Milwaukee, USA. To the accompaniment of soft music and birdsong, the camera pans to a house, complete with American flag, and set back behind a green lawn decked with trees and flower blossom. A hundred and nine harrowing minutes later, the film closes in Milwaukee again with the frozen shot of happy American pre-school children tended by their Russian teacher, Tanya Morozova. In between, the film has descended step by step into an inferno of personal tragedies, unresolved crimes, sinister political implications and scenes of war and destruction. The date at the centre of this sophisticated documentary montage is nine, nine, ninety-nine – a number surely more eschatological and suggestive than the better known nine, eleven.

Nekrasov calls his film a documentary composition in 12 parts (*dokumental'naia kompozitsiia v 12 chastiakh*), in English a feature (or a feature-long) documentary. The film focuses on two sisters whose lives have been irrevocably changed by the explosion of a nine storey block of flats in Moscow. Tanya, married to an American and with a small son, is living in the USA and gives her interviews in English while her sister, Alyona, who survived the explosion in Moscow, speaks Russian. Tanya and Alyona have lost their mother and the home they loved, the ugly gray concrete apartment building on Guryanov Street.

Disbelief is an intensely political film with its accusation of Putin's criminality, but it is just as much a film about a series of individual Russian and Chechenian citizens, tragic victims, each and every one a centre of personal human suffering.[1]

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1   See the official websites (http://www.disbelief-film.com/indexDE.htm and http://www.disbelief-film.

The meaning of the film is achieved through an integration of the personal and the political dimensions such that they are presented as two sides of one coin. In one of the film's most moving scenes, Tanya and Alyona watch together as the building is razed to the ground and the rubble containing the fragments of their childhood ruthlessly cleared away. The sisters ask: Why was the rubble carted away so quickly? What was it that the FSB did not want to be discovered? Why was there no proper investigation? It is here that political suspicion enters the film and starts to interweave with the personal theme. This sequence of archive footage is artfully edited: the sisters face the camera with the façade of the bombed house behind them, its central section a gaping hole. At the very moment when they speak into the camera to say that they are scared, that they are saying 'goodbye' to their childhood, as Alyona refers to the loss of 'our memories, our childhood, our life' (*nasha pamiat', nashe detstvo, nasha zhizn*), we hear a rumble and see, behind the sisters, the remains of the house sinking to the ground. The sisters are overcome by grief; as they embrace, the camera slowly pans around them and zooms to a close-up with Alyona in full face and Tanya, adjacent, in half face resting her head in Alyona's neck. The shot achieves a portrait of sisterly grief bringing to mind classic tragedy, while in the background we hear the monotonous drone of official instructions spoken through a megaphone.[2]

The composition

At the core of the composition is a regular documentary film which takes its point of departure in a series of interviews with people directly connected to the events which took place on 9/9/99. Fanning out from the interviews, the core documentary follows Tanya's journey to Moscow to try and discover who lay behind the bombings; and likewise Alyona's emigration to the USA where she comes to live to be near her sister. Into this basic documentary film are edited numerous and frequently minimal clips from a range of different archive materials. The result is a kaleidoscopic montage which interlaces a variety of times, places, perspectives and moods.[3]

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com/RU/indexRU.htm. Note that English and Russian websites contain partly different information and that the film (dubbed in Russian) can be downloaded from the Russian website.

2 Nekrasov is primarily a documentary film maker. His concern with Chechnya was first documented in *Children's Stories*, Chechnya, documentary in 2000. His latest film is *Rebellion: The Litvinenko Case* (2007) which was shown amongst the special screenings at Cannes in 2007 (http://www.dreamscanner. com/sites/FRAMESET.html). Quite clearly the murders of Anna Politkovskaia and Alexander Litvinenko confirm, for Nekrasov, the political standpoint which he takes in *Disbelief*.

3 See section 'A Tale of Two Sisters'.

The core documentary includes:

- a number of interviews
- Tanya's trip to Moscow to investigate who was responsible for the explosion on 9/9/99
- Tanya's journey from Moscow to the Urals to visit her grandparents and other relations
- Tanya's brief visit in London where she has an appointment with the Chechenian leader, Akhmed Zakaev
- Alyona's new life as a digital artist in the USA
- David Satter's lecture in Washington in connection with the release of his book *Darkness at Dawn: the Rise of the Russian Criminal State* in 2003 (a lecture attended by Alyona)

Archive footage covers:

- recurring shots of the house on Guryanov Street taken before the explosion
- the scene directly following the explosion of the apartment building
- the demolition of the building shortly afterwards
- the politcal crisis which preceded the explosion
- the scandal of the discovery of a bomb and ensung evacuation of an apartment house in Ryazan (on September 22, 1999), dismissed by the FSB as 'merely an exercise'
- Tanya's wedding in the US at which her mother was present
- Tanya's first visit to Moscow to be with her sister at the time of the tragedy
- the Morozov family videos of the sisters' relations in the Urals including an earlier birthday party for Lyuba
- atrocities committed during the second war on Chechnya[4]

The variety of different documentary levels and the rapidity of the editorial montage comprises an artful composition and results in a many layered record or investigation into the personal and political events in interrelation. The viewer has actively to work at comprehension, piecing the different bits of evidence together, and coordinating both an intellectual and an emotional response.

As a documentary the film contains no ostensibly fictional material. However it manifests expressive devices and a level of artistry in many ways typical of feature films, and thus it creates the tension, suspense and the emotional effect of a dramatic narrative. The drama is divided into the following twelve sections each with their headings: [5]

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4 For archive footage the following credits are given: Morozov Family; Moscow Rescue Service (Cameraman Alexandr Mushtakov); CNN; NTV; RTR; Russian Ministry of Interior; Andrei Babitzki; Viktor Popkov †; Kavkas Center; PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION, May 7, 2000, RTR-show, Moscow.

5 Proper names are transliterated in accordance with the credits of the film, with the exception of 'Luba' which I spell 'Lyuba'.

1. Tanya now lives in America
2. A tale of two sisters
3. No escape
4. Who did it? A theory
5. Tanya comes for answers
6. Mikhail Trepashkin, attorney at law
7. Ethnic fingering or a terrorist by birth
8. Who wants to know too much?
9. Tanya's ural roots or a simple peasant's view
10. A tale of two Russias
11. A meeting in London
12. Who do you believe?

The segmentation and chapter headings contribute to the impression of a story with its questions and suspicions, not least typical for a thriller (for example, 'Who did it?', 'A Meeting in London' etc.); there is a clear association to literary narrative in the parallel headings: 'A tale of two sisters' and 'A tale of two Russias'. The final section addresses the question of 'belief' indicated in the film's title.[6] It confirms on the one hand the idea of a thriller, an unsolved mystery, while on the other it touches on the existential problem of ascertaining what actually did happen. To come to terms with a tragedy in the past, the characters must face the disquieting gap between the private and the political accounts, those two dimensions in all human lives which, in the case of Putin's Russia, are especially fraught with fears and suspicion.

The personal and the political

Returning to the question of a dramatic narrative or political thriller it is interesting to note that in the credits the characters are presented as a cast, literally 'dramatis personae' (in Russian *deistvuiushchie litsa)*. But there are no actors, only real people – some living, some dead. The individual characters caught up in the political event and its aftermath offer a broad spectrum of different Russian, some Chechenian and even a few American citizens. They comprise the following:

- Tanya who appears in her new married life in Milwaukee with her husband, Abraham, and her small child, Sasha. She works as a teacher in a pre-school. Before the explosion her life is ordered and harmonious;
- Tanya's sister Alyona who lived with her mother on Guryanov Street and was in the house at the time of the explosion. Alyona also lost her boyfriend and his family;
- the sisters' mother, Lyuba, who had moved to Moscow from the Urals to train as a hairdresser;

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6   I have adjusted the spelling and orthography which is taken from a review copy of the film.

- Tanya's clean-scrubbed and endearing grandmother, as well as her grandfather and uncle, living way to the east of Moscow in the Urals;
- Tanya's friend Sveta in Moscow who shares Tanya's predicament;
- American journalist, Jeff L. Kinney, who was called to the scene of the explosion in his capacity as a videographer and producer with CNN;
- American writer David Satter who gave a talk in Washington in connection with the release of his book *Darkness at Dawn: the Rise of the Russian Criminal State* (2003);
- political characters shown in archive footage who include: Sergei Kirienko, Boris Yeltsin, Evgenii Primakov, Jurii Skuratov and Vladimir Putin;
- former FSB lawyer Mikhail Trepashkin who is acting as the sisters' attorney in Moscow;
- Chechen Timur Dakhkilgov, living in Moscow, arrested and charged with terrorism in connection with 9/9/99, his wife and children.

Each of these characters adds a new dimension to the narrative drama. The scene with Tanya's relatives (discussed below) takes us to the depths of rural Russia and adds an important aspect: not only does it articulate the way a private tragedy ripples out far away from the central scene of the crime, it also provides a contrast to the criminality of official Russia, and bears witness to the intelligence of ordinary Russian people.

As for the Americans, it was to Jeff that Alyona turned at the scene of the wreckage to ask for help in contacting her sister in the USA. Jeff has two roles in the film. Firstly, in his professional capacity, he is an eye witness to the explosion and to the ensuing official reaction; secondly, he shows fundamental human decency in helping Alyona beyond his professional role. When interviewed in the core documentary, he describes the problem of living in Moscow with a dark skin and attests to the fact that Chechens were under general racial suspicion in Moscow at the time. Presumably he is responsible for helping with archive footage, both from the night of 9/9/99 and for the apparently hasty demolition of the house on Goryanov Street shortly afterwards.

At the release of his book, *Darkness at Dawn: the Rise of the Russian Criminal State*, David Satter gave a lecture which is presented substantially in the core documentary.[7] Satter's lecture provides the film with a full theory and account of its accusation: namely that the apartment explosions in 1999 were instigated by the FSB, if not by Putin himself, as a provocation to miscredit the Chechens and mobilise Russian public opinion in support of a second war on Chechnya. The sequence with Satter's lecture incorporates numerous clips of archive footage explaining the political crisis which led to Putin coming to power in 1998. The political characters shown in archive footage include Sergei Kirienko, Boris Yeltsin, Evgenii Primakov, Jurii Skuratov and Vladimir Putin. Satter gives a comprehensive presentation of his theory concerning both the explosion on Guryanov Street and the discovery later that month of a

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7   See section 'Who did it? A theory' (lasting appproximately 17 minutes).

bomb and the evacuation of an apartment house in Ryazan. Extensive footage from the program 'Independent Investigation' on NTV (screened on March 24, 2000) is edited into this scene. Alyona attends the lecture and during question time she tentatively raises two fingers but is not given the opportunity to put her question.

Two characters interviewed in the core documentary are presented through the political role they play, while at the same time their personal fates are raised to the level of tragedy and included in the narrative of innocent victims. They are witnesses in the accusation which the film is making and become personally acquainted with Tanya. The former FSB lawyer Mikhail Trepashkin, who has changed loyalties and is acting as the sisters' attorney in Moscow, shows courageous integrity in persuing his investigations into the false role of the FSB in the September house bombs. The after-text of the film informs viewers that Trepashkin was arrested on October 22, 2003 and is currently serving a four-year prison sentence. Nekrasov is gravely concerned with the persecution of Trepashkin and there is more information on the website.[8]

Timur Dakhkilgov, born in Chechnya and now living in Moscow, is alluded to in an after-text as 'the protagonist of the film'.[9] Timur was arrested after the explosion, tortured, charged with terrorism and then released in December 1999. Now he sits meekly in the crowded Moscow flat which he shares with his wife Lidia and several children. In the core documentary Tanya pays a visit to the Dakhkilgovs. The scene in Timur's flat is one of the film's most crucial sequences.[10] Timur sits dark-skinned and silent, with smile-wrinkles at his eyes, while his wife tells in great distress the story of the tragedy that has befallen the family, 'Timur does not like to talk about it,' she says, 'he does not even like to remember'. Lidia tells her story and her interpretation of the official reaction to the explosion concurs with David Satter's. But while Satter delivers his theory in Washington to journalists and other interested parties, Lidia is confined in a small and crowded room; she holds her youngest child in her arms; facing the camera she stands in front of a mirror which reflects the back of her head, the room in front of her, and the attentive face of Tanya listening to her; all around are children playing, crawling over the adults, their natural noisy play competing with Lidia's tortured and grief-stricken account of Timur's false confession. Timur had signed a confession under threat that otherwise his pregnant wife and his children would be driven to Guryanov Street and delivered to the victims of the explosion to do with as they wished. The scene with Timur and his family shows unequivocally how the FSB's and Putin's acts of provocation

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8   In 'Anti-democracy: A letter from Russia', addressed to and published in Helsingin Sanomat's International Edition shortly after the death of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006, Nekrasov mentions Trepashkin's case in his general accusation (http://www.hs.fi/english/article/Anti-democracy+A+letter+from+Russia/1135223214214).

9   'Protagonist' normally refers to 'chief person in drama or plot of story', which is the way an English speaker understands the information about Timur Dakhkilgov in the after-text. On the English website all the characters are listed as 'protagonists' which is misleading.

10   See section 'Ethnic Fingering or a terrorist by birth'.

to justify the second war on Chechnya – that is accepting the film's theory – invade a family in its most intimate everyday life. The children, for whom Timur sacrificed his assertion of innocence, are alive and rampaging around the small apartment, as yet unaware of the heartrending story their mother is telling. This scene gives the emotional side of the theory which Satter has expounded in theoretical terms.

Nekrasov's film art

Nekrasov has directed two feature films: *Love is as Strong as Death* (*Sil'na kak smert' liubov'*, 1997) and *Love and Other Nightmares* (*Ljubov' i drugie koshmary*, 2001).[11] His innovative film language can be recognised in the documentary *Disbelief* which he has edited himself together with Ol'ga Konskaia. The visual artistry of the photography together with the editorial composition lifts the film onto a level of classic human drama. The documentary material is not dramatised with the help of reconstructions and actors, but it is given dramatic form so that the private fate of real individuals – Russians and Chechens alike – is integrated with political and historical events to achieve powerful pathos.

An effective technique is the introduction of an extra level of montage consisting of virtually subliminal shots lasting just one or two seconds. Very often these occur when the camera has concentrated on Tanya's face in close-up. If this had been a feature film the viewer would have understood the subliminal associations to represent Tanya's inner thoughts. Yet since it is a documentary, with no equivalent to the omniscient narrator, these associations have to be interpreted as the director's comments. Here are some examples:

- Sasha (picking his nose in close-up!) drives with his mother to the day nursery; Tanya points out a digger, an ordinary bulldozer, on the American street and a flickering shot of a more sinister bulldozer in Moscow, shovelling away the rubble of the exploded apartment building, is cut in, so quickly it it easy to miss.
- Tanya sits with her sleeping pre-school children in Milwaulkee; there is an effective accompaniement of piano music before a second-long shot cuts in to show the dead, white body of a child from a scene of destruction, either the explosion on Guryanov Street or the war in Chechnya; this cut is accompanied by the sound-track recording of a rescue operation.
- Throughout the film, the house on Guryanov Street appears still standing in brief shots. The house – an ugly Khrushchev-era building – usually towering above a row of trees blowing in the wind – gradually becomes part of a lost and longed-for past.

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11 See Björling 1999 and 2001.

Nekrasov has an acute sense of the aural as well as the visual medium of film. The editing of dialogue, sound effects and the music works with the visual montage to create an extra level of association. The music, with piano and vocal compositions by Natalia Osterkorn, comprises a variety of musical styles; recurring motifs modulate quietly to enhance the mood of a scene, and create an emotional atmosphere of threat, fear, longing or sadness. As the visual montage flickers rapidly from the core documentary to different archive sources, so the sound track sometimes keeps apace and sometimes lags behind or moves ahead to create overlaps. In the final section of the film the core documentary, showing Tanya in her American pre-school, is interspersed with documentary footage showing horrendous scenes from the war in Chechnya.[12] As the film closes, Tanya sits with her pre-school children and together they recite an American prayer of thanks: 'We fold our hands in prayer. Dear God, We thank you for our families, we thank you for our friends, we thank you for our teachers and we thank you for our food. Amen'. While the soundtrack relays the voices of Tanya and the young American children, the screen shows a classroom of traumatised Chechenian children. What, asks the film, do they have to thank their god for?

Since the montage consists of many different archive sources artfully edited, there is continual contrast in the texture or import of the sequences. Just as the visual and aural montage flickers quickly from one scene to another, so the film demands sometimes intellectual and sometimes emotional response in quick succession. The scenes showing the sisters' grandmother preparing dinner in her Urals cottage might almost be taken from a feature film extolling the traditional way of Russian life.[13] While Tanya's grandmother bears the sorrow of her life bravely and forlornly, Sergei Mingalev, Tanya's uncle, presents a coherent account of why he does not believe that the explosion was an act of Chechenian terrorism. His 'simple peasant view' cogently reiterates both David Satter's and Mikhail Trepashkin's theories, concurring as well with Lidia Dakhkilov's version. The family has gathered to raise a toast to the eternal memory of Tanya's mother. Into this scene in the core documentary is edited footage from the Morozovs' home video recording another family party in the same place, a celebration of Lyuba's birthday. The two parties are presented in parallel: the grandmother wears the same festive dress on both occasions; the grandfather delivers the identical suggestion that they 'take another little glass', and yet the two occasions are divided by what happened on 9/9/99.

When Alyona tries to describe her dazed state of mind after the tragedy she says that she felt as if she were under water, and in the home movies of the Morozov family, taken before the disaster, there is a haunting underwater quality connected to memories of the past. These amateur films have an unfocussed, shaky, hand-camera quality and give a sense of dream to the memories of Tanya's mother when

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12 See final section: 'Who do you believe?'

13 For example Elim Klimov's *Farewell* (*Proshchanie*, 1981) or Lidia Bobrova's films *In that Land* (*V etoi strane*, 1997) and *The Granny* (*Babusia*, 2003).

she was alive, dressed in white and butterfly-like as she celebrated her daughter's wedding, or her birthday party in the Urals. The trembling and poetic texture of the sequences express the unrealness of the past, its sudden disappearance and its ongoing desirability. The home videos, and likewise the scene in Timur's flat presented above, are all the more heartrending when seen in contrast to numerous cuts conveying the cynicism of the official handling of the crime. Here are a few examples:

- A short cut, early on in the film, of Yeltsin speaking into a microphone at a street scene and saying, 'Today I'd say that banditry is the main Chechen strategy'.
- Sergei Shoigu, Minister for Emergencies, replies to CNN reporters at the scene of the demolition, in arrogant and sarcastic dismissal, implying that their questions are ridiculous, 'What on earth do you mean? This is just an ordinary routine jobb'.
- Putin first embracing Tony Blair, then enjoying a stroll with George Bush.
- A Russian television news broadcast reporting that 'The military operation in Chechnya is going well. Air and artillery strikes are reaching maximum effect'.

Conclusion

Disbelief makes compelling viewing and generates a sense of suspense and intrigue to match the best psychological thriller. Through to the end the viewer, like the characters involved, lives in the hope that the murder of the innocent inmates of the Moscow apartment building, destroyed on 9-9-99, will be resolved. In an interview Alyona says, 'One wants the perpetrators to get caught. We're not just puppets for playing war games with'. But the murder of the innocent inmates of the Moscow apartment building is not resolved and Tanya returns from Moscow with her mission unfulfilled. So Putin and the FSB remain the unproved villains of the story. When the film ends, the narrative is left hanging and the suffering of the victims is still ongoing and open. Whereas a documentary may not be able to complete its investigation, a feature or fictional film narrating a tragic human drama creates the expectancy of resolution and – for the viewer – relief or catharis. If one of the achievements of ficton is the presentation of an imagined world of human beings as experienced from within, and if documentaries aim to record what actually happens in the world beyond individual experience, then fiction and documentary narratives are in some sense diametrically opposed to one another. Nekrasov himself writes: 'In *Disbelief*, I reconcile the documentary and the drama for myself. And not just stylistically: the camera lets the main protagonists live, not just answer questions or illustrate a voice-over narration … I learned the classic meaning of tragedy: through a documentary'.[14] It is in the hybrid genre of documentary and feature film that Nekrasov's film achieves its disturbing pathos whereby the past is not resolved and thus does not loosen its grip on the present.

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14 See Director's cut: http://www.disbelief-film.com/intro.htm.

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The Myth of St Petersburg in the Contemporary Russian Cinema. Balabanov's *Brother*

Natalia Bratova

Mythmaking may be regarded as one of the essential tools in constructing a community's memory. In fact, a myth in the contemporary understanding of the notion is an emotionalized interpretation of the given community's history which reflects this community's attitude to certain historical events. According to George Schöpflin (1997, 19) 'myth is about perceptions rather than historically validated truths'. Myth allows a community to establish and develop its cognition of the world through a series of allegoric stories, to gain its self-identification and to bind itself together with common interests and with common history. Hence myth is a way for a community to find its place in the changing world and to integrate into it. This is probably why mythmaking and, so to speak, *mythremaking* (i.e. revising and modifying already existing myths) reaches its high point in crucial moments of a community's history such as wars, revolutions etc. The mechanism of mythremaking renders it highly relevant to the present of the given community in accordance with new historical events and, as a result of this mechanism, a myth can be drastically changed in the course of time. Historical events provoke a re-evaluation and alteration of the myth, but the process can even work in the opposite direction. A myth that is deeply embedded in the consciousness of the community shapes the way in which current historical events are received and evaluated by the community. It functions as a lens through which the community perceives reality. So not only the myth undergoes changes according to the facts, but even the perception of the facts by the community is adapted to suit the existing myth.

The myth of St Petersburg serves as an excellent illustration of the mechanism and functions of mythmaking. It appears as a commingling of the positive and negative (i.e. the official and public, respectively) reactions to the reforms of Peter the Great and to the foundation of the new capital as the quintessence of these reforms. These two contradictory reactions gave rise respectively to the cosmogonic and eschatological myths of the city that became merged into one integral myth almost immediately. Together these cosmogonic and eschatological aspects create a complicated, ambivalent mythopoeic image of the city of St Petersburg. It is the polarisation between these two aspects that has produced a myth of the city that is unmatched in its beauty, tension and complexity. I would prefer to consider both aspects as parts of one and the same myth and call it *the reversible myth (mif-perevertysh)* since they represent two conflicting emotional loads inspired by the same event. Moreover they cannot and do not exist separately either in folklore or in

literature. From the 1830s the myth began to develop in the literary works of Pushkin and Gogol', who are considered to be the founders of this tradition of portraying St Petersburg in Russian literature. The tradition is well known as 'Petersburg text', a term given it by Vladimir Toporov (1995) and discussed in some depth in his works. It should be mentioned that it is in literary works that the myth of the city becomes the most organic, harmonious and advanced. Indeed, the 'Petersburg text' develops and strengthens the principal features of the myth absorbing many new traits, details and subtexts into it and transforming its ideas according to the spirit of time, and to the outlook and the destiny of the authors. Hence the 'Petersburg text' serves as the best articulated and well-known medium for promoting the myth. Although many historians proclaim the October revolution of 1917 to be the moment of the myth's demise or even as the fulfilment of the city's damnation, I prefer to regard this period simply as one of those crucial moments that stimulate the re-evaluation of the myth. Later, the perestroika period (among others) has had a similar effect on the myth of the city. This article aims to show the cinematic 'Petersburg text' of the 1990s as a developer and transformer of the myth of the city, taking the films of Aleksei Balabanov and especially his film *Brother* (*Brat'*, 1997) as striking examples of this period.

In the 1990s the city found itself in a contradictory predicament. On the one hand, the city's former name was restored to it. On the other, the old name of St Petersburg, together with all the connotations of the city's glorious past, was in conflict with the actual conditions in a city in acute need of renovation, a city that had been oppressed for the past 70 years as the former capital of the Russian empire and then as a centre of opposition, and where the present-day inhabitants were living with a shortage of almost all the most essential goods. In the cinema this led to representations of the city balancing somewhere between downfall and resurrection. Probably the main characteristics of the cinematographic representations of St Petersburg during this period were the chaos and marginalisation of both the space and the protagonists. Chaos and its confrontation with order within the city space is one of the fundamental notions in both the cosmogonic and eschatological aspects of the myth of St Petersburg (see, for instance, Lotman (1992, 10–12), Toporov (1995, 299f)). In the films of the 90s the idea of chaos, i.e. the negative aspect of the myth, starts to prevail over the idea of order. The touristy gala images of the city are rarely shown in the films of this period, as though film-makers were almost ashamed of the new-old name which seemed ridiculous in comparison to the miserable reality of the city. Such images are included in the shot only as bearers of some special meaning in the narrative, or as an easy and efficient way to map the location of the film's plot. Sometimes, as in *Smile* (*Ulybka*, 1991) by Sergei Popov, this mapping happens only at the very end of the film when what had seemed to be a flea-market throughout the film changes into the very heart of Nevsky Prospect. The space seems to be turned inside out when the main sets for St Petersburg films become the outskirts of the city and such liminal places as asylums, flea-markets and cemeteries. In many

films the space also becomes chaotic and fragmented in another way, allowing the protagonists to make science-fiction transitions into space (*Window to Paris* (*Okno v Parizh*, 1993, Iurii Mamin), *White Monday* (*Dukhov den'*, 1990, Sergei Sel'ianov)) or trapping them inside it (*The Stairway* (*Lestnitsa*, 1989, Aleksei Sakharov)). Iurii Mamin's *Window to Paris* is a good example of the way the theme of St Petersburg is treated in the cinematography of the period. Here the city with its dilapidated buildings, dirty yard-wells full of trash, flea-markets and bonfires in the middle of the street resembles the ruins of a dead but still populated city. Portrayed in this manner the image of St Petersburg in *Window to Paris* is closely linked to the idea of the doomed city. As shown in the film, the city is already almost dead, although the hope of resurrection still glimmers there, for example in the image of the children returning to the city led by the flute of their teacher as though he were the Pied Piper of Hamelin. St Petersburg was a recurrent set and theme in the films of the 90s, which proves that the myth strived to be rethought and remade at a new turning point in the community's history, and that it did not come to an end at the beginning of the 20th century as some scholars have claimed.

Aleksei Balabanov may be regarded as one of the most significant creators of the contemporary Petersburg text. He returns to the subject of St Petersburg in numerous films beginning with his full-length debut film *Happy days* (*Schastlivye dni*, 1991) based on Samuel Becket's works, though set in the cold and loneliness of St Petersburg. His next St Petersburg film made in 1995, although a short one, *Trofim* (*Trofimy*) (one of four parts of *The Arrival of a Train* (*Pribytie poezda*)) is also an interesting example of Petersburg text. In 1997 Balabanov made the film that made him a well-known director both in Russia and abroad, namely *Brother*. His next film about St Petersburg, where he presents some of the most remarkable and fascinating images of the city, is entitled *Of Freaks and Men* (*Pro urodov i liudei*, 1993). Here the city is shown as being almost dead: no people on the streets and embankments, no movement and even no colour – the movie is monochrome, stylized in sepia tones. The action takes place some years before the October revolution and a feeling of approaching downfall is in the air and is made extremely visual in the film. The city in the film is even referred to verbally as 'a dead city'. Finally Balabanov returns to the St Petersburg theme again in 2006 in his melodrama *It Doesn't Hurt* (*Mne ne bol'no*).

What unites all Balabanov's films set in St Petersburg is the meeting of the protagonist with the city, a protagonist who comes to the city from outside to conquer it and succeed, and who enters into a certain interaction with the city and its dwellers. Chronologically, Balabanov has as a preference for two periods in the city's history – the beginning of the 20th century (*Happy Days*, *Trofim*, *Of Freaks and Men*) and the city contemporary to him (*The Brother*, *It Doesn't Hurt*), that is the periods that have played an important role in the transformation of the myth of the city.

In *Brother* the story also begins with the arrival of the protagonist Danila (Sergei Bodrov Jr.) in St Petersburg in search of his elder brother, but where he will later

become a professional killer. In the film there are several details and ideas characteristic of the myth of St Petersburg, which will also have an important influence on its further representation in contemporary cinema.

At the most crucial moments in its history the city always symbolized a new and better life and this served as the main idea in the positive aspect in the myth. During the reign of Peter I it served as a symbol of a new young Russia, 'a window onto Europe'. In Soviet Russia the city was proclaimed the crucible of three revolutions, hence also as the founder of a new tradition. Eventually, in the 1990s, the city that had regained its old name was regarded as the symbol of a return to the old traditions, to the Russia's cultural roots. In this context it is also symbolic that Danila Bagrov of the film *Brother*, who was proclaimed a new Russian hero both by the public and by the critics, is brought by Balabanov to St Petersburg and is associated with this city.

The film's plot seems to be very much inspired by Fedor Dostoevsky and above all by his novel *Crime and Punishment*. Danila is an ambiguous hero-killer who in comparison with Raskolnikov has no inner conflict yet provokes us to question whether or not he has a right to kill and whether or not we should sympathize with him. The question will be answered in an absolutely non-Dostoevskian manner as Danila Bagrov along with the actor who plays this role became almost national heroes following the release of this film, although in the film he is abandoned by those whose approval and sympathy he strives for the most – Sveta and Nemets.

Apart from the Dostoevsky-inspired milieu and plot, what makes this film so similar to other films of the Petersburg text of the 1990s is the extreme marginality and liminality of its space. Almost all the story takes place in the backyards of the city, showing both its downfall and impoverishment and conveying a very strong idea of the chaos reigning there. It is life at the edge, with the expectation of something – the end or the resurrection. The gala side of the city is included only to show its dissonance with the hero, who comes to the city but takes no interest or curiosity in strolling around it. He becomes interested only in a girl passing by and in a broken piece of the embankment grill but not in the monuments and cathedrals surrounding him. So the picture-postcard shots of the city have a symbolic meaning because they add to the character of Danila as a person with no roots and no inner pivot which might keep him from the crimes he later succeeds in committing. Everything is turned upside down, moved to the margins of the city: the most important and even the most inhabited places become the flea-market and the cemetery.

The cemetery also provides shelter to the most controversial figure in the film and the one closest to the mythopoeic city, Nemets. On the one hand Nemets, which means the German, is a nickname referring to a nation that had inhabited St Petersburg from its very beginning and even took part in its foundation. Nemets also seems to represent the Leningrad intellectual elite, which is evident in what he says and how he speaks. On the other hand, here in the film he is portrayed as a vagabond hiding from the city in the cemetery and warning Danila of the city's evil power that takes control of newcomers (a theme that also recurs frequently in the literary

Petersburg text of the 19ᵗʰ century). At the same time he himself stays in the city and has no intention of leaving it. The cemetery also refers to one of the names that St Petersburg had in literature – Necropolis, the city of the dead. The choice of the cemetery is interesting per se – it is the Smolenskoe Lutheran cemetery, one of the oldest in the city erected already in 1756 especially for burying foreigners of whom there were many living in the city. Hence the figure of Nemets is closely related to the more positive elements of the myth while his location in the cemetery suggests the idea of a city destined probably to die or already considered dead. Nemets also provides a strong contrast to Danila which helps the viewer to comprehend Danila's nature more easily. Danila has no inborn principles or morals, no roots, and he therefore adheres only to the principles of war from which he has recently returned where all people are divided into 'us' and 'them', 'brothers' to defend and 'enemies' to kill. Unlike Danila, Nemets has his past and a strong sense of morality. When he leads Danila to the cemetery Nemets explains to him: 'This is my Motherland, here lie my ancestors'. Throughout the whole length of the film Danila speaks very unwillingly of his past. In Nemets' case it is his principles that help him survive and not lose his humanity and intelligence, even in the extreme situation in which he is now living.

In conclusion it can be said that the films of Aleksei Balabanov may be regarded as a part of the 'Petersburg text' that proceeds and develops the ideas of the St Petersburg myth even in our own day. And moreover that the perception of the city in cinema today remains very much dependent on the existing myth.

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In Search of the Grand: Pavel Krusanov

Audun J. Mørch

Pavel Krusanov

Pavel Krusanov (1961–) is a prolific St Petersburg writer of novels, short stories and essays. The topics of his essays range from Russian rock music to alcoholism and terrorism. He has also published a modern Russian prose translation of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*.

   During the 1980s Krusanov was closely associated with Leningrad's rock scene. He was a friend of Viktor Tsoi, the singer of the famous band *Kino* and was even part of the circle around Boris Grebenshchikov and the legendary pianist and composer Sergej Kuryokhin. Once Victor Tsoi borrowed a pair of bongo-drums from Krusanov, and Krusanov, who never got his bongos back, though he repeatedly asked for them, chose to shift his focus to literature. (Krusanov 2006, 39, 45–46, 53)

Works by Krusanov

Krusanov's first works of literature were published in journals such as *Rodnik*, *Zvezda*, *Moskovskii vestnik* in 1989. In 1990 his first novel *Where the Wreath Cannot Lie* (*Gde venku ne lech)* was published. It has been rewritten and republished under the name of *The Night Inside* (*Noch' vnutri*) (2001). During the period 1990 to 2006 he has published fifteen collections of short stories, while his version of the *Kalevala* was published in 1997. Nevertheless, his main work is the trilogy of novels, *The Bite of an Angel (Ukus Angela)* (1999) *Bom-Bom* (2002) and *The American Hole (Amerikanskaia dyrka)* (2005).

The letter to President Putin on his inauguration: The problem of post-totalitarian laughter

Before we speak of the trilogy, it may be pertinent to to take a quick look at a 'stunt' instigated by Krusanov and some of his associates during Putin's presidential inauguration in 2000. In a letter to the new president the authors make the following statement:

The sad example of Europe with her deplorable perspectives shows that the loss of imperial self-understanding leads not only to the mollification of morals and pluralism of opinions, but even to a softening of brains and a paralysis of will. Russia has a chance to avoid such an outcome. Russia's immense territorial losses at the end of the twentieth century are comparable in principle to similar losses by other great powers, but there are also invisible boundaries at the perimeter of consciousness, and for the imperial self-understanding there is no task more important than to defend these boundaries. We will name those boundary lines, that lie beyond our present, official borders, directly, without reserve: Tsargrad, the Bosporus and the Dardanelles – and if you please – the possibility of causing irreparable harm to America. Any leader of Russia, whether he be called president, *gensek* or emperor, must keep these goals concealed, but he must also keep them in sight. […] At the present moment in time an annexation of Constantinople may seem absurd from a pragmatic point of view. Yet from an aesthetic point of view this idea is impeccable, and you, Mr President, are obliged to keep these goals in view, not as an ultimatum for the present day, but as a symbolic reference-point for long-term state policies.[1]

Печальный пример Европы с ее плачевной перспективой показывает, что утрата имперского самосознания приводит не только к смягчению нравов и плюрализму мнений, но также к размягчению мозгов и параличу воли. У России есть шанс избежать подобной развязки. Огромные территориальные потери России в конце XX века в принципе сопоставимы с аналогичными потерями других держав, но есть еще незримые границы, проходящие по кромке сознания, и нет для имперского самоощущения более важной задачи, чем оборона этих рубежей. Мы назовем эти запредельные рубежи прямо, без изворотов: Царьград, Босфор, Дарданеллы – и, если угодно, возможность нанести Америке неприемлемый ущерб. *Любой государь России, как бы он ни назывался – президент, генсек или собственно император, должен держать эти цели сокрытыми, но обязан иметь их в виду* (…). В настоящее время аннексия проливов и Константинополя с прагматической точки зрения может показаться абсурдом. Но эстетически эта идея безупречна, и Вы, господин Президент, должны иметь ее в виду – не как ультиматум сегодняшнего дня, а как *символический ориентир для долгосрочной и не подлежащей пересмотру государственной воли.* Только твердость этой воли позволит решить и все попутные задачи.

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1 Tsargrad is the old, poetic Russian name for Constantinople.

This letter is an interesting exercise in rhetoric. At first it seems wildly ironic, an absurd joke, but why then say that the leader must keep these goals concealed, why concede that their fulfilment is not the policy for today?

During a conversation with Krusanov in November 2006, I reminded him of the letter. At first he laughed and said 'that was a funny joke', but when I followed up the subject it turned out he had meant what he said: 'Without Constantinople and the straits, Russian expansion towards the south is meaningless. And the largest Orthodox cathedral in the world is to be found in that city. That is reason enough'.

In other words, from Krusanov's point of view, the rhetorical trope at work in the letter is *not* irony. One might ask, then, what it is, and why we laugh? Where does the power to amuse come from, if not from irony? It would seem that the rhetorical trope at work in this text is rather hyperbole, or *bombast*. It is reminiscent, if only faintly, of the hyperbolic tropes of Rabelais.

According to Bakhtin, carnivalesque laughter in Rabelais specifically has the power to *liberate from fear and oppression* (Bakhtin 1965, ff. 101). Laughter has such power because it provides its own truth, as an alternative to the truth of the Church, thus breaking the oppressive monopoly on truth of the latter. In a somewhat similar fashion the letter to Putin liberates Russians from the oppressive truth of the contemporary historical situation by providing an alternative truth: that of national myth.

Thus Krusanov's laughter has a similar goal: to *liberate* Russians from the feeling of shame and humiliation that followed the downfall of the Soviet Union (which was, after all, a Russian empire) and the chaos of Yeltsin's Russia, the shambles of that fallen empire.

We tend to laugh at the outrageous. That is why we laugh at Rabelais, and that is why we laugh at Krusanov's letter to Putin irrespective of whether we take its meaning to be ironic or hyperbolic, at least so long as we take this meaning to be more or less sympathetic with our own views. Yet a more sinister side to Krusanov's post-totalitarian laughter could be that it serves to make the outrageous more palatable.

The Great man and the grand new style: Krusanov's novel trilogy

Pavel Krusanov has explained that there are two programmatic aspects to his trilogy. Firstly, the trilogy is supposed to be an answer to the theme of the 'little man'. This is a well known tradition in Russian literature, suffice it to mention such landmarks as Pushkin's *The Station Overseer* (*Stantsiionnyi smotritel'*), Gogol''s *The Overcoat* (*Shinel'*) and Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk* (*Bednye liudi*). Krusanov wanted to explore the motifs of the 'great man' and Russian 'imperial self-understanding' (*имперское самоощущение*, interview in November 2006).

Secondly, he wants to make his contribution to what he wants to see as 'a new grand style' in Russian literature. According to him, 'romanticism' was such a style. Moreover, he wants to challenge the hegemony of 'realist literature' over all kinds of non-realist literature. (One might perhaps disagree with Krusanov that such hegemony

exists at the present time). However, at this point it is necessary to ask the question: What exactly is an imperial self-understanding? Such a notion must necessarily be related to the problem of national myth. We might remember how Roland Barthes argued that a photograph of a black soldier saluting the tricolour served to confirm the myth of the French empire, which implies that a certain empire-myth is a part of the French national myth (Barthes 1993, ff. 116). In similar fashion, British television broadcasts of cricket matches, for instance, against India and Pakistan serve to underscore the myth of the British Empire, since cricket is only played in countries that once were a part of that empire (and now the Commonwealth).

As far as Russia's imperial myth is concerned, its seems possible to identify its most important single element: The idea of Moscow as the Third Rome was expressed by the monk Filofei in the year 1510. Rome, as the original centre of Christendom, had fallen to heresy after the schism of 1054, the second, Byzantium, had fallen to the Moslem Turks in 1453, thus Moscow was now the true centre of Christendom: "'Two Romes have fallen, and there shall never be a fourth", Filofei said' (Bodin 1993, 63. *My translation* A.J.M.). The Roman doubleheaded eagle became Russia's official coat of arms. Per Arne Bodin calls this 'the most fateful statement in the history of Russia. From this statement stems the idea that Russia is a nation with a special mission in the world' (*ibid.*).

The double headed eagle may be seen as a metaphor for the double nature of the Russian empire. On the one hand we speak of an immense geographical space that rests on political and military power. Yet there is also an invisible, or spiritual, Russian empire that is based on the notion of Moscow as the true centre of Christendom. The messianic implications of this myth find expression for instance in a work such as Vladimir Solov'ev's 'A Short History of the Antichrist' of 1899. When the Apocalypse is at hand, it becomes the destiny of a Russian wandering monk (*strannik*) to save humankind from perdition. He identifies the Antichrist. On his initiative the Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran churches are reunited (Solov'ev 1999, 572 ff.).

Dostoevsky's words 'sooner or later Constantinople will become ours' have become infamous as an expression of Russian imperialism, but unlike Solov'ev, Dostoevsky was speaking not only of the spiritual empire, but also of a military conquest of that city. (Dostoevsky 1983, 65–67 and Dostoevsky 1984, 82–86), (Solov'ev 1999, 629–630).

The Bite of an Angel (1999)

The Bite of an Angel (*Ukus angela*) has the form of an apocalyptic fable. The action takes place in what we could call the *chronotope of a parallel universe*. This is a world which is basically like our own, but where many historical facts are different, because history has taken a different course at certain key points. An example of this is related to America rather than Russia: The Confederacy has won the American Civil War. For this reason, there are many black people in Russia, who have fled oppression in

America. As far as Russia is concerned, the Crimean War as we know it, seems never to have taken place. Yet at the beginning of the novel some major war with Turkey has been won, and Constantinople and the straits have thus been transferred to Russia.

At the same time the Russian general Nikita Nekitaev, who has been severely wounded in the belly, decides to have sex with his Manchurian wife strictly against the doctor's orders. During his orgasm, his wounds open and his wife thus conceives a child while being bathed in her dead husband's bloody entrails. The child, Ivan Nekitaev, who has been conceived in this way follows in his father's footsteps and becomes an officer. Brilliant and ruthless, he becomes Russia's youngest general and like Napoleon, crowns himself emperor. Now this Russian Bonaparte is also a perfect despot, if he is not indeed the Antichrist. A personification of pure evil, he leads the Russian empire into an apocalyptic war against the rest of the world.

The Russian empire of Krusanov's parallel universe seems to represent the Asian aspect of Russianness, that aspect that Aleksandr Blok describes in his poem 'Skify', written in 1918:

> Before fair Europe we will walk apart
> Far into wilderness and forests
> We will turn toward you
> Our Asian snout![2]

> Мы широко по дебрям и лесам
> Перед Европою пригожей
> Расступимся! Мы обернемся к вам
> Своею азиатской рожей!

The Asian quality of this empire, moreover, is signified by the general and later emperor, Ivan Nekitaev's background: he is half Manchurian, or Mongol, like Genghis Khan. Curiously, his family name has the meaning of 'not from China'.

The novel borrows motifs from ancient primitive mythologies as they are described, for instance, in Mircea Eliade's books (e.g. Eliade 2001, 1991), but it also characterized by an intertextual relationship with Solov'ev's *Antichrist.* Parts of the text are obviously inspired even by Solov'ev's style. I have in mind especially the manner in which major fictitious historical events are narrated. Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of the present article to provide detailed examples of this.

At first glance it is difficult to read this novel as anything but a staunch warning against what Krusanov calls an 'imperial self-understanding': The work implies such a way of thinking is pregnant with catastrophe for various reasons, but primarily,

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2 The text in its entirety was never published, but read aloud publicly. The text was later provided by Krusanov, An excerpt may found at this site: http://www.rossia3.ru/pkrusanov. *Translation is mine,* A.J.M.

perhaps, because the Russian people are too easily seduced by the strong man who proves able to fulfil their imperialist dreams. 'A great man is not necessarily a positive figure' Krusanov explained, and added that this is a book with no positive characters at all (interview in November 2006).

On the other hand, it is quite possible to read the evil Russian empire of *The Bite of an Angel* as a negative reflection of that *good* Russian empire which the author wishes to see, and wishes his readers to see. Such a reading would be consistent with a technique known from Russian Orthodox saints' lives, where the man or woman who will later become a saint is initially depicted in utter destitution. Yet this very destitution at the beginning serves to contrast and emphasize the glory that comes later, when the saint is ultimately united with Christ. One could argue that the intertextual relationship with Solov'ev's Antichrist supports such a reading: Russia's mission is actually to *save* the world from the Antichrist, not to destroy the world under the leadership of an emperor who has obvious traits in common with the Antichrist. Thus, *The Bite of an Angel* does relate to the messianistic aspect of Russian myth. Furthermore, we should not forget the specific Old Believer myth that not only proclaims Moscow to be the third Rome, but even that the Antichrist is destined to appear on Russian soil. (Hosking 1997, 209.)

Be that as it may, the following novels, *Bom-Bom* and *The American Hole* present an entirely different picture.

Bom-Bom (2002)

In *Bom-Bom* (Krusanov 2002) the action takes place partly in present-day St Petersburg and the area around Novgorod, and partly in other parts of Russia and Siberia around the year 1900. Nevertheless, it is chronotopically more complex than *The Bite of an Angel*. Characters include real people such as Krusanov's friend, the philosopher Aleksandr Sekatskii, but also characters with double natures such as demons and werewolves. The great man in this work is Andrei Norushkin, a St Petersburg philologist and bookbinder, who belongs to an old boyar family. This family is entrusted with a particular mission: At different locations in the world there are seven Devil's towers concealed in the earth. Through these towers evil from the centre of earth – hell – may be channelled onto the surface of the earth. However, the demons control only six of these towers, the seventh, located in the Novgorod area is controlled by the Norushkin family. So long as this remains so, evil will not prevail on earth. However, demons, known as *ubyrkas* are active under the guise of latter-day St Petersburg bandits.

A hundred years ago the young officer Nikolai Norushkin, who was serving his country in Siberia, understood that another one of the devil's seven towers is located in Manchuria. He decides to try and get control over that tower too. Yet it turns out Nikolai has gambled too recklessly. He is killed by the *ubyrkas* and his dead body is brought to the Devil as a trophy. Importantly, the catastrophes that befall Russia and

the world during the 20ᵗʰ century are presented as a direct result of this incident.

Significantly, Andrei Norushkin succeeds in destroying the present-day *ubyrkas* in their disguise as bandits. He is helped by the inhabitants of the village of Pubudkino. They turn out to be descendants of the Norushkin family's serfs. Lovingly and respectfully, they still call Andrei Norushkin *barin*. When the battle against the *ubyrkas* reaches its climax, their ability to turn into werewolves comes in decidedly handy.

There are two things in this novel that I find intriguing: First, I think the author succeeds in showing that the catastrophes that befell, Russia especially during the 20ᵗʰ century have such huge dimensions that they cannot really be understood within the framework of history as a scholarly discipline, nor artistically represented by realistic literature. This is why the author turns to the language and imagery of myth. Secondly, the novel seeks to reconfirm the myth that Russia has a special, messianistic mission to fulfil in the struggle between good and evil. Norushkin, and the villagers who remain his faithful peasants, represent an idealized image of the old Russian order. However, the peasants' capacity to transform into werewolves is most curious.

Anyone who is familiar with Russian discourse will not have failed to notice that the word for unity (*единство, единый*) has extremely powerful positive connotations. It is hardly coincidental that Putin's party is called *Unified Russia* (*Единая Россия*). Moreover, the notion of the *triunity* has a particular mythic strength, certainly stems from the Holy Trinity of the Christian faith. Interestingly, Norushkin represents two elements in a particular Russian trinity, in which the third element is the people (*народ*), represented by his peasants.[3]

According to Old Believer myth, both the tsar and the clergy abandoned the Russian (messianistic) cause after Nikon's reforms, whereas the people remained true to it. Hosking is probably correct in asserting that this is why the Russian people are such a powerful mythologem of Russian myth. The people are believed to possess a genuine Russianness that is lacking in both tsar and clergy, to say nothing of post Petrine service nobility. (Hosking 1997, 208). However, not least because of Surikov's famous painting of boyarina Morozova, it is common knowledge that at least a part of the old nobility became Old Believers. The intelligentsia, of course, has a more dubious standing, but it could perhaps be argued, as does Berdiaev in *The Russian Idea* (*Russkaia ideia*), that the most outstanding representatives of the Russian intelligentsia were always Slavophiles. In other words we may argue, that the novel *Bom-Bom* is a mythological statement confirming that Russia, if unified and cleansed of alien elements, has the power to conquer the Evil of this world whatever it might be. What the evil of this world really is becomes clear in Krusanov's next novel.

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3   Norushkin by birth belongs to the old Russian nobility (бояре) not to the later service nobility, which was introduced by Peter the Great. Yet because of his education as a philologist, Norushkin even belongs to the intelligentsia.

The American Hole (2005)

The action of *The American Hole* (*Amerikanskaia dyrka*) takes place in a not too distant future, in the year 2011. Locations are defined as St Petersburg and Pskov. There is also a sequence describing a car trip across rural Russia, an example of the familiar *chronotope of the road*. In this novel the musician Sergei Kurechin, a historical person who died of a rare disease of the heart in 1996, is said to have merely faked his own death. He merely went into hiding in Pskov. Here he manages a computer firm that wages a successful war against the United States. Kurekhin is now a trickster who tricks the US into another civil war. As in *The Bite of an Angel*, this time the South wins and the United States fall apart.

Again, there is no doubt that this is a mythic struggle between good and evil. USA is the evil empire. Kurechin's firm *Lemminkainen*, thus named after a typical trickster from the *Kalevala*, represents good.

I asked Krusanov whether he really regarded USA as an *evil empire*. He confirmed this: 'The USA is the actual source of almost all negative tendencies in the world today' (interview, November 2006).

Given present-day United States' policies, this statement may not seem too controversial, even in Western Europe. It was clear from Krusanov's words that his antagonistic view of the USA was something deeper than merely a reaction to the policies of the present US administration.

Therefore, the Soviet understanding of America as an antagonist has not disappeared in Russia in the way it has in many other former Soviet republics. President Putin's tough rhetoric in the face of the one remaining superpower has obviously been instrumental in securing him popular support. A novel such as *The American Hole* needs to be understood in this political context.

In *The American Hole*, the USA is construed not only as political adversary, but even as a *mythical* one; America is a *monster,* it is the serpent that must be destroyed. Why is such an image of America still artistically viable in Russian literature? The answer could be, at least in part, that Russia and the USA both possess national myths with salient messianistic traits. They are certainly not alone in this, but Russia and America are great nations that are very much aware of one another. Their respective messianistic myths thus become *competitive*. As a result, therefore, one is bound understand the other on a certain level not only as an adversary but even as the Antichrist.

In her elucidating article 'Making History: Myth and American Nationhood', Susan-Mary Grant gives a clear picture of American national myth and its messianistic traits. She also points to the pivotal role played by the American Civil War in the making of this myth (Grant 1997). It would seem that Krusanov has understood (or sensed) the mythical importance of the Civil War in America. After all, he uses the Civil War as a motif in both *The Bite of an Angel* (the version that takes place in a parallel universe) and *The American Hole* (a new Civil War taking place in 2011), and in both instances he reverses the result of the war: the Confederacy is victorious

and the United States fall apart. This, it would seem, is the only way of defeating America, for only if the outcome of the Civil War is reversed will the powerful American myth loose its power and the world be free of its evil.[4]

I also asked Krusanov why he introduced Kurekhin in the role of a mythical trickster who has the cunning to trick the monster into destroying itself. He answered that Kurekhin was the character he wanted. Every Russian knows who he was, and there was no need to create this character artistically. In describing Kurekhin to me, Krusanov called him an absolutely 'conquering type of man' (*абсолютно победительный тип человека*, interview in November 2006).

In *The American Hole* Kurekhin becomes not only a trickster but even a mythical conqueror like St. George or his Pagan predecessors. How, then, can Kurekhin be viable in the role as St George so soon after his death? Not because of his musical genius, for musical geniuses are as plentiful in Russia as everywhere else. It seems more probable that at least one generation of Russians felt a sudden liberation from post-totalitarian trauma having watched Kurechin's famous satirical television show, in which he proclaimed that Lenin had been a *mushroom*.[5]

However, as the author clearly implies by chosing the name *Lemminkainen*, Kurekhin the conqueror has inherited just as much from mythological tricksters as he has from St George or pagan thunder gods. By means of computer-hacking among other things, the Americans are fooled into believing that there is a thick layer of pure liquid gold deep beneath the surface of the earth. Kurekhin knows how Americans are not able to control their greed. Once they believe this is so, there is no stopping them from drilling a hole into the ground to reach the gold. Now, according to the special mythology of this novel, digging deep holes into the ground enables utterly destructive forces come to the surface. These forces typically have the power to destroy empires. For instance, the demise of the Soviet Union was 'really' caused by an extremely deep hole that Soviet scientists drilled into the frozen ground of the Kola peninsula. As far as the American hole is concerned, the result is, as indicated above, another civil war, this time ending with confederate victory and an end to this 'evil empire'. Thus, the serpent is killed not by sword or spear but by *a practical joke*. It is fooled into biting its own tail, as it were. Unlike *The Bite of an Angel* and *Bom-Bom*, *The American Hole* is imbued with the same ambiguous laughter as was the letter to President Putin.

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4   Unfortunately, it is beyond both the scope of this article to contrast this picture with a discussion of the perpetual image of Russia as an evil force in American popular culture.

5   The satire can be watched at this web-site: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Xq5Hl0zl9Y [Downloaded 05/05/2008]).

Conclusion

Pavel Krusanov is by no means a right wing nationalist by Russian standards. Nevertheless, his patriotism and what he himself refers to as his 'imperial mentality', may certainly cause him appear so when seen through liberal Western European eyes. I asked him whether he regards himself as democrat. He said 'yes, but to me democracy is not the most important thing. More important is a strong and flourishing state'. Interestingly, this statement illustrates the fact that while 'democracy' is a strong mythologem in the West, this is not so in Russia, where the word democracy (демократия) seems to lack any mythical aura. The word 'state' (государство) on the other hand does indeed possess such an aura.

It would appear that Krusanov is a conscious mythmaker: While he himself claims that his literary programme has two objectives; 1) to help create a 'new grand style' in Russian prose and 2) to explore the 'great man' (rather than the 'little men' of Gogol' and Dostoevsky), it seems that his novels are specifically intended to invigorate the Russian imperial myth in several ways.

First, the author's great interest in ancient and primitive myths, as he himself has stated, is motivated by the fact that he regards myth as a way of understanding the world. In other words, he is not only interested in the myths themselves (the stories they tell) but in mythical language. When writing his novels he is obviously trying to utilize this language, and he does this exactly in order to invigorate and reinforce the Russian imperial myth as a way of understanding the world from a specifically Russian point of view.

Why does he want to invigorate the imperial myth? It seems that Krusanov is afraid that the Russian nation may fall apart and eventually disappear. This basically apocalyptic fear is related to similar sentiments that were expressed by Anna Akhmatova (see for instance the full version of her poem 'When in suicidal despair' ('Kogda v toske samoubiistva') from 1917 (Achmatova 1997, 143)) and Vasilij Rozanov (Rozanov 1990, ff. 470) in his 1916 essay *The Apocalypse of our Time* (*Apokalipsis nashego vremeni*). They imagined Russia was about to be destroyed by Germany just like the Gallic nation had once been destroyed by the Romans. To be sure, present day Russian fear of America and NATO seems less existential, although many Russians certainly are wary of an American encirclement of Russia, for instance in the form of American military bases near Russia's borders.[6]

On the other hand, when Russians worry about declining birth-rates for instance, is there not something apocalyptic about their worries? In any case, declining birth-rates do indicate a lack of prospects, lack of belief in the future. It seems that Krusanov believes that in order to change such sentiments, it is necessary to revive the imperial myth. In order to overcome their troubles, Russians need to feel they still belong to a great nation.

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6   See for instance evidence of this provided on these websites: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/russia/newsid_4430000/4430118.stm and http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/projects/finfo/finfo1999/560_11367/of19992106 (Downloaded 05/05/08).

Why are Krusanov's novels important? Firstly, their artistic literary qualities, and the author's mastery of the Russian language and the power of his imagination make them worth reading. Secondly they enable us to grasp the complex, ambiguous nature of Russian 'imperial self-understanding' and how and why it is still alive.

Students sometimes ask me 'when will Russia become a *normal democracy*?' The answer, of course, is never, and the reasons are partly to be found in Krusanov's novels.

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PART IV: Memory and Representation from Modernity to Post-Modernity, from Totalitarianism to Post-Totalitarianism

History Textbooks in the Balkans: Representations and Conflict

Anamaria Dutceac Segesten

History, Textbooks and Politics

The present paper proposes to examine the political use of history (Karlsson & Zander, 2004) as it is reflected in the history textbooks of two Balkan countries, Romania and Serbia, and to discover what types of historical knowledge the local people have about themselves and their neighbours. This research paper explores the representations of the in- and out-groups as they appear in history textbooks and tries to establish a link between these representations and the potential for interethnic violence. It assumes, together with Triandafyllidou (1998, 593), that 'others may condition the formation or lead to a transformation of the identity of the in-group' and are therefore an important inclusion in an analysis of the national identity formation in multiethnic societies.

It is here that history plays the role of legitimizer: historical events are gathered and rearranged to fit into the puzzle created by the nationalist leadership. The selection and interpretation of historical facts and sources are dedicated to the present cause: rallying the people around a flag which, they have been told, has been theirs since time immemorial. Rituals, symbols and an inflammatory rhetoric play a role in the mobilization of the people, but their receptivity to this message cannot be explained in the absence of information on their level and the type of information about their own past. In this sense, history is one of the symbolical resources used by nation builders in their process of boundary-drawing to infuse their community with legitimacy (Zimmer 2003, 178).

It is some time since scholars unveiled the presence of ideology in textbooks. As Michael W. Apples states, textbooks 'embody someone's selection, someone's vision of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the process of enfranchising one's group's cultural capital disenfranchises another's' (Apples 1991, 4). This *someone* is the State, and the more authoritarian, less transparent the regime, the tighter the grip it holds over the knowledge it allows to spread into society.

The textbook is a socialization tool, as school children learn about the limits of social acceptance and rejection, the rules of the game and the moral values at the core of their political and social organization. The history textbook in particular can be an instrument for controlled remembering and forgetting. History is a vast reservoir of information, out of which only the most significant episodes are chosen and highlighted, sometimes reassembled to fit the version of the past acceptable to society and its leaders. The history textbook is a simple and efficient conservation tool, the bearer of the collective memory sanctioned by the State. If we accept that we can 'remember together', that institutions have memories just like individuals (Halbwachs 1992), then the institution of the school, partly via textbooks, suggests to each member of the society which fragments of the past are worth remembering.

History Textbooks, Collective Memory and Identity

These fragments form the 'building blocks' of the collective identity of the nation. Collective identity is created both by individuals, each with their own set of beliefs and interests, and by institutions. Once created, this shared identity tends to impose normative limits on the behaviour of social actors, as it 'determines the way individuals feel about themselves and about society' (Sztompka 2004, 483).

Collective identities emerge in a double movement: the building of bonds (the solidarity around a common 'We') and of borders which separate from the 'Others'. As we create moral connections with the members of our group, based on trust, solidarity, reciprocity and empathy, we draw a line of separation from the non-members, arranged on a scale of otherness. This process is inevitable and in that sense it is to be expected. The question remains however where and how we place the Others along the exclusion scale. In what are generally defined as consolidated, stable democracies (Linz & Stepan 1996), alterity is accepted and even admired, thus leading to a positive tolerance. In other societies, and for a variety of reasons, the Other is cast in a negative light, as menacing, dangerous or undesirable and inferior. The negative tolerance can even be taken one step further and grow into outright intolerance, when the Others are perceived as the 'enemy', as an evil to be eliminated and destroyed.

The process of constructing collective identities is partly supported by myth. Myths are understood here as narratives that illustrates the beliefs a community has about itself (Hosking & Schopflin 1998). Myth is both archetypal, in the sense that its composing elements are recurring in different epochs and places, and particular, describing events that pertain to a specific group in a specific period. This is why

we can identify the grand typologies of myth (the Foundation, the Golden Age, the Conspiracy, etc) with their plethora of characters (the Hero, the Villain, the Wise Man, the Ingénue, the Victim) in almost all societies (Girardet 1986).

As they serve both an explanatory and an identity-building function, myths carry a special force in societies in transition and for communities that have suffered a recent trauma:

> The post-communist landscape is propitious soil for collective passions, fears, illusions, and disappointments […]. Political myths are responses to the sentiments of discontinuity, fragmentation, and the overall confusion of the post-communist stage […] they provide quick and satisfactory answers to excruciating dilemmas (Tismaneanu 1998, 5).

If myths are playing a more important role in transitional societies, such as the Balkans, it is to be expected that we would recognize them in the public realm, perhaps in the media as well as in the education curriculum. The democratization process in the former communist bloc brought with it a desire to rejuvenate education, to cleanse it of ideological influences, to build it on the basis of critical thinking and political correctness. However, this is an ideal that does not necessarily come from within the societies themselves but is rather inspired by similar models in the West. Education in southeastern Europe, especially from the second half of 19th century onwards, has been put to the service of the nation.

If textbooks are elements in the identification process, they can play a role in conflict-ridden societies: they can either radicalize the stand-points of the various groups involved, or paint an image where tolerance is not only desirable but also possible. Their role in conflict resolution has been acknowledged by international organizations such as the World Bank, who invest in the reshaping of curricula and teaching manuals in order to promote pacifism and tolerance: 'Wherever and whenever a conflict has been terminated, education and textbooks usually are seen as major instruments to restabilize the society, to reconcile former enemies and to foster peace' (Hoepken 1999, 2).

The present paper builds on the ideas presented above and investigates the link between the representation of the Self and of the Other on one hand and the potential for radicalization and conflict on the other. The two cases studied are Romania and Serbia, both multiethnic Balkan societies emerging from a long period of undemocratic rule, with a nation-building process developing at about the same time, but which took two different paths in dealing with the problem of ethnic diversity.

The history textbooks examined cover a ten-year period, roughly 1991–2001, and focus on national history for young pupils (10–12 year olds), because the underlying stories and messages are easier to detect. The State must provide a simple, easy to understand and effective way to communicate knowledge about the past at the same time as it attempts to turn the young into model citizens.

Historical Overview of Textbook Legislation

In both cases, the textbook situation inherited from the communist system exemplifies the view of education at the service of the State. Only one story was allowed to appear in the public space: the story sanctioned by the Party. History legitimized communist rule and citizens were exposed only to the values and interpretations sanctioned by the communist elite. This was certainly problematic as at times individual memory and official versions would collide, but because of the monopoly of expression held by the State, and because of the fear of repression, the individual tended to voluntarily censor (at least in public) personal memories so as to fit into the official framework.

Only in recent years (after 1999 in Romania and after 2000 in Serbia) did a true liberalization of the textbook market occur, with free and open competition among textbook authors and publishers (but still with the State, represented by a commission approved by the Ministry of Education, in control). Both the Serbian and the Romanian 'old guard' opposed the changes aligning with the general European standard, illustrating the clash of two traditions in history teaching.

Representation of the Self in Romanian and Serbian Textbooks

Serbia

The spirit promoted by history textbooks in both countries is patriotic and encourages national pride. Research carried out of Serbian 5th–8th Grade history textbooks in 1997 (Ivic et al. 1997, 20) pointed out that:

> Patriotic values are absolutely the strongest value message in our textbooks. They appear only in the positive form and almost exclusively as the national value. The significance of those values is practically equated with the fight for the freedom of the homeland or, even more concretely, with the enormous sacrifices in this fight and the readiness to sacrifice in the future.

This fits with the general description of Serbian history made popular among professional historians who 'propagated the thesis that Serbs, because of their goodness, have always been victims of others; that their enemies conspire to annihilate them; and that the time has come to act aggressively to avenge past wrongs and become the dominant power in the area' (Anzulovic 1999, 7).

Especially in recent editions, there is an increased filtering away of the other southern Slavs and a focus on Serbia as the main actor in Balkan politics. Historical events are presented and even explained only from a Serbian standpoint. This is in sharp contrast with previous textbooks, in which the creation of Yugoslavia was

portrayed as the common wish and effort of all the southern Slavs. For example, in a textbook for 8th Graders it is stated that the southern Slav unity ideal did not enjoy support among the Serbs at the beginning of the 20th century, because the Serbs were far better off by themselves, having 'created conditions for an independent political and cultural development' (Gaceša 1993, 82).

Even less of a common effort seems to be behind the description of the creation of Yugoslavia at the end of WWI in a 1st Grade high school textbook, which refers to this historical event as 'annexation of southern Slav regions of Austria-Hungary by the Serbian state' resulting in the ideal of the 'unification of all Serbs'. The 'brotherhood and unity' ideal is now reinterpreted as the creation of the Greater Serbia ideal (Perović 2003, 91).

Textbook authors do not even seem to pretend to be objective, they can express opinions and personal points of view directly in the text, declaring that the Greater Serbia ideal, 'a state of the Serbian people in which they would live together with the Croats and Slovenes', is to be preferred to other solutions of cooperation in the Balkans. Some of the mythical structures mentioned previously appear unmistakably in Serbian history textbooks. One of the most common is the Conspiracy Theory. For example, the story of the secret agreement between the Entente and Italy, signed in 1915, according to which Serbia would expand to the Adriatic coast south of the (Croatian) city of Zadar, is mentioned as a historical fact, even though respectable sources concur in denying the existence of such an agreement. The fact that this attempt at enlarging Serbia to include 'Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slavonia, Srem, Backa, Southern Dalmatia and Northern Albania' failed is due to the work of secret forces, in particular the communists led by Soviet Union (Mihaljčić 1992, 57).

Conspiracy theories are backed up by a presentation of historical characters in a 'good guy – bad guy' gallery. The Hero and the Villain are legitimate figures in traditional storytelling and they find their way into history textbooks unharmed. It is interesting also to note that the archetype remains the same, but that the content of the myth changes according to the political regime. During the Yugoslav period, Tito and his communist faction, the partisans, were presented as the heroes of World War II, the anti-fascists par excellence, who were able to defeat the invading armies led by the Germans. As communism became an unpopular idea, and as Yugoslavia disintegrated, Tito's role changed from loving leader to foreign agent, and his position as Hero was taken by the father of the nationalist Chetniks, Draža Mihailović.

Mihailović is introduced as a refined intellectual, educated abroad, a lover of French literature, dedicated to the national cause in whose name he and his Chetniks had to sometimes make compromises, but only for the common good. Collaboration with the Italian forces, 'the least of all evils', was undertaken to 'ensure the bare survival of the Serbs', as the collaboration with the fascists by the government of Milan Nedić, whose aim was 'the very biological survival of the Serbian people' (Mihaljčić 2000, 102).

If collaboration with the fascists is mentioned, no words are said about the major actions that Chetniks took against the non-Serbs of Bosnia and Croatia, nor about the camps of Sajmiste and Banjica which detained about 60 000 people, nor even the arrest of more than 90% of the Serbian Jews (for more on this, see Resic, 2006). Organized forgetting implies the consistent removal of information that does not fall in line with the official ideals of the State, and thus we can observe the elimination of negative aspects from the presentation of the Hero and the accumulation of crimes on the head of the Villain.

The Villain's definition changes with political circumstances, and the 'bad guys' are now the communist militia, the Partizans. They were the only ones whose crimes are described in detail: they 'imprisoned, tortured and put before the firing squads not only those suspected of having collaborated with the occupiers, but also those of whom they thought as potential class enemies' (Mihaljčić & Ćirković 2003, 84).

The textbooks present a simplified, black and white story, from which uncomfortable elements have been purged and which uncritically supports the political priorities of the people in power, especially the national ideal and the goal of unifying all the Serbs in one state.

Romania

Myths find their way into the Romanian textbooks as well. Some of them are familiar from the Serbian example, such as the myth of victimhood, of being at the mercy and discretion of the Great Powers, and the myth of national unity, of creating a state for all Romanians. Other myths are more emphasized than in the Serbian case, like the myth of noble descent or the antemurale Christianitas, constituting the last line of defence of the Christian faith. Heroes and Villains also find a home in the pages of history books, both during the communist period, when the number one Hero was none other than Ceausescu himself, and in present times, when a more inclusive pantheon kept the princes of the old but replaced communist revolutionaries with some of the political figures 'forgotten' during the dictatorship.

The myth of national unity developed as a result of the popularity of nationalism towards the end of the 19th century. As the national slowly replaced the local identification of the people, intellectuals, and in particular students of history, endeavored to demonstrate the common nature of all the Romanian-speakers living in the three historical principalities of Walachia, Moldova and Transylvania. Ever since, national unity constitutes one of the major pillars in the construction of national Romanian identity and a dominant myth (Boia, 1995).

To demonstrate the cultural unity of all Romanians, the first step was to provide them with a common origin: the Romanians are descended in equal proportions from the local population inhabiting the area currently known as Romania (the Dacians) and from the Romans, who conquered the region in 101–102 AD under the leadership of the emperor Trajan. This common ancestry is presented as a very

noble one. The historical source that is most often referred to when describing the Dacians is Herodotus, who calls them 'the most courageous and just among the Thracians', a phrase which is included in all the textbooks when dealing with the original inhabitants of the Romanian lands. We also find out that the Dacian men were 'tall and robust, with fair skin and blue eyes. The commoners wore their hair long […] whereas the nobles had a woollen hat'. The Dacian women were 'tall and supple, with long hair worn in a bun'. The connection between the Dacians of the old and today's Romanians is made even clearer: 'The Dacian clothes resembled the Romanian national costume' (Burlec 1999, 13). In another textbook we read that the Dacians were farmers and 'skilled craftsmen' and that their kings were also 'skilled' (Grigore 1998, 12–13), and again that their clothes looked like those of the Romanians (Ochescu & Oane 2003, 11).

The Romans need no extra praise as they are already known to children in the 4th Grade and upwards as the epitome of refinement and development, the fathers of the Western civilization. We are drawn to conclude that the result of the fusion of such two noble, beautiful and skilled peoples, the present-day Romanians, must also carry the same qualities: courage, justice, and an aesthetic sense. The Dacian – Roman symbiosis is presented as unperturbed by later additions to the mixture (the migrating peoples of later centuries for instance), leading straight to the Romanians. This myth illustrates also the Latinity of the Romanians and thus their connection to the great cultural families of European cultures, alongside the French, Italian and Spanish ones.

The cultural unity based on a shared descent justifies the formation of a 'national unitary state' including all Romanian speakers. This is presented as the most ardent desire of the people and a constant preoccupation of their leaders. There are always three heroic figures of the middle age: one prince from each historical province. Stephen the Great, who ruled over *Moldova* in the 15th century, is portrayed as the defender of Christianity against the Turks, and his image was reinforced in the early 1990s when he was officially proclaimed by the Romanian Orthodox Church as a saint because of his work in the promotion (e.g. monastery construction) and protection (defeat of the Ottomans) of the Christian faith. No mention is made of his less that Christian lifestyle, his abuse of power against his nobles and his treatment of the poor.

The *Walachian* prince Michael the Great is known as the first unifier, as he succeeded to temporarily gather under his rule the largest part of the three provinces before meeting his death, betrayed, in 1601. His figure, always painted as riding a white horse into the city of Alba Iulia, the geographical centre of this Great Romania, is on the cover of many textbooks.

The most difficult case in presenting the three-fold unity of the Romanians comes from *Transylvania*, which had been under Hungarian control since the 11th century. The Romanian speakers constituted the lower social strata, mainly landless peasantry, and were not allowed to gain positions of power. The textbooks' choice for

Transylvania's ruler was prince Mattias Corvinus, who later went on to become king of Hungary and whom the Hungarians claim exclusively as their own. Regardless of his potential Romanian descent (his father might have been Romanian), Mattias never acted on this identity and behaved as a representative of the Hungarian aristocracy.

The ideal of national unity is promoted not only at the level of the content (which historical events and characters are included in the narrative) but also at the level of the form, with the parallel presentation of the history of the three provinces and the inclusion whenever possible of representatives of politics, culture and science from all the provinces.

National unity was possible only at the end of World War I, just like in the case of the first Yugoslavia. This moment is presented in many of the textbooks as an epochal achievement, the 'Great Union' of 1918, 'an ancient dream of all Romanians which became reality in 1918', 'the fulfilment of the Romanian national state', 'the natural result of the centuries-long struggle by the Romanian people', symbolically taking place in the same city of Alba Iulia where the first attempt at unity was curtailed in 1601 (Burlec 1999, 82; Vulpe 1999, 102).

The Romanian participation in World War I – known as the 'war of national reunification', and later in World War II, is always motivated by the ideal of national unity. The Romanians are supposed to be peace-loving and just, like their ancestors, and they would not get involved in a war unless the highest of goals are to be met. In the name of unity, the Romanian army 'attacked the enemy troops in Transylvania to liberate the Romanian brothers from across the mountains'. (Burlec 1999, 83) Losses on the battle field are explained not because of some internal failure of the Romanian army command but because of the lack of international support; the Romanians are again falling victims to the Great Powers: 'But the allies did not respect their promises to help the Romanians, and the Romanian Army, caught in crossfire, had to retreat step by step. Heroic battles took place […] but the disaster could not be avoided' (Ochescu & Oane, 2003, 76). Another textbook also mentions the heroism of Romanian soldiers and under a headline marked 'Pay Attention!' says: 'The sacrifice of the soldiers on the Front contributed to the fulfilment of the Romanians' centuries-long dream [same phrase as above, but in another textbook, *my comment*, A.D.S.]: the Great Union' (Grigore 1998, 68). The same textbook urged the pupils 'to take care of historical monuments in your locality dedicated to the heroes of World War I. Honour them on Heroes' Day or whenever you have the opportunity, by deposing a bouquet of flowers' (Grigore 1998, 69).

It is unsurprising that the national unity and especially the claim to Transylvania at the expense of Hungary became such a popular political theme in post-communist politics. Mobilizing the fear of dismembering the organic unity of the State won many points for the nationalist parties, as it appealed to values (unity, territorial integrity) to which Romanians have been exposed throughout their lives, ever since childhood.

Comparing the Serbian and the Romanian history textbooks we can observe the presence of common themes, especially the perception of victimhood, and the desire

to create a nation – state in which all the members of the ethnic groups can live under the same political leadership. The distinction rests in the nuances: whereas Romanian textbooks specifically mention the fact that there is no political will to modify the current borders of the country (even though 'the historical truth needs to be known', the fact that Bessarabia and Bukovina were once Romanian), Serbian historians suggest that the Greater Serbia solution was a suitable one and thus imply that it may be applicable even today.

Both Serbian and Romanian group identity is strengthened by the message coming through in the history textbooks. The in-group is always positively connoted and a positive national image begins to take shape. Specific values emerge as characteristics (e.g. Serbs are supposed to be brave and very skilled in military conflicts; Romanians are close to nature, brave and just; both groups often display heroism). Even when events which could cast a shadow over the perfect picture of the nation are included, responsibility for the actions is assigned outside the group, usually into the hands of powerful leaders in the western world. There is a strong emphasis on group unity and cohesion and the message transmitted through the textbook is that one cannot trust anyone else except one's co-nationals.

Representation of the Other in Serbian and Romanian Textbooks

It is interesting to continue and examine who are the out-groups from Serbian and Romanian points of view and how they are portrayed in relation to the nations. As it already emerges from the representation of the self, a contrast is drawn between the smaller nations and the large neighbouring powers. For both Serbia and Romania, the two most common threatening others have been the Turks and the Habsburgs.

The description quoted from the memoirs of a Serbian general participating in a World War I battle between Serb forces and the Austro-Hungarian Army vividly illustrates the negative image of the Other: 'The Austro-Hungarian military is committing bestial acts and brutality in our villages. Everywhere I can find a group killed, most of them children and women, some had been hung and some had been shot, some children as young as ten' (Nikolić 2002, 108).

The threats from one's large neighbours are a constant feature in the narrative emerging from the pages of the textbooks. The history presented is, in most cases, a history where wars and conflicts dominate, even though chapters like 'Life in the countryside', 'A day in the life of a Roman child', or 'Cultural personalities of the modern era' are increasingly present (Mihaljčić 2000, 26; Almaş 1996, 17). Emphasizing the conflictual relationship with the neighbours proposes a worldview in which no one is safe, and where fear and uncertainty are the main determinants of policy decision-making.

Even more problematic is the relationship with the Other from within, various minority groups who, under a longer or shorter period of time, shared the land with the majority group. In Romania there has been a constant attempt at political

correctness ever since 1991, with the recognition of minorities. However, when the main focus is on Romanian nationhood, it is difficult to accommodate a nuanced and detailed view of the Other – most of the information about minorities was only in connection (or contrast) with the main group, without pausing to describe their specific traditions, customs, and characteristics. Most common were enumerations of this kind:

> Besides the Romanian population, which constituted the majority on both sides of the Carpathians [meaning also in Transylvania, to counter the argument that there were no local people when the Magyars arrived in the 11th century, *my comment*, A.D.S.], other ethnic groups continued their historical existence: in Transylvania the Hungarians, the Saxons (inhabitants mainly of towns due to the privileges given to them by the Hungarian king) and the Szeklers, and in Walachia and in Moldova the Greeks and the Armenians (Manea 1992, 210).

As seen here, when details are provided about another ethnic group, they are usually cast in a negative light: the Hungarians and Saxons were privileged, whereas it is understood that Romanians were excluded, victimized.

Later on, the history curriculum has been modified and adapted to the European standards so that textbooks had to address issues like 'Romanian principalities, multicultural space', 'minorities' culture', and for students in the last grade of secondary school, case studies about the situation of the Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries, or the multiethnic nature of Greater Romania. The inclusion of such topics appears to be half-hearted at best, since no effort had been made to specify what exactly the teachers are expected to cover during such lessons. This appears to be an attempt to conform to the form and not so much to the spirit of political correctness and respect for minorities (Murgescu 2001, 231).

One of the most important minority groups, both politically and demographically, is the Hungarians. They represent currently about 7 % of the population of Romania and historically have played the role of dominant minority in Transylvania. Information about them is scarce and only given in connection to their policies towards Transylvania; no information about their specific culture or traditions is included. More is said about an ethnic group related to the Magyars, the Szeklers, who live in an enclave in the southeastern corner of Transylvania. The Szeklers are a Hungarian-speaking group brought in for the purpose of reinforcing the border of the Hungarian kingdom to which Transylvania belonged. In history textbooks, the Szeklers are called 'the armed vanguard of the Hungarian Crown' (Bozgan 1999, 15); 'although their origin is uncertain, the Szeklers consider themselves Hungarians too; they were hard working people, silent, loving freedom but "quick at anger"' (Capita & Retegan 1999, 148). The author attempts to be inclusive and to find something positive to say (hard working, freedom-loving) about a group that in reality does not interest him nor the reader.

The general impression is that the textbook authors are torn between two goals: on one hand to promote the Romanian national idea even at the expense of historical accuracy and on the other to conform to international requirements and standards by including relevant information about other cultures. One cannot have a history where the aim is for Romania to belong to Romanians and at the same time a history where Romania belongs to and is enriched by a host of other ethnic groups. This tension remains yet unsolved.

Also, for Serbian textbook authors the problem of minorities must be addressed. In general, the conditions in which the ethnic minorities lived in Yugoslavia, and later on Serbia, are never mentioned in textbooks, thus denying their very existence (Janjetovic 2001, 210). As in the case of Romania, the Hungarians are a controversial group, since they, during the time of Double Monarchy, prevented the Serbs' national unity from becoming a reality. They used to be depicted as wild, cruel, a danger to their neighbours, but over time their presence waned and now they are mentioned only inasmuch as they relate to episodes of Serbian history. They are not perceived as having contributed anything positive to Serbian society and their culture is largely ignored.

Albanians are also surprisingly absent. Their entry into the official history of Serbia happens at the time of the Great Migration of the Serbs from Serbia and Kosovo to southern Hungary (today Vojvodina). The migration, provoked by a failed alliance with Austria – Hungary, took place in the late 17th century. Sixty thousand Serb families are alleged to have moved northwards, leaving the south sparsely populated and thus allowing now, for the first time, the Albanians to move into Kosovo. In some cases published during the Milosevic era, there is not even a mention of the imigration of the Albanians. This interpretation denies the presence of Albanians in Kosovo prior to the end of the 17th century and thus argues in favour of the primacy right Serbs currently have over this territory.

Another controversial historical episode is the creation of the League of Prizren at the end of the Russo-Turkish war of 1878. This organization, based in the former capital city of Kosovo, Prizren, is the first attempt on the Albanian side to formulate goals aiming for the creation of a separate and autonomous Albanian political unit. This episode is mentioned during the Milosevic period and increasingly afterwards, but the interpretation given is ambiguous. On one hand this is included in the general anti-Ottoman struggle and thus positively described; on the other, the League is criticized for wanting to expand its authority outside the territories inhabited in majority by Albanians, being perceived as a threat to the Serbian national ideal.

With the above-mentioned exceptions, Albanians do not seem to make an appearance on the stage of Serbian history. This purposeful ignorance can be explained by the desire of the Serbian historiography to diminish the role and importance the Albanians played in the history of the Balkans. In a sense, it is almost as if the Albanians are insignificant to such an extent that they are not even worth mentioning.

In fact, this is the general impression one gets from the pages of Serb textbooks: most non-Serb ethnicities are only mentioned in order to be criticized or to be cast in the role of the Villain. When they would have had to be shown in a positive light, they are simply left aside (for example in the case of the famous battle of Kosovo Polje, a purely Serbian – Turkish affair if we are to believe the Belgrade textbooks, but, according to historical documents, a rather mixed battle where almost all the people of Southeastern Europe were involved, on both sides of the war).

A concise and general conclusion would say that both Romanian and Serbian history school books demonstrate that politics interferes with the presentation of history. The perspective adopted by the textbook authors, especially before 2000, is a presentist one: they interpret the past in the light of the present and try to justify current political decisions by finding either historical precedents or historical explanations in their favour.

When speaking about the representation of the Self, both States are providing school children with an unequivocal definition of the national character, always positively portrayed, with Serbia being more radical and aggressive in its language. As for the representation of the Other, both historical traditions have some way to go before writing an inclusive and nuanced history of the multicultural societies they inevitably have inherited.

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A Chinese Virtual 'Heimatmuseum' – *Old Beijing.net*

Michael Schoenhals

During a recent conversation with a colleague at Peking University, I was given the pessimist's view of what is happening to the study of history in post-everything China. Young people are no longer interested in history, they do not apply to study in university history departments; they are interested only in making money and savouring the present. As a result, history departments are shrinking, no longer hiring staff, and changing their focus – even their names. My friend told me of a university in southern China where history is now a sub-discipline in the Department of Tourism Management. What was the world coming to? He shook his head while I reacted by quoting the title of Lenin's 1902 analysis of the social environment in which Russian political activists tried to work – *What is to Be Done?*[1]

A few hours later, however, as I was walking past a DVD shop on the street where I live in Beijing, I saw signs of what struck me as a waxing rather than waning of interest in history. Prominently on display in the window were boxed sets of a TV soap consisting of 60 episodes fictionalizing the life and times of the Yongzheng emperor (1678–1735), the fourth ruler of the Qing dynasty. That same night, while the educational cable station was broadcasting the history of China's nuclear program, I myself – like probably the majority of Beijing viewers – turned to the re-run of *Liang Jian*, a 24-episode TV drama telling the history of the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945) through the intertwined fates of two officers: one a communist, the other serving in Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army, and both based in part on real historical characters. When *Liang Jian* was first broadcast on China Central Television during prime time in the autumn of 2005, it enjoyed an average rating of 11.42 percent.[2] Not bad for a historical drama in a country of 1. 3 billion where the typical urban viewer has in excess of 50 channels to chose from.

I mention all of this not merely in order to provide context for what follows, but to make a substantive point. As in many parts of Europe, so also in the People's Republic of China (PRC): academic historians see interest in history waning, yet at the same time, historical films and TV series are increasingly popular and historical

1 Revised text of a paper read at the conference 'Histories: Unsettling and Unsettled,' 14–16 June 2007, Arbeitsstelle Historische Anthropologie, Erfurt, sponsored by the Fritz-Thyssen Stiftung und Mission historique française en Allemagne; and at the workshop 'The Poetics of Memory in Post-Totalitarian Narration,' 28–29 May 2007, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University.

2 http://www.smeg.com.cn/news/news_view.asp?newsid=272. All URLs cited in the notes were, unless otherwise noted, accessed by the author in April/May 2007.

infotainment attracts an ever growing audience. PRC mainstream media and what was known during the Cold War as the machinery of propaganda – a term for which the 21st century prefers such substitutes as image engineering, strategic rebranding, and perception management – are making major multi-million *yuan* investments in large projects central to the production of history and its exploration, exploitation, and representation. And yet, as Alf Lüdtke and Sebastian Jobs have argued, what is thus conveniently provided may still miss the target when it comes to satisfying the popular 'attraction to the visual and even tangible that reflects a quest for "true reality"… [and] a hunger for the real that cannot be stilled by representation'.[3]

And this is where the Beijing city government's Municipal Archive comes in, as the unlikely proactive provider of a bridge to something decidedly different and growing – to a *virtual* 'Heimatmuseum' located 'below the radar' of Communist Party politics and providing room for activities and perspectives that neither quite fit the label official, nor belong comfortably in the sphere of the 100 percent unofficial/ oppositional.

The Beijing Municipal Archive: Click here and you will be taken to…

The archive of the government of Beijing (resident population 15 million) is as high-tech as one might expect from a city that has an English language website called *E-Beijing* proclaiming 'with full confidence, Beijing is on its march into the new century [and] by 2010… [its] functions as political and cultural centre will be further enhanced and brought to perfection'.[4] It is an archive whose director and Party Secretary commits in her official English language 'mission statement' to making her institution serve as a 'thesaurus… open for society circles to gain all kinds of knowledge' [*sic*].[5]

Europeans will no doubt be inclined to take such hyperbole and talk of openness with a pinch of salt. After all, here is an archive in what the PRC Constitution still asserts is 'a people's democratic dictatorship founded on an alliance of the workers and peasants, led by the working class'.[6] Who would *not* spontaneously expect, particularly if he or she were in any way familiar with the history of central Europe's 'people's democracies' an archive located in such a state to be little more than a repository for what Eric Hobsbawm has called 'the raw material that is turned into propaganda and mythology'?[7] But, as the former Director of the Smithsonian Institution Archives William W. Moss pointed out a decade ago, in China's 'rapidly

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3 Sebastian Jobs and Alf Lüdtke, in their call for papers (21 August 2006) to the conference 'Histories: Unsettling and Unsettled'.

4 http://www.ebeijing.gov.cn/About_Beijing/Cons&Modern/Article/t101378.htm

5 http://www.bjma.org.cn/staticfile/oldversion/en/main.asp

6 http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-03/15/content_1367387.htm

7 Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 275.

changing society,' talk of openness and of 'serving the people' (i.e. Mao's famous slogan) 'must not be dismissed prematurely as a controlling characteristic'. Visits to more than 20 archives in China between 1982 and 1996 led Moss to conclude that 'our Chinese colleagues' during that time had 'experienced a fundamental shift in operations from reflexive responses to a more open and expansive sort of service'. In another 'full generation of adaptation' – which is where we may be tomorrow, if not today – he speculated, things might well be even more 'congenial to scholarly research' (Moss 1996, 121).

Predicting that pronounced changes would occur in the years that followed, Moss may well have anticipated how the spread of new technologies inside and outside the archive of recording, storing, and communicating/sharing images, text, and sound would redefine the traditional relationship between archives and the wider public searching for traces of the past. In parts of China, such redefinition may still be slow in coming, but the Beijing Municipal Archive and its research staff seem prepared at the very least to view it as an opportunity full of possibilities. Hence they allow their own official website to serve as a broadly conceived information resource and prominently display on it links (which undoubtedly imply official endorsement of a kind) to other actors in the broader archive 'community'.

In Beijing, one actor thus endorsed, whose website is prominently displayed on the 'front page' of the municipal archive, is the *Oldbeijing.net*, now operating for more than seven years, whose 8,000 virtual 'members' have carved out for themselves a space between the state, on the one hand, and the market place – a rather more passive 'consumer' of history symbolized by the neighborhood DVD shop and cable television – on the other. Not content with the State Archive criteria for distinguishing the historically valuable from the useless, *OldBeijing.net* has embarked on a complementary if not alternative process of selection, storing, preservation, and representation, by encouraging members of the public with digital cameras, sound recorders, scanners, notebook computers and so on to record and post, on its website, sights and sounds of the present and past – images and texts illustrating everyday life in 'our city's changing and quickly disappearing old neighborhoods'.

…OldBeijing.net

The name *OldBeijing.net* represents both a site on the inter*net* and an open *network* of people in Beijing – ordinary citizens from all walks of life, the youngest not even in her teens, the oldest a septuagenarian, who share a love for the 'northern capital' (the literal meaning of the name Beijing).[8] The founder of *OldBeijing.net* and prime mover behind it is Zhang Wei, former newspaper employee in his thirties trained as a cook. In an interview given in February 2007 to Anni Poulsen, web-publisher of *The Cooler* ('Travel and Technology Articles and Photographs by Anni Poulsen and Dawn Ahukanna'), Zhang spoke of how he had come to launch *OldBeijing.net*:

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8   In June 2008, I discovered that (the URL) OldBeijing.net had recently been changed into OldBeijing. org. For the purposes of this article, I have retained its old name.

The initial reason for building this website was to remember our old house, which was demolished. In the year 2000, during the road-widening project in Beijing, our old house, where my family had lived for over 70 years, was torn down. I kept the wooden frame of a window, which was made from red pine tree as a memento and took it to my new home. One night, I was looking at it and suddenly a thought came into my mind: I ought to do something to remember our old house. In addition, I have always had a passion for the traditional culture of old Beijing. Then the *OldBeijing.net* was born.[9]

The website was launched on National Day 1 October 2000 at the highest point of expansion of China's web bubble. By 2002, Zhang was devoting himself to it full-time. Since 2005, 'more and more people have joined me and are helping me voluntarily', he told Poulsen.[10]

In his own blog on *OldBeijing.net*, Zhang makes a point of explaining that from the very beginning to this day, it has never been his intention to make any money from what he calls 'a spiritual home for all my friends'.[11] He is, he explains, the quintessential disgruntled idealist, and that for the sake of managing *OldBeijing. net*,

never-ending activities in society have ended up occupying all of my time and made me turn into a genuine poor devil. I never have more than 20 Yuan in my pocket and now when I see a 100 Yuan bill, it looks really unfamiliar to me. I always keep having to tell my mother and father that I do have a job, a full-time job out there in society, except it does not earn me any money![12]

Anyone who has ever met him can certainly testify to the fact that Zhang Wei behaves with the easy approachability of a 'genuine poor devil'. This despite the fact that the 'value' of *OldBeijing.net* has been estimated at a staggering 8 to 10 million Yuan! 'Some might argue that I am a wealthy man,' he writes in his blog: 'Wrong! Entirely wrong! I remain a poor devil. All that estimated money is illusory. It is a *drawing* of a cake' [and hence will not satisfy hunger, *my comment*, M.S.].[13] Seemingly content to let the big money remain 'illusory,' *OldBeijing.net* contained no commercial advertising for many years and it was only in the summer of 2007 that it set aside a corner of its website to accommodate half a dozen advertisements from such obscure firms as the *JapanRailPass Beijing Ticket Office* ('This website is under construction'), the *Love Teeth Club Perfect Dental Clinic*, and *BrianRealEstate: Realty Experts in*

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9   www.oldbeijing.net/Article/200702/10551.shtml

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 http://blog.obj.org.cn/u/1/index.shtml

13 Ibid.

Shanghai, a site that informs visitors in English 'Looking for apartments in the [*sic*] Shanghai? You've come to the right place! BRIAN (Shanghai) REAL ESTATE are a FREE apartment finding service in Shanghai'.

Image 1

Image 2

'A picture says more than a thousand words' is a saying that exists in almost every language, it seems, including Chinese. *Image 1* is a screen-shot of what the *OldBeijing. net* 'front page' looked like in April 2003; *image 2* is what the same page looked like four years later. Many of the clickable tags take the visitor directly to a recent posting, others to subdirectories such as 'Tea Houses, History, Culture, Folkways, Lanes & Alleys, Commerce, Natural Science, Tourism'; 'News, Anecdotes, Personalities, Archaeology, Seen & Heard, Protection, Obituaries'; 'Record of Major Events,

Ceremonies, Deconstruction, District Divisions, Organizational Systems'; 'Legends, Folk Art, Literature, Secret Histories, Divination, the Tianqiao area,' etc.

Image 3

Image 3 shows part of a page where words of heartfelt thanks are expressed to people who have donated funds in support of *OldBeijing.net* (the cartoon-like drawing of two young Red Guards reading Chairman Mao's works on the right is a clickable 'pledge notice' that reads 'Public Service Websites Need Your Support!'). The banner headline reads: 'We must take a clear-cut stand in opposing acts of wanton destruction of our material cultural heritage!'

Image 4

Image 4 is simply one example of many old and new photographs which ordinary people have scanned and which can be viewed in *OldBeijing.net*'s extensive image gallery. Who are the people in the picture? What are they looking at? We don't know.

A relaxed attitude to intellectual property rights is undoubtedly one essential ingredient in what has made *OldBeijing.net* what it is. The site has never paid any royalties for any of the cross-posted, 'borrowed' or otherwise appropriated material posted on it. In an interview on Mao Zedong's birthday in December 2006, Zhang told me how he occasionally receives phone calls that begin with an author or intellectual property rights holder inquiring and asking for money. But once the circumstances have been explained, the callers no longer ask for money, and in some cases even end up pledging money in support of *OldBeijing.net*, Zhang noted with pride. He added how 'people tend to be disappointed in the government, which doesn't do any of this stuff…'

OldBeijing.net ultimately depends on people out there 'in society,' Zhang insists in his blog:

> I am *not* expressing any thanks to any leadership, because *OldBeijing.net* has never been subject to leadership, much less come to enjoy any leadership's support. I am not expressing any thanks to any colleagues (by which I mean persons in government offices doing [culture/history, *my comment*, M.S.] preservation work), because if they weren't behaving the way they are, I wouldn't need to exhaust myself preserving culture. The people I want to thank are friends on the web, since if it wasn't for them, *OldBeijing.net* wouldn't be what it is today.[14]

This, of course, will probably be seen as a suspiciously romanticized depiction of reality unless one also takes into account the fact that some of the mentioned 'friends on the web' may be quite wealthy. Thus when I interviewed him, Zhang was very pleased to announce that 'a rich businessman with lots and lots of computer space has donated a server with a massive capacity to *OldBeijing.net*. This is very big news, very good news! We will no longer have to worry about not being able to put all those pictures up there'.[15]

'To create an archive of everyday life': The *OldBeijing.net* Roving Recorders

OldBeijing.net is not, however, a website run solely as a way of appropriating and preserving the 'intellectual property' of others. On the contrary: as a network, it is very much an active creator/collector in and of itself. On 26 June 2005, Zhang began to organize (with the help of a dedicated electronic bulletin board and SMS) ordinary people to meet at weekends to record with digital cameras, moving image and sound recording equipment, what still remains of old Beijing's cityscape. 'Then we put all this information together,' he told *The Cooler*, referring specifically to

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14 Ibid.

15 Author's interview notes, 26 December 2006.

information on physical structures, 'and look through historical files to find evidence of the object's importance to support its preservation'.[16]

Image 5

Image 5 shows members of the *OldBeijing.net* Roving Recorders on a rare formal occasion. At various stages of their activities, the Roving Recorders have risked falling foul of PRC legislation, which imposes various restrictions (not least financial, in the form of registration fees, red tape, etc.) on networks of people that have even the slightest degree of formal 'structure' (e.g. a 'head' or a roster of 'members'). This explains the wording of a web-posted 'declaration' which describes the Roving Recorders in the following fashion:

> The *OldBeijing.net™* Roving Recorders constitute an activity of a non-organizational (*fei zuzhixing*) nature that has the quality of webizens gatherings devoted solely to the complete, authentic, and objective recording of the process of vicissitudes our ancient capital is undergoing.[17]

The full statement, drafted by a lawyer in cumbersome and longwinded legalese, is posted on a bulletin board where webizens can register comments. Below it, one comes across a number of short messages such as the following: 'My full backing!' 'Supported!' 'It's all too obscure, and I don't understand what it says. Why are there that many 'Howevers' in the text?' 'Thank you, *OldBeijing.net* Roving Recorders for saving Beijing as we see it…'

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16 www.oldbeijing.net/Article/200702/10551.shtml

17 http://bbs.oldbeijing.net/dispbbs.asp?boardID=9&ID=6952&page=1

OldBeijing.net thus preserves in the form of a (virtual) archive whatever its Roving Recorders capture in whatever form – image, sound or text. But, in a way similar to the Beijing Municipal Archive, it will on occasion put some of its 'holdings' on display in quasi-permanent form (i.e. one that does not necessitate an uninterrupted supply of electricity). In 2005, it organized the first traveling exhibition of pictures taken by the Roving Recorders at a few of Beijing's universities. For that purpose, initial funds totaling 10,000 Yuan were borrowed. When in 2006, a second traveling exhibit was arranged, 'people out there' were prepared to donate funds to the cause, hence money no longer proved to be a major problem. This welcoming attitude on the part of selected universities and independent individuals has been matched by a positive write-up in some of China's major media outlets and the occasional *n*-second interview on television. Thus in April 2006 for example, the Roving Recorders received a very positive endorsement by the organ of the Communist Youth League, the *China Youth Daily*, under the headline 'The "Old Beijing Roving Recorders" Seek to Create an Archive of Everyday Life in Beijing'.[18] It described how:

> There is a group of people like this in Beijing […] who get together every Sunday and walk about the gradually disappearing alleys of Beijing, capturing every detail of those alleys with their lenses, and taking down every story they hear with pen and paper.[19]

The author of the *China Youth Daily* article explicitly underlined one welcome aspect of what was being done, reframing the discourse of the 'resistance to modernity', the angle from which critics of *OldBeijing.net* typically argue, and substituting the no less powerful discourse of 'patriotism'. It was pointed out that an absolute majority of the photographs of the city – of its places and people, in effect its history – dating from before the 1950s, had been taken by foreigners. In fact it made the charge that, as far as the 20th century as a whole was concerned, the 'record of systematic and comprehensive photographic and textual recording of the city of Beijing by the Chinese themselves is still a blank'. The activities of the Roving Recorders, Zhang was quoted as saying, were in other words patriotic in that they 'aim at the creation' *by* Chinese people themselves 'of an archive of Beijing's everyday life'.[20]

In what could be construed, depending on one's stance, as either a euphemistic or a postmodern comment on the naïve 'mode' of recording and preserving the material chosen by *OldBeijing.net*, the *China Youth Daily* continued:

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18 http://www.cnarts.cn/yszx/12440.html

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

The Roving Recorders not only photograph Beijing in its entirety but its details as well. The reader can see the details through the lens, like the doors, stairways, hand railings, ornaments, courtyard awnings etc. and in this way experience the atmosphere unique to those times. One of their principles of photography is not to interfere with any of the things that exist in real life, hence although their images sometimes appear chaotic, this is in fact the actual state of the lives of ordinary people in Beijing at the start of the 21ˢᵗ century.[21]

The people memorialize: Cultural Revolution suicides

Given the profusion of texts, images, and bulletin board postings, it would seem that 'ordinary life' dominates *OldBeijing.net* in ways that make cataloguing and indexing, in the interests of handling and tracking, very difficult. In other words, what one might want to look for/at more closely as an ordinary visitor (or indeed as a cyberpolice censor!) cannot be found easily. Finding anything more specific than the picture of the day quickly becomes a matter of haphazard negotiation between personal interests, surfing skills, and the stubborn if not idiosyncratic preferences of the *OldBeijing.net* search engine. My own interest happens to be the historical reconstruction of what could simply be called simply 'Beijing In the Sixties', although the accepted shorthand for much of it long ago became 'the Cultural Revolution'. Interestingly, when I asked Zhang Wei, he explained that the one generation which he has had a hard time enthusing for 'Old Beijing' is today's middle-aged, former Red Guards who grew up under late Maoism. Most visitors to *OldBeijing.net*, he believes, are either young, in their twenties perhaps, or older, in their sixties or seventies even. Why this should be so, he is unable to explain.

The material on *OldBeijing.net* which the search engine relates directly to the formative years of the Red Guard generation is limited. When searched on the subject, it lists only a handful of texts. One is simply a succession of jokes from or about the Cultural Revolution, a light-hearted mini-version of the kind of collections that were popular in China in book form some fifteen to twenty years ago.[22] Another is a more or less unedited brief string of recollections about the Cultural Revolution, dated 1986.[23] The one item that stands out is entitled 'Already Investigated Deaths in the Cultural Revolution at Beijing University and Qinghua University'.[24] Its appearance on *OldBeijing.net* lends the site the unusual quality of a memorial.

Upon closer scrutiny, 'Already Investigated Deaths' turns out to be a small part of a survey and oral history research carried out since the 1990s by a Beijing expatriate based at the University of Chicago, named Wang Youqin. Recent products of

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21 Ibid.

22 http://www.oldbeijing.net/Article/200409/4704.shtml

23 http://www.oldbeijing.net/Article/200407/4472.shtml

24 http://www.oldbeijing.net/Article/200405/4250.shtml

her research include her book *Victims of the Cultural Revolution: An Investigative Account of Persecution, Imprisonment and Murder* published in Hong Kong in 2004, and a dedicated US website (*chinese-memorial.org*) called 'Memorial for Victims of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: Chinese Holocaust Memorial'. What appears on *OldBeijing.net* is essentially a list of names of teachers at two of Beijing's most prestigious universities who died 'abnormal deaths' during the Cultural Revolution, with minimal contextualizing information. Here is an extract from the list:

Peking University
> On 11 June 1966, Wang Jian, professor in the department of history, committed suicide by drinking pesticide.
> On 28 July 1966, Dong Huaiyun, lecturer in the department of mathematics committed suicide.
> On 4 August 1966, Wu Xinghua, lecturer in the Spanish language department was forced while undergoing 'labor reform' on campus by Red Guards to drink the polluted water in a stream running from a chemical plant nearby. She was poisoned and fainted, but the Red Guards insisted she was merely 'playing dead'. She died later that evening.
> On 24 August 1966, Yu Dayin, professor in the English language department, committed suicide in her home after seeing it ransacked and being beaten…
> On 2 September 1966, Cheng Xiance, party secretary in the CCP General Branch in the Chinese language department killed himself by consuming poison after having been 'struggled', humiliated, and beaten as a so-called 'black gang element'.
> On 9 October 1966, Shen Naizhang, professor in the department of psychology committed suicide after being 'denounced and struggled' and humiliation…[25]

The list goes on and eventually leads into a narrative section which is in turn followed by a similar list from Qinghua University. It is said among European students of history, ethnology and literary studies that recent decades have seen a growing interest in the 'memory document' as a genre, and on this point the PRC is again not so very different. Of all the memory-representations to be found on *OldBeijing.net*, Wang Youqin's lists (and the narrative which they frame, as beginning and end) are perhaps most easily identified as belonging in the genre of the memory document. Which further suggests that the website as a whole may be regarded on a more generalized level as a memory document itself, impermanent as it may be in its digital form:

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25 Ibid.

Qinghua University

On 20 September 1968, during the 'Cleansing the Class Ranks' movement, Chen Zudong, professor in the department of hydraulic power, hanged himself on the grounds of the old imperial Summer Palace

On 6 November 1968, during the 'Cleansing the Class Ranks' movement, Yang Jingfu, teacher in the foreign languages department, committed suicide by jumping out of the building.

On 6 November 1968, after having been humiliated in the 'Cleansing the Class Ranks' movement, the husband and wife couple Yin Gongzhang and Wang Huichen who had taught entry-level courses committed suicide by hanging themselves in the Xiangshan Hills.

On 29 November 1968, after having been locked up in the department laboratory during the 'Cleansing the Class Ranks' movement, Li Peiji, professor in the department of hydraulic power, committed suicide by jumping out of the building. He was 57 years old.

On 10 December 1968, Zou Zhiyin, professor in the department of mechanics, committed suicide by jumping from a building.

On 13 December 1968, after having been persecuted in the 'Cleansing of the Class Ranks' campaign, Cheng Yingquan, lecturer in the department of civil engineering, committed suicide by jumping into a lake.

On 8 February 1969, after having been persecuted in the 'Cleansing of the Class Ranks' campaign, Lu Xueming, lecturer in the physical education department, committed suicide by jumping from a building.

On 23 April 1969, after having been persecuted in the 'Cleansing of the Class Ranks' campaign, Li Yuzhen, a member of the university library staff, committed suicide by jumping from a building.

On 4 May 1969, after having been persecuted in the 'Cleansing of the Class Ranks' campaign, Wang Dashu, assistant professor in the department of electrical machinery, committed suicide by taking poison…[26]

In case it might be construed as strange that a list of suicides should appear on a website claiming to be devoted to preserving the memory of the everyday, it should be noted that such was life during the more brutal periods of Mao Zedong's final decade at the helm, that suicide was in a sense 'everyday,' if not 'life' then death. Hence there is nothing strange about it from this point of view, although it is of course politically significant. Which begs the question as to whether or not it provokes the ire of today's state authorities?

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26 Ibid.

The cyberpolice & *OldBeijing.net:* Censors interested in history?

'Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution'. Thus begins volume 1 of Mao Zedong's *Selected Works*, and it would be misleading not to consider the question as to what, or who, might constitute the enemies of a project (if not a revolution) such as *OldBeijing.net.* Obviously there is the issue of censorship, but this should not be interpreted as reflecting a fundamental hostility on the part of the people's democratic dictatorship. One need only remember the endorsement given to *OldBeijing.net* by the Beijing Municipal Archive, in order to appreciate that something of greater complexity is going on here. And although, on the other hand, the forces of the market that just might, in the opinion of some, play midwife to a freer environment in which such sites can operate, they too are seen by Zhang Wei as part of the problem rather than its solution. This despite the gratitude due to the businessman who donated computer equipment and server space. Zhang sees the greatest danger to *OldBeijing.net* in a nexus of market forces and self-serving politicians:

> They make up one or a number of interest groups – interest groups able to operate the machinery of the state and created by the coming together of some obnoxious officials in the government and commercial developers. They accuse us of being roadblocks standing in the way of socialist economic construction, of impeding the pace of their economic reform, and of obstructing the process of improving the living conditions and infrastructure of the ordinary people.[27]

But what about censorship *per se*? Anyone unfamiliar with today's China might expect the authorities to demand the removal from *OldBeijing.net* of Wang Youqin's lists. (Access to her own website on a server in the US is, after all, said to be blocked and inaccessible from within China). But on some level the cyberpolice are acting, as though to confirm that Carrie Lucas was right when she sang, in the 1980 disco of the same name, that 'It's not what you got (it's how you use it)'! That the information should be 'out there' about who died under what circumstances at Qinghua University when Red Guards were in control of the campus is not what bothers them. What they *do* object to strenuously is the occasional hyper-politicized 'enrichment' of it by foreign journalists. Take for example the following commentary by *The Independent* of London, reprinted on George Mason University's *History News Network* ('Because the Past is the Present, and the Future too') and entitled 'Did China's New Leaders take Part in a School Bloodbath?' Jaspar Becker's ascription of guilt by association and physical proximity 'enriches' data about life in such settings as Qinghua University to produce the following:

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27 http://blog.obj.org.cn/u/1/index.shtml

Qinghua University was the birthplace of the Red Guards – the fanatical teenage activists who terrorized 'closet capitalists' in the Cultural Revolution… *Many* of those who *witnessed*, and *possibly* even participated in those atrocities, are stepping into the highest offices of the Chinese state… *What if anything* Mr Hu [Jintao] and his classmates said or did during the Cultural Revolution *has been carefully air-brushed out* of their official biographies… He *almost certainly participated* in the initial Red Guard activity and *reportedly* put up posters attacking faculty members stigmatized by their class background or 'feudal ideas'. How far Mr Hu went *is not known* and *no evidence suggests he was one of the diehards*… However, it is revealing that Mr Hu has surrounded himself by those who *must have been heavily involved* (emphasis added, M.S.).[28]

It is prose of this kind (strikingly reminiscent, in its tortured rhetorical 'guilt-by-proximity' logic, of Maoist 'big-character poster' attacks) that attracts the ire of the censors, rather than the straightforward web-posting of ordinary Chinese people's fates during the Cultural Revolution.

No less 'everyday,' yet at the same time potentially more controversial – depending on *who* does *what* with it – is the image of an object with commentary, also left untouched by the cyberpolice, in a section of *OldBeijing.net* devoted to so-called 'Treasured Collector's Items from Years Gone By'. It is a string of postings under the heading 'Medal Commemorating XXXX'. The first posting simply shows a photograph of a medal (*image 6*) of the kind presented to soldiers who took part in the brutal suppression of the Spring 1989 People's Movement in central Beijing.

Image 6

28 http://hnn.us/comments/9344.html

The second posting reads 'Seems like there are a lot of young people around… who don't know what this is!' Following it is a posting in a larger-than-usual font size, for added emphasis, that reads 'Back then, I was a thug!' The 'thug' charge, of course, was one often made in 1989 by the authorities against members of the People's Movement. Commenting on the latter, the fourth and final posting reads: 'I now bestow upon you the posthumous title of Defender of the Republic'. A text input error has resulted in the homophonous character for *wok* appearing as the third character in the word 'Republic', the meaning of the sentence as it now stands thus being something akin to: 'I now bestow upon you the posthumous title of Defender of Common Harmony in the Frying Pan'.[29]

OldBeijing.net has so far been censored only on but a handful of occasions. Deep down in the blog bowels of *OldBeijing.net*, there is a text written by Zhang Wei on 18 March 2007:

> Certainly, in these circles, everybody knows us… They also know that our website is not only being seen by friends on the web, but by large numbers of government officials as well. My every word, my every move, is being watched and controlled by them; and every movement, every activity, on the website has them worrying. In 2006, an officer with the Beijing cyberpolice phoned and specifically demanded the removal of certain named articles that had lifted the curtain on shady things. He told me: People up here are watching![30]

Three months earlier, Zhang had complained to me (and to the CCP Vice-Party Secretary from the Beijing Municipal Archive who had arranged our meeting in the cafeteria of the Beijing Capital Museum) about how in 2006, he had received phone calls from the cyberpolice on three separate occasions. Once he had been told to remove something from *OldBeijing.net* seen as expressing hostile local 'exclusionist' sentiment towards migrant workers from other parts of China flooding Beijing; on another occasion he had been told to remove something about certain cultural relics having actually been sold to (rather than stolen by) the French; and on a third occasion to remove something that apparently constituted a military secret.

'May you live to represent the past in interesting times!'

I began this paper by hinting in broad terms at what seems to be happening in China with respect to interest in history, and proceeded to note that Beijing's municipal (state-run) archive offers at least one surprise answer regarding the use of the internet as a tool of interactive communication with a public increasingly interested in history. From here I proceeded to examine *OldBeijing.net* and the trend it represents

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29 http://bbs.oldbeijing.net/dispbbs.asp?boardID=20&ID=15576&page=1

30 Ibid.

in archiving materials and data that record the everyday lives of ordinary people. Implicit in my description of its alternative mode of exploring and representing the past is that it impacts on the ability of the state to 'control' history as it had done in the past.

In the short term, what is archived on/by *OldBeijing.net* would appear to be unproblematic in the eyes of the cyberpolice and state archives. The Roving Recorders have on occasion been trailed in a perfunctory manner by the ordinary municipal police, but for precisely what reason and with what mandate is far from clear. When a young German master's student from a Swedish university accompanied Zhang Wei and his colleagues through Beijing's *hutongs* (traditional narrow alleys), one weekend in February-March 2006, he noted how

> a police bus closely followed the group that was walking through the *hutong* taking pictures. This time [*sic*] they did not try to stop the group. Still, in our interview Zhang openly showed his discomfort with their actions. 'We are trying to protect the *hutong* culture and these people are trying to stop us and give us a lot of trouble. They think we are traitors. If they work for the government and if they don't do anything the way they should do…. why are they still doing this job? Who are they? I hate them'. But he too put his criticism into perspective by stating that there are perhaps only a few people like that. 'But only a few can have very bad influence. Most people really want to do good things in the government but they don't have the power or the right to do so. It is a pity'.[31]

What does the future hold in store for *OldBeijing.net* (and sites like it in other Chinese cities)? One likely possibility is nothing in particular; another is that of a take-over, 'hostile' or otherwise, by the authorities. Zhang Wei has himself envisaged being made to shut down, yet at the same time credited with having performed a service of sorts and seeing his unique record become part of the state-managed and controlled archive arena. A pretext, if needed, could easily be found, and it would most likely be strongly linked to the present rather than to the past, to politics and not history.

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31 Enno Ladwig, Cultural Identity in Urban Beijing: Cycle of Change, Life and Development in Beijing (Malmö: Malmö University Communication for Development, 2006), p. 32. Ladwig's work also resulted in a film Cycle of Change: Beijing My Old Home, awarded the 'Best Short Documentary' prize at the New Beijing International Movie Festival in 2007. See www.cycleofchange.tv.

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Memories of a Modernity-to-be. Some Reflections on South Africa's Unresolved Dilemma

Oscar Hemer

Introduction

First, a few words on the very notion of Modernity. It is obvious that the declaration of its death in the 1980s was not only premature but also a particular phenomenon of the so-called west. Modernity is very much alive in the world today, with China and India as the two giant challengers of western economic and political supremacy. The ferocious modernization process in China resembles in many ways the modern projects of post-WWII Europe (on both sides of the Iron Curtain) – yet on a much larger scale and at a much faster pace.

Usually 'modernization' and 'globalization' are seen as equivalent to a lesser or greater degree and globalization is even sometimes regarded as the global fulfilment of 'the modern project'. The liberal interpretation of 'the end of History' has indeed been overshadowed by the backlash of (alleged and real) fundamentalist reactions and the ongoing global 'war on terrorism'. However, the dominant globalization discourse – the idea of a 'digital revolution' of 'informatization' as equivalent to the earlier industrial revolution – remains a rerun of the modernization rhetoric: a reconstructed grand narrative of progress, not necessarily more sophisticated than its predecessors.

According to Dutch sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2004), the definition of globalization as a form of hyper-modernity is purely Eurocentric. Globalization goes much further back than the 18th century (Enlightenment) or even the 16th century (Discovery of the New World). Whichever symbolic beginning you choose, Modernity, as an historical era, happens to coincide with western expansion and world domination. In Nederveen Pieterse's view, the fundamental feature of globalization is *hybridization* – a process of cultural mélange that to some extent is interrupted by and even radically opposed to the modern experience.

Globalization is the term used to describe the new global transformational processes. But in order to fully understand these processes, we must realize that there is more to globalization than immediately meets the eye. This brings the postmodernity debate of the 1980s to mind. The fundamental meaning of 'the postmodern condition' was not the end of the modern, but Modernity coming of

age and becoming aware of its own historicity. Maybe it is only now that we are beginning to realize the full implications of that major shift – the modern becoming aware of its historicity, and also, and probably more important, the west becoming aware of its particularity. Simultaneously, with the revival of a naive and unreflected upon modernization paradigm, we are now clearly experiencing what could be described as the *pluralization* and *de-westernization* of modernity.

The South African scene

What does this imply for the particular South African experience? I would claim that South Africa is an excellent example, not only of the duality of globalization, but also of the fundamental ambivalence of modernity. South African literature and other creative production from the transition period provide evidence to support such an assumption.

David Attwell (2005, 1) defines two general historical conditions that mark the country's postcolonial history: 'The first is its textured postcoloniality, by which I mean that it combines the history of settler-colonial and migrant communities with that of indigenous societies. In a sense it combines in one country the histories of Australia and Nigeria'. The second general historical condition, according to Attwell, is the experience of an aggressive modernization that began with the industrialization of the mining industry in the 1880s. Industrialization 'created the conditions for the emergence of a pan-ethnic, non-racial movement for decolonialization in predominantly urban and polylingual environments'. (Atwell 2005, 3)

What Attwell describes could also be defined as an emerging culture of modernity – which in South Africa as in South America (and the rest of the world) is synonymous with the culture of the metropolis. But while South America's big cities fomented cultural and political modernism,[1] the potentially equally fertile South African urban modernity was to be doubly suppressed, by British imperial interests and rising Boer nationalism.[2] Johannesburg, the industrial metropolis supported by gold mining, 'grew as a frontier city closely tied to the global market economy and the world of consumption while at the same time mired in bigotry and prejudice, constantly caught between what it could be and what it ended up being'. (Mbembe & Nuttall 2004, 362).

Modernization was thus imposed and inhibited with equal force, and Johannesburg, where metropolitan consciousness went hand in hand with the most pervasive forms of white supremacy (*wit baasskap*) and the most brutalizing forms of economic violence, became living proof of the fact that a commercial society – just as a cosmopolitan one – could be founded on settler racism and oppression (Mbembe & Nuttall 2004, 363).

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1 The twin cities of Rio de la Plata, Buenos Aires and Montevideo, are even arguably the cradle of literary modernism.

2 The defeated rural Boers (Afrikaners) who migrated in order to find work in the mining metropolis rightly regarded black African workers as superior competitors on the capitalist labour market.

The fundamental ambivalence of modernity becomes even more evident under apartheid.[3] The apartheid system was one of the most elaborate projects of social engineering – comparable only to the grand modern disasters of fascism and communism in its repressive brutality, yet related to other more modest modernization projects, such as Sweden's social democracy.[4] The apartheid state was a welfare state, albeit for whites only and Boers/Afrikaners in particular. 'Afrikaner advancement' was the core motivation. Yet, at the same time, apartheid was explicitly a reaction against modernity. In rhetoric, if not in practice, it aimed at preserving cultural diversity from the devastating influences of modern civilization. As a consequence, the very notion of cultural difference has been compromised in South Africa, through its intrinsic associations with apartheid.[5]

Leon de Kock (2004, 17) describes 'South Africa' as an entity which has come into being 'only by virtue of tumultuously clashing modalities, the modernity of a globally expanding Western culture intermeshing with an irreconcilable heterogeneity of cultures and epistemologies'. Cultural heterogeneity is neither new nor surprising in a context of globalization, but the South African case is special since it 'remains to this day a scene of largely *unresolved* difference'. De Kock proposes the *seam*, as opposed to the frontier, as an illuminating metaphor for this peculiar predicament. The seam is not only the site of difference, as the frontier might be defined, but 'the site of a joining together that also bears the mark of the suture'. It is an evocative metaphor; the stitching together of otherness and sameness, the place of both convergence and difference where the impossibility of origin and unity is staged repeatedly, where the divided culture compulsively returns time and time again. And the key element in this process is desire: 'It is an incessant mark of desire that cultural inscription in the divided country seeks the site of lost origins, a lost or never-realized wholeness' (De Kock 2004, 12).

Hence, fierce and frustrated modernization and unresolved difference are constitutive elements of the 'textured postcoloniality'. Thus, memories of modernity in the cultural production of contemporary South Africa connote nostalgia for an idealized pre-apartheid past – often depicted and interpreted as an embryonic (cultural) modernity which is brutally interrupted.

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3 The term apartheid is associated with the National Party, which came to power in 1948 on a ticket of full-scale racial segregation. Racial laws were, however, implemented and practised long before that. The Act of Union, 1909, which served as the constitutional base for the South African state after the Anglo-Boer war, explicitly excluded blacks. Segregation was already at hand, but apartheid implemented it systematically and more efficiently.

4 The latter comparison was an implicit motivation for the 'Memories of Modernity' project, involving four Swedish and four South African artists whose artworks were exhibited in Durban, April 2007, and Malmö, November 2007 – May 2008.

5 The apartheid state officially *reinvented* difference in the name of equality and applied, in theory, what would today be called a multicultural policy, aiming at restoring South Africa to its pre-colonial geography, by creating 'homeland' states that supposedly would eventually become 'independent', sovereign political and social entities (De Kock 2004, 16).

The Myth of Sophiatown

Although the black poor constituted what Mbembe and Nuttall call the underside of the mining city's modernity, the Johannesburg of the 1950s gave rise to a vibrant and racially diverse culture, with its epicentre in the inner suburb of Sophiatown, which 'offered unprecedented possibilities for blacks to choose and invent their society from the novel distractions of urban life' (Gready 2002, quoted in Mbembe & Nuttall 2004, 364). The mixed and defiant Sophiatown attained mythical status even before it was finally evacuated and levelled to the ground in 1963. There are equivalents in almost all major South African cities – District Six in Cape Town, Cato Manor in Durban – but Sophiatown holds the strongest presence in the public imaginary, not least internationally. Zola Maseko's feature film *Drum* (2004) tells the story of Henry Nxumalo and the other legendary writers of *Drum* magazine and reinforces the romanticized notion of a swinging multicultural enclave of jazz, gangsters and political radicalism, where the ruling motto, according to legend, was 'Live fast, die young and get a good-looking corpse!'[6]

On my first journey to South Africa in 1991 I was guided by writer and former gangster Don Mattera.[7] He took me on a tour through the endless dismal townships south and west of the formerly ethnically cleansed white city; Lenasia, Eldorado Park and Soweto (abbreviation of Southern Western Townships), to which Asians, 'coloureds' and blacks were deported and 'resettled' in accordance with the Group Areas Act.[8] It was Sunday before a two-day strike and the atmosphere in Soweto was tense with protest and readiness for violent action. I was scared, and I could sense that even my scarred Virgil was nervous. But the strongest lasting memory of that city tour is my earlier visit to Triomf, the white working-class suburb that was literally built on the ruins of Sophiatown. At the time, one could still see the remnants of the demolished swimming pool nextdoor to the former Anglican Church, where legendary Father Trevor Huddlestone denounced apartheid in his Sunday sermons. The church was desecrated by the white mob and turned into a boxing hall before being reconsecrated as Pinkster Protestante Kerk.

To me, this constitutes the most obscene memorial of racist South Africa. There is brutal irony in the very name Triomf, in the ruling National Party's pyrrhic victory over urban modernity. *Triomf* is also the title of Marlene van Niekerk's novel from

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6   *A good-looking corpse* (1991) is the title of white writer Mike Nicol's documentary story of 'a decade when hope turned to bitter disillusionment'.

7   As Zinga Special, he was the feared leader of The Vultures, in constant gang war with The Russians. Mattera has depicted his childhood and violent youth in the autobiographical novel *Gone with the Twilight – a Story of Sophiatown*, 1987.

8   Asians, 'coloureds' and blacks were the three main categories of non-whites in the hierarchical Apartheid classification system. Asians (mostly Indian) and coloureds (mixed black and white) were middle categories with a higher status than blacks. Light-skin coloureds could even 'pass for whites', in which case the doors to upward social mobility suddenly opened. Skin colour was the decisive factor, and the arbitrary racial division could cut through a family.

1994, one of the most acclaimed literary works of the transition period.[9] It is the story of a dysfunctional family of poor Afrikaners and their daily struggle in the suburb, showing how apartheid failed even those it was designed to benefit.

Hence even in literature Triomf becomes the inverted myth of Sophiatown, which is really the myth of a lost or never realized wholeness. It imagines a South Africa that never was. It is a projected illusion of what South Africa could have ended up being without apartheid, and thereby also a kind of nostalgic utopian vision of what it may one day become.

Hybrid genres

Another tendency in contemporary literature and art, closely connected to the first, is the attempt to come to grips with the alleged parenthesis of apartheid: the investigation of the recent past with its first momentum coinciding with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission TRC – 1996–98.

The most well-known example, and one that certainly has inspired others, is journalist/poet Antjie Krog's personal account of the TRC in *Country of My Skull* (1999), which I have discussed at some length elsewhere (Hemer 2005). Krog, herself an Afrikaner, had covered the Commission's hearings for the South African radio. But when she reviewed her reporting in retrospect she realized that there was something missing, something which journalism (alone) could not disclose, and went back to the records to tell the story all over again, this time in a semi-fictional way, which could also be described as a form of meta-journalism.

In re-examining the records and focusing on the different layers of the narratives, the key question for Krog was whether truth can be pursued at all, at any level beyond indisputable facts. Even though we may always be stuck with a patchwork of diverging stories, having to make more or less random selections and interpretations, she seemed inclined to say yes, and suggested fiction as a means of 'distilling' truth from reality.

'Distilling' reality is more than just adding creative language or subjective interpretation, as in 'new journalism'; it may even include the bringing-in of fictional characters, in order for example to 'express the psychological underpinnings of the Commission' (Krog 1999, 256) . This is where she crosses the line from a journalistic perspective. Krog was heavily criticized by some of her journalist colleagues for allegedly blurring journalism and fiction. However, she is *deliberately* crossing the genre-lines, not to blur them but to let the different perspectives and norms illuminate one another. This personal explorative method is pursued in her sequel hybrid prose work *A Change of Tongue* (2003), in which she investigates the notions of identity and belonging in times of rapid and radical transformation through the personal narratives of an array of South Africans from different backgrounds.

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9   English translation 1999 by Leon de Kock.

The blurring of borders between fact and fiction may be a universal phenomenon, but until recently it was confined to the experimental margins of literary creation. In South Africa it appears to be almost the dominant tendency: J. M. Coetzee's innovative use of the academic novel in *Lives of the Animals* (1999) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003); Njabulo Ndebele's philosophical biography-novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003); Ivan Vladislavic's essayistic memoir of Johannesburg, *Portrait with Keys* (2006); Denis Hirson's *White Scars* (2006), a personal reading of four books that deeply influenced his life. Publishers have often been hesitant as to whether they should label the books fiction or non-fiction. Krog's *A Change of Tongue* was marketed in Holland as 'creative non-fiction'. It seems very likely that *Country of My Skull* somehow served as a catalyst or spark for this generic hybridization, which also had its predecessor in the creative journalism of *Drum* magazine (Chapman 2006).

Among black writers, playwright and novelist Zakes Mda is the one who has most explicitly addressed the recent past and the issues of post-apartheid reality. His first novel, *Ways of Dying* (1995), is set in the wasteland of city and township in an unspecified South Africa during the interregnum years of the early 1990s, between the unbanning of the liberation movements and the first democratic elections, when clashes between ANC and Inkatha, 'third force' killings engineered by security agents, the 'necklacing' of alleged collaborators and other everyday atrocities, made death a way of life. His second and most ambitious novel to date, *The Heart of Redness* (2000) goes further back in history to a crucial and symbolically loaded event in Xhosa history: the disastrous millenarian Cattle-Killing Movement in the mid-1800s, when the prophecy of a young woman made the people kill their cattle in the firm belief that their ancestors would return and drive the white intruders into the sea. This event is juxtaposed in the novel with the historical moment of the present, 1994. The Heart of Redness is interesting not least from a 'memories of modernity' perspective. According to David Attwell, Mda reverses here the trope of the modernization theme found in earlier generations of black South African writers: '[I]nstead of narrating the emergence of the African as modern subject – the end of innocence – the novel attempts a reintegration of the already-modern subject into the dilemmas of southern Africa's post-coloniality'. (Attwell 2005, 198)

Mda's next novel, *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), is an interesting example of the journalistic-literary genre-crossing mentioned above. It is based on a 'true story' – a nationally famous trial in 1971, when prominent white citizens of the little town of Excelsior in the Orange Free State were accused of breaking the Immorality Act, which forbade sexual relationships across the race lines. The proof of miscegenation was the remarkable number of light-skinned infants in the black servants' quarters.

Mda tells the story from the seventies right up to the present and turns Excelsior into a microcosm of South Africa, with the focus on the transition period. It is a good-humoured story, yet with critical underpinnings, disclosing the hypocrisy of the old and the new regimes but also exposing and somehow celebrating the

strange affinity between Afrikaner and African.[10] As opposed to Krog's documentary approach, Mda's account has a purely fictional character, although it contains news reports from the events of the trial. It is a novel, which could easily be translated into a film or TV-series, even as educational entertainment. From a 'truth perspective', I find Mda's method more problematic: there is no explicit meta-narrative and therefore no way of knowing where factual reality ends and the author's imagination takes over. How do the characters in the novel relate to the real persons of Excelsior? One may of course question whether that distinction is important at all. Even if Mda had made up the whole story – should it not be regarded as a work of fiction in its own right? But then again, why does he not make it a purely allegorical story, like *Ways of Dying*, in a fictional small-town universe resembling the real Excelsior? Or – why does he not make a documentary, interviewing the living witnesses and letting them tell the story? What are the specific gains achieved by this fusing of genres? In Krog's case, it is quite clear; in Mda's I am not sure.

Truth and Reconciliation

Although *The Madonna of Excelsior* does not explicitly mention the TRC, *truth* and *reconciliation* are crucial categories in the novel, more explicitly than in his preceding works. Both truth and reconciliation are fictional constructions themselves, as demonstrated by Daniel Herwitz (2003, 41) in his analysis of the Commission's procedures: 'The very idea of *reconciliation* in South Africa, of reconciliation as process and as goal or ideal, is, strictly speaking, a fiction […] Reconciliation implies that beings were once one, came apart, and are now back together again. This is hardly, from the historical point of view, the case'.

Yet the urge for reconciliation seems to overshadow the quest for truth. By way of explanation, Herwitz points to the TRC's strong Christian element and the personal impact of its chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The religious redemption theme, combined with the fictional structure of the very proceedings, has served almost as a matrix for artistic and literary expression in the transitional period following the TRC.[11] The most obvious example is perhaps Ian Gabriel's feature film *Forgiveness* (2004), which in a kind of pastiche of the Wild West form tells

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10 Obviously the tabooed miscegenation has been much more common than Afrikaner nationalist ideology had us believe. In the 19th century the condescending English attitude towards the Boers resembled the racist contempt for the Portuguese; they were lumped together and both accused of mixing with the natives. See for example Nuttall 2004.

11 References to the transition often include the liberation struggle of the 1970s and 1980s, and the prolific literary and artistic expression of these crucial decades. But for my purpose here it makes sense to set 1990, when Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the liberation movements unbanned, as the starting point for the process which acquired momentum with the 1994 elections and Mandela's installation as South Africa's first democratic president. In literary terms the transition period may be experiencing its momentum now towards the end of the first decade of the new century, but I choose to leave the end date open, since the transformation of South African society is an ongoing process with a multitude of possible outcomes.

the story of an Afrikaner ex-cop who goes to a godforsaken town in the Western Cape to seek absolution from the family of one of his victims. His quest for closure brings old conflicts back to the surface and confronts all who meet him with morally ambiguous choices.

The redemption element is also very strong in the 2006 Academy Award winning film *Tsotsi*, directed by Gavin Hood and based on playwright Athol Fugard's novel. The original story, published in 1980 but written in the early sixties, is actually set in Sophiatown, but the image it conveys is hardly the romanticized one. In the film, the story of the nameless gangster (*tsotsi*) who happens to kidnap a child is transposed to a nameless township in contemporary South Africa, but retains its almost archetypal character. (The township, in contrast to the village or small town, is a representation of modernity.) There are no references to the TRC, or to apartheid. The only white character is an Afrikaner policeman. There are, however, allusions to the HIV/AIDS pandemic: the perpetrator seeking forgiveness is an orphan, himself a victim of abuse as a child.

In the key scene, Tsotsi is insulted by a crippled beggar in a wheelchair and then follows him, like a predator sneaking up on its prey, to a deserted area below a freeway. It is a terrible scene, because the viewer knows that it is not the money he is after: he is going to take revenge on this angry but defenceless man. We can see the contempt in Tsotsi's face – contempt for the weakness and the humiliation of his victim. But something in the defiance of the crippled man moves him – maybe simply the fact that he sees someone worse off than himself, someone seemingly living a miserable life, yet with the ability to appreciate beauty. In the novel, the victim has a name and a history, as a former worker in the gold mines – another marker of modernity! – who was crippled by a falling baulk. In the film, this history is told in one single sentence, when Tsotsi asks him what happened to his legs.

Frustrated nation-building

Why this recurrent theme of redemption? Why this almost obsessive focus on reconciliation? (It would be very difficult to imagine a correspondent calling for forgiveness between perpetrators and victims in the 'dirty war' of the 1970s in Latin America). Does it have to do with South Africa's frustrated modernity?

Without any exception that I can think of, modernization as a project has coincided historically with a process of nation building. Literature has played a key role in the construction of national identities, in Europe as well as in the newly independent former colonies of Africa, Asia and the Americas. Many postcolonial writers actively participated in the nation-building process, providing epics for identification and contributing more or less deliberately to a national imaginary. Fiction has served a modernizing and nationally mobilizing function in Ireland, Norway and Iceland as well as in Indonesia, Senegal and Nigeria.

In most of Africa, the national projects have failed and given way to disillusion, which may also be artistically productive, but neither happened in South Africa. National modernization was frustrated in its embryonic stage by the imposition of the perverse and exclusive national project of *afrikanerdom*. On the other hand, there was of course the anti-apartheid struggle, which served to forge a common culture of resistance. In the 1980s, literature played an important role in creating and proposing subject-positions that exceeded the racialized determinations of the apartheid system and the colonial legacy (Helgesson 1999). However, from an artistic point of view, the struggle was also a limiting and constraining factor. In the heated literary debate of the 1980s, between allegedly 'aesthetic' and 'activist' positions, the two white Nobel laureates-to-be, Nadine Gordimer and J M Coetzee, took antagonistic stands. In her review of *Life & Times of Michael K*, Gordimer accused Coetzee of his 'refusal to engage with the historical thrust of the time'.[12] Coetzee's heroes are, according to her, 'those who ignore history, not make it'. Coetzee on the other hand strongly opposed Gordimer's view of literature as a supplement to history, as he polemically put it. In his essay *The Novel Today*, published in1988, he eloquently proposed the novel as 'a rival to history':

> I mean – to put it in its strongest form – a novel that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history (as a child's schoolwork is checked by a schoolmistress). In particular I mean a novel that evolves its own paradigms and myths, in the process […] perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history – in other words demythologizing history. (Coetzee, quoted in Helgesson 1999, 11).

In retrospect it seems likely that J. M. Coetzee's allegorical way of addressing the brutal absurdity of the apartheid state, in for example *Life & Times of Michael K*, had a more lasting impact than the contemporary realistic novels with clear affiliations with the on-going political struggle. I would also claim that Coetzee's late novel *Disgrace* (1999) is one of the most disturbing, if not accurate, depictions of the South Africa of the early transition period. Yet, the minute I state that, the question immediately arises. Impact on what? On whom? The title of the previously quoted anthology is very evocative: *South Africa in the Global Imaginary* (De Kock, 2004). But what about the *South African imaginary*? The English-language South African literature has largely been directed at an overseas audience – trying to explain South Africa to the world. The same goes for the many internationally acclaimed and award-winning films of recent years – *Forgiveness, Yesterday* (2004*)*, *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2005), *Tsotsi, Drum* … They have hardly been screened at all in South Africa, and when they have, to a very limited audience. The South African public sphere remains very fragmented and incomplete. Moreover, one might even question whether it is

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12 *The New York Review of Books*, 2 February 1984.

even meaningful to talk about a common, collective imaginary – which has hitherto been a prerequisite for the formation of any imagined community that stretches beyond the limits of the local neighborhood or township.

If there is no common imaginary, it is difficult to assume that literature – or art in general – can have any social impact at all. And if it has, it remains impossible to measure. Calling for evidence is like asking for a quantification of literary *quality*. Although we know that to be impossible, hardly anyone would deny that quality can be assessed, and most of us would agree that it is not merely a matter of subjective taste. There are standards of critical judgment that cannot be defined, and I would suggest, as a hypothesis for scrutiny, that truth in the sense that I am hinting at here is the main criterion for literary quality.

Truth may not always be compatible with reconciliation, and Coetzee's *Disgrace* is certainly a prime example. As Krog would put it, it is 'busy with the truth' but not with reconciliation. The novel's main character, David Lurie, who has certain easily recognizable traits in common with the author himself – so that many readers tend to identify one with the other – is expelled from his position as a university teacher in Cape Town, after sexually abusing one of his students. He is tried by a committee that obviously resembles the TRC, but refuses to confess and be forgiven. He does repent in the end, in his solitary way, but without bowing to the illusionary official myth of the reconciled Rainbow Nation. What the novel proposes, according to Elleke Boehmer (2006, 137), is 'secular atonement' as an alternative to 'the public and Christianized ritual of redemption through confession' offered by the TRC.

Disgrace was however accused by the ANC of exploiting racial stereotypes, and the submission made to the Human Rights Commission's investigation into racism in the media may have been decisive for Coetzee's present voluntary exile in Adelaide, Australia.

Fiction and social change

Arjun Appadurai (1996) refers to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* as an example of fiction that can move its readers to intense action. I do not believe it is a very good example. One could question whether the impact of *The Satanic Verses* really had to do with the expressive power of Rushdie's fiction. Most of the people instigating riots, in India and Great Britain, had surely not read the book. (Neither had Ayatollah Khomeini.) They were driven only by rumours of the contained blasphemy, just like the more recent crowds who burned Danish flags in protest against the caricatures of Muhammad in *Jyllands-Posten*. But Appadurai is certainly right in claiming that fiction is part of the conceptual repertoire of contemporary societies and that writers of fiction often contribute to the construction of social and moral maps for their readers.

Social impact does not necessarily imply that readers/listeners/viewers are moved to intense action. Works of art and fiction may simply play a testimonial role and/

or provide a deeper analysis which, directly or indirectly, informs debate among so-called public opinion.

The role of fiction – and art in general – in a social context is, in my view, primarily a transgressive means of investigation and innovation, and secondly a vehicle for identification and empowerment. There is no necessary conflict between these two objectives – fiction as investigation and social analysis, on the one hand, and as strategic communication, on the other – but I strongly believe that the second must always be subordinated to the first. Just as truth, if not justice, comes before reconciliation – not the other way around.

Present-day cultural production in South Africa is very much testimony to this dialectic, which also reflects the dynamics of the young democracy with all its problems and huge potential. Nowadays, references to apartheid and the TRC evoke a certain fatigue among writers and artists, as the transition has gradually become a state of normality. But the lack of closure – the unresolved difference – is an artistically and intellectually productive condition, and South Africa may prove to be the most interesting exponent of emerging global modernity. A modernity which – if I may propose a provisional definition – is free of the constraints of a national imaginary, yet firmly grounded in a local transcultural context.

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Memory as Documentary Fiction. Documentation in Contemporary Russian Art

Charlotte Greve

In recent years a new focus on documentation in contemporary art has appeared in both Venice Biennials and Documenta exhibitions. The documentary art, which makes use of photography and video film as well as historical documents and testimonies, is most often interpreted as a renewed interest among contemporary artists in politics and as a reconceptualisation of the relationship between art and life in avant-garde art. A new 'political' art seems to have emerged. Here, the political is most often interpreted as a sign of the obvious representational character of these art works and the subject matter, which are often atrocities to mankind, war, violence and poverty. Moreover, they put new focus on memory and testimony. Thus, the art works have a testimonial character, which critics rarely regard as a questioning of the relationship between representation and the real. However, the art work of Walid Raad includes fictional testimonies and documents in a seemingly historically 'true' archive, and in the archival and documentary works of art by such artists as Christian Boltanski and Sophie Calle the 'real' is reworked into a fiction of memory. These works of art suggest that the 'politics of memory' does not reside in the representation of the traumatic 'real'. This may also be observed in works by contemporary Russian artists, most notably in Il'ia Kabakov's 'archival' installations, but also in performance art group The Collective Actions (*Kollektivnye Deistviia*) as well as in installations by the Escape Program that will be examined below.

So, how are we to understand the relationship between memory and politics in contemporary art without reinstating the ontological status of the 'real'? Here, with his critique of indexicality in contemporary art, Jacques Rancière may provide a model for an analysis of this relationship in contemporary 'political' art. Thus, in this article, I will extract a concept of the politics of memory from poststructuralist critique of presence and Rancière's theory of the image, which could contribute to the analysis of the relationship between memory and politics. In addition, with the historical strong ties between art and politics in Russian art of the 20th century, contemporary Russian art may offer a new perspective to the relationship between art and life in avant-garde art. Therefore, the focus will be on the documentary practice of the Russian art performance group The Collective Actions of the 1970s and 1980s and the recent video installation *Too Long to Escape* by the Escape Program, which was shown at the 51st Venice Biennial in 2005.

Photography, memory and performance art

In the 1960s, photographic documentation of art performances emerged as a visible part of the contemporary art scene. The role of photography in performances, happenings and art actions reveals a persistent paradigm of the relationship to the real of art performance on the one hand and of photography, documentation and memory on the other hand. Performance (body) art was an expression of the modernist/ avant-garde desire to dissolve the boundary between art and life. The distance between the object of art and reality, between the object and the self of the artist and between the object/self of the artist and the spectator was continually challenged and dissolved. Performance art was perceived as the unmediated, authentic presence of the event before the eyes of the spectator, while the documentary material was merely a necessary supplement. Thus, photography was used to register and document art practices, which had the expressed focus on the here and now. Photography was perceived here as especially valuable because of its double quality of capturing an instant present and of being an archival testimony to a past event. Traditionally, therefore, photographic documentation provides a record (although fragmentary and incomplete) of the event through which it can be reconstructed as well as evidence that it actually occurred. From the very beginning, photography, therefore, had a secondary role in relation to the live event (Clausen 2005, 7):

> The documentation of performance art became carrier of the myth of a lost moment, which could only be desired in its non-existence, as a substitute. The inherent characteristics of the ephemeral and singular of the performance were re-established again and again in its historical as well as societal reception by the means of its choreographed medial repetition of its *disappearance*.[1]

Documentary photography is the *writing* of performance art, the substitute for the absent other. Thus, the photographs serve as memory-documents of a past event. Here, photography is regarded – in line with Roland Barthes – as an unmediated imprint of a past reality. Quoting Don Slater, Helen Gilbert (1998, 17) dryly remarks:

> Through its trivial realism, photography creates the illusion of such exact correspondence between the signifier and the signified that it appears to be the perfect instance of Barthes's 'message without a code'. The 'sense of the photograph as not only representationally accurate but ontologically connected with the world allows it to be treated as a piece of the world, then as a substitute for it'.

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1   *Translation is mine*, C.G.

The performance art event is generally considered to possess a special indexical relation to the real: it delivers the body (and the subject) of the artist directly and unmediated to the viewer. The art performance is said to *be* the real, while photographic documentation is said – similar to memory – to be what is left when the performance no longer is physically present before the eyes of the spectator. Documentary photography is a sign of absence. However, an equally persistent paradigm is the seemingly contrary notion: photography is considered to be an unmediated imprint of reality on a light sensitive surface (in Roland Barthes' terms a 'message without a code'). Similarly, memory is an imprint on a receptive surface. However with conceptualism in the 1970s, poststructuralist critique of originality, authenticity and the 'message without a code' and theory of performativity, such notions of pure indexicality have been contested.

Thus, Amelia Jones claims that the distance between the body of the performing artist and the viewer introduced by the documentary material may facilitate the identification of the historical, political, social, and personal context of the performance – it may help in understanding the signification of an event and historicising it. Moreover, performance art relies on the documentary material in order to attain completion and 'symbolic status within the realm of culture', as she puts it (Jones 1997, 13). Therefore, the mechanisms of documentation work on a more profound level as well. Jones has promoted the view that distance is not inherent to documentary material alone; it is an inherent quality of performance art itself. She rejects the assumption that body art performances deliver the body of the artist directly and unmediated to the viewer. On the contrary, 'by using their bodies as primary material, body or performance artists highlight the "representational status" of such work rather than confirming its ontological priority' (*ibid.*). Thus, the body can only be understood as the unique body of the artist within the codes of identity that accrue to the artist's body and name. Therefore, the body is a supplement, a 'visible "proof" of the self and its endless deferral' (*ibid.*, 14). The lack of the actual body of the artist (and the self) is produced by 'the sequence of supplements initiated by the body art project – the body "itself", the spoken narrative, the video and other visuals within the piece, the video, film, photograph, and text documenting it for posterity' (*ibid.*). Thus, the photographic documentary material is not secondary to the experience of the live performance, but just one element in a sequence of supplements starting with the body acting as the body of the artist; i.e., the body itself is a supplement. Jones quotes Jacques Derrida: 'The indefinite process of supplementarity has always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self' (*ibid.*). The documentation confirms the supplementarity of the body itself, therefore, Jones argues, the reliance on the photograph as 'proof' of the fact that a specific action took place is 'founded on belief systems similar to those underlying the belief in the "presence" of the body-in-performance' (*ibid.*, 15).

If examined in relation to memory, it becomes clear that, according to the traditional view of visual communication, the visible inscribes itself as an index upon the mind. It is a sign with a factual existential relation to the object signified (the image). This is a consistent idea in Western cultural history and dates back to the dialogue *Theaetetus*, in which Plato regarded the mechanism of memory as an imprint of a signet ring on a waxen surface. In other words, the mind is seen as a blank table, upon which impressions can be inscribed without the intervention of the perceiving or receiving subject. This bears resemblance to the sign functions of the index. According to Charles Peirce, the index is defined by an existential relation to the object (or concept) such as a bullet hole to a bullet, a footprint to a foot, a fingerprint to a certain person and so on (Peirce 1932, 170). Another type of indices are the so-called deictic signs, which are words in language that point to a certain time, place, and person ('I', 'you', 'this', 'there', 'here' and 'now'). They correspond to the linguistic category of pronouns, which Roman Jakobson characterizes as shifters that incorporate elements from both the symbol and the index (Jakobson 1957, 2). It has often been maintained that the meaning of the pronoun 'I' is purely symbolic. Thus the terms 'I' and 'here' only obtain their value in relation to a 'you' and a 'there' and so on. However, when a person says, 'I am leaving', the pronoun 'I' does not signify the same person who says, 'You can't leave now, I just arrived'. The meaning is therefore also indexically linked to a certain person given by a certain situational framework that the addresser shares with the addressee. When the situation changes the meaning of the word 'I' changes; the indices are variables. In this sense, it is an empty word waiting to be filled by a specific situation (Greve 2004, 11). If we think of memory in accordance with such a conception of the index, it is impossible to think of it as 'a message without a code'; it is always also inscribed by a signifying system and a situational framework – in addition to a discursive system. This is where Jacques Rancière might add new theoretical insight to the conception of a relation between the event, memory and photography. Ranciére delivers a critique of de-politicized notions of the image. Most recently he criticizes what he calls the preference in contemporary art for *Veronica's veil*.

Aesthetics and politics

In *The Future of the Image*, Rancière maintains that dissonance is what characterizes photography – and film. He argues that the contemporary preference for the image is a longing for an immanent transcendence, a glorious essence of the image found in 'The imprint of the thing, the naked identity of its alterity in place of its imitation, the wordless, senseless materiality of the visible instead of the figures of discourse' (Rancière 2007, 9). The relationship of the image to reality resembles the relationship of the Son to the Father (the word made flesh), Jesus to the imprint on *Veronica's veil*, or the body to the photograph's imprint of it registered by light (Rancière 2007, 10):

> The *studium* makes the photograph a material to be decoded and explained. The *punctum* immediately strikes us with the affective power of the *that was: that* – i.e. the entity which was unquestionably in front of the aperture of the camera obscura, whose body has emitted radiation, captured and registered by the black chamber, which affects us here and now through the 'carnal medium' of light 'like the delayed rays of a star'.

Rancière reads Roland Barthes' famous distinction between the *studium* (that is, the encoded message that the critic deciphers in order to show how the image can ideologically reproduce the values of the dominant) and the *punctum* (that is, the pre-reflective, pre-ideological and affective power of the image) as a capitulation to a religious sentiment, that is, as a reactionary gesture (Porter 2007, 1). Rancière also reveals how the *sober* Barthes of *Mythologies* might characterize photography: Barthes might warn: 'Look out! What you are taking for visible self-evidence is in fact an encoded message, whereby a society or authority legitimates itself by naturalizing itself, by rooting itself in the obviousness of the visible' (Rancière 2007, 10–11). In other words, Rancière critiques Barthes' essay on photography for excluding the work of the literary critique or art historian – the political or ideological critique.

Contrary to the notion of a mute image found in Barthes, Rancière emphasises the essential position of the word in conceptions of the image. In addition, to Rancière, aesthetics is political. His concept of the 'distribution of the sensible' (the sensible refers to what is apprehended by the senses, while 'distribution' refers to power of a system to include or exclude the sayable, visible or audible) is central to his understanding of the relation between politics and aesthetics: politics revolves around 'what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak', around 'ways of doing and making' a shared sense of what we have in common, then 'artistic practices' are always-already political: that is, 'aesthetics is at the core of politics' (Rancière 2006b, 12–13). He concludes the critique of Barthes with a concept of the image that is closer to *Mythologies* than *Camera Lucida*: 'What the simple relationship between mechanical impression and the *punctum* erases is the whole history of the relations between three things: the images of art, the social form of images, and the theoretic procedures of criticism of imagery' (Rancière 2007, 15).

In relation to documentary film, Rancière raises the problem of the documentary genre of cinema. He defines memory as 'an orderly collection, a certain arrangement of signs, traces, and monuments' according to which 'the Great Pyramid, the tomb par excellence, doesn't keep Cheop's memory. It *is* that memory' (Rancière 2006a, 157). According to Rancière, 'memory is the work of fiction'. Here, he understands fiction as *fingere* (forging). Consequently, in the case of the documentary film, it is not the unconscious registering of an action that creates the fable or memory, but the conscious construction of 'a system of represented actions, assembled forms, and internally coherent signs' (*ibid.*, 158). Fiction is understood here as 'a way of cutting

a story into sequences, of assembling shots into a story, of joining and disjoining voices and bodies, sounds and images, of lengthening and tightening time' (*ibid.*, 158), and he concludes: 'the fiction of memory sets its roots in the gap that separates the construction of meaning, the referential real, and the "heterogeneity" of its documents' (*ibid.*, 159). Cinema to Rancière (2006a, 165) 'seems almost to have been designed for the metamorphoses of signifying forms that make it possible to construct memory as the interlacing of uneven temporalities and of heterogeneous regimes of the image'. Memory is not something that is, nor is it some harmoniously true and unspoilt matter; it is rather constructed of and inflicted by a variety of heterogeneous elements. In other words, memory is a site of conflict.

Thus, for a long time, photography seemed to be untouched by questions of representation. Because of its indexical character – as an imprint on a light sensitive surface – it *survived* the critique of representation, which dominated the discourse of other media. However, as I have shown, it is possible to develop a model of photography that stems from recent critiques of indexicality. It rests on four conditions: 1) There can be no unmediated perception of the real; 2) The real can only be perceived through a series of supplements (the body, the memory screen, the photograph, textual documentation); 3) Photography is a work of fiction; it is a site of conflict, it is constructed of and inflicted by a variety of heterogeneous elements; 4) Photography is political, i.e., it ideologically reproduces (or challenges) the values of the dominant regime of the sayable and the visible. In addition, I have shown that these are conditions that can equally well signify the relationship of memory to *the real*.

The Collective Actions

The Collective Actions-group was part of a loosely tied community of unofficial artists in Moscow. At the end of the 1970s, the Moscow Conceptualist School (also called the Moscow Conceptual Circle or NOMA) emerged around the self-published (*samizdat*) art magazine *MANI*: *Moskovskij Archiv Novogo Iskusstvo* (*Moscow Archive of New Art*). Among the members of the group were Il'ia Kabakov, who was later to become renowned for his total installations, Boris Groys, who defined the practice of the group as romantic conceptualism in an article bearing the same name from 1979 (Groys 2005), and Collective Actions, which emerged in 1976. At the beginning, the Collective Actions-group consisted of among others Nikita Alekseev, Andrei Monastyrskii, Nikolai Panitkov and the photographer Georgii Kizeval'ter (Sasse 2003). Soon, however, the artist Igor' Makarevich became the principal photographer. In addition, several other artists, poets and photographers participated as co-organizers in one or more actions, and a selected group of friends and colleagues participated as active spectators.

It was characteristic of Collective Actions-group that their actions consisted of three links: the writer was a kind of instructor, the co-organizers organized the

action, and the audience was the material, of which the actions consisted. That is, the audience took active part in the actions, but they did not have anything to say about the course of the actions. The actions consisted of minimal aestheticised everyday actions. All actions were documented with letters of invitation, photographs, notes, schemas and tape-recordings, but discussions, memories, reports and theoretical outlines were also included as part of the documentary material. In the terminology of Andrei Monastyrskii, this documentary material is characterized as the 'factographic discourse', which he defines as a 'documentary system, with which a meta-level of artistic events is formed as resultant contexts for the construction of aesthetic action' (Monastyrskii 1999, 90).[2] This quote is exemplary in reflecting the transformation that the revolutionary avant-garde concept of factography underwent in the aesthetics of the Collective Actions.[3]

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the revolutionary avant-garde concept of factography experienced a revival among Moscow conceptualist artists and writers. Curiously, now the concept was defined according to two different historical lines: one understanding of the concept seems to have been reintroduced in Russian photography, art and literature by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, who used it in his seminal article 'From Faktura to Factography' (1984) to signify a photographic practice.[4] The other understanding of factography, which was introduced by The Collective Actions-group, seems closer to a literary conception of factography. Factography was developed at the end of the 1920s as a literary answer to production art, an example of which is the *Workers Club* by Alexandr Rodchenko. Similar to the production art, literature was to function as a concrete productive force. The word 'fact' in the neologism 'factography' refers to activism, process, and operativity (Fore 2006a, 5). Factography is not a documentary practice in the traditional sense of the word; it differs from an idealistic understanding of facts as the truth in things. The truth, according to the factographers, emerges from the action; from the operation and the production of facts. Thus, the word has, according to Sergei Tretiakov, become action. 'Operativity' was a concept, used by Tretiakov to signify a situational aesthetics, which conceptualized representation – not as an objective reflexion of a static world, but as an operation, which, according to its definition, intervenes in the context of the aesthetic action (Fore 2006b, 105).

In the reconceptualisation of factography, the concept became a part of the artistic practice of Collective Actions, where photography and text played a decisive role as documentation of the *having taken place* of the actions *and* as the medium through which contextualisation, interpretation, and signification of the events of the actions was made possible; event and text as well as art and art documentation stand in a

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2 *Translation is mine*, C.G. See also Monastyrskii 1998, 115–122.

3 In a recent interview made by me, C. G., Andrei Monastyrskii, Sergei Romashko, and Igor' Makarevich claim to have no knowledge of the origin of this concept. Apart from the definition of the concept by Monastyrskii, they deny having any thoughts about the 'fact' and 'f(-)otography', which is implied by the neologism.

4 See also Wolf 1999.

mutually reflexive relationship. During the actions, the participants were instructed to move according to predetermined schematic lines in the land- or cityscape. An enormous amount of the documentary material and often a slideshow was made in connection with the actions. Its significance was not limited to describing and documenting the action, but could be structurally significant for the elements of the action and its course – in some actions the participators were told to stop at certain marked points in the landscape and let themselves be photographed. Therefore, it seems, photography plays a significant role in the aesthetic practice of Collective Actions.

The action named *Ten Appearances* (1981) consisted of ten participants being led to a board, upon which ten spools were placed on vertical nails. Each spool was wound with two to three hundred meters of strong, white thread (Collective Actions 2006, 127). Each of the participants was told to walk in radial lines from this point and enter the surrounding forest for about another fifty or hundred metre. When the thread was completely unwound, they were to stop and pull towards themselves the other end of the thread (which was not attached to the spool), onto which a piece of paper with a factographic text with the date and time of the action was affixed. Then they were free to do whatever they wanted. Some went home, while others returned to the rest of the group. The participants who returned to the point of departure received a photograph of the indistinct contours of a person emerging from the distant edge of the forest. The photograph bore a label upon which were written the last names of the action's authors, the action's name, and the event 'represented' in the photograph (Collective Actions 2006, 128). However, the photographs were not taken on the same day of the actions, but some time prior to the actions, which could be seen on the snow and the weather. Later, the participants received a photograph on which they were depicted. The factographic material – the text and the photograph – had either a metaphoric or a factual connection to the action. A displacement had occurred in the relationship between the factographic material and its content, because the text and the photograph appeared to be absurd and meaningless.

The Collective Actions-group staged many of their actions outside Moscow on an empty field surrounded by trees and often covered by snow. Groys has pointed to the association of the empty snow-covered field with the white background of the icon, to the white background of the suprematist paintings of Malevich, but also to the white sheet of paper that functions as the basis of every kind of bureaucratic, technological or artistic documentation, and therefore, to bureaucracy. In fact, the actions are similar to bureaucratic systematization, control, authority and dehumanization in which the participant, as in a Kafkan labyrinth, loses all sense of direction and is delivered to meaningless instructions and reduced to an object.

Il'ia Kabakov describes his experience of one of the actions in the following manner (Monastyrskij 1998, 64):

> I have to say that each time I turned around, an unusual sense of loss and isolation arose in relation to my near friends, with whom I was standing just a minute ago […] this state – to move who knows where to, but at the same time, along a straight line, while it was unimaginably empty all around me – I cannot describe it – in some way it made a great impression on me: it was like a joke, but at the same time something like loss – but I did it of my own free will.[5]

The participating viewer is isolated, kept under surveillance, instructed to enter into programmed repetitive and meaningless actions, which seem disorienting and maybe even threatening to the individual. The actions were inspired by John Cage and Eastern philosophy, but what I wish to emphasize here is the element of authority and control, as well as pleasure, that is present.

Foucault characterizes one of the main forms that the power over life assumed after the 17th century, as 'the body as machine', which determines

> its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body (Foucault 1990, 139).

In this perspective, the schematic, de-individualizing, bureaucratic actions of the Collective Actions express this political anatomy, which is based on control and surveillance. This system of surveillance works by the interiorising of the surveillance gaze in the individual, who becomes his or her own prison guard (Foucault 1981, 155). Therefore, as the German literary critics Georg Witte and Sabine Hänsgen conclude, on the level of the actions, the artists intervene in the ideological text in order to describe and analyze it. The artist acts as an 'inner ethnographer' who examines the ideological text from within and from the outside at the same time (Hirt & Wonders 1991, 57).

In addition, the action was doubled and perceived through the photographic documentary material, and single participants – such as Kabakov – could be asked to witness their experience of the action and their own reaction to participating in it. During the action, the meaning remained obscure and unexplained to the participants. It was only in the following screening of the slideshow that memory and reflection was made possible.

Therefore, on the level of art documentation, the factographic material was not limited to a description and documentation of the *having taken place* of the action; it also structurally intervened in the action. It is the factographic documentation, which decides the elements and the course of the action – that the participants had to

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5   *Translation is mine*, C.G.

stop at certain points, turn around and let themselves be photographed. In addition, the absurd action laid bare the basic condition of life in a play of deictic signs, and it was only in the following screening that memory and reflexion was made possible. However, the meaning of the actions remains obscure and unexplained to the participants. No one seems to be able to raise themselves to a level above their most basic point of perception. The relationship between the artist and participant, the factographic material and the social practice, art and life, past and present, subject and object is destabilized and remains unresolved.

The Escape Program

The video-installation *Too Long to Escape* by the Escape Program consists of a video that is projected onto a large screen. In front of it, the spectators gather in a dark room. The video shows four figures (the artists Anton Litvin, Liza Morozova, Valerii Aizenberg and Bogdan Mamonov) in red boilersuits. They move on a snow-covered flat surface towards the viewer with a speed proportional to the number of spectators in the room.[6] This was made possible due to sensors, which were placed in the room to register the number of spectators: an almost full room meant an increase in the speed of the screening, while an almost empty room meant a decrease in the speed of the screening. When the artists have almost reached the edge of the screen, a machine gun is fired and they fall to the ground, upon which the film ends and starts all over again.

Apart from the obvious proximity between *Too Long to Escape* and the Collective Actions' absurd actions on a snow-covered field, upon which figures move, there are some clear similarities in the way in which the relationship between artist, art object and spectator as well as between past and present are thematised. The Collective Actions-group seem to dissolve the boundary between viewer and artist in inviting the viewers to participate in the making of the work of art. The viewers are not passive spectators, but are, so to speak, the material of which the work of art is made. The video installation of the Escape Program creates a direct interaction between viewer and work of art. The artist moves towards the viewers, as if to meet them and transcend the boundary between them, but the number of viewers in the room also determines the speed of this approach and the speed with which the artists are 'executed'.

Similar to the actions of Collective Actions, *Too Long to Escape* involves an implicit 'invitation' to the viewer to participate in the 'work of art'. But the work of art is also a testimony to the screen, the membrane or boundary, which separates the artist and the viewer; the artist never reaches beyond the edge of the screen. When he or she is

6   Both art works recall *Suprematist Composition, White on White* by Kazimir Malevich (1918). In addition, *Too Long to Escape* seems to refer to *Red Calvary* (*Krasnaia Konnitsa*) by Malevich (1928–32).

close enough, a machine gun is fired and he or she falls – the proximity equals death to art, as Mamonov expresses it. He claims that the surface of the painting is a no-man's land, where a meeting – between artist and viewer – could take place, but if it does, the boundary is destroyed and art dies. Here, the viewer is also transformed into a participator, and driven by curiosity and pleasure he or she enters the dark room and experiences the red figures move towards him or her. At the same time, the artist and viewer are tied together in a compulsive relationship. Only here, it is first of all the compulsive repetition of the artist in his or her struggle to reach the viewer, which is displayed and runs as a *perpetuum mobile*, while the viewer, in principle, can walk away – and often will choose to do so after one or two viewings. However, it is not the artists in flesh and blood, who approach the viewer, but some strange science-fiction-like anonymous characters in similar red boilersuits and no traces are left on the snow-covered surface. It is a virtual landscape, which is similar to a video game, and the viewer becomes aware of playing a game, but at the same time also of being in an isolated room as a part of a crowd. The game is played with virtual characters similar to the artists Aizenberg, Litvin, Mamonov and Morozova, but represented as ideal, anonymous artists, as empty signs.

The video, which was a popular technology of art documentation of the 1970s, has become interactive. It 'documents' the 'actions' of the 'artists', the movements towards the viewer that is, but at the same time the 'documentation' is 'living'; it can be influenced by the presence of the viewer. But it is also 'dead', because it is repeated infinitely in a game between the viewer and the 'documentation'. It is the crowd that has the only influence on the progress of the game. The purely quantitative influence on the work of art thematises the commercialisation of art in a capitalist market economy. At the same time, the work of art indexically points to Malevich and the artist as producer of art for the masses of the 20th century's utopia. Accordingly, Mamonov writes: 'He [*the artist*, C.G.] believes that the New World will come and there will be no artist or viewer, no customer or commodity, and the lion shall lie down with the lamb' (Lopukhova 2005, 34). Here, the viewer, the work of art, and the artist are caught in a kind of compulsive behaviour, where the boundary between art and life or the impossibility of realising the utopia of the avant-garde is displayed.

Conclusion

Boris Groys remarks that one need not know Baudrillard and Derrida to understand that Soviet language was phantasmagorical, psychedelic and delirious, 'it communicated no facts, knowledge or information, only seductive visions of the impossible' (Groys 1993, 28). However, it is no coincidence that Groys mentions Baudrillard and Derrida. The questioning of the real and the (im)possibility of representing the real is not a problem specific to Soviet totalitarian society; it

dominated post-war poststructuralist discourse and had an enormous impact on literary and art criticism. Thus, representation became a dominant problem in discourses of the image: how can one describe reality when there seems to be no connection between the real and the language with which to describe it? How can one picture reality when what is seen must be regarded as phantasmagoria? Can such a reality be documented, archived or remembered?

In my analysis of the documentary photography of The Collective Actions, and the video-installation of the Escape Program, I have shown that these avant-garde art practices, each in their own way, reveal a complex relation to *the real*. In recent avant-garde art documentary practices, it is in the unresolved oscillation between art and life, art and documentation, life and art documentation, that the new Russian art sparks off the play between art and politics. Thereby, the inner ideological tensions between art and politics and art and life are laid bare. The performances of the Collective Actions represent art that makes use of the ideological text. In this way, the binary opposition between art and life, between the event and the text, and between documentary photography (memory) and performance art is not dissolved in an avant-garde utopia, but in an infinite series of supplements, where text and situation continually bring each other to life again. The political can be identified as an investigation of social practices (the relationship between individual and power, power and bureaucracy), but also as an investigation of the commenting and theorizing discourse, which is inherent to art documentation. This documentation explains and interprets, but, at the same time, the interpretations are undermined by the implicit disorientation and unresolved situation. Similarly, in the video-installation of the Escape-program, the relationship between art and life appears to be obscure and caught up in an unresolved, painful repetition. Here, the relationship is contextualised by art as a commodity and, as a consequence, a quantitative dependent relationship between art and viewer. None of these art projects appear to give an answer to the question of the relationship between art and life or between representation and *the real*. In this, perhaps, it is possible to locate the *political* aspect of documentation (and memory). Thus, with poststructuralist critique of the ontological status of the real and Rancière's critique of indexicality, it is possible to locate memory in the slippery divide between representation and the real. This again calls for a concept of memory which is inflicted by the 'studium' and, therefore, by 'the political', or, in other words, by the ideological discourse of art critique.

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The Poetics of Memory in Post-Totalitarian Narration

Can we create a true memory of the past? How shall this truth, in that case, be presented?

Against the background of a totalitarian epoch and its falsified history writing, the notions of memory, history and truth have received quite specific meanings.

This book sheds light on several totalitarian and post-totalitarian regions, such as Russia, Poland, Latvia, Serbia, Romania, China and South Africa. Taking the various genres and media of film, literature, art, autobiographies, testimonies, history textbooks, newspapers and websites as their point of departure, an international group of researchers examine the collective and individual memory in these regions, investigating its relation to poetics, identity, myth, history writing and, not least... its relation to the Truth.

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