

The background features a series of concentric circles in light gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a ripple effect. A large, solid red speech bubble is centered on the page, pointing downwards. The text is contained within this bubble.

# REENACTING TRAUMA: WORKING WITH DOCUMENTARY CHARACTERS THROUGH FICTION FILM

PHD PROJECT BY ANASTASIYA MAKSYMCHUK

## Introduction of the project

- Phenomenon of reenacting trauma as a compulsion in human psychology was described back in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Freud (Freud & Gay, 1990)

According to Freud's Thanatos concept, human behavior is not only explained by the pleasure drive, but also death drive. In his essay Freud theorizes repetition, aggression, compulsion, and self-destruction.

- Developed later by Jung and others: from compulsion to repeat trauma towards attempts to transform trauma through reenactment.

Cathy Caruth: "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on." (Bennett, 2005, p.40)

"The unconscious cannot tell the difference between a "real" act and a symbolic one." – *Owning Your Own Shadow* (Johnson, 1994, p.22)

# Introduction of the project

- Reenactment and ritual connection

Misconception inherent to equalizing ritual to a non-transforming and non-transformative practice (Couldry, 2005). In classic rituals participants reenact what their ancestors did, therefore becoming connected with the archetype behind the reenactment. Repetition of certain formal actions, preservation of narrative through its repetition, extracting meaning beyond practicality of action, collective cohesion and feeling of belonging make reenactment a form of ritual.

In a similar nature to ritual, Blackson (2007) observes how reenactment is known to be a dynamic process.

- Media adapted these practices in order to work with memories / through memories.

Contemporary cultural events have a ritualistic nature, and that they become more and more mediatized (Cui, 2019)

Trauma needs ritual as trauma needs media in order to “frame” itself, and express itself. Mourning rituals described by Bennett (2005, p.58)

# Introduction of the project

- **Mediatization of memory.**

Due to the second wave of mediatization, 21st century has obtained a description of an “era of digital memories”. Digitalization challenges memory in a way that is unprecedented (Neiger, 2020).

Memories generated in human minds and transitioned into digital form, both still have immaterial nature.

The excess of media produces excessive amount of memory, as a result “past is everywhere” (Hoskins, 2014, p.662).

# Problem

- Why is contemporary art (2010s-20s) preoccupied with regenerating traumatic memories?

“In recent years, the strategy of re-enactment is increasingly found in contemporary art, especially media art and performance” (Horn & Arns, 2007, p.2)

- How hybrid film uses these techniques to relive and rethink memory, both historical and personal?

“Reenactment does not retrieve an essential and original truth of the past. It permits an explosion of sorts of the notion of truth in a multiple temporal scattering of events, not in order to invest into the supposed authenticity of history, but to create new forms of thinking and staging the relation to history itself.” (Baldacci et al., 2022, p.ix)

“In the hybrid film, respectively, it is the viewer who ultimately determines the mode of engagement with the object at stake, sizing things up and settling the balance between fiction and reality... Hybrid documentaries seek to achieve a higher, more slippery sense of truth, reaching at, but never quite touching, the longed-for Real.” (Landesman, 2014, p.43)

# Problem

- How are these two interconnected?

Interconnectivity of the world after the second mediatization wave is the phenomenon of due to which collective and personal memories increasingly merge, and our minds become more and more networked. As a result, we live in interconnected society with collective memories shared all over the globe. Scholars call this a transition from collective to connective memory. (Landesman, 2014)

- What can be done to traumatic memory as a result of artistic reenactment?

External witnessing is the role of media for those bearing trauma: finding the language to process trauma, “putting outside and inside into contact” – Deleuzian idea in Empathic Vision (Bennett, 2005).

Role of visual media: “Although words can clearly serve sense memory, vision has a very different relationship to affective experience - especially to experience that cannot be spoken as it is felt.” (Bennett, 2005, p.35)

# Design of the PhD project

**3 research components:**

- **state-of-the-art research through literature review**
- **case study work**
- **artistic based research**

**Chapman & Savchuk's (2012) concept of "Research-from-Creation" where research data is generated through the production.**

**"Learning through feeling" idea by Dombois (2006)**

# Interim Results

## ■ Literature review concluded 40%

### **Hybrid film**

*While staying within the contemporary context, this part talks about hybrid film and its properties, its relevance for the postmodern epoch and the wide range of the creative possibilities within the genre.*

### **Mediatization of memory**

*This part grounds the knowledge in mediatization theory, giving the context to the contemporary process of dealing with information, memory and media.*

### **Reenactment**

*It is a part of the research on artistic reenactment, its connection with non-artistic reenactment, its meaning for culture and art.*

### **Ritual**

*In this part I intend to trace and explain the ritualistic nature of reenactment and see what common features, mechanisms, and meanings these two cultural practices share.*

### **Psychological perspective**

*This part talks about reenactment from the perspective of its influence on psyche, individual and collective consciousness. I intend to review the theories starting from Freud, Jung and finishing with the contemporary critics of those; as well as discuss the psychological practices integrated into the field of knowledge of psychology.*

### **Time. Hauntology.**

*This part will add Mark Fisher's theory of Hauntology to the context, and by these means place the research within the contemporary framework and its philosophical contemplations on current times.*



# Interim Results

- Case studies concluded 90%

## ***Horse Money (2014) by Pedro Costa***

Conceptualizes the film within the contemporary hybrid filmmaking process and discusses it as a case of the tendency for hybridization, mediatization of memory and ritualization of artistic and media processes. The points for the discussion are the following: Hybrid, Reenactment Method, Post-Narrative, Time/Space relationships, Memory, Ritual & Repetition, Mythic & Mystic, Political and Ethical aspects of the film. Interview with the director completes understanding of the points mentioned above.

## ***Atlantis (2019) by Valentin Vasyanovych***

Focused on the questions of the role of artistic reenactment for this production, and in particular the special modality of reenactment used in this case. With help of literature review and semi-structured interviews with the crew members of the film, we investigate how the artistic approach reflects and affects the political situation in contemporary Ukraine and its discourse. The following points are at the center of the research: politics, aesthetics, hybridity, method, metaphors and archetypes.

## ***The Act of Killing (2012) Joshua Oppenheimer***

Ethics, aesthetics, politics and methodological findings as well as connection with psychological issues behind reenactment of trauma are in the base of this case study. It is currently in progress, with literature review concluded, and interview with one of the crew members expected.

# THE MOVING ROOM

autobiographic hybrid film in progress

## Methodology of artistic research & challenges

- Project design evolution

Photo from family archive  
as an initial base for reenactment



Zoom calls recording as a developed  
methodological and aesthetical  
base



# Methodology of artistic research & challenges

- war 2.0. as a reenactment of trauma for people from Ukraine.
- manifestation of a compulsion to reenact russian`s victory over nazis

(«Never again vs. We can repeat» post war mottos)



“We can repeat”, a 1945 russian sign on captured Bundestag, Berlin



“Never again” 1960 poster by John Heartfelt

# Methodology of artistic research & challenges

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“We can repeat”, a 2012 russian meme, became a popular car sticker



“Never again” 1960 poster by John Heartfelt

# Methodology of artistic research & challenges

- questions and challenges posed by the research process, artistic process & life circumstances

large amount of literature, data from different fields to research

new COVID-19 reality & full-scale war both affecting the project design as well as personal ability to be productive

hyper-connection between the project and social and political processes

difficulties of working on autobiographic project, emotional involvement with heavy themes

- what's done so far for The Moving Room

Project design

Work with initial memories of each member

Diary method trial

Zoom calls recorded (part of production) – memories discussion

A large red speech bubble graphic with a white outline, containing the text "Thank you!".

Thank you!

**And looking forward for your comments**