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### From myths to memes

*Transnational memory and Ukrainian social media*

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### **YouTube and Second World War memory**

In her work on the use of photography to represent war, Susan Sontag argues that remembering conflicts is “not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture” (2003, p. 89). While this argument can be applied to nearly all of the conflicts which have taken place since the beginning of the mass distribution of photographic technology in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Keller, 2001, p. 251), the Second World War occupies a special place among all these conflicts. According to David Bathrick, the employment of visuals – both in the form of static photographs and moving pictures – is an “absolutely integral” (2008, p. 1) practice in the representation and interpretation of the Second World War and the atrocities which took place in the course of it. Audiovisual materials have not only served as evidence documenting war crimes during and after the war, but have also allowed the post-war generations to witness the wartime horrors personally. The development of audiovisual technology in the ‘60s and the ‘70s thus became an integral part of the “memory boom” (Winter, 2000) which brought memory of Second World War, and in particular of the Holocaust, into North American and Western European mainstream societies (Hirsch, 2004, p. 4).

In their works on the use of visuals and war memories, Sontag and Bathrick mostly devote their attention to Western memories of the Second World War, but it is beyond doubt that similar processes of memory remediation have taken place in the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc. Here, the crystallisation of the Great Patriotic War narrative was also followed, in the ‘60s and ‘70s, by a rapid growth in the number of audio-visual testimonies of the Second World War, particularly in the form of war movies (Youngblood, 1996; Youngblood, 2010; Talaver, 2013). Since then, Second World War memory has become increasingly mediatised, both in Western and in Eastern Europe,<sup>42</sup> leading to the production of numerous films of various genres and the establishment of massive audiovisual collections of historical materials, which, combined, have resulted in “a globalisation of discourses” (Huysen, 2003, p. 13) about the war.

The advent of digital technology and its development in recent decades has led to the replacement of analogue mass media by digital media as the main source of audiovisual memories. According to Hoskins (2009), this post-broadcast age<sup>43</sup> is characterised by an increased connectivity

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<sup>42</sup> The scholarship on the mediatization of Second World War memory is too extensive to name all the recent studies relevant to this subject matter; however, the following have been particularly relevant to this study: de Kegel (2005). Youngblood (2007), Noakes (2013), Lassila (2013), and Ramsay (2015).

<sup>43</sup> Also known as the post-network era, which, according to Lotz, is characterized by “the break from a dominant network-era experience in which viewers lacked much control over when and where to view” (2007, p. 15). A number of different factors influenced the transition from the broadcast to the post-broadcast state, including increased possibilities for amateur productions of audio-visual materials, new advertisement strategies, and the advancement of digital technology which changed existing patterns of consumption as well as distribution of content.

between forms, agents, and discourses of memory, leading to unprecedented opportunities for archiving and retrieving the past. However, the exact implications of this “democratisation of memory” (Haskins, 2007, p. 418) for the Second World War remembrance culture remain unclear, especially when it comes to post-socialist countries, where war memories are extremely politicized and controversial.

In order to investigate how digital media and audiovisual memories interact with one another in the context of a contentious European past, this chapter examines how the two episodes of the Second World War chosen for the study are remembered on YouTube. The YouTube platform’s impact on the remembrance of past and present conflicts is increasingly recognized: not only is it the world’s largest video-sharing platform, used by millions of users to publish and watch videos, but it also allows individuals to comment on what they watch. Such a combination turns the platform into a veritable “portal of cultural memory” (Hilderbrand, 2007, p. 54) which provides ordinary citizens with an opportunity to share their views on the past, by making and disseminating audiovisual memorabilia, and to express their agreement or disagreement with existing memory practices, by commenting upon others’ creations. YouTube’s strong emphasis on the audiovisual – and not simply visual – component of digital data also makes it particularly relevant for investigating the acoustic mode of remembrance, which, as Carolyn Birdsall (2016, p. 135) argues, until now remains a blind spot in academic scholarship. Combined with the significant popularity of YouTube in Ukraine,<sup>44</sup> these features render the platform a powerful outlet for the remediation of memories, including those related to the Second World War, in this particular post-socialist state.

This chapter begins with a review of the literature concerning YouTube and collective memory: here I devote special attention to studies which tackle not YouTube-based collective memory *per se*, but specifically commemorations of past conflicts on the platform. I will then go on to describe the research methodology employed to detect and analyze YouTube audiovisual tributes to the capture of L’viv and the seizure of Kyiv. There follows an overview of the findings, which opens with the discussion of different genres of audiovisual memories of the Second World War; these genres vary from self-produced requiems, mourning the suffering and glorifying the heroism of those involved in the event, to clips of TV shows which instrumentalize the past, and amateur recordings documenting public historical reenactments. It continues with an examination of the different ways YouTube users interact with these audiovisual testimonies, including both verbal and non-verbal ways of interacting. The chapter concludes that YouTube is frequently used for the propagation of nationalistic interpretations of the past in Ukraine and in Russia, but, at the same time, much like Wikipedia, it

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<sup>44</sup> According to Alexa.com data from 2016, YouTube is the third most popular website both in Ukraine (“Top sites in Ukraine,” n.d.) and in Russia (“Top Sites in Russia,” n.d.).

entertains the potential to democratize collective remembrance of the Second World War.

### 3.1. Literature review

An impressive number of studies exists which examine the use of audiovisual materials in the context of Second World War remembrance. However, these focus mainly on the remediation of war memories from “old,” “traditional” media, such as war movies (Hirsch, 2004; Youngblood, 2010; Gershenson, 2013), audiovisual testimonies (Langer, 1991; Simon, 1998; Shenker, 2015), and documentary films (Bolshakov, 1950; Hicks, 2012; Harris, 2015). In contrast, not much research has been done on strictly digital media and Second World War memory: a few article-length exceptions include works by de Bruyn (2010), Trubina (2010), and Gray (2014). Even fewer studies consider the audiovisual dimension of Second World War online memory; furthermore, the majority of these works focus on one particular aspect of Second World War memory, namely the remembrance of the Holocaust.<sup>45</sup> A number of reasons can be brought forth to explain such a delay in recognizing the growing impact of digital technology on Second World War memory, including the complexities associated with digital data collection and the analysis of multi-media memory; however, one particular reason, which may be significant in the case of memories related to mass atrocities, is the potential fear of “desacralising” (de Bruyn, 2010, p. 59) these traumatic narratives by considering them in the commodified environment of digital media, a context which is also often characterized by an aggressive communication culture.<sup>46</sup>

YouTube’s impact on collective remembrance, though, is becoming increasingly acknowledged. According to Dirk Uffelmann (2014, p. 17), YouTube constitutes a distinct digital memory genre, characterised by the specific “technical conditions as well as rhetorical rules and cultural particularities” I have mentioned above: publishing and storing materials, as well as allowing for individual commentary. A number of studies (Bloom & Jonhston, 2010; Chau, 2010; Waldron, 2013) consider YouTube as an example of online participatory culture;<sup>47</sup> however, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, in their extensive study of the platform (2009), provide a critical assessment of its participatory potential, showing that it can actually lead to the formalization of amateur productions, by propagating select patterns which become dominant when users are led to assume that these patterns will make their video clips more popular and successful.

While the criticism expressed by Burgess and Green should certainly be acknowledged, it is hardly questionable that YouTube’s architecture provides ordinary web users with an opportunity to

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, the study by Anna Reading (2003) on the use of audiovisual technology for Holocaust commemorations and the work by Steve Jones and Paige Gibson (2012) on YouTube clips and Holocaust memory.

<sup>46</sup> Indeed, a number of existing studies consider digital media mainly in the context of Holocaust denial (Rock, 2001; Darnell, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> The concept of participatory culture was introduced by Henry Jenkins, who identified it as a culture which stimulates artistic expression and civic engagement by endorsing “creating and sharing creations” (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 5).

both share their view on the past, by disseminating audiovisual materials, and to express their agreement or disagreement with existing memory practices, by commenting upon others' creations. Consequently, as Knudsen and Stage argue, YouTube "enables the creation of a democratized memory practice" (2013, p. 432). Knudsen and Stage also argue that those opportunities are particularly important in the case of war memories, which are often defined by a small selection of dominant discourses geared towards promoting national unity, and under those conditions the possibility of expressing "public commemorative disagreement" (2013, p. 432) can be viewed as an example of YouTube's democratising impact on the remembrance of past conflicts.

The idea of YouTube's democratising potential in the context of cultural remembrance is further developed by Steve Jones and Paige Gibson (2012) in their study of the "Dancing Auschwitz" YouTube video series<sup>48</sup>. Based on their analysis of a video triptych made by Australian artist Jane Korman and her father – a Holocaust survivor – Jones and Gibson claim that digital media provide an unprecedented opportunity to construct and develop collective memories (2012, p. 127), including those dealing with the atrocities of the Second World War. Similarly to Levy and Sznajder, who argue that digital technologies facilitate new forms of memory which "span territorial and linguistic borders" (2002, p. 91), Jones and Gibson view YouTube as a means of transcending traditional modes of war remembrance. By opening new spaces for memory interaction, they argue, YouTube expands the limits of remembrance, both for individuals and collectives, and creates new commemorative experiences which are much less susceptible to local memory politics and official narratives.

In contrast to these optimistic suggestions, Natalia Danilova, in her study of virtual memorials to British fatalities in Iraq and Afghanistan (2014), argues that the use of digital media, in particular YouTube, can foreclose public discussion of ethical dilemmas by sustaining the mainstream interpretation of a contentious past. Similarly, Stephanie Benzaquen, in her study of audiovisual representation of the Khmer Rouge atrocities (2014), gives an even more pessimistic assessment of the interactions between YouTube and traumatic memories. According to Benzaquen, the platform's entertainment-oriented environment and the aggressiveness of some of its users turns it from being an active outlet for political opinions and historical interpretations into "a battlefield in transnational politics" (2014, p. 805). Finally, Paulo Drinot, in his study of the interplay of memory of the War in the Pacific and YouTube, further dismantles the idea of the platform as an outlet of cosmopolitan memory, arguing that instead of facilitating the production of new global narratives of the past, YouTube more often than not serves as an outlet for "ultra-nationalism inflected by virulent racism" (2011, p. 381).

These divergent evaluations call for the critical assessment, undertaken in this chapter, of

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<sup>48</sup> Original videos are available on Jane Korman's website ([http://www.janekormanart.com/janekormanart.com/16.Dancing\\_Auschwitz/16.Dancing\\_Auschwitz.html](http://www.janekormanart.com/janekormanart.com/16.Dancing_Auschwitz/16.Dancing_Auschwitz.html))

YouTube's impact on Second World War memory, and especially in Eastern Europe, where, as has been pointed out earlier, digital media play an essential role in performing the past. By examining how Ukrainophone and Russophone users interact with Second World War memories on YouTube, the chapter tests both the optimistic and pessimistic assumptions listed above, by questioning the purposes behind these interactions, as well as their potential consequences. While it is hardly debatable that YouTube can, in theory, enrich commemorative experiences and expand the limits of Second World War remembrance, the current study strives to understand to what extent the platform is actually used for this purpose in the Ukrainian context, and whether or not it (also) can give space to less tolerant, or even downright instrumental, views of the past.

### 3.2. Methodology

To collect data for the study, I used YouTube's native search engine to work my way through the platform's huge collection of audiovisual material. On March 4, 2015, I employed two different search queries – “ljvivs'kyj pogrom 1941” and “l'vovskij pogrom 1941” (in Ukrainian and Russian, respectively; both are translated as “the L'viv pogrom 1941”) – to search for videos which could be relevant to the L'viv case study. The same process was repeated on March 12, 2015, when I used two other queries – “bytva za Kyjiv 1943” and “bitva za Kiev 1943” (in Ukrainian and Russian; both translated as “the Battle for Kyiv 1943”) – to find videos which would be relevant to the Kyiv case study. In neither case were YouTube's filters applied for the search, in order to avoid any limitations on data collection.

Despite the significant amount of videos which were returned through the use of the above queries, not all of them were relevant for this study. For instance, of 343 videos returned at the use of the L'viv queries, only a few dozen appeared pertinent to this analysis. The remaining videos were mostly related to other pogroms which took place in Eastern Europe, either during the Second World War (e.g. the Jassy or the Berdichev pogroms) or at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. the Odessa or the Kyiv pogroms), or else to the activities of Ukrainian nationalists (particularly the Ukrainian Insurgent Army); such a wide range of results shows both how rich the selection of historical materials available through the platform is,<sup>49</sup> and how challenging the process of data collection on YouTube, using the platform's native search engine, can be.

In order to identify the videos which would be relevant for the selected case studies, I examined

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<sup>49</sup> One particularly interesting content grouping was related to the so-called “L'viv pogroms” of 2014, a series of attacks on administrative buildings in L'viv on February 18-19, during anti-government protests. While this finding rests outside the scope of this study, it does demonstrate how the memory of the Second World War is appropriated in Ukraine and Russia – and it could thus very well serve as the subject of a separate study on the use of historical references during the Ukraine crisis.

their descriptions as provided on YouTube. In those cases when descriptions were absent, I examined the video's content in order to decide whether or not it should be included in the study. In the end, I identified 40 videos which were explicitly related to the L'viv pogrom, and 50 videos directly related to the Battle of Kyiv.

Similarly to earlier studies, some of which I have mentioned above, on YouTube and traumatic memories (Knudsen & Stage, 2013; Benzaquen, 2014; Harju, 2014), I used web content analysis to examine how the platform was used for audiovisual commemoration of the two episodes of the Second World War on two levels: that of representation (i.e. how the event itself is presented on YouTube) and that of interaction (i.e. how YouTube users interact with the audiovisual representations of the event). In order to examine the first level, I explored the content of the videos, along with their descriptions, in order to understand how the seizure of L'viv and the capture of Kyiv are presented online, and what audiovisual genres are used to encode Second World War memory in the Web 2.0 environment.

For investigating the second level – user interactions with the audiovisual tributes on YouTube – I looked at how Ukrainophone and Russophone users respectively receive these audiovisual memories, by examining the different forms of feedback provided on the YouTube platform. While the majority of studies on YouTube and memory (Drinot, 2011; Jones & Gibson, 2012; Knudsen & Stage, 2013) explore how users interact with each other and with the audiovisual memories verbally – i.e. through the system of YouTube comments – the platform does in fact also enable non-verbal interactions, namely through its view count and “like” or “dislike” options. In this study I thus took both verbal and non-verbal forms of interactions into consideration to investigate Russophone and Ukrainophone user experience in relation to the two episodes, and whether or not their reactions are dependent on the specific audiovisual genre employed to communicate these on YouTube.

### **3.3. Findings**

#### ***3.3.1. Representation***

This section examines the audiovisual representations of the two episodes of the Second World War found on YouTube. Using web content analysis, I identified five genres of audiovisual testimonies which were employed by YouTube users to represent the capture of L'viv and of the seizure of Kyiv: requiems, documentaries, historical records, amateur reports, and shows. The majority of these genres are not unique to YouTube or to digital media in general;<sup>50</sup> however, the use of these audiovisual genres in the context of digital memory of the Second World War and/or war remembrance on YouTube currently remains under-investigated. Below I will explore precisely how each of these genres is used

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<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, the discussion of the most popular audiovisual YouTube genres in the work of Burgess and Green (2009).

for the remembrance of the two episodes, starting with the digital-born genre of the requiem.

*Requiem*s. Requiem rank among one of the most interesting genres in war commemoration on YouTube, given that they employ digital technology in a number of creative ways to produce tributes to the victims of war atrocities. As their name suggests, requiem are videos which deal with death and sorrow. Unlike other genres, which are characterized by a significant uniformity in the way they structure the representation of the past, requiem tend to be more diverse and personalized. While the choice of content varies significantly among videos which can be grouped in this genre, the majority feature historical photos and/or footage, as well as fragments of contemporary documentaries, together with some explanatory texts which provide brief historical notes to the video. Requiem are often accompanied by music, which, in the cases studied, varied from old songs in Yiddish and mournful instrumental compositions, to Soviet military marches, to Russian heavy metal.

The focus on the glorious actions of the Red Army in the course of the Battle of Kyiv was a feature common to three out of four of the requiem videos related to the capture of Kyiv in 1943.<sup>51</sup> The majority of visuals used for the tributes in this category showed Soviet soldiers in action, inexorably moving forward, whereas Germans were usually shown retreating, or dead. Similarly, the corollary explanatory texts described the battle as a brilliant operation, perfectly executed by Soviet troops, which led to significant gains on the Eastern Front. The subject of Soviet losses, however, was almost completely ignored, both visually and textually.<sup>52</sup> Neither photos nor footage showed dead Soviet soldiers, and the only exact figure cited in the requiem which pertained to the Red Army was the number of soldiers who were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union; this particular choice of numbers for citation was found in the 2012 requiem video entitled “Bitva za Dnipro Shidnij Val” [Battle for the Dnieper – the Eastern Wall] (v4itel, 2012). In contrast, the only reference to Soviet losses among all the requiem videos which I have analyzed was found in the video entitled “6 Nojabrja 1943 Goda. Osvobozhdenie Kieva” [November 6, 1943. The liberation of Kyiv] (RMHS, 2014); the requiem did not provide any concrete numbers, but claimed that less than 1% of the Red Army soldiers who fought in the battle were killed. These estimations contrast sharply with some of the contemporary evaluations, according to which Soviet fatalities varied from 240 thousand (37%) (Korol, 2003) to 380 thousand (56%) (Ginda, 2010).

<sup>51</sup> Three requiem which promoted a heroic interpretation of the Battle of Kyiv were the following: “Velikaja Otechestvennaja Vojna – Bitva za Dnepr (1943–1944)” [The Great Patriotic War – the Battle for the Dnieper (1943–1944)] (Ivliev, 2011), “Bitva za Dnipro. Shidnij val” [Battle for the Dnieper. The Eastern Wall] (v4itel, 2012), and “6 Nojabrja 1943 Goda. Osvobozhdenie Kieva” [November 6, 1943. The liberation of Kyiv] (RMHS, 2014). It is worth noting that even in their titles these requiem relied on Soviet memory tropes such as “the Great Patriotic War” and “the liberation of Kyiv.”

<sup>52</sup> It is worth reiterating that the question of Soviet war fatalities remains controversial even today. During the Soviet period, the issue of human losses on the Soviet side was silenced; while during the Perestroika era discussion on the matter was initiated both in public and academic spheres, the evaluations still vary widely, from 26 million (Krivosheev, 1993) to 43 million (Sokolov, 1996).

Similarly, almost all of the eight requiems I examined which dealt with the seizure of L'viv by the Germans in 1941 followed the same structure; however, unlike the above mentioned requiems, which focused on the heroism of Soviet soldiers, the structure of the L'viv requiem videos centred on the subject of suffering – and, in fact, in many of the videos, a gradual increase in the amount of suffering presented to the viewer can be witnessed. The 2012 video entitled “Horrorific Images of the 1941 L'viv Pogrom in Ukraine” (Reynolds, 2012) can be viewed as a model example of this approach. The video starts by showing historical footage of Jews cleaning up bodies in the prison's courtyard, and being humiliated as they work; the degree of abuse, however, is relatively mild at this point. The video then moves on to images of beatings, mainly of Jewish men pursued by angry crowds. Then, it proceeds to scenes depicting women being beaten – first clothed, and successively naked. The last few seconds of the video are reserved for images of dead bodies, which are presented as the final stage of the L'viv pogrom, thus completing the traumatic escalation in the requiem's narration.

The structure of gradually intensifying scenes of suffering is followed not only by requiems on the L'viv pogrom, but also by similar YouTube videos on other pogroms which I have watched in the course of the data collection (e.g. the Jassy and the Zhitomir pogroms), even if many of those videos were produced in different languages. The same structure was found in the Ukrainian video dedicated to the political prisoners killed by the NKVD in the Lonsky prison; in this case, however, the parallel with the pogrom videos bears additional implications. The video bearing the title “Memorialnyj Muzej ‘Tjurma na Lonckogho’” [Memorial Museum ‘The Lonsky Prison’] (ninamity, 2011) borrowed similar footage of Jews being beaten by the crowds, but followed it with images of bodies of Ukrainians killed in the prison. It thus, arguably, not only ignored the issue of the pogrom altogether, but also, at the same time, equated Jewish suffering with the suffering of Ukrainians. Similarly, another requiem to the Ukrainian victims of the NKVD titled “L'viv 1941 Tjurma ‘Bryghidky’” [L'viv 1941 the ‘Brygidki’ Prison] (Antimoskovla, 2009) used the same footage of Jews clearing the bodies from the prison courtyard, but referred to them as Ukrainian relatives of the victims, trying to recover the bodies of their loved ones.

In the two latter cases, the use of the same structure could be considered an instance of theft of suffering – one which originates from what Wilfred Jilge (2006) has termed the ongoing “competition of victims” in Ukrainian society. At the same time, it can be suggested that this focus on pain – or martyr-like heroism in the case of the Battle of Kyiv video clips – can instead be viewed as one of the quintessential features of the requiem genre. Such a specific articulation is not accidental: my observations suggest that, despite involving the most sophisticated use of digital technology among all audiovisual genres identified during my analysis, requiems seem to rely significantly on existing, traditional patterns of media representations of the Second World War. In fact, even where the L'viv

and Kyiv requiems do vary in composition and emphasis, this variation can be explained by the different traditions of war representation upon which they build. The origins of the L'viv requiems can be traced back to the tradition of Holocaust movies, which look into the past and emphasize the deaths and suffering (Hirsch, 2004, p. 18), whereas the Kyiv requiems re-create tropes from Soviet war cinema, which interpreted the Second World War as “a grandiose triumph achieved through the heroism of the Soviet people” (Talaver, 2013, p. 20). Thus, it can be argued that both the L'viv and Kyiv requiems attempted to provide their own specific interpretation of war atrocities and to rationalise these events in the context of Second World War memory, though reviving and recycling the latter's more stereotypical representations in the process.

In order to achieve the desired effects, the requiems tend to create a story which follows a certain logic, one which explains to the viewer what happened – though, significantly, failing to account for *why* it happened. This logic often leads to simplifications, not only in the description of the event, but also in simplified judgements which amount to “speaking for the victims” (Wiesel, 1989). In the case of the L'viv requiems, a certain hierarchy of suffering is imposed on the viewer, a hierarchy which suggests that humiliation is not as bad as abuse, that the suffering of men is not as bad as the suffering of women, and that death is the ultimate consequence of what has been shown to the viewer. Similarly, the Kyiv requiems also propose a hierarchy of meanings: the Great Victory and the selfless service to the Motherland trump the importance of an individual life, and indeed the very notion of individual, personal suffering is almost entirely absent in the Kyiv requiems.

While such simplifications might seem almost inevitable, a few of the requiems examined in my study suggest that the use of digital technology can also provide alternatives to the traditional representations of the Second World War. Unlike the majority of the Kyiv requiem videos, which articulated a sense of triumph and joy, there was one video clip which attempted to problematize the dominant Soviet-style interpretation of the Battle of Kyiv. This requiem, entitled “Bytva za Kyjiv u 1943 roci” [The Battle for Kyiv in 1943] (Didenko, 2013) departed from the established practices of requiem-making by focusing not on active, but on static memory. Instead of framing the event through historical photos or footage – the type of footage showing, for instance, soldiers on the move, and generally footage geared towards instilling a sense of action and excitement in the viewer – the video deliberately chose contemporary photos from the museum of the Battle of Kyiv at Novy-Petrivtsi and the neighboring monument to the Soviet soldiers who fell during the battle. By focusing on these post-battle images (museum stands and memorials) instead of combat images and footage, the video shifted the emphasis from the past to the present. In doing so, it attracted viewers' attention to subjects which were omitted in other tributes, including the importance of remembering not only the victory, but also the sacrifices made to attain it; however, it is worth noting that this video, too, fell short of openly

discussing Soviet fatalities in combat.

In the case of the L'viv requiems, established commemorative patterns were challenged by two videos in particular, both produced in 2011. The first bears the title “Yanina Heshelles–Return’ 2011” (hesedweb1, 2011), whereas the second was called “Dva tango.’ L’vov period okkupacii 1941–44. Holokost” [‘Two tangos.’ L’viv during the occupation 1941–44. The Holocaust] (Spasibo za Zhizn’, 2011). The videos were made by the creative group “Pervaja Zapadnoukrainskaja evrejskaja kinostudija” [The First Western Ukrainian Jewish Film Studio], which is affiliated with the Hasem-Areh, the Ukrainian Jewish Charity Fund. The first video followed one Holocaust survivor, Yanina Heshelles, on her trip to contemporary L’viv, where she had lived during the Second World War. The video combined modern footage from L’viv with historical records of the city in the years of the war; the requiem also included several scenes in which actors revisit episodes from Heshelles’ childhood. Similar techniques were used in the second video, which showed a series of photos related to the pre-Holocaust lives of Jews in L’viv, followed by images of the destruction inflicted by the Holocaust, and then a combination of photos from pre-war and contemporary L’viv, and scenes, again, reenacted in the present.

In contrast to the other requiem videos I have examined, the requiems produced by The First Western Ukrainian Jewish Film Studio were not focused entirely on the event in question – the L’viv pogrom. Instead, both “Yanina Heshelles–Return” and “Two tangos” tended to put the events of 1941 in L’viv in a larger perspective, by referring both to interwar and contemporary Jewish communities in the city. In doing so, these two requiems replaced the simplistic, linear model of suffering (humiliation → abuse → death) found in the other requiems associated with the L’viv pogrom, with a more complex cycle of life and death, in which the Holocaust was positioned not as the existential end of everything – the “black hole” (Levy, 2005) of history – but as one episode of a Jewish history in L’viv which continues to this day.

This focus on the present, albeit viewed through the prism of a painful past, is one of the features which unite these non-traditional requiems with another piece of Second World War memory on YouTube: the “Dancing Auschwitz” series (Jones & Gibson, 2012). Both used similar techniques for this purpose: the “Dancing Auschwitz” series showed three generations of the Korman family dancing at various Holocaust sites across Europe, whereas the “Two tangos” requiem animated historical black-and-white photos with live action performances by the studio’s own members. In an analogous move, the “Battle for Kyiv in 1943” requiem used contemporary photos of memorials and battlefields in order to connect traumatic memories of the past to the present. While at times these requiems demonstrated what Burgess and Green called “a noticeable focus on video as technology, and on the showcasing of technique rather than of artistry” (2009, p. 52) – one example, for instance, is the “Yanina Heshelles–

Return” requiem, where the overuse of color filters and special animation effects looked rather artificial and produced at times a humorous effect which was probably not intended by the video’s creators – it represents an approach to Second World War remembrance which does not reproduce established commemorative patterns, but rather offers an alternative to them, or even challenges those dominant memory narratives.

*Records.* Unlike the requiems commemorating both of the Second World War episodes selected for study, records were used only for representations of the L’viv pogrom. Similar to the requiems, the records used historical footage of the pogrom and of other events of June 1941; however, unlike the requiems, they did not provide any personal comments embedded in the video clip. Records are simply pieces of historical footage, uploaded onto YouTube without any additional interpolation from the video’s uploader. Because of the limited availability of such original footage, there was little variety among the records: in the case of L’viv, the majority of them were based on two recordings – both made by Germans in 1941 – showing the pogrom. The first record was made in the prison courtyard and showed Jews clearing the bodies of Ukrainian prisoners, whereas another record used footage from the *Deutsche Wochenschau*<sup>53</sup> short film on the capture of L’viv. Besides displaying German troops entering the city and the destruction of Stalin busts, the film briefly shows Ukrainians beating Jews, after a significantly longer shot showing the victims of the NKVD massacre found in the prisons.

While the videos’ creators did not add extra content to the records, there was still significant variety in their representations of the events of 1941 in L’viv. Firstly, the length of the records varied, depending on the personal preferences of the author of each clip. For instance, while the majority of records were based solely on the *Deutsche Wochenschau* film, in some cases, the beginning or the end of the footage was cut, resulting in a shorter duration of the record in question. Secondly, despite featuring the same historical record, different video clips were often titled differently: the above mentioned *Wochenschau* film appeared under several names, including “Lwow Lemberg 1941” [L’viv L’viv 1941] (kolodno, 2008) and “L’vov v ijule 1941 goda” [L’viv in July 1941] (andreistp, 2011).

The analysis of the records demonstrated that, similar to the requiems, this particular genre was also used by Ukrainophone and Russophone users to turn YouTube into an arena of competition between different narratives of suffering and victimhood. In the previous section I mentioned how several requiems to the Ukrainian victims of the NKVD instrumentalized evidence of Jewish suffering for the purpose of promoting the image of Ukrainian martyrdom; similarly, a number of records (in particular, the ones uploaded by Russophone users) employed the same strategy to emphasise the suffering of Jews and Poles in L’viv. One interesting case of this competitive strategy was represented

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<sup>53</sup> *Deutsche Wochenschau* [German Weekly Review] was a newsreel series released by Nazi authorities as part of the war propaganda campaign between 1940 and 1945.

by the video titled “Posle evrejskih i pol’skih pogromov vo L’vove 1941 g.” [After the Jewish and Polish pogroms in L’viv in 1941] (Russkij Blok, 2015). The video was supplemented with a description, according to which the bodies shown lying on the streets are those of Polish and Jewish victims of Ukrainian nationalists. In contrast to the title, however, what the video actually shows is Jews gathering the bodies of Ukrainians killed by the NKVD on the prison courtyard.

The use of historical footage for the theft of suffering as well as the numerous instances of manipulation of the records’ names and lengths were not the only problematic aspects of the representation of the capture of L’viv in this particular YouTube genre. It can be argued that the origins of the records render their use for the commemoration of mass atrocities associated with the L’viv event, and in particular the Holocaust, rather questionable: because the historical footage used for these records were produced by German soldiers – or even propagandists – they tend to present the events which followed the seizure of L’viv, in particular the pogrom, under a specific angle. This selective representation is especially controversial in the case of the *Deutsche Wochenschau* film, which in itself is a piece of German propaganda. The lack of proper attribution and/or description of such records on YouTube can make viewers interpret them not as propagandist videos, though, but as authentic pieces of historical evidence – which was in fact the goal Goebbels’ Ministry of Propaganda intended to achieve. This perspective is particularly problematic, considering the tendency of YouTube users to view historical records as documents, which, as Kasper points out in her study of documentality in post-socialist states (2010), makes those materials appear more authentic and truthful to the uncritical viewer.

*Documentaries.* The extensive use of historical photos and footage was also common to the third genre of audiovisual representations of the Second World War found on YouTube: the documentary. This genre comprises non-fictional films which embody “a simulacrum of the perceptual experience of human existence” (Aitken, 2013, p. 2). Most of these films were produced for educational purposes and then uploaded to YouTube, either in their entirety or in fragments. As in the case of the records, such a selective uploading of traditional media content constitutes a recognized pattern of YouTube users’ activity (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 41–42); furthermore, it can be viewed as a specific mode of cultural meaning making, one that John Hartley labeled as “redaction” (2008, p. 26). According to Hartley, redaction can be viewed as a format of production of new material based on editing of existing content (e.g., documentaries produced for TV broadcasts).

While all three genres – requiems, records, and documentaries – used historical material to illustrate their statements, documentaries – unlike the first two genres – usually supplemented these statements with contemporary content, such as commentaries from scholars and interviews with surviving eyewitnesses. Furthermore, unlike digital-born requiems, documentaries usually featured less

of the amateurish digital video-making techniques; such a difference can be attributed to their origins, as most of the documentaries were made for traditional rather than digital media and were not subjected to additional manipulation of their content (e.g., remixing), besides the redactions mentioned previously.

In contrast to the requiems, the majority of which had a similar structure and emphasis, the documentaries propagated different views on the Second World War, depending on their country of origin.<sup>54</sup> These differences reflect significant distinctions between national historiographies of the Second World War in post-socialist countries, in particular in Ukraine and Russia. In the case of the capture of Kyiv, the Russian documentaries usually reproduced the traditional Soviet view of the battle, which emphasized the successful implementation of the High Command's sophisticated strategy and the heroism of the Soviet soldiers. While some of them referred to the heavy Soviet losses, such references were limited to rather abstract statements (e.g., the one about the waters of Dnieper that turned red with the blood of Soviet soldiers) and avoided citing exact numbers. One example of such a narrative tactic can be found in the clip entitled "Osvobozhdenie Kieva ot nemecko-fashistskih zahvatchikov. S'emki 1943 goda" [The liberation of Kyiv from German-fascist invaders. The record of 1943] (RIA News, 2014). Similarly, while some Russian documentaries, such as the one titled "Osvobozhdenie Kieva" [The liberation of Kyiv] (Kovpak, 2013), mentioned that Kyiv was presumably taken in order to mark the anniversary of the October Revolution, others deliberately addressed this notion and explicitly dismissed it as fantasy.

In contrast, the Ukrainian documentaries unilaterally emphasized the significant losses sustained by the Red Army, ranging from 417 thousand to one million dead in battle. Many of the documentaries also accused the Soviet High Command of deliberately seeking to destroy the Ukrainian population by way of criminal field mobilizations, motivated also by the desire to capture the city in time for the anniversary of the October Revolution. The focus on suffering – both of mobilized Ukrainians and of Soviet soldiers *tout court* – was a common feature of the Ukrainian documentaries, often including visceral descriptions of the hardships experienced by Soviet soldiers during the battle.

Many of these descriptions, however, relied on controversial images (for instance the story about German machine-gunners who had to shoot down so many Soviet soldiers that they eventually went mad<sup>55</sup>) originating from individual war memoirs or works of adherents to revisionist views, such as

<sup>54</sup> Unlike the requiems, which were often produced by anonymous YouTube users and, thus, were hard to attribute to a particular country, the documentaries uploaded on YouTube usually included information about their producers. Such information serves as a more reliable identifier than language, because, for instance, a number of Ukrainian documentaries were produced in Russian, not Ukrainian. One example of such a documentary is the clip titled "Bitva za Kiev – Dokumental'nyj fil'm – Inter" [Battle for Kyiv – The documentary – Inter] (Inter TV channel, 2013) which, despite its Russian title, was produced by the Ukrainian TV channel Inter.

<sup>55</sup> One of possible sources of this memory trope comes from the memoirs of Nikolai Nikulin, who describes the unsuccessful operations of the Red Army in 1942 on the Volkhov front (Pekarsh & Pernavskij, 2015). It has, however,

Victor Suvorov (2014) or Mark Solonin (2008). By employing these controversial images, the Ukrainian documentaries evoked that same tendency towards myth-making which was common in Russian documentaries; however, unlike the latter, which relied on memory tropes of Soviet war myths, the Ukrainian documentaries tended to refer to opposite tropes, those of a revisionist tendency. Some of the claims made in the Ukrainian documentaries sounded almost absurd – for instance, about Stalin’s order to arm the forcibly mobilized Ukrainian men with halves of bricks<sup>56</sup> – but were presented by the documentaries’ narrators as statements on par with those of authoritative scholars, whose comments on the Battle of Kyiv were also included in the documentaries.

Russian and Ukrainian documentaries on YouTube differed not only in the factual sense, but also in the way these facts were represented. The majority of the Russian documentaries studied relied on historical footage produced by Germans and Soviets on location, and on contemporary animation, stylized to resemble historical footage. Similar to the requiems, these documentaries were action-focused and brought the viewer into the thick of the Soviet offensive; at the same time, they usually omitted showing scenes of Red Army deaths, or dead bodies in general. In contrast, the Ukrainian documentaries showed a limited use of historical footage, the main focus lying, instead, on historical re-enactments, along with interviews with witnesses, thus making their approach more personal and focused on the present, instead of the past. The subject of death was also much more strongly present in the Ukrainian documentaries than in the Russian ones: the Ukrainian clips not only discussed it frequently, but also included gory images aimed at shocking and thus attracting the viewer’s attention. Such a difference, again, can be explained by the reliance on different memory frameworks: the Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War, with its taboo on the discussion of Soviet fatalities in the case of Russian documentaries, and the revisionist narrative of the Ukrainian ones, with their corollary nationalistic discourses on the victimhood of the Ukrainian people.

Similar distinctions were found in the case of documentaries on the capture of L’viv. While all the documentaries placed the blame for the pogrom on the Germans, who encouraged anti-Jewish retaliations after the bodies were discovered in L’viv prisons, their respective evaluations on the involvement of Ukrainians diverged significantly. For instance, the Russian documentary titled “Holokost Evreev v Ukraine – Vtoraja Mirovaja Vojna v Cvete” [The Jewish Holocaust in Ukraine – the Second World War in Colour] (Istorija Rossii, 2014) argued that Ukrainians were not only glad to meet German soldiers with “honey and bread,” but that many of them were also active collaborators

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found its way into Ukrainian documentaries about the Battle of Kyiv, such as the one titled “Chernaja pehota. Dneprovsko-Kievskaja nastupatil’naja operacija Black infantry Kiev Dnieper-operation” [Black Infantry. Dnieper-Kyiv Offensive Operation] (taes28n2, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Such a claim was made in the already mentioned Ukrainian documentary about the Battle of Kyiv titled “Black Infantry. Dnieper-Kyiv Offensive Operation” (taes28n2, 2012).

and perpetrators of the Holocaust. Similarly, a fragment of a 2001 Russian documentary titled “Cvety Vremen Okkupacii” [Flowers of the Occupation Period] (Grigor’ev, 2001), uploaded to YouTube in 2012 with the title “Period Okupacii Fashistami L’vova 1941–1944” [Period of Fascist Occupation of L’viv 1941–1944] (strubcinaorg, 2012) pointed to the active participation of Ukrainian crowds in the pogrom – though avoiding claims about the widespread collaboration of Ukrainians, unlike in the previously mentioned documentary.

A slightly different interpretation of the L’viv pogrom was provided in the English/Russian language documentary video entitled “N/S Part 06: The 1941 Pogrom in L’viv, Ukraine and Modern Antisemitism” (Reynolds, 2012a). This clip was made and uploaded on YouTube by Daniel Reynolds, also the creator of one of the L’viv-related requiems discussed earlier in this chapter. The documentary, which is part of a larger project by Reynolds called “Nazis/Skinheads: The Holocaust by Bullets and Modern Antisemitism in Ukraine,” connects the pogrom to the NKVD killings of Ukrainian prisoners in L’viv, which is presented as the spark for the start of the pogrom, used by the Germans to ignite the rage of the Ukrainian crowd. At the same time, the documentary also draws parallels between pre-war and present-day antisemitism in L’viv, showing the large number of swastikas found on the walls of the city, and numerous cases of harassment of minorities on the streets.

In contrast to the English- and Russian-language documentaries, which mentioned the participation of Ukrainian civilians in the pogrom, the Ukrainian documentaries ignored this issue almost entirely. Instead, the majority of the Ukrainian documentaries put the most emphasis on the killing of Ukrainian prisoners by the NKVD before the L’viv pogrom. For instance, the Ukrainian documentary titled “L’VIV 1941r Palachi NKVD Lwow Lemberg NKVD Murder Western Ukraine” [L’VIV 1941 Murderers of NKVD Lwow Lemberg NKVD Murder Western Ukraine] (taes28n2, 2013)<sup>57</sup> discussed the brutal torture of prisoners at the hand of members of the NKVD, presenting shocking images of dead bodies with nails in their eyes and ears and thick layers of blood on the prison floors. Similarly, another Ukrainian documentary made in 2009, entitled “Suspiljno-Politychna Sytuacija u Ljvovi, Chervenj” [Social-Political Situation in L’viv, June 1941] (Terytoriiia Teroru, 2014), began with another description of the NKVD killings in the L’viv prisons, followed by the discussion of the popular euphoria in response to the declaration of the Act of Restoration of the Ukrainian state. The only time anti-Jewish reprisals were mentioned in the latter documentary was when a witness of the events in L’viv noted that it was hard to look at not only the Ukrainian patriots hanged by Germans, but also the Jews.

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<sup>57</sup> It is worth noting that the user known as taes28n2 was rather active in uploading audiovisual materials related both to the L’viv pogrom and to the seizure of Kyiv. The user did not provide any personal information about himself besides his country of residence – Ukraine – and his personal mission statement, according to which his purpose is to “call by name” (“taes28n2,” n.d.) those responsible for the Soviet crimes in the Soviet period.

This greater emphasis on the suffering of Ukrainians, together with the deliberate ignoring of the event of the L'viv pogrom, was thus common to a majority of the Ukrainian documentaries examined. In fact, the only instance when the pogrom was mentioned explicitly was in relation to the discussion of the involvement of the Nachtigall battalion in anti-Jewish actions organised by Germans. For instance, the documentary, tellingly entitled “Nachtigall ta Shukhevych ne Robyly Pogromiv 1941 Roci – Nachtigall i Shuhevich ne Delali Pogromov 1941 g” [Nachtigall and Shukhevich Were not Involved in the Pogroms of 1941] (taes28n2, 2013a) claimed that the L'viv pogrom was a German provocation, and that the OUN leadership was not involved in it. Another documentary titled “Nimecjska Okupacija Ljvova” [German Occupation of L'viv] (Molfarius1, 2012), built on a fragment of a larger documentary cycle called “Ljviv: Khroniky Drevnjogho Mista” [L'viv: Chronicles of an Ancient City], also preferred to omit the issue altogether by opening the narration on the German occupation with the beginning of August 1941 – not June. Consequently, while the documentary did once mention the pogroms in L'viv, it did not go into any detail, moving immediately to the discussion of the L'viv ghetto set up by the Germans and citing instances of Ukrainians helping Jews.

Together, these observations point to one significant problem with the documentary genre which arises in the context of its use for Second World War remembrance on YouTube. The majority of the documentaries – especially the ones in Ukrainian and Russian – were originally produced for traditional media and with a (mostly) national audience in mind; consequently, even while clips of this genre were subjected to redaction – which can also be viewed as a form of production of new content – they still remained heavily dependent on their respective, national historiographies of the Second World War. Unlike the requiems, which demonstrated the potential to challenge established views on either of the two episodes in Ukraine, or at least to provide an alternative interpretation of the events in question, the majority of the documentaries were simply reiterating dominant historical discourses online. While even under these circumstances their presence on YouTube can be viewed as a part of that democratization of the post-socialist mnemonic landscape in Ukraine pointed out in previous sections, the phenomenon can also, at the same time, again be seen as another instance of propagation of hegemonic war narratives which facilitate appropriations of Second World War memory and the contemporary marginalization of alternative views on the past.

*Shows.* The appropriation of the past was also common to shows, another memory genre identified in my study. Much like documentaries, shows are pieces of audiovisual content produced for Ukrainian and Russian TV channels. However, in the case of shows, the content originated either from entertainment programmes or news reports. Unsurprisingly, these shows also tended to promote the dominant discourses on the Second World War upheld in mainstream Ukrainian and Russian societies, but in comparison with documentaries, they did so in an even less critical way. This less critical, and

more entertainment-focused, approach, as Vera Zvereva (2004) argues, is common to both Ukrainian and Russian journalistic shows, and sets them apart from the genre of academic documentaries, in spite of the fact that both are produced for largely the same TV channels. In some cases, these shows went as far as to propagate conspiracy theories based on non-historical sources, such as, for instance, blaming Jews for the Soviet repression and destruction of the Ukrainian nation.

One example of the divide between shows and documentaries was the video titled “Korchyns'kyj pro Babyn Jar: Khotilosj by Pochuty Vybachennja Jevrejiv Pered Ukrajin'cjamy” [Korchynsky on Babyn Jar: We Wish to Hear that Jews are Sorry for Ukrainians] (Yar Babyn, 2014). The video was a part of a popular 2011 Ukrainian television talk show featuring a speech by Dmytro Korchynsky, leader of the Ukrainian nationalistic organisation “Bratstvo.” In a passionate 3-minute speech, Korchynsky touched on a number of topics, including the Jews’ responsibility for the destruction of the Ukrainian people, the active participation of Jews in the German–Soviet war on the side of Germany, and, finally, he concludes that Jews must ask for forgiveness for the Holocaust. As a case for his arguments, Korchynsky used photos from the L’viv pogrom and claimed that while the pogrom did take place, existing evidence (again, in his view) shows that the victims were not Jewish, but Ukrainian.

Similar examples of memory appropriation can be found in shows which originated from news reports, in particular ones related to the annual celebration of the capture of Kyiv by the Red Army. For instance, the video titled “Bytva za Kyjiv – ‘Kyjiv's'kyj Kotel’ Vlady || Anna Kibenok” [Battle for Kyiv – ‘the Kyiv Encirclement’ for the Government || Anna Kibenyuk] (TVi, 2012) was produced in 2012 for the Ukrainian TV channel TVi. In the video, journalist Anna Kibenyuk drew parallels between Ukraine’s then ruling party – the Party of Regions – and the Nazis who occupied Kyiv, suggesting that the Party of Regions needed to be expelled in a new battle for the Ukrainian capital. In a similar manner, in a news clip entitled “Kiev Otmechaet 65-ju Godovshhinu Osvobozhdenija ot Fashistov” [Kyiv Celebrates the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Liberation from Fascism] which was originally produced for the Russian TV channel “Rossiya” in 2008, commentators complained about the nationalistic distortions of history in Ukraine, citing as evidence the absence of red flags or greetings in honor of the Red Army on the streets of Kyiv on the anniversary celebration.

*Amateur reports.* Unlike the previous audiovisual genres usually found for both cases studies, I was not able to locate any amateur reports related to the seizure of L’viv; instead, all videos of this particular genre were related to the Battle of Kyiv. Similar to the show genre, amateur reports dealt exclusively with present day content; however, in contrast to shows, which were produced by professional journalists for Ukrainian and Russian TV channels, amateur reports were videos made by ordinary people. Like requiems, amateur reports can be viewed as examples of “user-created content” (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 42); yet, compared with videos of the requiem genre, which often saw

experimentation with video technology for the sake of self-expression, amateur reports were of a more mundane nature and usually consisted of short (40–60 seconds), often non-edited records made with the help of mobile devices and subsequently uploaded, unretouched, on YouTube.

A central feature of such amateur reports, which contrasted with the often obtrusive appropriation of memory of the Battle of Kyiv found in other YouTube genres, particularly in the shows, was the almost complete absence of commentaries in the recordings themselves. While this feature limits their interpretative value, the volume of such reports – found to be the most common type of audiovisual representation of the Battle of Kyiv on YouTube – points to their significant role in the remediation of Second World War memory, and are thus deserving of closer study.

The majority of amateur records I examined in the context of the Kyiv case dealt with the celebration of the city's liberation, emphasizing the importance of this event for Ukrainian and Russian users, who considered it significant enough to be filmed, uploaded, and shared online. The analysis of these amateur reports also indicated which aspects of offline commemoration attracted the greatest interest from those in the audience who had access to video-recording devices. One particular example of clips of this genre which was found on YouTube is the video titled “Rekonstrukcija Vozdushnogo Boja! Bitva za Dnepr!” [The Reenactment of Aerial Combat! The Battle for the Dnieper!] (Territorija video, 2013). This short video – lasting only 1:21 minutes – was recorded in Ukraine during the official celebrations of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Kyiv by the Red Army. Like the majority of other amateur reports, this video focused on the historical reenactment of the Soviet offensive on the Lyutezh bridgehead, and demonstrated the audience's special fascination with the use of authentic aircrafts from the Soviet and German military.

While the majority of the amateur reports examined showed scenes from historical reenactments, one specific group of these dealt with museums dedicated to the history of the Second World War. One example is the clip titled “Tajemnyci Rejkhu i RKKA v Muzeji” [The Secrets of the Reich and Red Army in the Museum] (novasichTV, 2011). The video was shot in the museum of the Battle of Kyiv in the village of Novy-Petrivtsi and showed several of the museum's expositions. Unlike the reenactment reports, this video – and museum reports in general – included vocal commentary from the video's producer, who, in this case, briefly described the items showcased; these commentaries, however, tended to be rather more descriptive in nature (e.g., “Here we can see photos” or “Look, German weapons!”) and provided little information on the historical event the items were meant to represent.

The examination of this last genre concludes my review of the five audiovisual genres which are most employed by YouTube users in the context of Second World War remembrance. The findings of this section suggest that YouTube hosts different narratives which vary significantly in their interpretations of the two events. The platform's ability to accommodate divergent views on the past

and articulate a variety of emotions, ranging from grief to pride, supports earlier suggestions (Jones & Gibson, 2012; Knudsen & Stage, 2013) about YouTube's potential for the democratization of collective remembrance. The co-existence of contradictory narratives on the same platform, however, does not necessarily lead to the formation of a new cosmopolitan and pluralist view on contentious pasts, as some have argued. In contrast, my findings suggest that, as in the case of other historical wounds (Drinot, 2011), digital clips, especially those dedicated to the Battle of Kyiv, more often than not replicate national and nationalistic interpretations of particular episodes of the Second World War. Consequently, instead of viewing YouTube as the source of new digital forms of transnational remembrance, it seems more reasonable to consider it as a prism through which better to compare how the past is viewed in Ukraine and in Russia.

### **3.3.2. Interaction**

This section examines how YouTube users interact with audiovisual memory of the Second World War in both verbal and non-verbal ways. It begins with the non-verbal forms of interaction: these include viewing, liking, or disliking the video in question. As Gerlitz and Helmond argue in their study on Facebook and the Like economy, the use of non-verbal metrics not only allows to “metrify and intensify user affect and engagement” (2013, p. 1361), but also strategically exposes those parameters to other users, evoking further interactions with specific materials. An example of this is the “rich get richer” principle: when digital content attracts a large number of likes – or other forms of user engagement, such as sharing and reposting – the item continues to attract even more likes, and the breadth of users' interactions increases exponentially. While these forms of feedback have perhaps less interpretative value than explicit comments, they exhibit general patterns of interaction as well as point to genre-dependent variations in the way users interact with the representations of the past. After examining non-verbal feedback patterns, the section moves on to the examination of verbal reactions, in the form of comments published under the YouTube videos; as has already been mentioned earlier in the methodology section, the analysis of YouTube comments constitutes the most frequently used tool to assess users' interactions with memory narratives present on the web platform (Drinot, 2011; Jones & Gibson, 2012; Knudsen & Stage, 2013).

*Non-verbal interactions.* Table 9 indicates that users' attention is distributed extremely unequally across the individual YouTube videos used to represent the Second World War. While the view count for some of the clips ran into the hundreds of thousands, other clips had been viewed only a few dozen times. The same inequality – albeit on a smaller scale – was found in the distribution of likes and dislikes: while the majority of videos were neither liked or disliked, or had received one or two likes, other videos provoked much stronger emotional reactions. While no statistical tests were done, all non-

verbal forms of feedback appear to be correlated – that is to say, videos with larger view counts tended to receive more likes/dislikes, as well as comments. Further research is still needed, however, in order to empirically prove or disprove this suggestion.

**Table 9. User interactions with L'viv and Kyiv videos (by genre)**

	Minimum	1 <sup>st</sup> Quartile	Median	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quartile	Maximum
Requiems					
Views	449	810	2 009.5	35 354.5	41 948
Likes	3	4.5	9	49	77
Dislikes	0	0.5	1	12	25
Comments	0	1	5	38.5	312
Records					
Views	54	238	1 344	4 266	82 688
Likes	0	1,5	8	11	65
Dislikes	0	0.5	1	2.5	23
Comments	0	5	4	10	522
Documentaries					
Views	49	596	1 049	8 121	159 621
Likes	0	1	11	41	258
Dislikes	0	0	0	9	99
Comments	0	0	2	11	167
Shows					
Views	95	148	241	400	519
Likes	2	2	2,5	3	3
Dislikes	0	0	0	1	2
Comments	0	0.5	1.5	2.5	3
Amateur reports					
Views	29	95.5	155.5	1 116	19 559
Likes	0	0	0	2	11
Dislikes	0	0	0	0	2
Comments	0	0	0	1	2

While the highly unequal reception of different clips is not surprising and, thus, cannot be viewed as a finding in itself, it is worth pondering why some of the clips attracted more attention than others.

While it is hard to explain this on the basis of YouTube data, a qualitative reading of the videos allowed me to consider several factors which might play a role in users' preferences. My observations suggest that the length of a video's presence on YouTube was not an influential factor: some of the most viewed videos were uploaded to YouTube in 2011/2012, but many others appeared around the same time, without incurring as many views. Instead, the choice of language seemed to be more relevant: the majority of the most frequently viewed videos used either English/German in their titles ("Lemberg 1941") or a mixture of languages ("L'vovskij Pogrom 1941 Goda / Lvov Pogrom in 1941"). This strategy allowed the videos's creators to attract not only Ukrainophone and Russophone, but also Anglophone or Germanophone users. Even though the latter would not necessarily have been able to understand the language spoken in the videos, they still experience the music or visuals therein, which would be especially true in the case of the comparatively language-free requiem genre.

The most important factor linked to the popularity of a given clip would in fact appear to be genre. Table 9 suggests that requiems and documentaries attracted significantly more user attention – both in terms of views and explicit responses – than amateur reports and shows. While there are many possible reasons for this kind of distribution of interest among genres, I would venture to suggest that one of them could be the more emotional and authentic commemorative experience provided by requiems and documentaries, which may result in a reverberation of affective states on and off YouTube.<sup>58</sup>

Unlike reports and shows relating the content to contemporary commemoration practices, which tended to provide brief – and usually quite arid – commentary on the two episodes, both the requiem and documentary types of videos were often affectively charged, as they shared a wide range of memorabilia with the viewer, varying from historical photos to interviews with eyewitnesses. They also made active use of sound, which, as has already been noted in the introduction to this chapter, constitutes an important feature of digital tributes on YouTube. The use of sounds, such as Soviet war marches in the requiems, or sad instrumental motifs in the Ukrainian documentaries, is another factor which mobilizes interest among viewers of clips of these two genres, who experience what Thompson and Biddle call "affective transmissions" (2013, p. 5). Unfortunately a more in-depth examination of the reasons behind the attractiveness of a particular genre for non-verbal interactions remains beyond the scope of the current research, though it is certainly deserving of a separate study.

*Verbal interactions.* Unlike non-verbal forms of interactions, which pointed to a number of differences in the reception of different genres of audiovisual tributes to the Second World War, content analysis of verbal interactions (i.e. comments left by viewers) indicated a much lower inter-

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<sup>58</sup> For more information about the interactions between digital media and affective states see works by Karatzogianni and Kuntsman (2012) and Massumi (2002).

genre variety. Instead, the majority of verbal responses, independently of the video's genre, expressed negative feelings, varying from anxiety to rage, whereas positive emotions were expressed quite rarely. The content analysis of the comments suggests that users' reactions to audiovisual representations of both episodes of the past mainly revolved around three subjects: the current political situation in Ukraine, the struggle for historical truth, and sympathy for the victims of the war (whomever these were perceived to be).

The translation of Second World War memory into the more recent context of crisis in Ukraine was a dominant subject in the comment sections of the Kyiv and L'viv videos ("*mnogie kadry gorjashbih hat, snjaty kak segodnja – letom 2014?*" [Many images of burning houses look completely like today – in summer 2014?] (xtyjlx, 2015)), sometimes directly framing the post-Euromaidan Ukrainian government as successors to Nazi Germany ("*S prazdnikom Kievljane! Svobodu Kievu i ruskomu i ukrainskomu narodu ot majdano-gej-fashistov!*" [Greetings, Kyivites! Freedom to Kyiv and the Russian and Ukrainian peoples from Maidan's homosexual-fascists!] (Evgeny 161, 2015)). Many comments compared the Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine to a military defeat ("*Kak zhe tak v 1943 godu pobedili a v 2014 godu sdali bez boja i komu?*" [How is it we won in 1943, but surrendered everything without a fight in 2014, and to whom?] (Peshhur, 2015)) and expressed the desire to reclaim what was lost ("*kak by ne prishlos' po novoj osvobodzhat*" [Seems like we should liberate it again] (Evil Ufo, 2015)).

The second most common type of reaction revolved around the question of historical truth and the (in)adequacy of current commemorative practices related to the Second World War. Unlike comments of the first type, which were produced mainly by Russophone users, these reactions appeared to be distributed equally between Ukrainophone and Russophone viewers. Both categories of users were particularly active in responding to the interpretations provided in Ukrainian documentaries. While a number of users praised the revision of the traditional Soviet narrative on the Battle of Kyiv ("*OSJ CE potribno pokazuvaty po TV na '9 maja,' a ne moskovsjku khrjenj*" [THIS should be shown on TV on 'May 9,' not the Muscovite shit] (OmyLeg, 2014)), others were slightly more critical ("*nu suka, pidor, s pervoj zhe frazy – pizdez! davno zhe dokazano, chto Kiev brali ne special'no k 7-mu nojabrja, tak sovpalo... huesosy antory, gandony liberasticheskie, rot vash ebal v porjadke ocheredi!*" [well you bitch, you fag, from the first sentence – you are fucking up! It has been proven already long ago, that they took Kyiv not especially for November the 7<sup>th</sup>, it just so happened... cocksucking authors, liberal condoms, get fucked in the mouth one by one!] (osjabender, 2015)). The majority of comments of this type promoted a particular interpretation of the Battle of Kyiv, either from a Ukrainian or Russian mainstream historiographical point of view; there were also a few reactions, however, which criticized the nationalistic tinting of the past in general (e.g. "*Vbros dlja ocherednogo razzhiganija nacional'noj problemy Rossijan i Ukrainev*" [Another provocation for igniting national strife between Russians and Ukrainians]



(“*Ssyklyjavaja nacija, da i familija u nib na ‘ko,’ idite k lesu, pidarasy, ne brat’ja vy nam, predateli !!!!*” [A nation of cowards, whose surnames end in ‘ko,’ go to the forests, fags, you are not our brothers, but traitors!!!!] (Die, 2015)) and/or homophobic nature (“*pidorasty krasnopogonnye nenavizbu bljadi pribvostni ebanogo lysogo pidora i churki usatogo*” [Faggots with red epaulets, I hate you, you are the whores of the fucked bald fag [Lenin] and the mustached bastard [Stalin]] (theak1227, 2014)). As much as the resulting environment could in theory be identified as an “interactive commemorative space” (Knudsen & Stage, 2013, p. 420), the metaphor of Drinot, who likened comments on YouTube to “a nasty shouting match between anonymous posters” (2011, p. 371), seems to be more appropriate here. These observations also hold true for topics other than the Second World War: as Oegema et al. argue in their study of Dutch internet fora, online discussion spaces often serve as breeding grounds for feelings “that are at odds with mutual respect, mutual understanding, and democratic problem solving” (2008, p. 55).

My findings suggest that non-verbal interactions with audiovisual representations of the Second World War varied depending on the genre of the given video: requiems and documentaries provoked more emotional reactions and attracted more attention from YouTube users than shows and amateur reports. In contrast, verbal interactions showed little variety across genres, as the majority of comments expressed negative emotions, often in the form of aggressive statements addressed to the video makers or to other YouTube users. The predominance of such reactions – as well as the tendency for them to be framed in nationalistic and/or homophobic terms – problematizes the idea of using social media as a commemorative space.

While some users employ YouTube for what could be seen as attempts to overcome historical controversies by debating over a contentious past, others, as I have shown above, use the platform to appropriate the memory of, for instance, the Battle of Kyiv in order to frame the current Ukraine crisis and simultaneously dehumanize their opponents – real or perceived, physical, historical or virtual. Consequently, while it is hardly debatable that YouTube provides a variety of opportunities for interacting with different visions of the past, the fact remains that these interactions are frequently hostile and aggressive, thus achieving little progress in discussion. However, despite the aggressiveness of its environment, YouTube still remains a space in which Ukrainian and Russian internet users can discuss their contentious past and its relation with the present, which is a particularly valuable opportunity in the context of the ongoing crisis between two countries.

### 3.4. Conclusions

The findings of this chapter suggest that YouTube facilitates the remembrance of contentious pasts by opening up a new space for interaction – a space which is less limited by national borders than offline

commemorative spaces. While it might be overly simplistic to view the internet as a de-territorialized and de-politicized space – particularly considering the well-documented tendency, which we have also seen above, of projecting national feelings into cyberspace (Kuntsman, 2009, p. 17) – YouTube proves itself able to accommodate different views of the past, allowing distinct historical narratives to be freely represented and shared online. In the case of the two episodes of the Second World War examined in this study, this results in a co-existence of Soviet, Russian, and Ukrainian interpretations of the same event on the same digital platform. Even while these interpretations are not necessarily represented in equal proportions, the variety of digital tributes on YouTube to the seizure of L’viv and the capture of Kyiv contrasts positively with public memory practices which, as we have seen, tend to promote one-sided views of the events whilst ignoring alternative interpretations, both in Ukraine and in Russia. Consequently, my observations align with those made by Jones and Gibson, who argue that YouTube has a potential to enrich the remembrance experience by enabling “a cultural exchange of shared experience that more traditional forms of remembrance are unable to provide” (2012, p. 127).

At the same time, my findings suggest that the digital remediation of war memories does not necessarily lead to the formation of new cosmopolitan narratives of the past which might transcend “ethnic and national boundaries” (Levy & Sznajder, 2002, p. 88). Instead, even in the transnational space of digital media, memory of both historical episodes is predominantly represented in terms of national – and often nationalistic – interpretations of the Second World War, while the alternative versions garner comparatively little attention from most internet users. Similar to what has been observed in the Latin American context – where digital representations of historical traumas are also largely determined by local historiographies which portray these traumas in highly contradictory ways (Drinot, 2011) – Ukrainophone and Russophone users tend to employ YouTube not to challenge national narratives of the past, but to disseminate and propagate these same narratives online. While these users do interact with each other through the platform, these interactions are often limited to offensive comments which challenge opponents’ views in an obnoxious way, impeding rather than stimulating discussions about the past. Consequently, instead of constructing new narratives about a contentious past, YouTube user interactions often merely reiterate established practices of war commemoration in Ukraine and Russia and, thus, contribute to their conservation.

Nevertheless, as much as YouTube discussions may be permeated by “user flaming and crassness” (Hess, 2009, p. 431), this does not necessarily invalidate the platform’s potential for democratizing war remembrance. Despite the aggressive comment culture on YouTube, which at times turns the platform into a “battlefield in transnational politics” (Benzaquen, 2014, p. 805) often permeated by hate speech, it serves, at the same time, as a space where predominant discourses of the past can potentially be disputed and scrutinized. This opportunity for expressing public

commemorative disagreement with dominant memory narratives is particularly important for post-socialist countries, where war memories are often unconscionably politicized and regularly instrumentalized for collective mobilization. Under these circumstances, social media platforms such as YouTube can serve as a space for political and cultural self-expression, thus forming a vantage point for the comprehensive assessment of contentious pasts and the establishment of more pluralistic narratives of the Second World War in Ukraine and Russia.