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MOURNING AND MELANCHOLIA IN PUTIN’S RUSSIA:
An Essay in Qualitative Mnemonics

Walter Benjamin said, “He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging.” And we are still digging, though after many excavations and exhumations, our spades have taken forms that are different from what Benjamin might have imagined. In this essay on Russian cultural memory, I am testing statistical methods that operate with large – very large – amounts of digital artifacts. These massive data reflect the changing representations of the past and, as I argue, also of the present. Used by various teams of scholars, similar methods have been recently named Culturomics and Cultural Analytics. These methods have subjected incredible amounts of cultural data to computational analyses in the hope that the sheer amount of data in combination with the new software might generate new ways of representing – describing, explaining, or even predicting – cultural mechanisms. Operating with similar data, my approach follows a more traditional and I believe, more realistic methodology. This methodology addresses the cultural – in this essay, digital –
representations of the past, and therefore I call it, Quantitative Mnemonics.

While dependent on information technologies, scholarship is different from these technologies. What is important for scholarship is, of course, not the methods themselves but the verifiable results that they help to generate, provided that these results elucidate questions of clear and understandable relevance. Since only the living community of scholars can evaluate “relevance”, relevant questions can and, in fact, should sound traditional. Relying on the supercomputers that generate the unprecedentedly large archives and help to process these archives with incredible ease and speed, I apply to these archives a traditional approach of a historian. I formulate hypotheses that I believe to be relevant and verifiable, test these hypotheses on the available data, and finally, discuss my results in this essay.

My particular methodology aims at representing cultural memory as a historical process, which continuously changes in time. These changes leave traces in various media, and they can be dug up in the archives of these media. Given that we have the ability to identify the digital traces of particular memory events, to aggregate and count them, we can represent their changing intensities against the historical timeline. This is not a new idea, but digital archives provide us with unprecedented power in pursuing it. While the content of cultural memory is always qualitative, we can measure its changing intensity by tracking the frequency with which this content – specific figures, events, or concepts – is mentioned in the public sphere. In this way, the intensity of cultural memory can be empirically studied, statistically measured, and graphically charted. I would say that the purpose is to trace and chart memory processes – temporal shifts in the

![Chart 1. Frequencies of dates in Russian and Soviet books, 1978-2008; source: Books Ngram Viewer, Russian corpus](chart.png)
balance between multiple acts of remembering and forgetting, – in
the same way as one follows the charts of the stock market, which
also represent a moving equilibrium between multidirectional choices. Ideally,
this set of instruments should represent the trends and flows of
memory in the intermedial space of digital communications, including electronic
representations of non-digital materials such as books or public events.

For some time, I have been engaged in polemics about the general character of post-Soviet
cultural memory. There are scholars who claim that it features historical amnesia, and there are scholars who claim that it features the opposite, what they call nostalgia. For my part, I have stated that post-Soviet memory is melancholic. I define amnesia as preferring the present to the past and nostalgia as preferring the past to the present. Melancholia means an inability to distinguish between the past and the present.

How can one possibly verify and quantify these conceptual distinctions? One idea is to go to the library, select a sample of books, read them, and then calculate to what extent these books are concerned with manifestations of the present, to what extent they are concerned with manifestations of the past, and to what extent they contaminate and blend the two. Doing essentially the same work but on a much larger scale and in the blink of an eye, I employ the Google Books Ngram Viewer, software that reads through all the books that the Google has scanned, and calculates the frequencies of selected words in these books over the years. The Ngram Viewer uses a sample of about 4% of all books in existence, including Russian books. Unfortunately, Google stopped collecting these data in 2008, so the Viewer can only be used to follow books up until this year. Within this limit, however, it allows us to calculate annual frequencies with which certain concepts, or even short sequences of words, are mentioned, and to do so separately for the Russian corpus of books, which can be compared with the English and German corpora.

An easy way to start is to trace the important dates of Soviet history, as mentioned in books and charted by Ngram Viewer (see chart on previous page). The years from 1978 to 2008 are plotted on the horizontal axis. On the vertical axis, we see how often a certain year (say 1917) is mentioned in Russian books relative to the total number of counted words and symbols, in fractions of percent. The different lines trace the shifting frequency with which these dates are mentioned: 1917, the year of the Bolshevik revolution; 1937, the culmination of the Great Terror; 1941, the start of the Great Patriotic War with Nazi Germany; and 1945, the Soviet victory in this war. Over the three decades, we see that two tragic dates dominate public memory. The first and most dramatic spike is associated with the start of the Great Patriotic War (1941), which was particularly relevant for books written in the late 1980s and early 1990s, fifty years after this event. The line of the Great Terror (1937) shows the most recent peak among these charts; interestingly, “1937” became a popular term of reference after 2004, surpassing even “1941”. Caused by the proliferation of popular history books that strikes any visitor of a contemporary Russian bookstore, this peak reflects the actual focus of many of those books: Stalin, his victories and his “repressions”. Is this interest in Stalin and Stalinism patriotic and nationalist, or melancholic and mournful?

The Ngram Viewer helps to answer this question with a degree of precision that no amount of reading could ever provide. Though one could expect the Russian authors’ and readers’ interest in the events of the Great Patriotic War, what is remarkable is their strong tendency to focus more on its tragic start than its triumphal end.
The year “1941” is mentioned much more often than “1945”; basing on a popular idea that modern Russian nationalism is grounded in the victory in this war, one could probably expect the opposite. This focus on the most tragic dates testifies to the active and continuing, though not acknowledged, immersion into the darkest parts of the Soviet past — a feature of melancholy.

Following the proper names of Russia’s political leaders provides another clue on the same question (see chart below). Predictably, Lenin and Stalin dominate this chart from 1930 to 1950, then Stalin retreats and Lenin moves ahead, and stays on top until about 1990. Then, Lenin’s reputation collapses, and Stalin’s leaps up again. Even in the 2000s, Russian books mentioned Stalin and Lenin more often than they did more contemporary leaders, and Stalin clearly leads the chart. For the course of almost two decades, from 1991 to 2008, Stalin is mentioned in Russian books more often than any other Russian political leader, current or recent. There is no doubt that these books discuss Stalin in vastly different terms, from the most

Chart 2. Frequencies of mentioning leaders in Russian and Soviet books, 1918-2008;

source: Books Ngram Viewer, Russian corpus

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glowing to the most critical. However, the fact is that they discuss Stalin more often than any other of Russia’s leaders. “Moscow does not believe in tears”, alleged one of the most popular Soviet films; the data testify to the opposite.

To provide this finding with a comparative dimension, I asked the Ngram Viewer to chart two terms, Stalin and Hitler, separately in Russian and in German. In both cultures, their corresponding dictators were mentioned most frequently while they were in power, with the peaks immediately following their deaths. However, the results become different in more recent decades. Starting from about 1985, the Stalin curve on the Russian chart began to rise, and this stable growth continued through two decades, until 2008. On the German chart, there is no such growth. The curve declines after its peak in the late 1940s, shows a minor spike in the mid-1960s, with the end of the “inability to mourn” period, and then steadily declines. While in 1980 the chances of reading about Stalin in a Russian book and about Hitler in a German book were equal (about 0.0015% in both cases), in 2008, the relative frequency with which Stalin was discussed in Russian books was about four times higher than that; the relative frequency of discussing Hitler in German books remained the same.

Obviously, it takes more time to write a book than it does an essay or a blogpost, and one can speculate that this process creates a certain chronological distance, or time-lag, from the subject matter, while for newspapers or blogs this time-lag is shorter. Comparing the Ngram Viewer for books, the Integrum databases for the press, and the Yandex “Pulse of the Blogosphere” for blogs and forums, helps to test this inter-medial hypothesis. According to these comparisons, if books (up until 2008) mentioned Stalin more often than Putin, bloggers have been
discussing Putin more often than they discuss Stalin. However, even in these media, the interest in the past is very robust, and the focus on Stalin is significant and stable. Charting Stalin and the 21st century political leaders in Russian blogs, I have found that only Putin and Medvedev have been mentioned more frequently. Most of the time, Stalin surpasses any foreign leader in Russian blogs, though from time to time, sensational events, such as the election of Obama or the war in Libya, outweigh Stalin's lasting grip over the internet. Then, Obama or Qaddafi may dislodge Stalin for a few weeks, but later Stalin invariably regains his dominance.

In its coverage of the activity of the current Russian leadership, is the Russian press more interested in the leaders’ policies in the present, say in international affairs, or in their relations to the past? Integrum gives the opportunity to chart these relations using a so-called proximity search to find terms occurring within a specified maximum textual distance from one another. Using this method, I have computed the frequencies with which two different terms (say, Putin and Stalin) feature as textual neighbours, mentioned within a standard distance of three sentences from one another. Obviously, the charts do not tell us the actual meaning of this proximity, or the nature of the relationship that it reflects: in some texts, Putin and Stalin may have been compared, in others, contrasted, or we might be dealing with texts citing a recent comment of Putin's about Stalin, etc. On the third chart (see page 5), I present the results of proximity searches linking Putin to two of his counterparts, one from the past and another from the present. Specifically, the chart shows how often Putin is mentioned within three contiguous sentences together with Stalin, and how often he is mentioned within three sentences of Bush. We see here that the central Russian press does care more about international relations in the present than it does about the relation to the past. However, the difference between the two lines is not as large as we might expect. We also see that after president Bush left office, the press lost interest in discussing him together with Putin; but despite the fact that Stalin left his office almost sixty years ago, the press keeps telling stories in which Putin and Stalin figure together.

As the next step in using this technique for mapping relationships, I have centered on president Medvedev and computed how often he is mentioned in the same three sentences as some other figures, from Putin to Stalin to the ex-mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, and others. Presented on the final chart (see page 7), the results are dramatic. Of course, for all the things that Putin and Medvedev have done or failed to do together, they are mentioned together much more often than other pairs. However, Stalin is mentioned in some connection to Medvedev as often as almost any current political figure, e.g. less frequently than the mayor of Moscow, but more frequently than the mayor of St. Petersburg, and more frequently than some of Medvedev’s key advisers, allies, or rivals.

Finally, let’s briefly look at the victims of the Russian state over decades, as they are mentioned in the blogs. Mikhail Khodorkovsky dominates this picture; understandably, his peaks coincide with his trials. Between them his relevance for the bloggers is roughly equal to the relevance of Trotsky. Russian books, however, barely mention Khodorkovsky; even in 2008, Trotsky was mentioned about ten times more frequently than Khodorkovsky. The figures of the past have their stable, grasping power over the present.

There are many interesting aspects of these data, but one common feature is the general bias towards the past. Russian authors, journalists, and bloggers
feel the past to be understandable and relevant, and this is different from their response to the confused and confusing, incomprehensible, and meaningless present. In their texts, they use the figures and stories of the past in two ways: they focus on them when they discuss the past, and they draw on them when they discuss the present, in various comparisons and allegories. The combined result of these two processes is that the public is constantly speaking about the past, as a source of allusions, allegories, and fears. The public needs the past to understand the present, and the public does not need the present to understand the past. As Walter Benjamin said, “The only pleasure the melancholic permits himself, and it is a powerful one, is allegory”.

This is an abridged version of an essay which will be published in Ellen Rutten, Julie Fedor and Vera Zvereva, eds, Memory, Conflict and Social Media: Web Wars in Post-Soviet States (Routledge: forthcoming 2012).

Chart 4. Frequency of names mentioned within three sentences of Medvedev, 2009-11.

Source: Integrum (central press)
In January 2012, in a report announcing Mikhail Prokhorov’s pledge to participate in the forthcoming demonstrations on 4 February, Gazeta.ru made a meaningful mistake: ‘The presidential candidate, who attended a rally of those protesting the results of the Gosduma elections, has promised to take part in the next rally, scheduled for 4 November’. One blogger immediately commented in a LiveJournal post entitled ‘4 November or 4 February?': ‘Yesterday Gazeta.ru wrote that Mikhail Prokhorov had “promised to take part in the next rally, scheduled for 4 November”. – “They’ve confused him with Naval’nyi…”’ the civic activist Oleg Kozlovskii pointed out on Twitter… 4 November… is the day when the “Russian Marches” take place…’

This mistake surely arose out of the firmly established association between 4 November and Russian protests. Since 2005, this date has been marked annually in cities throughout the country in the form of ‘Russian Marches’: mass demonstrations organised by various nationalist organisations such as the banned ‘Movement Against Illegal Immigration’ (DPNI, from the Russian initials), the main organiser of the rallies; the ‘Russians’ movement; ‘Pamiat’; the ‘Resistance’ movement; the National State Party of Russia; and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia.

Yet this symbolic meaning has by no means always been inherent to 4 November, and is in fact studiously ignored to this day in the official discourse. According to the official discourse, 4 November is National Unity Day, a very important state holiday, no less important than Victory Day. As Patriarch Kirill put it,

It is only because of the most difficult civil conflicts of the 20th century that this day has not yet taken root in the people’s consciousness under this marvellous word – victory. If you compare what happened then, in the distant 17th century, with what happened in the 20th century, upon careful examination of the events themselves and of the significance of the victory that was sustained, you can say with confidence that these are events of the same order, and one is not more important than the other.

The Russian regime established this holiday in a series of steps aimed at eradicating the collective memory of another holiday: 7 November, the Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution. First, in 1992,
Russians were deprived of their traditional companion public holiday on 8 November. Next, Yeltsin changed the name of the holiday, renaming it the ‘Day of Accord and Reconciliation’. In September 2004, the Inter-Faith Council of Russia ruled that 7 November had not led to reconciliation in 1917, and therefore proposed that the holiday be abolished altogether, and replaced by a nearby date, 4 November: the feast day for Our Lady of Kazan, probably the most venerated Russian Orthodox holy icon, and also the anniversary of the popular uprising which expelled the Polish-Lithuanian occupation force from Moscow in November 1612. The Council also proposed a new name for this holiday: National Unity Day.

In 2004 the Russian State Duma duly resolved to move the traditional holiday from 7 November to 4 November. The official explanation was that 4 November was:

not a new holiday, but a turn back to tradition: the day of Our Lady of Kazan was established by Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich as a state holiday in 1649. Moreover, in the early 20th century, Kuz’ma Minin (whom Peter the Great called the ‘saviour of the Fatherland’) was commemorated on 8 May (Old Style). Because of the 1917 revolution and the events that followed, however, the tradition of celebrating the liberation of Moscow from the Polish-Lithuanian invaders and the day of Kuzma Minin’s death was lost.

4 November 1612 was now declared the ‘moment when the Russian Time of Troubles were overcome’ and a ‘triumph of the patriotic spirit’. The replacement of 4 November by 7 November was labeled a ‘counter-revolution’. The newly declared holiday needed media support. The relevant TV reports from the archives of ORT, NTV, and Rossiia TV channels for 1-7 November 2005-2010 show how intensively the various channels were developing one and the same discourse, trumpeting the success of the holiday’s introduction. By way of proof, they cited an ever-growing list of festivals, concerts, and other forms of joyous national celebration, such as the unveiling of monuments (eg. Pozharskii’s mausoleum in Suzdal’); commissioned movies (eg. the feature film 1612, and the documentary The End of the Time of Troubles); a Russkii Mir Assembly, and other events aimed at fostering friendship with compatriots abroad (eg. the Pushkin medals); prayers for a United Russia, ‘a blanket of peace’, and other concoctions dreamed up by ‘Nashi’ and similar pro-Kremlin youth movements.

Meanwhile, however, another discourse was taking shape around 4 November – a discourse that was conspicuously absent from all television channels and from many other forms of media: the discourse of the nationalist Russian Marches. Despite the fact that the first Russian March of 2005 was a reasonably organised and serious affair, the media coverage made only a vague mention of ‘hooligan elements’ and the arrests of twelve people. From 2007 onwards, even blurred references of this kind disappeared, and reports focused exclusively on the number of police assigned to the marches – numbers that grew steadily, year by year.

It was only in 2009 that all media began to report openly on the Russian Marches, after alternative pro-Kremlin Russian Marches were invented as a counterweight to the growing popularity of the nationalist Russian Marches.
The intrigue surrounding the lack of media coverage of the nationalists’ marches in 2005-2009, and the tricky maneuver with the alternative marches, invented in 2009, both spoiled the original plan of making 4 November into the National Unity Day. Instead, the combined effect was to reinforce a quite different meaning for the day: as a Day of Protest.

The amount of blogosphere discussion about National Unity Day has grown from year to year. When we take a closer look, however, we find that a key factor in this growth was the intensity with which bloggers discussed their plans for the ‘November holidays’ and the news that the calendar of holidays was to be re-arranged. As for the meaning of the holiday, the blogosphere has continued to develop discourses consistently focused on historical inaccuracies and highlighting the absurdity of this ‘silly’ holiday (‘But what are we celebrating?’, ‘How we are supposed to celebrate this holiday?’); and disapproval and bewilderment over the replacement of 7 November (‘the day of fear of communism’, ‘First of all, happy holiday, everybody! Although, to tell the truth, I don’t really understand why it is that all of a sudden, in 2005, we realised that in far-away 1613 our ancestors showed patriotism, and from now on 4 November is a state public holiday, and why 7 November (note that this is also the history of our country!) is not a red calendar day... evidently, back in 1917, something dishonourable was done?’).

The second factor in the growth of the blogosphere’s attention to 4 November was a new discourse, centred on the Russian Marches of the nationalists and other street actions. (‘Along the path of the column’s procession, on the opposite bank of the Moscow River, somebody had hung a large black banner with a crossed-out swastika and the words “4 November – the day of unity between the government and the fascists”’). Thus, the peak frequency of blogosphere discussion on 4 November was associated with a doubling of marches, mobilising people for these marches, and then reporting back on them.

Having traced the changes in the meaning of 4 November over the six years of its existence, I can draw several conclusions. First, 4 November has not lost the old associations with 7 November; it remains only very loosely associated with 1612; and ultimately, it has only one generalised meaning – as a ‘day of protest’. Invented by the government in an attempt to forget 7 November, 4 November absorbed the old date’s revolutionary drive and was transformed from a celebration of unity into a symbol of Russian protest. In turn, it then sparked off additional Russian protests on 10 December, 24 December, and 4 February, thereby rounding off the cycle of historical parallels – from 7 November to 4 November, from 4 November to 4 February.

For references, charts and additional details, see the full version of this article on the Memory at War blog: http://cambridgeculturalmemory.blogspot.com
Events in Cambridge

**EAST EUROPEAN MEMORY STUDIES RESEARCH GROUP SEMINAR**
CRASSH, Cambridge. All seminars begin at 5:00pm.

**✦ 29 February: Nelly Bekus** (University of Warsaw), ‘Memory and Forgetting in Two Post-Soviet Capitals: Minsk and Astana’ and **Anna Krylova** (Duke University), ‘Neither “Erased” nor “Remembered”: Academic Metaphors and Interpretive Challenges of Soviet Post-War Literature andMemoirs’


**EUROPE EAST AND WEST: FILM, HISTORY AND MOURNING**
Both meetings take place in Keynes Hall, King’s College, Cambridge.

**✦ 5 March at 7:30 p.m:** Screening of Ararat (dir. Atom Egoyan, 2002)

**✦ 7 March at 5pm:** Maria Pasholok (University of Oxford) presents a seminar paper on Ararat (dir. Atom Egoyan, 2002) with ensuing discussion.

**THE GULAG UNBOUND:**
**Remembering Soviet Forced Labour**
29 & 30 June 2012, Cambridge
Co-organised with University of Reading
Deadline for abstracts: 24 February 2012. For details please see our website

**EVENTS AT MAW PARTNER INSTITUTIONS**

**Groningen**

**CONFERENCE:**
**Film and Memory: Suffering, Agency and Memory in Polish, Russian and Ukrainian Films**
22 & 23 March 2012, Groningen, Netherlands
Features keynote addresses by Nancy Condee and Alexander Etkind.

For information, please see, [http://www.rug.nl/staff/sander.brouwer/SAMPRUProgramme.doc](http://www.rug.nl/staff/sander.brouwer/SAMPRUProgramme.doc)
FRIDAY 24 FEBRUARY

9:00am: Opening Remarks

9:20 am: Keynote Address
✦ Michael Rothberg (Urbana-Champaign, IL), ‘Multidirectional Memory Between the Posts’

10:40am: Coffee

11:00am: Panel 1: Postcolonial Theory, Undertheorized Memory
✦ Chair: Caroline Humphrey (Cambridge)
✦ Dirk Uffelmann (Passau), ‘Socialism as Colonialism in Postcolonial Theory’
✦ Ilya Kalinin (St Petersburg), ‘Empire of Memory: Mnemonic Patriotism and “Post-Colonial Challenges” in Contemporary Russia’
✦ Alexander Etkind (Cambridge), ‘Nostalgia or Melancholy: Nationalism after Empire’

12:30pm: Lunch

2:00pm: Panel 2: Postimperial Malaise
✦ Chair: Rachel Polonsky (Cambridge)
✦ Viacheslav Morozov (Tartu), ‘Subaltern Empire? Alternative World Order(s) in Russia’s Political Imagery’
✦ Tamás Scheibner (Budapest), ‘Between Universalism and Particularism: The Metaphor of Colony in Hungarian Intellectual History’
✦ John Hawley (Santa Clara, CA), ‘Vain Art of the Fugue: The Postcolonial Romance of the Eastern European Nation’

3:30pm: Coffee

4:00 pm: Panel 3: Pre-Postsocialist Generation
✦ Chair: Julie Fedor (Cambridge)
✦ Svetlana Vassileva-Karagyozova (Lawrence, KS), ‘Poland’s Last Communist Generation: Lost or Found in the Transition?’
✦ Mikhail Krutikov (Ann Arbor, MI), ‘Soviet vs Jewish: Constructing a Usable Past in Russian Jewish Writing, 1991-2011’

SATURDAY 25 FEBRUARY

9:00am: Panel 4: Provinces of Europe
✦ Chair: Uilleam Blacker (Cambridge)
✦ Simon Lewis (Cambridge), ‘Belarus: National Catastrophe and the Work of Mourning’
✦ Kevin M.F. Platt (Philadelphia, PA), ‘Hegemony without Dominance: Russian Culture in the Near Abroad’
✦ Sonja Koroliov (Halle-Wittenberg), ‘Memory and the Undead: Strategies of Identity in Macedonian Film and Literature since 1990’

10:30am: Coffee

11:00am: Panel 5: Memory Spaces
✦ Chair: Rory Finnin (Cambridge)
✦ David Chioni Moore (Saint Paul, MN), ‘Worldwide Retrospective Cosmopolitanism and a New York State of Mind’
✦ Mischa Gabowitsch (Berlin), ‘Soviet War Memorials as Colonial Import’
✦ Andriy Portnov (Kiev), ‘Out of the Soviet Closet: Dniepropetrovsk beyond Postcolonial’

12:30pm: Lunch

2:00pm: Panel 6: Local Memories, Global Post-Memory
✦ Chair: John Barber (Cambridge)
✦ Anika Walke (St Louis, MO), ‘Inhabiting the Space of Devastation: Post-Soviet Memories of the Nazi Genocide’
✦ Dušan I. Bjelić (Portland, ME), ‘Postcolonialism and Balkanism’
✦ Firuza Melville (Cambridge), ‘Russian Colonial Military Folklore in Post-Colonial Russia’

3:30pm: Coffee

4:00pm: Round Table Discussion
✦ Chair: Alexander Etkind (Cambridge)
In a paper given at Memory at War’s ‘Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe’ conference in July 2011, Jay Winter outlined the important role of memory in bolstering the growing discourse of human rights in post-war Europe.

Undoubtedly, in both Western and Eastern Europe, the attention to memory, versus traditionally authority-centred History, was of huge importance in re-evaluating a continent left in ruins by World War II. The cultivation of memory-based human rights discourse has, as Winter pointed out, been carried out to a large degree by activists operating in the sphere of civil society. Such individuals and groups existed in both Western and Eastern Europe, but the challenges they faced were quite different.

In the West, the processes of uncovering and preserving the memories of the atrocities of the war, particularly the Holocaust, were central to official discourse and the basis of the creation of unity in Europe. In the Soviet Union and its satellite states, such groups were decidedly anti-official: memory, whether of those repressed by the state, or of alternative versions of the war, was a key element of resistance against communist ideology. With the fall of communism, such groups did not disappear, but came into the open, grew and developed. Today these movements function as influential non-governmental organisations, continuing to preserve memory and, in many cases, cultivate civil society.

A number of these groups gathered in Cambridge in December 2011 to exchange experience with one another, with analogous groups from Western Europe, and with academics at the at the workshop ‘Memory Work and Civil Society’, organised by the East European Memory Studies research group, based at Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH).

The first speaker of the day was Nikita Petrov, representing the renowned Russian NGO Memorial, one of the most high-profile non-governmental organisations in Russian public life. Dr Petrov has for many years been at the forefront of the struggle to reclaim and preserve the memory of Soviet repressions in Russia and in Eastern Europe. His numerous academic publications and extensive campaigning work in the difficult circumstances of Soviet and post-Soviet Russia distinguish him as one of the most significant memory scholars and activists.
anywhere in Europe. The Memorial Society itself grew out of a grass-roots civil society campaigns in the 1980s aimed at commemorating the victims of Soviet terror. The movement went from strength to strength, and while today it remains focused on restoring and preserving historical memory, its mission is broader, encompassing human rights activism as well as historical research and education work.

Dr Petrov gave a fascinating outline of the contemporary memoriescape in Russia – a context in which Memorial’s work to promote the memory of repressions and uphold human rights is no less relevant, and indeed difficult, than it was in the 1980s. Dr Petrov discussed the importance of the larger mission of promoting a free, democratic society that is central to Memorial’s activities, and discussed the problems that the organisation has encountered at the hands of the current authorities. Other issues raised by Dr Petrov included the importance of attaching individual stories to statistics of victims, the complex and highly politicized issue of NGO funding, and the lack of coherent historical policy of the present government in Russia.

The East European Memory Studies group is keen to facilitate dialogue between scholars and activists from Western and Eastern Europe, and for this reason did not confine the invitees to former socialist states. The second speaker of the day was Lea Misan, director of the London-based NGO Act for Change. Act for Change is one of a number of NGOs based in the UK that specialises in promoting education about the Holocaust.

Lea Misan spoke about the important work her organisation does in facilitating dialogue between survivors of the Holocaust and young people form disadvantaged backgrounds in the UK, as well as with survivors of other atrocities, such as the genocide in Rwanda. These cross-generational, cross-cultural dialogues help to preserve and revitalise memory of the Holocaust among young people who otherwise have little knowledge of it, but also to bring that memory into contact with other, fresher memories of similar tragedies – a dialogue which benefits all sides. Act for Change’s activities are not purely orientated towards history education, but aim to empower disadvantaged young people to take a more active role in society, and to make them aware of the principles of human rights and democracy.

The EEMS group was pleased also to welcome Piotr Flipkowski of the KARTA foundation, based in Warsaw. While official bodies in Poland, most notably the Institute of National Memory, play a large role in research and education on the country’s past, civil society organisations are also highly active. Organisations such as the Federation of Katyn Families have played a highly visible role in Polish public life in recent years. However, while 1989 made the open, public discussion of the past possible, many opposition circles had been active in this area for some years. The emergence of powerful civil society movements in Poland in the 1970s incorporated an acute awareness of the need to preserve a non-official memory of the dramatic events of the war, and the subsequent years of communist oppression.

This was precisely the aim of the KARTA foundation, which began life in 1982 as a small scale, underground publication that documented political repressions. KARTA grew steadily throughout the 1980s, and became a legally registered organisation in the 1990s. Today it is a major presence in Polish society, running many high profile campaigns aimed at preserving the memory of Poland’s recent past, as well as promoting democracy and tolerance. Dr Filipkowski outlined the various activities that KARTA engages in, from archival work to publications, the establishment of the ‘History Meeting House’ in Central Warsaw, conferences and exhibitions to educational and media campaigns. He outlined the varied memory topics that KARTA deals with, from archival work to publications, the establishment of the ‘History Meeting House’ in Central Warsaw, conferences and exhibitions to educational and media campaigns. He outlined the varied memory topics that KARTA deals with, from the fate of Poles deported to the Soviet Union to the tradition of cycling in Poland, from the history of Russian-Polish and Ukrainian-Polish relations to the fate of Polish Jews.
While memory activism has been an integral part of Poland’s transition from socialism to democracy, in Ukraine it has been even more acutely significant. Ukraine only became an independent nation in 1991, and, unlike Poland and other East-Central European societies, who had had previous experience of state sovereignty, it was only after this date that the country could begin consolidate its national memory free from ideological strictures.

The next two guests of the workshop represented different aspects of the memory culture of contemporary Ukraine: Sofia Dyak of the L’viv Centre for the Urban History of Central Europe, and Oleksandr Svyetlov of the Kyiv Vasyl Stus Memorial Society. The organisations represented illustrate two differing reactions to the memory challenges facing Ukraine today.

The Vasyl Stus Memorial Society has its roots in dissident circles of the 1980s, and was officially registered in Ukraine in 1992. It carries out research and education programmes focussing on preserving the memory of Soviet repressions and violence, as well as anti-Soviet resistance movements. Oleksandr Svyetlov, who is an advisor and council member of the organisation, outlined the various ways in which the memories of Ukrainian national suffering and resistance are threatened by what he perceived as anti-Ukrainian policies and statements of the present government. Mr Svyetlov laid out how the Society attempts to redress this discourse with a more nationalist, Ukrainiocentric view of the past that focuses on national victimhood, particularly on the Holodomor, the artificial famines of 1932-33. The presentation provoked lively discussion over nationalist politics in memory activism.

A contrasting approach to Ukraine’s past was evident in the presentation by Sofia Dyak of the L’viv Centre for Urban History. The Centre, which was founded in 2004, takes both local and transnational approaches to the past, focussing in particular on the urban history of Lviv, and of the wider region of East-Central Europe. Its activities encompass academic conferences, education programmes, exhibitions, archive work, the development of online resources and programmes aimed at consolidating civil society activities. Taking urban space as its starting point, rather than national affinity, the centre investigates the multi-ethnic past of its city, particularly its non-Ukrainian – particularly Jewish or Polish – elements. As Dr Dyak pointed out, such an approach can meet with resistance locally. The careful negotiation of various, often conflicting parties interested in the work of the Centre, as well as with various levels of political authority, from local to national, was a particular theme of the talk.

The high-profile memory conflicts that characterise Eastern Europe are far from unique to the region. Similar phenomena can be found throughout Europe and the world, and in order to benefit from this alternative perspective the EEMS group invited two participants specialising in Spanish/Basque memory. Dacia Viejo Rose, a researcher working in Cambridge on the project Culture Heritage and the Reconstruction of Identities after Conflict, gave an overview of Spanish memory discourse, and the important role memory and forgetting have played in how the traumas of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship are perceived today.

Dr Viejo Rose’s talk was complemented by a presentation by Fiachra McDonagh, a researcher and collaborator with the NGO Gernika Gogarotuz (founded in 1987), which works on promoting peace through preserving the memory of the bombing of the city of Gernika (Guernica). Mr McDonagh outline the complexities of working with the numerous groups and conflicting memories that surround the Gernika tragedy, explaining the processes by which such groups can be brought together in order to facilitate dialogue about that past, with the larger aim of promoting peace. The case of Gernika, a location that concentrates divergent memories of various interest groups, providing both a focus of conflict and of dialogue,
had many echoes for the case of Lviv in Ukraine.

The workshop was well attended, and provided an excellent forum for dialogue between academics, students, NGO practitioners and members of the public. The dialogue across the various cultural contexts represented – Poland, Russia, Spain, Ukraine, the UK and beyond – also allowed for a wide-ranging and enlightening discussion.

Numerous common themes emerged during the workshop. First was the relationship with politics and political parties. Memory NGOs constantly tread a precarious line between retaining their independence and objectivity, and either pursuing or begin drawn into the pursuit of particular political programmes. Should an NGO present a strong vision of the past, or remain open to divergent memories? Similarly, how far do NGOs have a responsibility to represent the memories of particular groups, and how far should they pursue the stories of individuals?

The sheer complexity of the work of memory NGOs also became apparent: these organisations must simultaneously be many things to many people. They must educate, research, archive materials, work with the media, and engage in politics. The spheres in which they operate are also complex, and often fraught with difference: they must deal with local and national communities, political parties and factions, with business, administration and authority on all levels from local to European, as well as with the media and other NGOs.

Perhaps the most important function NGOs fulfil lies in another common theme that emerged: the promotion of tolerance, democracy and human rights. These are aims that are specifically stated in the mission statements of several of the participating organisations. Because of the crucial role, identified by Jay Winter, of memory in the cultivation of respect for human rights, memory NGOs are in a unique position to achieve these aims. In fact, in the countries that form the focus of the EEMS group, these groups have been at the centre of transitions to democracy, and in the continuing propagation of tolerance and the discourse of human rights. Listening to the talk by Nikita Petrov that opened the workshop, one could indeed be forgiven for asking what his and his organisation’s main aim is – to preserve the memory of the past or to fight for a free and fair society in the present. The answer for most of those civil society activists engaged in memory, is, of course, both.

Uilleam Blacker

We are very pleased to announce that Tatiana Zhurzhenko will be joining the MAW Helsinki Team as Postdoctoral Research Associate. Tatiana’s scholarly interests focus on transformation processes in post-Soviet societies, ranging from problems of democratisation and nation-building to gender related questions. She is particularly interested in comparative politics and transdisciplinary approaches. From 2007 to 2011, Tatiana was Elise Richter Research Fellow at the University of Vienna.
This two-day workshop, hosted by the Centre for EU-Russia Studies (CEURUS) at the MAW partner University of Tartu, Estonia, focused on the links between the public remembrance of communism and ontological security in Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic states. An interdisciplinary group of scholars from Russia, Ukraine, the UK, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Hungary, Turkey, Lithuania and Estonia examined, in the course of four thematic panels, how public remembrance of the Second World War (WWII) and the Soviet legacy shapes discourses and practices of security, and is, in turn, shaped by ontological security concerns in contemporary Eastern Europe.

As Maria Mälksoo (Tartu) noted in her opening remarks, ontological security theory invites us to ponder the ethical implications of engaging the argument of ‘historical memory’ in foreign and security policy. The proliferation of law as a mnemonic technology in Europe, the criminalisation and securitisation of public narratives of the Holocaust, totalitarian communist regimes and the complex legacies of WWII underscore a general failure to think beyond the logic of security. Replaying Alexander Etkind’s concept of hard and soft memory, she maintained that attempts to harden memory will only be able to produce a very soft kind of security for the competitive consolidation attempts of social memory as well as reproducing the sense of insecurity among its contesters.

The keynote address, ‘Remembering to Make the World a Better Place?’, was delivered by Maja Zehfuss (Manchester). She questioned a common assumption of public remembrance and memory studies, namely, that remembering makes for a better world. Premised on the idea of linear time, this assumption ignores the more problematic temporality of memory – the undecidable relationship between past and present. Telling the story of the past through the present to the future always mixes up all three. As people become different from what they were (or remember themselves to have been) in the past, writing about the past will always be more about the present than the past. Memory has the tendency to retrospectively reproduce the past while claiming only to invoke it. Our perceived need to persuade
others about what we regard to be true reveals the identity-generating powers of memory. What really matters (ethically speaking) are our deeds, not so much the meanings attributed to them, argued Zehfuss, for we can never know what others think of us and our actions in any case.

The first panel focused on the politicisation of memory, applying multiple angles from the global to the national and the regional. **Patrick Finney** (Aberystwyth) located the East European memory wars in the context of the global WWII memory boom that we have been witnessing since the end of the Cold War. The East European memory wars might accordingly be viewed as part of the wider wave of ‘new remembering’ of WWII, and it might be particularly useful to analyse them against the more defined backdrop of other postcolonial cases globally. Yet, remembering WWII in Eastern Europe also has its own specificity, which is not reproduced elsewhere. Distilling both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of this ‘new remembering’, Finney pointed out the enormous dynamism as well as the cross-currents and controversies of this terrain of remembering (e.g. Holocaust criminalisation vs Holocaust revision). He addressed the changing nature of the terrain of contestation (whereby the meaning of the war is increasingly fought over simultaneously on domestic, international and transnational planes) and the role of digital and networked information technologies in the ‘new wave’ of remembering WWII. He suggested that the end of the Cold War (and the accompanying geopolitical changes) should be viewed as a significant causative factor in precipitating such an upsurge in remembering, yet also warned against ignoring national factors. Generational, technological and normative shifts have further played their operative role along with the social, economic and political processes of globalisation and a larger nostalgia boom.

**Alexey Miller** (Moscow) traced the etymology of ‘historical politics’ from Poland to Russia, arguing for the uniqueness of the intensity with which the techniques and forms of politicising history have been mutually borrowed in Eastern Europe over the past decade. Emphasising the diversity of the Eastern European cases, Miller focused on the domestic political dimensions of historical politics. An animated discussion about the pros and cons of using history vs political science to study historical politics followed.

**Ivan Kurilla** (Volgograd) turned to the subject of hidden contradictions between national and regional approaches to the dominant narrative of the Great Patriotic War in Russia. Invoking the example of the hero-city Volgograd, the site of the Stalingrad battle and a central place of war remembrance in Russia, he argued that a major challenge to the centrally planned version of the Great Patriotic War comes from local narratives, as the controversy around the creation of a Federal Centre of Patriotic Education in Volgograd has shown. His analysis highlighted the role of Volgograd in the symbolic politics of the United Russia Party, underscoring the increasingly state-centric organisation of the war narrative, as well as its anti-Western tone, under the Putin regime.

The second panel investigated the institutionalisation of social remembrance in the form of History Commissions and Institutes of National Memory in Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states. **James Mark** (Exeter) discussed the image of the victim as a central part of the projects seeking to narrate recent history as liberation from criminal dictatorship in 1989. While the story of the end of communism was co-produced by historians and lawyers ‘as a journey from criminality to legality’ in the Polish case, generally speaking the judicial approaches to the organisation
of collective memories had been of relatively little importance in Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism. Mark underscored the similar aims of History Commissions and Institutes of Memory, in spite of their different rhetorical self-justifications. Both initiatives could be regarded as moral-political projects, embodying the idea ‘that a new liberal memory had to be created from above, by state institutions, on the basis of files created by the previous regime’, and not really engaging the democratic pluralisation of memory à la Truth Commissions elsewhere in the world.

Eva-Clarita Pettai (Tartu) spoke on ‘Baltic History Commissions as Catalysts or Inhibitors of (Bi-lateral) Reconciliation?’. She evaluated the Baltic presidential history commissions along four dimensions of reconciliation: enabling factual investigation; allowing for diversity of perspectives; creating wider societal impact; and engaging third party/international viewpoints. Her analysis explored the mixed results these unilateral history commissions have brought about for the Baltic-Jewish and the Baltic-Russian reconciliation. Her paper demonstrated that while the Baltic-Jewish ‘bilateral’ reconciliation was largely successful in the Estonian and Latvian cases (but failed in Lithuania), in the Baltic-Russian case reconciliation has been neither genuinely sought nor achieved.

Alexander Astrov (Central European University) examined the ‘politics of history’ as a case of foreign-policy making in Estonia. He observed the ‘fundamentalisation’ of totalitarianism in the Estonian history-political discourse which allegedly uses the experience of totalitarianism as a ‘measure of all things political’, inhibiting its treatment as an historical event open to different interpretations. According to Astrov’s argument, the politics of history has enabled the small states of Central and Eastern Europe – traditionally mere objects of history, to wage a political struggle for a place in history. He investigated the rise of the ‘politics of history’ in Estonia against the backdrop of the fluctuations of the dominant discourses in the West, as an attempt to address ontological anxieties along this vector.

The third panel, ‘Securitising Memory’, touched on the crux of the problem of the workshop. Ažuolas Bagdonas (Fatih University, Istanbul) presented an analysis of Lithuanian-Russian mnemopolitical relations since 1990 from the ontological security perspective. His paper showed how Lithuania’s relations with Russia have been driven by ontological insecurity that has stemmed from the incompatibility of their respective historical narratives, and eventually resulted in the routinisation of the bilateral conflict. For Lithuania, disagreement about the events that led to the country’s loss of sovereignty in the course of WWII has translated ‘into a direct challenge to the legal foundations and the identity of the state’, thereby making the pursuit of normal relations with Russia very complicated indeed.

Matti Jutila (Helsinki) examined the concept of societal securitisation and its implications for history politics. Departing from the Copenhagen School’s constructivist understanding of security, he argued for a less essentialist conception of society and ethnonationalism in order to make the study of societal securitisation more fruitful. Through colourful examples about the use of historical myths in contemporary Finnish debates on multiculturalism, he discussed new options for resistance to non-democratic and violent practices generally related to the securitisation of national identities.

Tomáš Kavaliauskas (Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas) spoke on ‘Different Meanings Applied to May 9th
Victory Day in WWII: Russian and Baltic Perspectives after 1989. Investigating the contrasting meanings attached to 9 May 1945 in Russia and the Baltic states, he discussed the differences in their respective symbolic thinking and mythological worlds, and argued for a hermeneutical approach to understanding the Baltic and Russian perspectives. He further explored the notion of a ‘Baltic paradox’ as regards to the differences between Lithuania, on the one hand, and Estonia and Latvia, on the other, when it comes to the public use of Soviet symbols.

The final panel of the workshop was dedicated to the monumental politics of Ukraine, and featured Georgiy Kasianov (Kyiv), Oleksandr Svyetlov (Kyiv), and Felix Münch (Justus Liebig University Giessen). Discussion spanned from Ukraine’s war of/for monuments and contest for the past during the past two decades (Kasianov and Svyetlov) to the curious case of Sevastopol in the Ukrainian-Russian ‘memory wars’ fought on the Crimean Peninsula (Münch).