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## The Restoration of Memory through Affect, Performative Act and Epiphany: History, Poetry and Politics

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The habitual union of memory and history is being replaced in our time by a deep rift between them, in which both sides change their very essence. Memory becomes a rift in the very ideology of history. The author surveys various possibilities of memory as an act performed by the remembering subject (“performative act”), not so much in relation to his or her individual past as in relation to a common present. The author looks at memory as the practice of subjectivity, i. e. only in one of the modes of its existence. The exercise of memory as a practice of subjectivity brings together different types of memory, whether they are personal or transpersonal. The issue in question is what happens with the subject of commemoration, himself. This article looks at three types of memory and remembrance. Psychological memory demonstrates the fragmentation and lack of self-sufficiency of human experience of “the self”, and the fundamental lack of integrity of this experience, which turns into need and deficiency.

Ideological memory presupposes that the past “belongs” to a subject which is forging and finalizing history (for instance, the state) — to one who holds the exclusive right to “tell history’s story”.

The third type of memory might be called performative: it assumes not the ability to recall, but the establishment of relationship with those who are present even in their absence. At its centre is the restoration of memory as an act and event in which a radical, transhistorical experience can take place. This act establishes a community of the living with the dead; this community has a paradoxical, temporal nature.

KEYWORDS: Memory, history, epiphany, performative act, community of the living and the dead.

## Introduction

My article has no pretension of being a systematic and exhaustive study on the problem of memory. “Collective memory”, “social memory”, “historical memory” and “cultural memory” form an enormous field in contemporary humanities research<sup>1</sup>. The main aspect of all these types of memory is that they are not dependent upon the direct reality of individual recollection, but are rather forms of shared social experience. My loosely-knit observations endeavour to delineate various possibilities of recollection/memory as a performative act of the remembering subject, not only and not so much in relation to his or her individual past, as to a common present. As such, I am looking at memory as the practice of subjectivity, i. e. only in one of its modes of existence. The exercise of memory as the practice of subjectivity unites various types of memory, independent of whether or not they are personal-individual or transpersonal. The issue in question is what happens, in this case, with the subject who remembers.

Considering the conceptualization of memory in modern humanities study, we find that memory is often set against history, yet is nevertheless seamlessly connected to history. This might seem strange: after all, Clio is the daughter of Mnemosyne (as are the other muses, which is important to our discussion to follow). The contradictory unity-within-separation of memory and history, itself points to our existential location within history and to that type of historicity which supports our memories.

As such, rationally-grasped memory is not the subject of neuropsychological impressions. Nor is it exactly the sort of memory which St. Augustine defines as one of the three fundamental abilities of the soul.

Memory, as it is generally understood, is oriented toward the practice of the self, and toward the support or establishment of that which is “the Self”. Memory has the advantages of depth and authenticity precisely because it always runs up against that which cannot be changed, insofar as “what really is” is only in the past, and only in “my past”. It is precisely the road to the past, however, which is fraught with difficulty, given that this past is — more than anything else — the subject of substitution. It is between me and my past that there

1. Starting with the works of those who first defined “Collective memory”, from Maurice Halbwachs to Jan Assmann, Jeffrey Olick and other contemporary

researchers. Also see the issue of the journal called “Neprikosnovennyj Zapas”, 2005, n. 2–3 (40–41), which is dedicated entirely to collective memory.

is a gaping hiatus. Constant doubts regarding the authenticity of my memory point to the constant, inherent demand with which it is bombarded.

I am interested in various aspects of the establishment of memory in and through the practice of the remembering subject, within a culture that is already conscious of its own historicity:

The memory that we are speaking about here is a form of existential, social and political action: this memory renews experience which is under threat of loss, while creating and supporting specific forms of experience which can be shared in the present moment. An important difference between this sort of memory and traditional memory lies in that the remembering subject regulates the values and himself instantiates the limiting field of this act. Memory is something performed. Rather than reproducing conditions, it designates and creates the conditions under which something becomes memorable and triggers something akin to recollection.

This new memory arises in response to the impossibility of directly continuing history as it is understood from inside the mega-ideologies of the Modernity [*Faybyshenko*].

### **The Subject of History and its Memory**

The version of the human person which we might call modern man, was forged “after 1789”, i. e., in the era in which history became the ultimate, metaphysical horizon of human action and was formalized as a totality, final foundation and rationale of common life (society). History has become a law-unto-itself, outside of which it is impossible to find any other law: any law at all is a law of history and a means of history’s self-formation.

The German philosopher, Karl Löwith, describes “the secularization of the theology of history” that is taking place during this era as a situation in which the past belongs fully to a desired future and is measured by this desired future:

F. Schlegel summarized the appearance of our historical ideas and actions in the following way: “The revolutionary desire to manifest the Kingdom of God serves as an elastic buttress for all progressive ideas and foundations of contemporary history” <...> But he who from the very get-go sees events from the perspective of the future and the process of striving for this future, or he who sees everything from the perspective of a progressing decadence and decay, will see everything that has already happened only as preparatory steps in a pre-history which has

not yet achieved a single one of its goals. This is similar to the sense in which the Old Testament was, for the church fathers, an anticipation of the New Testament, *praeparatio evangelica* and promise of a future which is fulfilled only in the New Testament, such that the interpretation of the past becomes a series of hidden prophecies, directed backwards in time: the past is understood as conscious preparation for the future, even when it is presented as “pure history”, and only affirms that one thing or another has happened in history. The contemporary historian, for instance, Tocqueville in his introduction to *Democracy in America*, asks: “where are we going now?” Whereas the classical historian asked, “how did we get here?” [Löwith, 266].

As such, the meaning of the past is drawn from an imagined end; every moment in the past is evaluated against the theoretically foreseen goal of history. In a game where participation in history holds the highest and last reward, the formation of memories and the construction of the correct means of recollection are weapons in the battle for history.

In that sort of history which is an integral whole, in which the past provides the rationale for and promises the future, a present oriented toward the future aggressively demands a “necessary” past for itself. On the other hand, and precisely because of the fact that history presupposes the authority of truth, it presupposes means for the cultivation and ability to distinguish the past, present and future as different modalities of being and thought. And it is in the distinction between these various modalities that any of them have any meaning for each other.

History always preserves a fundamental ambiguity: it is not only the bearer of meaning, but also the custodian of truth. Truth and meaning strive to merge with each other but never attain to this sought merger, because they must also test and critique each other. History realizes the truth of either individual or collective subjectivity. The extreme expression of either the individual or collective subject’s life (subjects can also be ethnic groups, states, or cultures) is embodiment in history and the coming-to-be of that which its law of history brings about via its own self-realization. Everything is individually historical and — specifically as individually historical — participates in that which is common to all: that which is common to all is realized in the battle for a place in history, as the exclusive expression of the universal spirit.

WWI aptly demonstrates the mechanism by which this symbolic (as well as physical) battle for position occurs; representatives of the many nations participating in the war understood it precisely as the affirmation of their fully-bodied participation in history and as the af-

firmation of their will as the creators of history. Victory was seen as an affirmation that the participant was empowered to realize its goals as the loftiest goals of history itself, rather than to become the victim of history. For this reason, intellectuals in the various warring countries turned to the systematic disavowal of the enemy's culture, which was manifest as the refusal or distortion of a particular exemplary value type [*Rutkevich*].

Totalitarian projects which structure common life take this thinking to its logical conclusion and instil it with a new ontological dimension: they simultaneously manifest history's law and supersede it from within, revealing themselves as the unique sovereign subject of all of history.

Czesław Miłosz, who had personal experience of ideological assimilation and the rebellion to follow, excellently describes the elements and sources of the totalitarian project's power over the human person [*Miłosz*]. Aside from everything else, this project convincingly aspires to absolute control over memory, and not only by rewriting the past. (Miłosz was speaking of the establishment of the Soviet regime in post-war Poland). The project also assumes that there is only one valid means of participation in history, which is conscious participation in the project itself. Everything that isn't spoken in the language of the project will be absolutely forgotten and struck from history — struck out not by temporal acts of the political authority in power, but specifically struck out by the finale of history itself. He who resists the authority of the project over his thinking or language can expect not only physical repression but total liquidation and his own disappearance from the totality of history, which is a secular version of immortality. This disappearance can be more terrible than physical death. History's main punishment is being forgotten by history. Perhaps Hanna Arendt had this same submission to History as the single arbiter of meaning in mind when in speaking about friends and acquaintances who practically in a single moment changed their views after the rise to power of Hitler, she said:

They didn't see themselves as responsible for Naziism; they simply found themselves under too large an impression of its successes so as to stand against the verdict of History as they saw it, in their own estimation [*Arendt*, 55].

Thus, the "law of history" (in the eyes of those who consider themselves its arbiter) swallows up human memory — memory either coincides with its law or vainly endeavours to stand against it, but this resistance is limited and isolated to within the limits of the short, phy-

sical existence of the one resisting. Memory belongs entirely to history thus understood, insofar as history takes for itself the entire mortal life of the human being — his immortality in this life. Memory that does not serve this history becomes meaningless, and history is realized in entirety only in its completion.

The image of the collision between history's strength and the lack of strength of personal, private memory is shown in these lines from the story of the "Bronze Horseman":

O fair Petropolis, stand fast  
 Unshakeable as this great nation  
 So that the elements, at last  
 Subdued, may seek conciliation!  
 And may the Finnish waves now cast  
 Aside hate born of long subjection  
 And not with futile insurrection  
 Disturb great Peter's ageless sleep!  
 (transl. by J. Dewey) [*Pushkin*].

In relation to a history which forgets, memory turns out to be irrelevant. Yevgeny is a victim of the passion of memory, calling out to the powers of history. The competing actors of nature and history, stormy waves and the tsar's will, make peace with each other. But, in this union, there is no place for the person who is oppressed by the memory of the fact that Parasha's house had been there and is no longer there. The incursions of nature and history have, from either side, ganged up against the madman who had the gall to declare his "personal memories" to the heavens. The awakening of madman Yevgeny's memory turns out to be not a flash of consciousness, but just his immersion into an irreparable delirium.

History, in its different dimensions, turns out to be a means of producing ideology, a critique of ideology, a means of existential experience, and the boundary determined by that experience, itself.

### **Personal Memory and the Structure of Subjectivity**

Now let us look at that sort of memory which has traditionally been understood as the heart of personal existence and which, as such, allows its carrier to preserve identity within the flow of time.

In the Modern era (New time), complex, reflective interaction between the apparatus of memory and its place in the reproduction of

the subject primarily occurs on the level of the individual person, as he looks back at his own past. We might call this concept of memory melancholia; we find it primarily in literature and essays. Before this age, there was a general assumption that the rift between the past and the present wouldn't destroy the unity of subjectivity. *The remembering subject* gazes into the melancholy gap "between", he himself always standing and gazing from the perspective of the present on the shore of that gap, no matter how much he wants to hold on to the past. The rift between the past and the present paradoxically affirms the unity of the subject, insofar as he who looks with melancholy into the past, is himself wholly present in the "now". The integrity of this sort of consciousness is established in melancholia. It is specifically for this reason, that the image of that which has been lost must be full of emotion: the past must for a moment become stronger than the present, so that the subject in the present can truly live through the past *as past* and integrate this with personal integrity.

The "modernist" concept of memory (still under formation in the poetry of romanticism), differs from the modern concept precisely in the revelation that the subject in the present is cut off — the part of him which has been cut off is left in the past, and the past itself is hidden in that cut-off part and, therefore, unavailable to the subject for melancholy contemplation. The past is, in a literally sense, "another country", while nevertheless present on the territory of the present and slashing into that territory; but there is no direct route to that other country. Here we are dealing with the drama of memory, as it happens upon a gaping hole in the historicity of subject. There is something within the subject that prevents him from "being himself", placing "the self" itself under question; the metaphorical wound reference rests upon the idea of such a "self", which here is known only in a negative sense. This wound is a fault in the integrity of the subject's history. It is a sort of negative of memory itself: that which has been removed from integral memory and, having been excised, is replaced by various other sorts of growths which themselves now form the history of the subject. This type of conceptualization of memory is actively used in psychoanalysis and other types of discourse which feed upon it.

In this way, the idea of a spontaneously recalled memory of the past becomes subject to radical doubt. Rather than revealing the past, memory hides that which is not appropriate to the subject's history, thereby destroying it. And even that which memory is unable to hide cannot be spoken. Memory has no voice and is, instead, manifest in symptoms.

Both “melancholy” and “psychoanalytic” memory are ways in which individual subjectivity organizes and directs attention to the self. Yet to the same degree, they point to the historicity of the remembering subject. Here, historicity doesn’t result in participation in external history, but rather takes root within the apparatus of subjectivity. And the subject, being constructed around his personal historicity and searching for that historicity, supposes that he is the bearer of truth about himself; this “truth” may be terrible or deferred, but is imprinted on the subject specifically as history. This truth is not given, as such, but exists only in acts of reconstruction and interpretation. In these reconstructions, the structure of subjectivity may be bogged down in broad historical narrative, yet at the same time held apart from them.

### Memory as Epiphany

In the attitude of the modernist artist to memory we find an important experience which we might call “concern for integrity”. Here, memory is no longer that which holds subjectivity together; memory no longer supports a unity, but rather points to a rift. It is not a recollection of that which has already been recalled. Memory doesn’t belong to the remembering subject. On the contrary, the recalling subject must decisively transform himself in order to attain the memory which transforms him. But in order to transform himself, that flash of memory which brings time together is necessary. Russian and Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili describes epiphany in the novels of Marcel Proust as the collecting together of “all” time in just such an arc of recollection: within this arc, being, which prior to its fulfilment in symbols and artefacts of recollection had no existence, first appears. There is no memory of the past until phenomena come together as a single crystal as they happen upon the work of memory itself. Epiphany catches a man not in the past, but at the inception of the meaning of the past. In this way, epiphanic memory turns out to be “restorative” in an unexpected sense: it creates an integral whole which has no existence within the linear unwrapping of life. This sort of memory makes the past, which has already gone by, into a present which is breaking in — similar to the end of time, though this end can open up at any point in linear time, and isn’t tied to a common teleology or private history. For instance:

For them (in particular for Proust, whom I have quoted upon more than one occasion for various reasons), artistic production was the “salt” — production, before

the face of which nothing and no one can come to your aid, and before which you must experience resurrection and revival, together with others, i. e. on equal terms with your readers (hence *you* are not the salt of the earth), being reborn with them, out of the ashes of lost time. (The words “lost time” can be taken not as the name of Proust’s novel, here, but in the sense of a general understanding, which designates everything gone by — things in which we have shared yet not thought through completely, not felt in their entirety, not had time to process). I repeat: to be reborn with others in the act of artistic production, or to be resurrected from the ash of lost time — from the ash of the dead and bygone. And no one has any privileges here, because the moment of resurrection itself is in no way designated... in the real structure of the world, in the way in which being is arranged, there are no privileged moments in time. The moment at which resurrection occurs is not designated: any point and any moment in time can be this moment [*Mamardashvili*, 378–379].

The past designated by the work of art has yet to be born; this clearly isn’t that finalizing and justifying sort of past proposed by the ideologies of history. Here the recovery of meaning, to a certain extent, moves in the opposition to history. In this sort of epiphany, man comes into contact with “himself” free of that self, having been freed of the need for justification by a goal/end.

### **Authentic Union**

In the 1930’s, when the historical was all-in-all, we witness attempts to slash through that totality so as to see history, memory and the human condition from another perspective. One such attempt, which had important ramifications for all of contemporary thought, are Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1935–1938) [*Benjamin*]. The perspective from which we now read that work, of course, differs from Benjamin’s own perspective, from which the renewal of history provided a connection with historical materialism. His text, as the author himself instructed us, when read “in the now” [*Jetztzeit*], reveals not a new theory of history, but a new means of subjective being within history as an act of solidarity with the dead. The angel of history in Benjamin’s depiction turns his back on the future and looks with horror at the mountain of wreckage, into which the perishable time of history is turning; in this way the totality of history is turned inside out.

Benjamin revolts against the normative role of the understanding of progress, insofar as this understanding trusts the meaning of the

past to the historical victor. Benjamin has another perspective on the position of the present between the past and the future. For him, the present is a moment which cuts vertically across linear time. “The now” is untethered from any connection with the totality of time being realized by the law of history. The uniqueness of “the now” is found in that it enters into communication with a unique moment in the past, creating conceptual meaning that didn’t before exist. My “now” enters into contact with those whom history has ignored and buried under its avalanches. I give them self-realization not in the sense of imitative re-creation of their severed existence, but by laying out a direct route to the present — a route which was denied them in the past. This is the resurrection of those who were not “on the right side of history”, so as to become its victors; there is a “messianic strength in weakness” that is given to man within history.

The present is connected to the past in union, and fulfils a promise in relation to the past, but not to the past justified by victims and victories which has already been assimilated by the present and serves as its buttress. In every moment of “the now”, a past which did not have a future is unmasked. Specifically, for this reason, the present spills over its own borders and acts directly as messianic.

Benjamin’s perspective on history is eschatological, but this eschatology does not coincide with a final moment which is the end of time. Everything happens “now”. Time ends “now”. All that has not been articulated in the past itself gains a voice in being directed to us, even as we pay attention to it and come into contact with this past in our own present. Benjamin affirms the personal connection of the dead with the living in the act of “saving the past” — an action which cannot be trusted to any law of history, or to any sort of progress which is directed *by* history.

Historical consciousness has always referred to an awareness of values which form the unity of the historical horizon, and has admitted that there is something unfading and enduring in the past; but here, that which is enduring changes. That which endures is that which comes out from under oppression — that which comes out of hiding from under the wreckage. Benjamin is perhaps the first to express the link between the messianic aspect of human life in history and the recovery of forgotten presence; this isn’t the veneration of that which forms the present and guarantees it, but precisely the location and bringing to light *as our very present* that which has been buried.

## Memory as a Performative Act or Event

Now we move from theoretical thought to practical thought, such as is found in poetry. Poetry is concerned with the act of recollecting memory as a mode of linguistic being: it is a performative act of speech (utterance) which, in the act of “saying”, fulfils the very thing of which it speaks.

My proposed definition of the poetic act is controversial. It has long been established and is absolutely valid, within the bounds of such definition, to assume that language’s poetic function is primarily addressed to language itself, in an autoreferential fashion: “The poetic is present when word is felt as word itself, and not only as the representation of that of which it speaks or as a release of emotion” [*Jacobson, 118*]. But it is also possible to suppose that the poetic dominant centrepiece of a word liberates a specific, active element in a given utterance; such an active element would then be distinct from the social function of a typical performative (act or utterance). At base, performatives (performative actions, or utterances) are acts which happen due to the objective authority of the speaker within objectively set boundaries of a given situation [*Austin*]. In this sense, poetry is always a self-proclaimed performative act. No one has given the poetic word the right to establish a certain state of affairs. This is both the meaning and the paradox of poetry’s aspiration: it is an act of speech which comes to be not in the authorities given to the poet; rather, the act itself affirms these authorities in the aspirations of those who hear and recognize his words. The hearer of poetry recognizes and establishes the rights of that which is heard. The reader/listener accept upon themselves the liability of the poet’s speech at the instant when it is spoken out and heard, independent of whether reader or listener possess the ability to decipher the poetry’s contents. And the poet himself is in the same sort of relationship to that which is said in the words of his own speech (of course this is only one aspect of these complex relationships, and we have no intent to deny technical, ethical or any other reflections or proximity in relation to the text).

In the case which I want to consider, a certain sort of event is considered as a performative act. This act is the recovery of those whose memory has been erased from the number of the living. The poet speaks with the dead. The dead impute speech to the living — speech which must take on life not in a nostalgic sense as some sort of bygone image, but in direct concern for the dead themselves. This is an authentic means by which the dead are present “now”, among the living.

Between 1930 and 1950, just when it seemed as if all memory had been ideologically colonized, several poems which “recover memory” in this way were written in Russian. These poems take upon themselves the personal establishment of a connection between the living and the dead.

Our first example is a poem by Boris Pasternak: “In Memory of Marina Tsvetaeva” (1943).

Dismal day, with the weather inclement.  
Inconsolably rivulets run  
Down the porch in front of the doorway;  
Through my wide-open windows they come.

But behind the old fence on the roadside,  
See, the public gardens are flooded.  
Like wild beasts in a den, the rainclouds  
Sprawl about in shaggy disorder.

In such weather, I dream of a volume  
On the beauties of Earth in our age,  
And I draw an imp of the forest  
Just for you on the title-page.

Oh, Marina, I'd find it no burden,  
And the time has been long overdue:  
Your sad clay should be brought from Yelabuga  
By a requiem written for you.

All the triumph of your homecoming  
I considered last year in a place  
Near a snow-covered bend in the river  
Where boats winter, locked in the ice.

\* \* \*

“Til present day I cannot fathom  
The thought that you have passed away  
Unreal as a stingy millionaire  
Amid starving sisters in the light of day<sup>2</sup>.

2. The quatrain transl. by G. Williams. — *Editor's note.*

What can I do to be of service?  
Convey somehow your own request,  
For in the silence of your going  
There's a reproach left unexpressed.

A loss is always enigmatic.  
I hunt for clues to no avail,  
And rack my brains in fruitless torment:  
Death has no outline sketch at all.

Words left half-spoken, self-deception,  
Promises, shadows—all are vain,  
And only faith in resurrection  
Can give the semblance of a sign.

Step out into the open country:  
Winter's a sumptuous funeral wake.  
Add currants to the dusk, then wine,  
And there you have your funeral cake.

The apple-tree stands in a snowdrift  
Outside. All this year long, to me,  
The snow-clad city's been a massive  
Monument to your memory.

With your face turned to meet your Maker.  
You yearn for Him from here on Earth,  
As in the days when those upon it  
Were yet to appreciate your worth (transl. by A. Miller)  
[*Pasternak 1990, 199–203*].

Pasternak speaks of the intent and meaning of requiem in the performative act of transferring the clay of Tsevtavaeva's mortal remains. The unfolding poem *is* this requiem, which describes its own intent and meaning. The poem doesn't only create meaning; it also acts alongside nature as part of the natural process; and Pasternak understands the natural process as Eucharist. The poet participates in this Eucharist as it happens — in a hidden bond within the flow of life, church worship and traditional everyday customs:

Step out into the open country:  
 Winter's a sumptuous funeral wake.  
 Add currants to the dusk, then wine,  
 And there you have your funeral cake.

And after this there was a stanza that was struck out by the author, perhaps because it revealed the paradoxical kernel of his thought:

Immortal, as in Eucharist  
 I seek, collect and often find  
 Frozen leaves in piles of snow  
 Or sense, aloft, in orange's rind<sup>3</sup>  
 [*Pasternak 1989, 545*].

Everything that has form — everything that is embodied — fights back against death and works together for immortality. From the apple tree in the snow to the cityscape which appears to the poet as the headstone of Tsvetaeva's grave at dusk, in memory of her. Everything that is living becomes a memory of the dead, and this memory is the means by which the dead are alive. The inability of death to take a shape ("Death has no outline sketch at all") is transformed not only in the possibility, but even in the necessity for all that is on earth to be that which communicates and communes the dead unto life: "And only faith in resurrection can give the semblance of a sign". For Pasternak, this resurrection creates again and again in the interment of the dead, itself.

Thus, this act of remembrance is in the funeral, the laying of a headstone, and in church worship — all at once. This poem in memory of Tsvetaeva is designed, in the motion of its words, to be the very thing of which it speaks: a requiem, the laying to rest of her body, a memorial celebration and the establishment of her headstone.

We see that in some sense Pasternak contradicts Tsvetaeva's suicide ("Til present day I cannot fathom the thought that you have passed away"). Her death is caused by some anonymous force — the very same force which has no outline sketch. The language used is that of secretarial work, which in having no particular subject, vaporizes the power and responsibility passed on to the self-propelling apparatus of language: "to appreciate your worth". The phraseology of dead language brings her alive in a paradoxical way, in speech directed person-

3. Transl. by G. Williams. — *Editor's note.*

ally to Tsvetaeva. And the poem hinders the action of the anonymous force and derails it. Burial and resurrection turn out to be two acts in a single event: the burial has to happen in order to provide a sign of resurrection which is in fact general, and not only personal. Here again technical language (“a sign”) is used, giving immortality a sense of directed movement (like a sign that appears to guide the way in an off-road setting).

Pasternak describes the burial of the dead as a requirement of the living soul itself in his poem, “Soul”:

My mournful soul, you, sorrowing  
For all my friends around,  
You have become the burial vault  
Of all those hounded down.

Devoting to their memory  
A verse, embalming them,  
In torment, broken, lovingly  
Lamenting over them,

In this our mean and selfish time,  
For conscience and for quest  
You stand-a columbarium  
To lay their souls to rest.

The sum of all their agonies  
Has bowed you to the ground.  
You smell of dust, of death’s decay,  
Of morgue and burial mound.

My beggarly, dejected soul,  
You heard and saw your fill;  
Remembered all and mixed it well,  
And ground it like a mill.

Continue pounding and compound  
All that I witnessed here  
To graveyard compost, as you did  
For almost forty years (transl. by L. Pasternak Slater)  
[*Pasternak 1984, 81*].

Here there are no words about the resurrection of a beloved shadow. The soul, in a frightening sense, churns all into “graveyard compost” for the dead, as if completing the work of nature itself. And nature’s work appears to be something quite in contrast to our typical impression of resurrection. In some sense, that resurrection which nature is able to confer, is precisely mourning and burial. The dead are real to the writer and the reader specifically *as dead* and, paradoxically it is exactly *as dead* that they can enter into personal being in the present.

Anna Akhmatova, who might be called “the poet of memory”, notes at least two different types of memory. The first is a person’s memories of his own past, which is subject to internal blurring and dissolution and is transformed by forgetfulness, estrangement, shame and guilt. This is the sort of memory that comes with reproach and to which reproach is addressed. It is the mortal memory of a mortal man, living out his own personal history within a more general history, and changeable within this history. This type of memory expresses the drama of the immediate historicity of human existence and of tragically exposed “external history”, which is never entirely external, as in the “Leningrad Elegies”:

The *harsh epoch*  
turned me back like a river.  
My life has been secretly changed,  
and flows  
along another course,  
past other landmarks,  
and I do not know my banks (transl. by R. McKane)  
[Akhmatova 1969, 13].

Or:

We realize that we could not contain  
This past in the frontiers of our life,  
And it is almost as alien to us  
As to our neighbour in the flat (transl. by R. McKane)  
[Akhmatova 1969, 89].

But there is another kind of memory. This other memory is liturgical; it buries and resurrects. It is the memory of requiem, and requiem-memory. The voice which speaks in this case isn’t the voice of the

psychologically determined individual. This voice is different. It's like a choir of voices incanting "I"... It is speech which calls out to the dead.

Sometimes the voice of the first (psychological) type of memory melds directly into the requiem-voice, within the verse of a single poem. For instance, in her poem "A Belated Answer" (*In Memory of Boris Pilnyak*, 1938):

All this you alone can guess...  
When the sleepless darkness seethes,  
That sunny, that lily-of-the-valley wedge  
Will pierce the December night's gloom.  
And along this path I'll come to you.  
And you will laugh a carefree laugh.  
But the fir tree forest and the rushes in the pond  
Answer with a kind of strange echo...  
Oh, if I'm waking the dead,  
Forgive me, I can't do otherwise;  
I grieve for you as for my own,  
And I envy anyone who weeps,  
Who is able to weep in this terrible hour  
For the one who lies in the ravine's depth...  
But the moisture boiled off before it reached my eyes,  
My eyes were not refreshed (transl. by J. Hemschemeyer)  
[Akhmatova 1990, 93].

The speaker begins with classical, melancholy poetry and mimetic recreation of the past, as if it is happening here and now. But this elegy is sharply cut off by a direct address of the one who has died. Here we see the paradoxical nature of the performative act of naming and calling out to the one who has died. The "I" of first person expression envies everyone who is able to mourn for all, but in the expression that is to everyone, the impossibility inherent in that affair is *already* being accomplished. The admission that mourning for all is impossible surprisingly unlocks that impossible possibility. Out of a moment of intimately calling out to a single person, a phrase addressed to another turns the scene into a common affair: to cry "For those, who lie at the base of the gulch".

Here we delve into that form of memory which supposes not only the action of a single subject in relation to another whose subjectivity has been taken away, but a *situation of unity, community and fellowship of the living and the dead*. We see just such an overcoming of the

boundaries between the kingdom of the living and the kingdom of the dead in Mandelstam's "Verses to an Unknown Soldier" ("The united comrades of the earthly sphere!") and, of course, in Akhmatova's own "Requiem".

### Remembrance of the Dead as Performative Memory

The addressee of Akhmatova's poem, writer Boris Pilnyak, was executed in 1938 at the shooting range in Kommunarka. In my view, the poem of Akhmatova offers a means of working with memory — something which is clarified, in fact, in contemporary forms of remembrance for the victims of repression by the state<sup>4</sup>.

The poet Olga Sedakova speaks of the annual ritual of "Return of names" at Lubyanka square, in Moscow:

The act of reading lists of names is already something that is well known to people in the church. We do this at every liturgy — we write out and read the names of the living and the dead during the prayers at the Eucharistic liturgy. But there is an enormous difference: the people who we remember at the liturgy are people who exist in our memories. We don't need to "return" them to memory.

But here at Lubyanka we are specifically "returning" people to memory — returning them to memory after they have been ritually forgotten. We are overcoming their second death (of having been forgotten), and this is a sort of resurrection within history. The people who we remember at Lubyanka have been executed twice (which is what my speech is about). And insofar as almost everyone was in agreement that those who were executed should be forgotten, there is an act of repentance in our act of remembering them. Reading out and listening to the names of those who were killed, we are endeavouring to atone for our common guilt. And we see that this is possible and that we can do this together. It is probably this that leads to the unmistakable feeling of cleansing and catharsis.

<...>

This spontaneous act that has arisen — not an act of the church or of some conference — is a rite which has the power of exorcism. It unites the participants in a kind of integral whole. <...> This is a unity in which we trust and respect each other, and are thankful to one another. We feel that we are engaged in a common affair not only in the attempt to recall and return the executed and stricken-from-common-memory to history, to which all people rightfully belong; those

4. Here we consider one such for — "Return of the Names". But we can assume that other such memorial acts, for instance "We would like to each by name..." («Хотелось бы всех поименно назвать...»), "Prayers

for Remembrance" («Молитва памяти»), Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Blockade (День памяти жертв Блокады), also offer a similar sort of shared experience.

who come to the “Reading of Names” are also linked in a kind of common faith and view of the world, and are gathered to profess that faith [*Sedakova 2017*].

In acts of “Memorial” and the case of Denis Karagodin (as well as in the verses by Pasternak and Akhmatova which Sedakova also mentions in her article), Sedakova sees events which are differ from each other, yet have a similar means of “working with grief”: “This work consists in a rite of remembrance through the naming of the executed, in returning to them our debt of compassion and respect, and by a clear delineation of that which has happened” [*Sedakova 2017*].

This work is simultaneously new and traditional, insofar as is returns us to the space of the age before ideology:

The thought of the establishment of an earthly society would be incomplete if it did not also include a place for those who have passed away and their inclusion in a seamless link with the living, not only in the present, but also in the future — an earthly future, however strange this might sound — in the movement of history toward the future.

The fact that this last affirmation may might sound glaringly strange to us is something that we owe not only to the post-Christian character of our contemporary civilization, but also to its post-traditional character, in the broadest sense. The idea of a human society which is in the most real and practical sense in contact with the world of the dead and where the living and the dead are interdependent, is an idea which is inherent in any traditional culture, whether we are speaking of Ancient Greek culture (see Aristotle’s thoughts to the effect that only a poor man would suppose that the dead are indifferent to that which happens on earth after their death) or the most archaic “manic” culture. Dialogue with the dead (not necessarily ancestors) is realized in rituals and is not a private affair of personal piety, but a social practice. In specific, the veneration of “one’s own” dead creates traditional society; in fact, as ethnologists know well, the act of the rite of burial makes a dead person into “one’s own” [*Sedakova 2003, 107*].

And it is true that scholars who study this kind of memory accentuate its non-individual character and its particular social role:

The idea of an “indissoluble society of the living and the dead” and of “memory, which forges a bond” should be considered one of the most interesting and heuristically valuable enquires in the field of personal liturgical memoria (more about this below).

The research of O. G. Oexle has shown that the core study of memoria on any level consists of two particular points: first, that memoria are themselves a form

of relationship between the living and the dead, and secondly, that this is always a collective phenomenon. For this reason, all medieval *memoria* should be considered from both angles: in their religious aspect as the remembrance of the dead by the living, and in their social aspect, as a means of affirming the community of the living and the dead.

The religious and social aspects are united in the main type of memorial rite — the remembrance of the dead by the living. There are two main forms of remembrance: the naming of names of the dead (for instance at a liturgy), and the memorial meal. The naming of a name implies a recall to memory and representation of the dead person as here among the living. At memorial meals (in Orthodox Christian practice this tradition is carried on to this day) the dead person is given a place at the table along with the living, from which we can conclude that his or her presence is considered absolutely real. Remembrance, it follows, is a means of expressing the “true presence” (German “Realpräsenz”) of the one who is absent, and again and again underscores the living link with the dead person.

There are two main thoughts at work in the remembrance of the dead: firstly, that death does not cut off human existence, and secondly, that the naming of the dead person’s name is equivalent in value to the presence of the one who is absent [*Arnautova*, 23].

Remembrance affirms community not as something which is simply passed on by former members of the community to future members, but as a “community of the living and the dead” that includes the dead among the number of the current community members and founds the community’s own legitimacy upon the dead, in particular. This type of memory determines a particular means of presence — “the present of dead” (a term which was popularized by German historian, O. G. Oexle)<sup>5</sup>.

And now we can note the exact accordance of the act of the “Return of the Names” with this paradigm. Thus, in the poetic performative act, and in the performative act of remembrance of those whom people did not know and with whom they could not have been acquainted, memory has a sacramental dimension which has never died, but has either been pressed out onto the margins by an age of ideology, or

5. “According to his concept, ‘remembrance’ and ‘*memoria*’ in the Middle Ages signified not only the recall to memory or the ‘revivification’ in a cognitive or emotional sense, but were denoted as specific forms of social and legal by means of which ‘rendered presence’, and ‘restoration of [the dead] to the present moment were established (Vergegenwärtigung)’. The dead belong not only to the past, but have a share in

the present, i. e. they have ‘presence’ in the ‘present’ — die Gegenwart der Toten — in an absolutely real way and, it follows that the ‘present of dead’ presupposes their legal and social status. In a way similar to how the naming of names established a dead person as a subject of community relationship, the striking of his name from the ‘books of the dead’ signified the total destruction of his personhood” [*Arnautova*, 24].

appropriated by it. Here the naming of names means the reestablishment of lost, decayed or cut off relationships, and it creates community. This doesn't only create a reference to the past, but establishes a present.

The dead who are remembered are carriers of the legitimacy of the community of the living. The community establishes its own autonomous (e. g., with a law unto itself) being, by supporting its unity with its dead; naming the dead and including them in the community makes the dead "their own". This is the social structure of memory. Now we can see something common between the attempts in modernist poetry and the forms in medieval memorial culture, and this common element brings us to the collision in the "difficult memory" of modern man.

### **What is the Essence of this "Difficult Memory"?**

Many participants in the act of the "Return of the names" speak of what is going on as a religious experience. The dead are being returned to the community of the living and are present in that community and, in so doing, truly make it a community. The community of those who remember becomes a community specifically in the establishment of a connection with "other" dead who "belong to no one", and not because of any direct blood ties. And the connection is established by the act of remembrance itself. Of course, this community isn't "real" in the sense of being a fixed system of social status with institutional requirements, as in traditional society. Its sense and means of existence are different and make reference to a subjective aspect which does not coincide with any specific social role or identity.

Who is afraid of this experience?

From what I have seen, the large number of public debates on the subject of repression by the state and victims of repression can be clearly delineated into one of two types, in terms of how they relate to the remembrance of the victims. One type springs from the idea of the existential importance of the presence of the dead among the living, and the other is obsessed with alarm and tends to deny this presence of the dead among the living.

Those people for whom the legitimacy of the existence of the community in time is exclusively supported by the state — or more accurately, narrative, built around the continuity of a single, unified subject of history represented by the state — are in favour of forgetting. It is

the state, in particular, which is the only “real” pipeline connecting the dead with the living, and therefore the state’s selection of “human material” is recognized as final. The bearer of this narrative contradicts the possibility of direct establishment of a relationship with the dead: the dead always have to fit into legitimate and given forms of “proper memory”, and the given forms of “proper memory” are, in their turn, legitimated by the state. The state is the only source and medium of legitimacy. In this view, the victims of a state have no personal potential to be legitimated; they are not able to build society along with others or alongside others, because those who of their own will communicate with the dead have no such right. The symbolic continuity of the state as the only bearer of historic meaning is affirmed, because its victims are swallowed up by state interests which continue to act in the present. The formerly existing forms of metahistorical legitimization of history have collapsed, and “state interest” abides as the only and ultimate interest; the only way to escape the “zone” of this interest is by being foreign and hostile to it.

People for whom the legitimacy of community existence in time is exclusively supported by the state practice a sort of memory which divines and reproduces the perspective of an imagined state and is interiorized by them as disciplined subjects of that imagined state. This same sort of state memory, insofar as I understand, is recreated by performative museums of a new type, which are meant to tell the history of the camps as a history of state-building.

An example of this mental construction can be found in the text of an article in *Moskovsky Komsomolets* in 2 December, 2020, entitled “Stop Showing ‘The ‘Final Address’ Conveyer’”. The article’s author, Dmitry Kuzmin, makes all the basic arguments for a position in support of “state memory”.

These arguments are organized in the following way: first we are asked to look at the fate of each of the separate repressed persons and judge them morally, and make a decision on whether they are worthy of immortalization. In other words, the memory of each victim is immediately made into a performative act as “the memory of a victim who could be an example to us all”. The second step is coming to the discernment that the majority of the victims of repression are not such exemplary people, insofar as they were supposedly (we note, here, that this is a faulty perception) “victims of an internal party battle”, i. e. didn’t suffered as “innocent”, but within the context of a process of cosmic (and almost karmic) battle for retribution. As such, participation in the creation and functioning of that state which destroyed

them becomes a means by which the victims of the state machine are themselves accused, while at the same time making it possible not to call the legitimacy of the state itself into question. Here the “innocent victim” pattern is used, and not a single adult really achieves the status of a complete innocent. This discernment takes on the role of a concessive judgement in the following way: “The truly innocent victim, who has not participated in anything and has not been part of anything, and who can be known for his good deeds and moral character, is a person whom we could justify. But the victims in question just don’t make the mark and can’t really be considered *sufficiently innocent*”. (I am generalizing based on many discussions that I have read). “The innocent victim” in this context plays the role of a para-religious concept, used in order to elevate the apparatus of state aggression to the level of divine judgement which punishes wrong hidden deep within the human heart. Then, at the next stage in the discussion, it turns out that the state which was the source and purveyor of aggression alone has the right to reward people with memory:

Respected officials! Eternal memory on the basis of rehabilitation after death alone seems one-sided and unfair. In order to be immortalized one should have to earn it.

When by your silence you give your consent to the immortalization of all rehabilitated citizens in accordance with their last place of residence, you make them equivalent to Heroes of the Soviet Union, or of Russia, or to Full Cavaliers of the Order of Glory.

In conclusion, I want to say several words about the attempts to make parallels between “The Final Address” project and Gunter Demnig’s project (to commemorate victims of Nazi persecution — translator’s note) which I became acquainted with at the end of the 90’s, as part of the Russian delegation at the laying of the first “Stumbling Stones” in Berlin. There is and can be nothing similar between these two projects! It is blasphemous and cynical to compare the innocent victims of Naziism with the victims of an internal party battle, or of a revolution which “consumes its own children” [Kuzmin].

But why, indeed, should we not consider with such intensity the biographies of various “Heroes of the Soviet Union” or “Cavaliers of the Order of Glory”? It’s quite obvious that they have been freed of such testing only by the simple fact that they have been declared heroes by the state. And “innocent victims of Naziism” by this logic are only innocent because the national socialism of the Nazi state is used as a means of justifying the Soviet state.

As such, those who practice the memory establishing a community of the living and the dead stand against the conviction that the performative right to establish memory belongs to the state alone. Such a connection between the living and the dead, which is established and controlled by the state is built on a hierarchical principle and presupposes that the state only has an exclusive right over its dead as the exclusive subject of history, and is equivalent to state control of the past, present and future.

It is clear that not only the state might have ambitions to such power over the dead; social and political groups might do the same, however a state has exclusive legal power and the possibility of creating the rules for “historical politics”, i. e. ultimate control over the strength of the performative act.

The question might arise as to whether there is any sort of an “ontological”, rather than political difference between the type of cultural memory supported by state structures and/or influential groups, and the experience of remembrance channelled to us through voluntary participation in the community of the living and the dead. After all, it’s possible to say that in either case we are dealing with a question of legitimacy and the production of identity for some sort of group-community in time. People who hold different positions vis-à-vis this question actualize their integration in various different “imagined communities” (in the sense of Benedict Anderson).

I think I would be so bold as to affirm that such an ontological difference does exist, but that it doesn’t arise within the line of political or ideological/conceptual difference, properly speaking. Rather, it is expressed in the work of this different type of “other memory”, itself, and inside the remembering subject. Perhaps this “other memory” for an instant creates the structure of an absolutely different “imagined community”, in which the remembering subject participates. I have already had occasion to write about this:

This sort of memory does not lay the foundations of community in the same way as they were laid in the case of traditional memory. This memory separates, because its focus is precisely on the experience of extreme separation and the loss of a human being’s face turned to people. In so doing, this sort of memory creates the foundation for a different type of community not determined by unity of language, heritage or faith, but as if determined precisely by separateness and separation, itself. In this case, this separation doesn’t imply isolation or the ontological impenetrability of “individuality” but, on the contrary, unites by the very impossibility of further reduction to a foundation. The restoration of a person’s presence

that springs from the retention in memory of that person's annihilation is a sort of sacramental dimension of secular memory. Memory plays the role of theodicy for a world in which theodicy is fundamentally impossible [*Faybyshenko*].

## Conclusion

Thus, we are working with various experiences of memory and remembrance. Psychological memory demonstrates the fragmentation and lack of self-sufficiency of human experience of “the self”, and the fundamental lack of integrity of this experience, which turns into need and deficiency.

Ideological memory presupposes that the past “belongs” to a subject which is forging and finalizing history (for instance, the state) — to one who holds the exclusive right to “tell history's story”.

Through different examples, I try in this essay to describe a third type of memory which is performative and assumes not the ability to recall, but the establishment of relationship with those who are present even in their absence. In this third type of memory, the presence of those who are absent (presently dead) is affirmed in the circle of the living and, itself, creates that circle of fellowship. We might say that precisely the act of memory has become one of the most powerful forms of religious experience available to modern man; this act of memory is the possibility for personal participation in and through an act of epiphany of that which is being remembered in the very moment of memory-making, and forms an immediate union with others.

*Translated by G. Williams*

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