



*The Anthropology of History*

# MONUMENTAL NAMES

ARCHIVAL AESTHETICS AND THE CONJURATION  
OF HISTORY IN MOSCOW

Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic



# Monumental Names

What stands behind the propensity to remember victims of mass atrocities by their personal names? Grounded in ethnographic and archival research with *The Last Address* and *Memorial*, one of the oldest independent archives of Soviet political repressions in Moscow, the book examines a version of archival activism that is centred on various practices of documentation and commemoration of many dead victims of historical violence in Russia to understand what kind of historicity is produced when a single name is added to an endless list. What do acts of accumulation of names of the dead affirm when they are concretised in monuments and performance events? The key premise is that multimodal inscriptions of names of the dead entail a political, aesthetic, and conceptual movement between *singularity* and *multitude* that honours each dead name yet conveys the scale of a mass atrocity without reducing it to a number. Drawing on anthropology, history, philosophy, and aesthetic theory, the book yields a new perspective on the politics of archival and historical justice while it critically engages with the debates on relations and distinctions between names and numbers of the dead, monumental art and its political effects, law and history, image and text, and the specific one and the infinite many.

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# Monumental Names

Archival Aesthetics and the Conjunction  
of History in Moscow

Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic



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Typeset in Sabon  
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To my daughter and husband



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## Note on Transliteration

There are several Russian-English transliteration systems. I have used a simplified British standard for non-specialised readers. Where possible, I have used familiar anglicised versions of names and placenames for easy understanding.

## Prologue

When I met Nikifor for some sorrel soup in central Moscow in October 2018, he patiently explained that, after his father had been executed during the Stalinist Terror and later rehabilitated, he, the son of the repressed, has built a good life. He studied engineering and learnt English to be able to teach the discipline to foreign students in Soviet Moscow. Retired and



in his late 80s, he has a loving family with several grandchildren. All the same, he regularly takes to the city's squares and busy public spaces to stage a solitary protest with a poster in hand to inform residents and visitors to the Russian capital about the past atrocities. He is repeatedly arrested and released on the same day as solitary protests are (or used to be) generally tolerated and Nikifor's old age and cooperative behaviour are his ticket out of a prison cell. Nikifor argues that the adoration of an acclaimed architect (he implies Joseph Stalin) who is known to have killed is a profanation. While many discussions of the Stalinist Terror in Russia tend to alloy its violence by pointing out the state's achievements, Nikifor does not think there is an ethical justification for his father's murder. For him, there is no political rationalisation or alternative interpretation of the fact of his father's death. Nikifor's categorical refusal to find historical excuses for a killing is thought-provoking.

However, he is not the only person I met who condemns the Soviet past as an incontrovertible history of mass murder. Although the commonplace tendency is to see historiographic practices as fungible and attentive to perspectival and spatio-temporal interpretations of history, some conceptualisations of history are highly legible and unequivocal. For some, history is on the surface; its meaning is a given. Like Nikifor, different historians, memory activists, researchers, architects, artists, and archivists who are associated with a dynamic Moscow-based archival network *Memorial (International)*, identify the Stalinist political repressions as a primary but not one-sided focus of their research. To me, a simple argument they make that much of Soviet history, from its inception in 1917 till its demise in 1991, was marred by a degree of political violence needs to be acknowledged.

Grounded in ethnographic and archival research with memory activists of *Memorial* and *The Last Address* in Moscow; the book illuminates the practices of archiving, historicising, and giving a monumental form to evidence of untimely violent deaths and unlawful executions in Moscow, mainly during the Stalinist Great Purge of that took place between 1937 and 1953. I use the term "memory activists" (Rubin 2018: 214) or *Memorial* activists to signal, without essentialising, a loose collective of archivists, historians, researchers, photographers, volunteers, descendants of the killed and other members, participants, and supporters of the three-decade old civic initiative to remember the dead of the political atrocities. Memory activists call the dead "victims of the Stalinist political repressions", and I have adopted their terminology.

In broad strokes, the activists' well-established archival project aims to accomplish a "return of names of the dead" (*vozvrashcheniye imen*) from historical obscurity into public historical consciousness. Historical events are persistent spectres that both return and arrive; they return from the past as if arriving from a future, impossible to forget (Cohen and Zagury-Orly 2022: 60). By returning names of the dead, the activists build up a body of evidence against the Soviet state, often in the absence of cadavers, as the

archive operates as a charnel house for names and paper files. Considering their veracity as an archival record, names of the dead are anchors for the activists' practical research activities and historiographic ethics. In short, to establish historical truth, the activists collect factual evidence of mass atrocities, which usually means tracing and preserving the names of the ordinary dead. Names of the dead, how they are collected, stored, and given a monumental, physical form, as well as a philosophical signification, are my main concern.

However, there are other facets to amassing names of the dead that go beyond the overt historiographic aims of the activists. Importantly, acts of inscription of names of the dead foreground material processes of creating a dispersed archive of a mass atrocity. Memory activists in contemporary Moscow attempt not only to record but also to inscribe and monumentalise *every and all* names of the dead. Here, two additional capacities of names of the dead are worth taking into consideration. First, they are mediatic, that is, they can be inscribed in various physical artefacts such as books, steel, and stone monuments and embodied as performative events. In other words, names of the dead have a tangible form and render history in different material media: textual, visual, monumental, auditory, and so on. Once a textual sign of a name is given a different ontology of a multi-media material inscription, names of the dead can “enflesh” (Violi and Bronfen 2019: 411; Hardt and Negri 2004: 192), that is, give an elemental vitality to the pervasive archival aesthetic of politically motivated mass atrocities during the Soviet period and, comparatively, beyond. Consequently, acts of inscribing names of the dead crystallise the past killings into a historiographic image, in the broadest sense of the word.

Second, names of the dead are returned as a singularity that has a propensity to accumulate into lists (*spiski*). In Moscow, personal names of the dead are singularities that are moved into collective lists that are written down, engraved, and spoken out loud, for example, during the annual name reading “memory ritual” (Bogumil 2022: 10). Long lists of names are common in political and judicial archives (Farge 2013: 13). Frequently, lists of names are uncommunicative about their bearers but suggestive of broader historical contexts, including reasons for the very existence of a list. In this case, lists with names of the dead are registers of atrocities, and no name is redundant. The activists stress the importance of uncovering and safeguarding every name because every name attests to one true event of a killing. The intertwined processes of inscribing names of the dead one by one and gathering them into lists are revealing of a conceptual movement between *everyone* and *all*, which signals the tense equivalence between a singularity of each name and the multitude of the killed. Instead of two historiographic principles of singularity and generality vying against each other, the movement collapses the opposition between personal and collective history without occluding their specificities. By critically engaging with anthropology, aesthetic theory, and philosophy, this book tells a story

about the archive of a mass murder, a kind of archive that does not make a numerical distinction between the scale of killing one and killing a million.

My effort is to narrate the activists' perspective and, building on it, to capture its inchoate conceptual potentialities. The language of memory and remembrance features prominently in the practices of memory activists. However, this book does not embark on the task of reviewing overabundant academic literature about the character of lived memory of the past. This re-positioning of the story from collective and intimate, affective, and vicarious recollections of violent events to questions of their historical documentation and monumentalisation enables me to turn conceptually to questions of justice and its political iconography. It allows me to develop an argument about the capacity of names of the dead to yield a representation of a concrete mass atrocity by means of an abstraction, a typographic sign that we recognise as a name. Thus, facing to a killing – “not death but the killing” (Koselleck 2002: 266) – is key to understanding the book's arguments.

I use pseudonyms for some living and dead persons throughout the book, even though most people I met in Moscow did not object to waiving their right to anonymity. The names of the activists' two organisations, *Memorial* and *The Last Address*, are not anonymised in support of the activists' work in promoting historical justice and critical reflection about the difficult past across the former Soviet Union. Although I clarify their perspective on archival activism and historical research, the arguments about the role of monumental names and the kind of historiography they propel are entirely my own. So are historical comparisons and parallels.

# Introduction

## Name and Number of the Dead

### Installation of a Name Plaque

The Lenin Avenue is a multilane, heavily congested road that extends from the historic Tverskaya Street past the Mayakovsky Square and the Belorussky train station (*vokzal*), a transport node with connections to and from Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, and further afield. It was a late morning of the last Sunday of October 2019. This calendar day usually forebodes the snow, muddy grey slush, and darkness of Moscow in winter. The deafening traffic noise was muted in the arch of residential building No. 14, a characteristic example of Stalinist constructivist architecture. Painted pale pink, with a few rows of tiles close to the ground to prevent scuff marks, the impeccably smooth wall was devoid of any ornaments or dents apart from 21 screw holes that had been drilled the night before. The building was primed for the installation of five memorial plaques to “victims of the Stalinist Terror”, in the words of the memory activists who run the project known as *The Last Address*. Their motto, “one name, one life, one plaque” (*odno imya, odna zhizn, odin znak*) for every victim, reflects their overarching aim to “return names of the dead (*vozvrashcheniye imen*)” from historical oblivion into the public historical consciousness. The activities of *The Last Address* are linked to the work of *Memorial*, the oldest independent archive of political violence in the Soviet Union. *Memorial* organises the celebrated public readings of names of the dead, *The Return of the Names* (*vozvrashcheniye imyen*), annually on October 29, on the eve of the official day of commemoration for victims of political repressions. Thousands of Muscovites participate in as the name reading event at the Solovetsky Stone, the first monument to the victims of political repressions, placed outside the Federal Security Services headquarters (FSB) on Lubyanka Square, previously known as NKVD and KGB. In addition to research and historiographic activities, the activists are also involved in monument building in Moscow and in other parts of Russia, as the activists’ organisation has several branches and many affiliate institutions. In 2018, a permanent monument, a long fence engraved with names of the dead, replaced makeshift burial shrines at the Kommunarika common grave in the suburbs of the



## 2 Introduction: Name and Number of the Dead

metropolis. Names of the dead are the nexus of these three commemorative sites and associated practices that form the narrative structure of this book.

*The Last Address* memorial plaques are installed fortnightly. The effect of each installation is far-reaching as a monumental plaque transforms the empty space into a politically and affectively charged conjunction of intimate memory and collective history. This way, the activists confront the architectural void of an unmarked address where a person was snatched away from the density of their domestic lives. From a place of abjection and historical horror (Buchli and Lucas 2001: 12), the flat façade becomes a site of conscience (Figure 0.1).

Family members or new residents in the apartments of the arrested Soviet citizens usually sponsor the installations (*ustanovki*). That Sunday on the Lenin Avenue, some 20 people assembled in the arch. They were greeted by five memory activists. On that occasion, three families shared the stories of injustice that haunt four generations of descendants. With some pomp, one of the plaques was ceremoniously declared No. 500 even though the plaques do not bear an engraved number. There is a digital record of when every plaque was installed, but the chronology of their installations does not matter because the plaques tell the same story of an unlawful arrest and a swift execution without a formal court hearing. Invariably, the relatives of the dead speak of the travesty of Stalin's extra-judicial killings of their family members who are remembered as being morally, professionally, and even politically loyal to the communist regime. The relatives emphasise



Figure 0.1 (a) and (b) The empty wall and a line of five memorial name plaques before and after the installation.

that their dead parents and kin became victims of repressions, regardless of their convictions and actions. Most installations end with a round of thanks as the relatives of the dead express their gratitude to the activists in attendance for their assistance with archival research and their commitment to the labour of commemorating personal tragedies and of providing reminders of the country's difficult past to family members and strangers.

Sometimes, installations of these memorial plaques engage passers-by. On that bleak October morning, one woman was describing her father's arrest when a bulky middle-aged man stopped in his tracks to listen. With a shopping bag swinging by his knees, he listened apprehensively, rubbing his chin with his hand. He seemed riveted by the story and the unfolding event but hurried to leave when the assembly moved on to attach the plaques to the wall. It might be that he suddenly felt like an intruder into the family's intimate memory. The family members were given the honour of fixing the plaques to the wall with an electric drill. Five plaques were mounted, then three were taken down as the plaques of the dead spouses were accidentally separated. Flowers were tied to a little hook with a plastic wire while one memory activist fretfully straightened and smoothed the black ribbon. Multiple photographs were snapped with mobile phones and the temporary community of grief disbanded. A week later, the photographer had to return to reshuffle the plaques again to ascertain that the plaques of the family members were reunited.

The "information plaques" (as they are called by the activists) have a purposefully ascetic design. Made of matt stainless steel, each plaque is engraved with a personal name of the victim, their occupation, and the dates of birth, arrest, execution, or death in a gulag camp, and rehabilitation. These are indisputable biographical details of a lost life. Each plaque approximates the size of a postcard. On the left side of the plaque, there is a square hole that offers a glimpse of the background surface of the building's wall. Although framing emptiness and incorporating the background of a sculpture or a painting is an element of the work of postconceptual artists such as Mangold, Stella, and others (Chilver 2014: 241), the hole of the *Last Address* plaques makes a simple claim to one unambiguous meaning: an effaced photograph, an absence. The political symbolism of the square hole is overpowering (Figure 0.2).

The plaques that are mounted on the façades of buildings in Moscow are flat, lustreless rectangular shapes. Matt stainless steel is seen as a more durable material. It is also understood to be less valuable than brass and, therefore, less likely to be stolen. The choice of location and the material engender the plaques' paradox of being seen and unseen. The plaques are hidden from vandals in the arches, but this makes them difficult to spot by the uninitiated. Attached to walls just above an average line of sight, the plaques are admittedly protected from sleet and dirty boots even though they get covered in urban grime. However, the inadvertent effect of the activists' conservation strategies is that the plaques are concealed



*Figure 0.2* The memory activists and the relatives of the victims during the installation.

from absent-minded city dwellers. It is not uncommon to remember the dead by hiding their traces. Rita Astuti describes that the graves of Vezo in Madagascar are “invisible objects” because cemeteries and funerary sculptures are situated out of sight of the villagers, far in the jungle (Astuti 1994: 111). Instead of being “conspicuous monuments” to gaze at (Astuti

1994: 112), Vezo graveyards are not “filled with objects whereby the living remember the dead” (Astuti 1994: 122). Simply, they are not meant to be seen. The activists argued with me, but many relatives shared my impression that the plaques are difficult to find in the density of one of the biggest European cities. The above strategy amplifies rather than mitigates a peculiar feature of commemoration monuments that we tend to overlook them; they deflect rather than draw attention (Grant 2001: 336).

To some extent, the plaques are safeguarded in their concealment. The inconspicuous plaques disappear among shop signs and house numbers on busy and quiet streets; one does not suspect their presence in the inner courtyards of Moscow apartment blocks. The name plaques are not only hard to notice by chance; one struggles to find them on purpose. Although this is seen as a precaution against theft, desecration, and bad weather, the plaques unravel historical truth as if it is a well-guarded secret (Symons 2013: 102). Walter Benjamin writes that truth does not shine forth (Symons 2013: 103). Benjamin recurrently uses the concept *unscheinbar* (unshining) to speak of inconspicuous fragments of the past that cannot be ascertained as facts. They do not resemble the past but designate an experience of history as traces and echoes rather than presence (Symons 2013: 109). Memory without shine consists of seemingly insignificant or unexpected flashes of the past, be it moments of experience, objects, or photographic images. They cannot be subsumed into a shared sense of understanding of the past; nor do they instigate its reconstruction.

In contrast to the unobtrusive *Last Address* plaques, Gunter Demnig’s brass Stolpersteine Stones, or commemorative cobble stones to victims of Nazism, are shiny, protruding stumbling blocks embedded in the pavements across Germany and a handful of cities of Northern,<sup>1</sup> Central, and Eastern Europe. The shine of the Stolpersteine monuments is not accidental as it exemplifies the agency of commemorative art to physically disrupt people’s walking through a city like Berlin and to remind forgetful or unaware pedestrians that a Jewish, Roma, or another person was arrested at that address during the Holocaust and the Third Reich purges. The Stones dazzle and trip pedestrians. They irritate. Demnig’s project recalls Vygotsky’s theory about the power of conceptual art to disturb, in this case, to disturb one’s walking in the city. Lev Vygotsky, an early 20th century Russian psychologist and art theorist, espoused the idea that the role of artwork is not to provoke edifying emotions or communicate a symbolic meaning (Vygotsky 2019 [1915–1922]: 423–456). For Vygotsky, art induces anxiety and intense discomfort that are requisite for aesthetic appreciation. The Stolpersteine do not only transform an unidentified location into a site

1 On Norway, see the ethnographic study by Ruth Mandel and Rachel Lehr. <https://anthropolitan.org/2018/11/09/kaddish-in-norway-on-the-trail-of-stolpersteine-sublestein-stumbling-blocks/>



## 6 Introduction: Name and Number of the Dead

of memory as a “lived space” (*espace vécu*) but they also turn it into “a manifestation of an anxious space, *espace inquietant*” (Smith 2018: 126). A site of conscience is a site of disquiet.

Striding through central Moscow with me, Sasha, one of the activists, paused in front of a rare wooden building in the Maryina Roshcha district. He pointed to a plaque mounted on the green façade and wiped it clean off the soot from traffic pollution to restore its subdued shine. He did so with his pristine white handkerchief and lamented the revealed corrosion caused by severe weather. On our subsequent peregrinations, I understood that he cleans the plaques routinely. For him, a grandchild of many violently repressed, history is luminous.

### Monumental Names

Names of the dead are central to the activists’ praxis. The opening vignette illuminates a familiar but largely unacknowledged and undertheorised propensity to document, catalogue, monumentalise and announce names of victims of mass atrocities, be it a military conflict or acts of political terror. First and foremost, a humble gesture of listing names of the dead points to a broader shift in practices of accounting for the dead, one by one, during and in the aftermath of military conflicts in the 20th century (Laqueur 2015). Prior to this re-evaluation of a singularity of a lost life of everyone, rank and file soldiers were rarely buried; some were piled into mine shafts and trenches or left on battlefields (Koselleck 2002: 290). Only war celebrities, tombs for the fallen rich or symbolic figures were memorialised or encoded as a collective sacrifice, a practice that lingers today. In her influential study of reburials of communist leaders and iconoclasm of their statues after 1989, Katherine Verdery reminds that monuments to political luminaries and party functionaries stretch their political efficacy into the afterlife as monumentalisation affords a transformation of a political and cosmic order as well as a reconfiguration of history and its shape (Verderey 1999). Exemplary figures of history are often spared the anonymity of the ash heap of history, while ordinary people tend to remain historically and politically nameless since they are mainly known to an intimate circle of friends and family (Verderey 1999: 4).

In a radical break with heroic monumentality, at the opening of a war memorial to the town’s dead in Villerbon in France in 1921, the mayor decried the tendency not to remember the dead by their name because “for history, they are, alas, anonymous, because too many” (Sherman 1998). The Villerbon monument was inscribed with the names of residents who died during the First World War, in contrast to the Paris Tomb to the Unknown Soldier, a nameless monument “offered in the name of all” (Sherman 1998: 443). Similarly, the Tomb to the Unknown Soldier at the Kremlin wall in Moscow contains a collection of bones of an unidentified soldier that fell in the Battle of Moscow in 1941 and was subsequently dug out from a

mass grave. Those who died on the territory of Soviet Russia during the Second World War were often “condemned to anonymity” as corpses were efficiently interred into mass graves, subject to detailed state regulations (Malysheva 2017: 249). The monument bears an epitaph whose author is uncertain: “Your name is not known, but your heroic deed (*podvig*) is immortal (*bessmerten*)”. At the same time, another monument to the fallen during the Second World War at the New Donskoye graveyard in Moscow consists of granite slabs with alphabetical lists of personal names, dates of birth and death. Although the slabs are inscribed with personal names, the monument remains a reification intrinsic to military cemeteries whose named, yet identical graves communicate “the homogeneity of the war experience, through the uniformity of the graves and the non-differentiated burials” (Popa 2013: 79). The uniformity of military graves underscores the commonality of acts of dying, obscured by formal commemorative tropes of victory, sacrifice, and renewal of a nation (Popa 2013: 89). In sum, naming the ordinary dead conveys “an egalitarian claim” to political memory (Koselleck 2002: 291) even though comingled bodies of soldiers of warring armies tend to be carefully segregated as “equality in death is revoked in favour of an equality safeguarding national homogeneity” (Koselleck 2002: 314).

Monuments and memorials to the fallen soldiers and to those murdered or ground down by cruelties of Nazi concentration camps or Stalinist labour and prisoner-of-war camps are often a subject of historiographic and political debates about who should be remembered, and where. Reinhart Koselleck suggests that clashes at the World War memorial for the German soldiers in Hamburg, at Stalag 326 VI-K in Stukebbrock and at the concentration camp of Struth in Alsace demonstrate that memorials “do more than just keep alive the memory of the dead for whose sake they were first erected” (Koselleck 2002: 286); they provoke political thought. Maya Lin, the architect of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC, has stirred a controversy with her allegedly ‘modernist’ design of black marble inscribed with names of the dead that she saw as more comprehensive than a photograph or a sculpture (Preston 2017). For many US veterans, architects, and politicians in the 1980s, names were an abstraction that lacked grandeur and artistic skill. Later, the slabs were complemented with a realist sculpture of three young men in combat gear that was crafted using life models.

What are we to make of the above politically and aesthetically contested decisions to inscribe names of the dead as lists on monuments to remember victims of a mass atrocity? It has been suggested that a figurative scaling up of memorial architecture assigns responsibility for a political atrocity where personal mourning and individualised burials of the dead risk depoliticising the past as personal tragedy (Baer and Sznajder 2015: 333). Monuments inscribed with names of the dead are a persistent attempt to figure out how to represent, visualise, or write about a mass atrocity such as

the Holocaust or the Stalinist Terror as concurrently a specific instance and a magnified whole. Thus, the entrenched distinction between monuments that focus on names and figurative monuments that are shaped as symbolic objects, human bodies, and obelisks, seems to exemplify a problem of providing a historiographic account of personal destinies within a collective history, that George Bataille has called “the agitation of countless multitudes” (Bataille 1985: 214).

This begs further questions. What is evinced when a name of the dead is inscribed on a monument or spoken in public? What happens when a single name is moved to a collective list of names? What do acts of accumulation of names of the dead into scrolls affirm? How do inscriptions of names of the dead resonate across political and philosophical thought? Finally, what can we gain by re-thinking names as a critical archival aesthetics of remembering the history of mass atrocities rather than a socio-linguistic principle of individuation and designation?

Names of the dead are a peculiar object, a material part of an archive, an element of a textual or visual document, an inscription on a monument, a sound, a sign, and its absence. Names of the dead are entirely factual and, at the same time, entirely detached from biographies. They are locatable and elusive. They have a materiality of a written text and a physicality of a spoken word. The materiality of names of the dead and their movement between different registers and media are suggestive of what Webb Keane calls “transduction”, a specific problem of materialising and dematerialising spirit writing, divine power, and silent worlds in religious contexts, such as divination, calligraphy, and ingesting of scriptures (Keane 2013: 2–3). The notion of transduction goes against a stable ontology of a written sign or a sculptural artefact, as it suggests that, in shifting between media, a physical entity acquires different properties, affordances, and potencies. Building on this, I argue that acts of multi-media (paper, stone, sound, flesh) inscriptions give names their *critical monumental aesthetics* and make them a polythetic image that has a provocative capability to mediate the tension between personal and collective history and to collapse the antinomy between concreteness and abstraction in history, thought, and art.

Henri Bergson writes that body is “a privileged image” of a memory in the universe that is an aggregation of images (Bergson 2016: 4). Bergson’s world is all about images – “memory is image, matter is image – matter is a self-existing image” (North 2021: 196). In this reading, the privilege of body is derived from its movement and ability to affect other images (Bergson 2016: 5–6). These actions involve the mastery of time, he notes (Bergson 2016: 14). The mastery of time is a grasp of the whole of the past, a heterogeneous amalgamation of “an enormous multiplicity of vibrations which appear to us all at once” (Bergson 2016: 41). Can names of the dead, then, be one of those “bizarre-privileged items in the universe” that bring out, radiate, and circulate relations in history, such as likeness, among a multitude of things (North 2021: 101–108)? Are names of the dead

multimodal image, an inscription into matter, a movement, a privileged item of history that underpin *Memorial* archival activism/history writing/politics/aesthetics of justice for the living and the dead?

## The Origins of the Archive

The activists of *The Last Address* share the office with members of *Memorial* who oversee one of the oldest archives of the Soviet violent past. The archive is a wide-ranging matrix of people, documents, practices, and things that blur historiographic, philosophical, socio-political, and aesthetic ideas and actions into *Memorial*, a simultaneously material and conceptual space. In their own pragmatic typology of archives,<sup>2</sup> the activists' archive is a non-state archival network of research and human-rights organisations that are contractually responsible to protect archival documents in their possession. The contract refers to a legal obligation signed between *Memorial* and the State Archival Service that regulates archival practices of non-state, federal, municipal, and institutional archives, including the FSB (former NKVD-KGB) archive that hosts the bulk of files and documents pertaining the Stalinist Terror.

*Memorial* in Moscow is a repository of names, letters, documents, photographs, video footage, and more. Archival materials and books are kept in the basement. The rooms are equipped with modular shelving units that can be moved by spinning a lever, with some effort. The shelves are a practical solution to increase the storage space for documents and books, but they also signify the density of the past as historical accounts and numerous publications mount up. The activists' archive is voracious as it exemplifies a broader archival logic of collecting everything, every mundane scrap of history about famous, infamous, and ordinary people (Osborne 1999: 56). Such inclusive archives are measured in kilometres or given oceanic depth (Farge 2013: 4).

The *Memorial* archive embodies what is known as the “archival impulse” and its key principle of publicity (Osborne 1999: 54). Publicity means that the archive is easy to access even though the archivists and the librarian curate the flow of visitors, researchers, a few survivors of the Stalinist purges, their friends and family members, professional and informal historians, sociologists and artists, and new generations of volunteers, school children, students, and ordinary citizens who are interested in the subject of Soviet political repressions. Few people I met in Moscow are former Soviet political prisoners. Some are descendants of the killed, the incarcerated, and the exiled. Most memory activists, the protagonists of this book, are archival agents who live in the aftermath, or postmemory (Hirsch 2012), of a mass atrocity, which is a more inclusive sociality. Postmemory usually refers to

2 <https://dostup.memo.ru/archives/types/>; accessed 12.10.2021

the subsequent generations' personal and artistic attempts at reconstructing affective links with the past through places, photographic images, and objects that often take an archival turn (Hirsch 2012: 227). In addition to being keepers of records and supervisors of the archive as a storehouse of historical documents, the activists define possibilities and conditions of engaging with their archive. I was asked if I had already done background readings on Soviet dissidents. There are forms to fill and promises to keep about how the materials might be used. Nevertheless, the activists do not censor how the materials can be interpreted. They mainly aspire to know and control the movement of frail documents and their copies.

Despite the conceptual association of archives with durability and stable governmentality, the activists see documents as fragile objects. They are treated as relics and precious objects, carefully returned into folders, and tied with a string. The archive blends the mystic feeling that converts "otherwise critical scholars into charmed acolytes of a kind of archival sublime" (Starn 2002: 392), beyond the practicality of keeping the documents safe. This is not particularly unusual as archives not only sort out, distinguish, and assign categories and variables to documented lifeworlds; they also encase perishable documents in iron-clad, damp-resistant, fire-proof rooms, and vaults (Friedrich 2018: 112).

While the documents stay within the archive's walls, names of the dead are carried outside. The archival and research activities happen behind the security doors of the archive as a physical place, but commemorative practices unfold on the outside, in the open city. The plaques are installed regularly, monuments are unveiled after mass graves have become habitual places of mourning, names of the dead are pronounced in a public square, and history walks are organised to trace the topography of the Stalinist Terror. These practices resemble or insinuate an archival activity that is exteriorised into monuments and public events. The city becomes an extension of the archive.

Names of the dead serve as an organisational principle of the activists' archive. The reading room of the archive overflows with "books of memory", or lists of names of the killed, biographies and memoirs of the dead, and academic literature about them. Sometimes, the activists call the lists "martyrolog" in Russian, from martyrology or a catalogue of names of martyrs and saints, except that the books kept in *Memorial* are encyclopaedias of ordinary dead, "the sum of human destinies, the totality of ephemeral happenings" (Kiš 2015: 47). With its Greek etymology of "evidence", the word *martyrolog* reinforces the idea of innocence of the dead and the uses of names of the dead as source of historical testimony. The practical purpose of martyrolog as an archival ledger in the endless database of the dead is indistinguishable from its commemorative role as a paper monument (Figure 0.3).

The activists do not just facilitate access to documents for others. Many members of *Memorial* are prolific historians, curators of exhibitions, and conference convenors. They organise film screenings, seminars, and



*Figure 0.3* A ready-made freight train carriage installed at the entrance to the archive. Trains play an important role in the iconography of the Stalinist Terror as they were used to transport people to Gulag camps and prisons.

historiographic competitions. The activists incessantly replenish their archive with new books and disseminate their publications at various books fairs. Some activists and their volunteers communicate with survivors and



their descendants to encourage the submission of old letters and other documents that are kept in family archives. Every day, the activists and volunteers comb through state and private archives and derelict attics in their relentless quest for forgotten names and diaries. Then, they record new names in memory books, card indexes, and catalogues, as well as copy, digitise, and publish them in online archives a process that seems to duplicate and multiply the names. One could say that the activists are collectors and verifiers of names of the dead. The utmost effort is taken to establish the accuracy of names. They are triangulated and checked against the records kept in the state and city archives that, despite partial access to the state-controlled archival systems, remain an credible source of historical evidence.

Archives are usually seen as locatable storage spaces, either well-ordered or chaotic repositories of documents and miscellaneous historical records (Friedrich 2018: 115). However, it is a misconception that archives are nothing more than a storehouse for static fact-laden texts and, sometimes, photographs. This misconception explains why some historians and researchers approach archival collections as instruments that legitimise historical and sociological findings. Frequently, archives behave as mechanisms of rationalisation, governmentality, and exclusion (Robertson 2005). They have the authority to enforce certain history as something that ‘really happened’ and authenticate historical truth, notwithstanding the dual ontology of archives as “the temple of fact, objectivity, and omniscience; the factory of deceit, distortion, and prejudice” (Starn 2002: 388).

In this light, archives can be re-imagined as fragmented scenes of production of historical knowledge and power inequities, which gives archives an agentive role in shaping historical narratives. They are endowed with “the power to make and command what took place here or there, in this or that place” (Povinelli 2011: 152). The agency of archives becomes apparent if we concede that a document is a verb as well a noun that denotes an object (Turin 2011: 447). Comparably, Bergson described memory as a “force to act” rather than a linear succession of time periods (Lazzarato 2007: 96). Documents exert a force on their collectors, researchers, and activists by instigating practices of locating, cataloguing, creating classifications, categories, and acronyms, streamlining databases, and constituting social relations and forms of political actions of archives (Höhn 2013), including historiographic writing and participatory acts of remembrance, described here. Presciently, Arjun Appadurai writes that practices of archiving and documenting suggest that “the archive is itself an aspiration, rather than a recollection” (Appadurai 2003: 16). Hence, he continues, all documents are an intervention into a social and political order (Appadurai 2003: 16). Historiographic work cannot be demarcated from the “politics of the archive” (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995a: 10) as a historiographic and ontological premise that signals a drive to recapture the past that is also “a commandment” (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995a: 9) to obtain justice.

Initially, I contacted *Memorial* to read various documents in their possession. However, the project morphed into an ethnographic study of the archive itself. Ethnographic studies of archives tend to foreground the intersection between historiographic and archival practices and their political effects and conceptual affordances. In some ethnographic studies of archives, the distinction between archive as an inventory of facts and archive as a process of creating and contesting historical knowledge and commemorative practices appears as a difference in kind between an official state archive and an alternative, subaltern, activist counter-archive. Since national archives are implicated in a contentious logic of safeguarding official histories and excluding counter-histories and marginalised biographies, counter-archives are endowed with capacity to subvert familiar, formal, or vernacular, historiographic accounts. Counter-archives are often scattered and incomplete as they consist of personal letters, family photographs, mundane objects, and non-textual documents of oral histories that include gossip, rumours, spoken memories, silences, music, and ruins, among other things. Sometimes, counter-archives are systematically collected. Alternatively, they are forgotten archives tucked away in drawers and shoe boxes of family homes. Regardless of their status, counter-archives put on display the salience of archival collections and historiographic practices in shaping the politics of public memory and transitional justice.

Numerous ethnographic studies of archives question the primacy of content and meaning of archival collections and turn to archives themselves as processes and practices of archiving, accumulating, distributing, and using material collections of documents and other objects (Trundle and Kaplonski 2011). Because of their involvement in political contestations of history, archives are frequently searched for evidence and traces that can offer redress for historical injustice, even when they yield nothing. For example, rehabilitation of the repressed Buddhist monks, who were executed by the socialist Mongolian state in the 1930s, hinges on establishing the fact and the unfairness of the executions through archival records created and kept by the secret police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs archives (Kaplonski 2011: 433–434). The rehabilitation process can only be commenced if sufficient documentation is presented, and reinvestigation concludes that a historical execution was illegitimate (Kaplonski 2011: 435). In this case, the dead are given a compensatory trial to determine whether their death sentence and should be upheld or represents a misuse of power, in which case baseless charges can be quashed. Inadvertently, a great deal of power is conferred to the bureaucratic procedures within the secret police archives as the paperwork kept in the police filing cabinets and fortuitous circumstances of locating them decide the course of justice.

Processes of historical justice and restitution can flounder if archival evidence is insufficient or missing as documents are destroyed, lost, or misplaced. An accidental discovery of bunches of mouldy documents at a police location in Guatemala in 2005 turned out to be a collection of files



of the secret police archives that gave hope for enacting justice in practice (Weld 2014). In some cases, documents might have never existed, yet a presumption of their loss somewhere inside the archive can be meaningful. Absent documents become a method for generating hope that 1 day a serendipitous discovery of documentation can restore rights to land and dignity (Miyazaki 2004). This imagined ontology of archives as a secretive, bottomless place that contains an infinite number of documents plays into an understanding of history as indeterminate stuff that can be concealed or revealed (Zeitlyn 2012). The play between what is contained on the inside and displayed on the outside only amplifies political potentialities of most archives.

Interestingly, the activists' archive in Moscow is all of the above, and, recursively, an archive of itself. It is an archive that archives itself. Its institutional existence is a memorial not only to the many dead but also to the people who remember them and keep the record of historical violence. The archive consists of a compendium of documents, its offices, and, of course, the people who run it. It is a composite monument to the politics of historiography in Soviet and contemporary Russia. Established in the late 1980s by, among others, Andrey Sakharov, a Soviet nuclear physicist and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, the archive has many precursors in informal, or dissident, historiographic, and intellectual circles that existed in some Soviet cities in the 1950s–1970s and can be traced to pre-revolutionary and revolutionary secretive discussion groups in Russia (Humphrey 2021). The dissident circles enabled a clandestine and subversive memory activism that accumulated documents and lists of names of the repressed on political grounds: the harassed, the exiled, and the dead.

Informal archives operated with a particular logic of inclusion and selectivity, as the collected material had incriminatory character, exposing various violent practices of the Soviet state. The Soviet samizdat dissident historians collected any textual materials, including letters, diaries, and documental records of Soviet citizens who reported or complained of Soviet repressive practices. Samizdat archives contained postcards from far-right nationalists, letters from Christian priests, photographs of the artwork of allegedly 'degenerate' conceptual artists, index cards with names and biographies of people subjected to punitive psychiatric treatment. All were regarded as equally valuable historical material about incalculable violations of human and social rights in the Soviet Union. Collected in boxes and circulated as typewritten edited volumes such as *A Chronicle of Current Events*, those personal accounts and documents expressed many grievances and sometimes castigated the Soviet state.

It is not surprising as letters that criticised the Soviet state were more likely to be sent to samizdat operators rather than to state-controlled newspapers, although some scathingly critical missives were dispatched directly to the Soviet government and its Central Committee. They are usually attached to police or psychiatric casefiles and interrogation

protocols as proof of mutinous activities of Soviet citizens. Written at a great risk to personal freedom, condemnatory letters addressed to the Soviet government can be found serendipitously among minutes of trivial institutional meetings and newspaper clippings as many archival files in the sprawling State Archive (GARF) are created by a small group of men (so it seems), who sort and accidentally stitch documents together with large needles and light brown thread in the dim-lit rooms on Floors 9 and 12 of the building.

Few members of Soviet dissident archives were historians by training. Many others, including sociologists, philosophers, engineers, and mathematicians, became members because they shared a common interest in alternative, unofficial versions of Soviet history. Regardless of their involvement in samizdat publishing, many participants claimed that their historiographic research was a strictly apolitical, even ‘scientific’ involvement in archival preservation of various documents. Just like some members of *Memorial*, many informal or non-conformist historians even rejected the label ‘dissidents’ and the connection between their historiographic work and political sedition (*kramola*) as they pre-occupied themselves with so called objective chronicling of historical events without any explicit intent to use obtained historical materials as a legal proof of Soviet violations of human rights.

Despite disavowal of the political, the memory activists are inevitably positioned “at the crossroads of historical scholarship and dissent” (Martin and Sveshnikov 2017: 1006). Before memory activists in Moscow launched a conference to establish *Memorial* in 1989, the themes and politics of samizdat historiography had made it a dissident gesture (Martin and Sveshnikov 2017: 1009), because the samizdat historians and the memory activists became trustees of an enormous judicial archive of evidence against the Soviet state. Archival work entails gathering up and classifying documents, images, objects, and sounds in a manner that can either impose restrictive categories or defy them (Stoler 2018: 43). To this end, archival work can simultaneously embody a principle of dissensus and control. Archiving as dissensus would make space for debris that contests conventional historical narratives and upends existing orders of thought (Stoler 2018: 47), something that the first memory activists and unofficial historians achieved by suspending ideologically motivated judgment and collecting accounts of political repressions without adjudicating whether someone was a priest, an extreme nationalist, a distinguished writer, or an ordinary, “non-heroic” Soviet citizen (Martin and Sveshnikov 2017: 1014). All-inclusive historical truth remains a tenet of the activists’ archive because of the dual nature of their research activities: scholarship and political guilt ascription through historical writing, a kind of ethico-political orientation that Boris Kolonitskii calls “applied historiosophy” (Kolonitskii 2009: 49). It is the archive’s applicability to justice that makes it a site of historiographic subversion (Stoler 2018: 48).

The original intention of *Memorial* was to engage in a kind of unvarnished historical research that was not permissible in formal academic circles of the Soviet Union. This allegedly negative, “depression-inducing”<sup>3</sup> coverage of Soviet crimes and injustice has been held against the activists from the inception of their organisation. Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, and Grossman, the authors whose books about Soviet Gulags and the Second World War experiences were seen as inflammatory by the Soviet censorship and editorial boards. The minutes of the editorial board at *Znamya*,<sup>4</sup> a leading Soviet thick literary journal, show that Grossman’s epic *Life and Fate* war novel was rejected in 1960 on the ground that it implicitly compared the Soviet and the “fascist” regimes and described abominable (*merzkiye*) people, subject to repressions, injustice, and antisemitism within the Soviet army. Today, Grossman’s books can be freely purchased as cheap paperbacks or luxury editions. Films and drama series such as *Volk* (Wolf) that tackle the Stalinist past are allotted prime time on television. Nevertheless, social networks, mass media, and competing agents of historical memory are consistently hostile to the activists for their presumed anti-patriotic desire to reveal skeletons in the closet, that is, to broadcast the facts of the Soviet violence in public. Why? At issue are not divergent interpretations or incomprehensible meanings, but public accountability and keeping violent history exposed.

The accusations of disloyalty to Russia as a sovereign heir to the Soviet Union underscore a remonstrance against the critical content of the activists’ work that is disparaged as the machinations of ‘foreign agents’ (*innostranniye agenty*), a loosely defined category of organisations and individuals who receive financial support from outside the borders (*izvne*) of the Russian state. The activists are required to append the label ‘foreign agent’ to all their publications, followed by a disclaimer that the designation is being challenged in the European Court of Human Rights. The political programme in the Soviet Union anticipated acts of self-making into a new Soviet person and of detecting impostors and foreign agents (Fitzpatrick 2005). The early revolutionary regime was pre-occupied with identifying names and unmasking double-dealers, undesirables, politically unreliable categories of people, spies, and ethnically unreliable persons. In 1932–1937, at the beginning of Stalin’s purges, practices of identification and tearing off masks, such as introduction of mandatory passports, residence permits, population statistics, card-catalogues, and the census of 1937 produced lists of names that were a faltering success of modernist administrative practices yet facilitated the political and ethnic cleansing that ensued (Kessler 2001). In some continuity with the past, the fascination with unmasking and establishing true names can be observed in

3 In the words of the public prosecutor’s office in Moscow.

4 Kept at RGALI, Russian Literary Archive, Moscow.

Russian online chat rooms where people create avatars and falsify their identity while demystifying and decoding who is ‘really behind’ a chat room persona (Humphrey 2009: 41). Unmasking remains a favourite game of online users in Russia. To be classed as a ‘foreign agent’ is damaging to the archive as it discredits the activists’ historiographic endeavours as an ugly graffiti “foreign agent (*innostranniy agent*)” once scribbled on the façade of the activists’ office building corroborates. In practical terms, the label has hampered some of the activists’ projects as they struggled to rent premises for different public events. More recently, the designation “foreign agent” has invented an excuse to shut the archive down, something that I will discuss in the conclusion. Notwithstanding, the appellation ‘foreign agent’ does not diminish the legendary status of the activists’ organisation in the eyes of their supporters and associates.

### The Imperative of History

Sunday, October 28, 2018. A small group of elderly and middle-aged people obstructed the pavement on the corner of a small side-street, right behind the iconic Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the touristy Arbat street. One man was drilling four holes in the orange façade of the house, while the others were chatting. Two half-sisters explained that the name plaque was for their father, Natan Rosen, who was executed on December 8, 1937.

Jacob, who researched Natan’s casefile in the central NKVD/ KGB archive, turned to the camera operator to tell Natan’s story in broad strokes. Natan was born in Brest-Litovsk in 1898. Brest-Litovsk, a town on the Polish-Belarus border today, was a battleground during the First World War and then during the Polish-Soviet war in 1918. Natan joined the Red Army, moved to Petrograd and then to Moscow, where he worked as a mechanical engineer at a factory.

“In 1937 Stalin signed the order to prepare lists of names (*spiski*) and exterminate (*unichtozhit*) everyone with suspected Polish connections. By the misfortune of his birth, Natan was charged with espionage”, explained Jacob. “The notorious Polish operation was indiscriminate...”

“Gosh, was there such an operation?” interrupted one of the daughters.

“Yes, order 00485, dated August 11, 1937. This was the reason for your father’s arrest”.

The daughter equivocated. “I am not sure. We always thought that he was arrested because somebody at work denounced him out of jealousy”.

Jacob turned to face her. He was livid.

“No, these are just the particulars. The state power (*vlast*) is responsible for the Terror. Forgive actual people, they were scared”.

“But there was that female secretary, and then an ordinary worker...” Before the daughter could develop her point, she was handed the drill to muffle her objections and invite her to affix the name plaque to the wall.

The project leader motioned discreetly that it was time to go to the next location where another family was waiting. As we turned our backs on her, the daughter was still trying to explain: “My father had arguments at work. They threatened to fire him because there was some machinery the factory brought from Germany...”

Jacob shrugged this off: “Assumptions, none of this is factual”.

Another memory activist tapped the daughter on the shoulder, gently and respectfully.

“Why don’t you send us your story and we will check to make sure there is only one correct version?” she said, in a conciliatory manner.

I caught up with Jacob to ask why he got so upset with the woman’s private account of the events. His answer was curt: “She exonerates the state with her tall stories” (Figure 0.4).

From the activists’ perspective, the focus on personalised narratives, rumours, gossip, and the commonplace emphasis on practices of denunciation might divert attention from the responsibility of the Soviet state for the death of many people. A speculative interpretation of the past, such as emotionally charged guesswork about what ‘really’ happened, poses a risk of becoming an excuse for systematic political violence of the Soviet government. In the activists’ account of historical violence, personal stories are understood against “the background of uniformity” of history (Veyne 1971: 7), such as the Polish operation. Paul Veyne notes that a historian is not interested in an isolated event taken out of time as if an inimitable trinket (Veyne 1971: 9) but in *every* event and *all* events. History is composed of singular true occurrences insofar as they happened. In this vein, personal names of the dead are indispensable conceptual blocs of political justice against the unscrutinised state.

In writing history, a historian rigorously and critically creates relations or “plots” between documented events (Veyne 1971: 31) and traces, which are “mutilated documents” (Veyne 1971: 13) and “non-events” as they are not yet noticed (Veyne 1971: 19). The daughter’s story attempted to qualify Jacob’s historical plot of the Polish operation as a collective event that encompasses the concreteness of Natan’s death. Jacob subsumed the woman’s personal recollections about her father’s death into the overarching discourse about the Soviet state’s criminal nature. One could say that names of the dead are documents that indicate “a kind of individuation of universality” (Harrison 1997: 177). They neither atomise history nor forego personal tragedy. Rather, the above low-key altercation speaks of the activist’s concern with maintaining the equivalence between one and many dead that sees concrete people without losing sight of broader political significance of personal narratives (Bamyeh 2010: 52).

The imperative of the activists’ archive is to restore the status of a singular person in opposition to the mass man or, pejoratively, the mob of the totalitarian ontology and bring into the open the truth manipulated by totalitarian leaders. Whose imperative is it, in the absence of a theological prescription?



*Figure 0.4* The argument between a family member and an activist.

This is not a fortuitous inquiry. For example, the Stolpersteine project to remember the dead of the Holocaust is underpinned by a Talmudic quote: “a person is forgotten only when his or her name is forgotten”. The first Stolpersteine Stones were installed nameless (Apel 2014: 187) because the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany who found walking



on names of the dead inappropriate (Apel 2014: 183). For descendants of murdered Jews and Sinti, names of the dead were dense with sacrality and personal loss. Furthermore, the Talmudic quote forges a spiritual trace between this multi-sited Holocaust memorial and epitaphs and names on ancient Hebrew tombs that identified the dead and made their names public; and did so in writing (Suriano 2018: 101). Vaguely theological exhortations such as the Biblical commandment to take a census of all Israelites, “listing every man by name, one by one” (Numbers 1:2) might have seeped into the activists’ archive. However, the “sequestration of death” (Mellor and Shilling 1993: 416) that individualises death, tucks the corpse away, and ridicules embalming and exhibiting the dead body, has gained momentum in the secular world, making it difficult to search for religious genealogies.

*Memorial* is a secular project. Overtly, the activists draw “textual self-authorization” (Crapanzano 217: 175) from the celebrated Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova. Her collection of poems *Requiem* contains the line “I’d like to summon you all by name, but the lists are lost, un-found again” (from “The Epilogue. Poem 2”; written in March 1940). This collection that has been aptly described as a “funeral elegy” (Bailey 1999: 325) is a poetic amplification of Akhmatova’s experience of waiting and howling outside the prison walls to hear about her arrested child, maybe dead or exiled. The poem’s significance is immense in its citationality. This quote is mentioned in everyday conversations. It often features as an epigram on the title pages of books that deal with the history and commemoration of the dead of the Stalinist Terror. It is engraved on a stone monument at Kommunarka, the site of mass burials in a Moscow suburb.

Akhmatova’s voice is autobiographical yet able to encompass an infinite number of tragedies that combine into unquantifiable collective grief. Akhmatova – one woman, or a woman alone, or every woman, or the whole of Russia, or all humanity– was determined to remember. Therefore, her work, both intimate and generic, has been used to validate the activists’ distinction between the value of a concrete human life and the putative ‘mass man’ of a totalitarian society. The ‘mass man’ appeared in Hannah Arendt’s discussion of the totalising logic of political violence and the resultant the creation of anonymous masses. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt argues that totalitarian regimes use propaganda and terror to establish control over the ‘masses’ (Arendt 2017 [1951]: 446). Totalitarian leaders demand mass sacrifice and perpetuate mass slaughter (Arendt 2017 [1951]: 455–456). Furthermore, Hannah Arendt suggests that, to convince the mob (in her terms), totalitarian movements and their leaders deploy the rhetoric of scientific nature of history and progress that are rendered as predictable generalisations and immutable laws of existence. At the same time, this scienticity of history colludes in the destruction of empirically existing reality, since, as Arendt notes, the masses fail to discern being predisposed to ideologies and socio-political fantasies (Baehr 2007: 13–14). Posited as a pseudo-positivist version of reality, totalitarian propaganda eliminates

facts and transcends “verifiable experience” (Arendt 2017 [1951]: 473). In other words, totalitarian propaganda is pretence of history.

The human subject of totalitarian regimes is neither the individual of human-rights discourses nor the more relational human being of social sciences but the amorphous ‘masses’ that are characterised by a loss of name and self-imposed anonymity. Anonymity can serve a positive function of bringing people together through “the generalized process of abstraction” (Natanson 1986: 52–54). For Schutz, anonymity enables commonality; it is assigned an emancipatory potential (Natanson 1986). Soviet Marxist ideology exalted ‘the masses’ as a world-transforming source of political agency (Baehr 2007: 12). In contrast, Arendt sees the masses as a destructive force.

Among other phenomena, Arendt’s critique is directed at the “total art” (North 1990: 865) of Nazi Germany that gave the notion of *e pluribus unum* a sinister, dystopian connotation of dissolution of a person into a totalitarian unity. Totalitarianism begins with the idea that a single stone participates in a formation of a unified social architecture. Siegfried Kracauer, a friend of Walter Benjamin, elucidated a totalitarian aesthetic of human sculpture, namely “mass ornament” (North 1990: 867). Kracauer famously described the Tiller Girls’ dance act where individual girls created “indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics” in a synchronised performance (Kracauer 1995: 76). The Tiller Girls created geometrical shapes using their matching, nearly standardised bodies. The mass ornament that emerges out of the Tiller Girls’ movements is “an end in itself” (Kracauer 1995: 76), a spectacle of uniformed order mass that transcends its fragments. For Kracauer, integration of singular people into a mass artwork or performance signalled a degradation of citizens under a totalitarian political regime where an impulse to consent substituted or eroded a space of disagreement and debate (North 1990: 871). Kracauer saw the degradation in the emptying of meaning, be it erotic, patriotic, or any other (Kracauer 1995: 77). One cannot recognise girls in this spectacle; they are no more than components of the immediate formation; the ornament subjugates them to its own existence. The mass ornament is “a monstrous figure”, Kracauer wrote, because it reflects a rational calculus, such as precision of coordinated movement (Kracauer 1995: 78). It is an aesthetic presentation of a historical moment that seeks to impose its own truth but does not consider the very people that constitute it. Such a historical moment gives rise to “abstractness” (Kracauer 1995: 81) that does not lack in physicality or materiality since the mass ornament enlists human figures. Rather, it disregards the concreteness of being or proffers “false concreteness” that leaves ‘man’ behind or consigns ‘him’ to anonymity (Kracauer 1995: 82–83).

There are many echoes of Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism in the activists’ work. Consider a letter penned after the founding conference of the activists’ organisation in 1989. The letter, written by one of its key participants, Arseny Roginsky, defined the objectives of *Memorial* as



## 22 Introduction: Name and Number of the Dead

attainment of “eternal memory of victims of repressions” (*uvekovechivaniye pamyati zhertv repressiy*). More than memory, eternity was linked to full truth about the past. Only this way, it was argued, society could revive its moral and humanist principles, recover forgotten names and ruined ideas (*zabitih imen i zagublenih idey*), and achieve cultural renaissance. The project of historical activism was rendered as a break from the existing forms of reading the past, such as invocation of historical necessity (*istoricheskaya neobhodimost*) to justify Stalinist atrocities. These, according to Roginsky, were manifestations of “the outside-historical awareness” (*vneistoricheskoe soznaniye*) that emerged in the process of banishment, near-excommunication (*otlucheniye*), and detachment (*otstranennost*) from reality and history, which led to indifference, lack of engagement with a broader world, and failure of affective relations. The letter suggests that the work of a historian is moral, political, and pseudo-psychological; a historian reprises the metaphorical role of “soul-healers” that was assigned to many Soviet writers after the Second World War (Krylova 2001: 311).

Treasured by the memory activists, Roginsky’s letter calls for rigorous historical and archival scholarship as an antidote to the apparent indifference of ‘the masses’ to objectively verifiable truth. At the same time, the letter makes an explicit mention of the outside-historical ‘mass consciousness’ which could be remedied through a return to historically grounded thought. Like some aspects of Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism, a mention of mass consciousness might appear both polemical and lacking in empirical foundations, which explains why many historians find the idea of the ‘mass man’ inimical. Some scholars of Soviet history argue that theories of totalitarian propaganda limit the possibilities of self-identification with the state to either indoctrination or cynicism among Soviet citizens. This generalisation overlooks internal contradictions and ambiguities as well as purposeful efforts to fashion a revolutionary self and to gain a sense of coherence between revolutionary subjectivities and Soviet realities by exercising introspection, self-critique, and “hermeneutics of the soul” among Soviet citizens in the 1930s (Slezkine 2017; Fitzpatrick 2017; Hellbeck 2001). However, the activists’ opposition to the mass man of a totalitarian society stems from their appreciation of “the value of each person, taken separately” (*tseinnost zhizni kazhdogo ot delno vzyatogo cheloveka*) (Ulitskaya 2018: 5). Ludmila Ulitskaya, a best-selling author of historical novels and an active supporter of *Memorial*, compares human life to “a grain of sand in a huge sand mountain” (Ulitskaya 2018: 6) that is held together not by “fake patriotism” but by a sense of “mutuality” (*obshchnost*) (Ulitskaya 2018: 6). Hence, names of the dead assume enormous significance.

### Facticity of Names

Names are conventionally ascribed a semiotic role of social designators in relational and historical contexts. The philosophy of language revolves

around the question of whether names, as proper names, are descriptive or referential, and if they determine or simply correspond to a referent. Some philosophers and linguists suggest that names have some semantic content that is socially imposed. In a nutshell, the basic parameters of the debate are whether proper names refer to their bearers and under what conditions, or whether they fail to signify and, therefore, constitute a propositional gap, such as a non-existent signified (Everett 2003).

Anthropologists tend to shift focus from linguistic and ontological properties of names to their socio-political uses. Names are treated as words, signs, things, and performative effects that are situated in historical contexts, traversed with power relations (Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck 2006: 4). It is suggested that names are used to formally identify and fashion people in everyday and institutional contexts. Practices of naming embed people in kinship relations, history, and politics (Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck 2006: 3). In some places, names connote a great deal of meaningful information about a person's background. They can reveal not only gender but also ethnicity, caste, lineage, religion, and more. Even though they are inherently unstable signifiers, names are efficacious at shaping and re-inventing ontological categories such as 'foreigners' or 'strangers' within national processes of classification (Brink-Danan 2010). The coercive nature of names (Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck 2006: 14) has also been noted. They are difficult to shed and modify precisely because of names' intersubjective, relational baggage. Jacob Copeman explains that, in India, self-consciously secular people seek to escape ethno-religious connotations of their names through experiments in "transcategorical onomastics" (Copeman 2015: 5) or acts of renaming and inventing non-normative names that either conceal the caste, religion, and ethnicity of their bearers or hybridise them.

Contrary to the reigning intuition that names pertain to 'private' identities, personal names are often lineages rather than ahistorical identity markers. Among European rulers and kings, transmission of names was instrumental to legitimate succession and transfer of political power. Sometimes names were handed down from a living king to an heir. Where a taboo on being called after a living person existed, like among the 9th century Rurik dynasty in Russia, names were selected from a known list of dead ancestors (Uspensky 2021). In a classical ethnography about Iatmul of the Sepik River in New Guinea that might have lost some of its exigency today, Gregory Bateson describes how personal names are heirlooms that are carefully transmitted to bind the living to the ancestors on father's and mother's line into a compound of nearly identical people (Bateson 1936: 35–36). Clusters of ancestral names are recited on ritual occasions including name songs and funerals. Names are an item of bride wealth and a bargaining chip in marriages (Bateson 1936: 51). Names are uttered in ceremonial houses, and some speakers take pride in knowing and being able to speak thousands of ancestral names in display of oratory and masculinity

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(Bateson 1936: 126). They are substances and items that can be used in witchcraft and need to be protected from theft (Bateson 1936: 127).

Thus, names are inevitably “signs of history” (Brink-Danan 2010: 389) as they suture the domains of the living and the dead. The dead are irrevocably of the past, but names of the dead position themselves as “immanent copresences” (Wirtz 2016: 346), dependants, or intruders into the lives of the living. At the same time, names of the dead invert the immanence of the living by binding them to a “historical transcendental” (Wirtz 2016: 343): the before and after of one’s life, with or without a recourse to any theological concept. Thus, names fall within “technologies of historicity”, or objects and practices that enable experiential access to the past (Palmié and Stewart 2019).

Evidently, the ontology of names is more complicated than a mere social code. Among the memory activists in Moscow, names of the dead are the hardware of someone’s existence. Circumstances of one’s arrest, personal biographies, and their contexts are outcomes of historical fabulation and interpretation. They are partial and ambiguous. But names of the dead are “a stubborn fact which cannot be evaded” (Whitehead 1978: 43). Whitehead defines stubborn facts as an entity, an unequivocal actuality, and a process (Whitehead 1978: 42–43). Stubborn facts are disparate from static categories of philosophy and science and from privileged ideations of becoming and flux (Halewood and Michael 2008: 34). A stubborn fact is a combination of stuff and substance with prehension, a conceptual and physical feeling of potentiality. A stubborn fact settles into “conrescence”, a becoming that has concretised as a particular entity (Whitehead 1978: 128). Conrescence is an ongoing innovation, generating a singularity, or one, out of multiplicity, and, conversely, multiplicity out of one (Whitehead 1978: 211).

Whitehead’s thought is comparable to the activists’ historiographic principle that name is a fact, a conrescence. During one of my visits to the administrative office of *The Last Address*, a plaque already inscribed with the name was placed in the palm of my hand to feel its heaviness. As a given singularity, each name carries the weight of physical evidence against the historical crimes of the Russian state. Names of the dead constitute evidence of murder and support the activists’ demands for “retroactive justice” (Rev 2005) that involves reinterments, such as re-opening of graves and re-making of the dead by giving them autopsies, and “necronyms”, such as a posthumous change of name or avoidance of proper name of the dead (Rev 2005: 52). In other words, the activists’ historiography is a mode of historical realism where a name is identical to reality. It is a fact of being.

In this, the activists adhere to a historiographic paradigm of *factography*, or description of facts without theoretical analysis or nuanced interpretation, which was a dominant approach to historical knowledge in official and unofficial scholarship in Soviet Moscow after the Second World War (Kozlov 2001). For instance, facts were (and still are) sought by independent

Soviet historians in oral testimonies of participants rather than in official judicial documents, such as interrogation reports and police records, which were seen as corrupted (Markwick 2001: 11). In the 1960s, Soviet historians faced the formidable task of revisiting the Stalinist period that was discredited in Khrushchev's denunciation speech "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences" at the 20th Congress of the Communist Part of the Soviet Union in March 1956 (Markwick 2001: 4). The speech set in motion a process of destalinisation that, for a short period, introduced the term 'public honesty' (*glasnost*) that was revived and implemented by Gorbachev during the perestroika era of the 1980s. For Soviet historians, writers, and intellectuals, the moment produced the conditions for a politics of truth, where fact-finding and claims to objective representation of reality underpinned new moral and political sensibilities of truth-saying that "cannot be reduced to a utilitarian calculus" (Smith 1996: 18). Denis Kozlov suggests that

to many students of history, the accumulation of rich empirical evidence became a source of special pride and the crucial aspect of historical knowledge, while the past, including its intellectual practices, came to represent a positive alternative and guide to contemporary reality  
(Kozlov 2001: 578)

Fact-chasing and obsessive hoarding of historical trivia were derided by some dissidents, such as the writer and journalist Sergei Dovlatov (Kozlov 2001: 598). At the same time, many Soviet dissident movements borrowed and amplified dominant and marginal Soviet forms (Oushakine 2001), including historiographic methods and discourses. In other words, the epistemological paradigm of factography was inherited and transformed rather than invented by Soviet dissident historians. Like their mainstream Soviet counterparts, unofficial historians demonstrated a fascination with factual historical detail, even though they organised empirical material and added comments to subtly nudge readers towards a non-conformist interpretation of the past (Martin and Sveshnikov 2017). Although "magical historicism" in Russia (Etkind 2009: 644–655) is a popular literary genre that professes an interpretation of the past through fictional representations of the undead, vampires, and monsters, dissident archives were inclined to create allegedly impartial representations of the past. Thomas Laqueur associates the refusal of historical fabulation and suspicion of allegories, poetic elisions, and conceptual experiments with "hypernominalism" (Laqueur 2015: 390), whose goal is extreme realism and documentary precision. Hypernominalism focuses on civic bookkeeping or cataloguing of names, dates, addresses, and so on. However, enumeration of historical facts does not translate into 'truth' about the past since, according to Agamben, facts do not coincide with truth. Factuality of history exceeds what we know and has a plurality to it that cannot be reduced to an account of 'how it really

happened', partly because accurate testimony is doubly impossible when every witness is both unreliable and outsider to the event, partly because of silence of records (Agamben 2002: 12, 34).

Moreover, factography has its own aesthetic. Factographic aesthetics enlists and produces images of objectivity (Daston and Galison 1992). Daston and Galison show how the 19th century illustrations in atlases, and especially medical books, aimed to give the aesthetic rendition and moral prerogative to objectivity that was interpreted as a lack of human mediation rather than veracity to nature (Daston and Galison 1992: 82). Artistic illustrations of human bodies in atlases and encyclopaedias were not 'realistic' or 'photographic' but their compositions and techniques embodied a virtue of scientific detachment. In other words, they were objective not because they accurately copied nature but because they expressed and entrenched a value of objectivity.

Because of their claim to objectivity, images, especially photographic or cinematic, can be used as historical documents, a perceived reliable record of the past political and social events (Burke 2001). For example, photographic and cinematic images presented at the Nuremberg trial were accepted on a par with physical evidence, witness testimonies, and other demonstrations of proof (Delage 2005: 493). Images can complement oral testimony and textual archives, even though historians are inclined to work with written materials and treat some artistic images, such as painting or tapestry, with suspicion. Such images are seen as treacherous because, allegedly, they do not accurately capture the moment they represent (Burke 2001: 31). Burke bravely suggests that all images are *acts of eye-witnessing*, as a record of a moment when something was seen, truthfully or not (Burke 2001: 14). They are seen as reliable indices of worldviews (Burke calls them 'mentalities') that shape their creation and subsequent circulation. Burke concedes that some images might not be admissible in legal settings, but images' compliance, or lack thereof, with legal standards of evidence does not undermine their imbrication in manifold processes of truth-making. To put it simply, images, including painting and film, are an indelible part of the verification of past and present realities, but such verification is illusory because images are interpretations rather than mirrored representations of history as it happened. Whatever the medium of witnessing, Burke reminds us, one must resist its "reality effects" (Burke 2001: 167). Tri Minh-Ha states that "there is no such thing as documentary", since "all we have are regimes of power that equate truth with positivist thinking that presumes a total identification between word and a factual object" (Minh-Ha 1990: 78–79). It is a widely held positivist assumption that to document is to inform by "showing real people in real locations at real tasks" (Minh-Ha 1990: 80). A claim to factual or naturalist reportage determines "an aesthetic of objectivity" (Minh-Ha 1990: 80) that gives a licence to speak 'the truth' in absolutist, and, inevitably, reified terms (Minh-Ha 1990: 95).

To secure the name of every victim of political repressions in Soviet history and to continue the legacy of the Soviet non-conformist historians (despite their ideological trappings in the very regime they contested), the memory activists in contemporary Moscow, see the commemoration of past atrocities as, to quote Derrida,

a matter of holding the promise of saying the truth at any price, of testifying, of rendering oneself to the truth of the name, to the thing itself such as it must be named by the name, that is, beyond the name  
(Derrida 1995b: 68)

For the activists, a name points to itself as a fact before it is as a sign to its referent. To see a name as a documentary fact is to sever a name from its family nomenclature and heredity, to obscure its human subject. A name of the dead has an inherent capacity for historical truth as it references the absence of the human subject and, as Derrida notes, signifies lack rather than designates a thing (Derrida 1995b: 68). A name of the dead is a sign of a person removed, in Charles Peirce's definition of a 'sign' as a relationship of dependence between an interpretant and an object where either might or might not exist (Peirce 1991: 239). However, names of the dead are signs of a different order. They do not postulate a correspondence between the proper name and a reality beyond themselves. They are facts of historical violence rather than symbols or indexes of the dead. In their multiplicity, names of the dead reference the irrefutable truth of the state's Terror that does not need to be proven. It must be unconcealed and affirmed repeatedly.

## The Total Number of the Dead

The initial impetus for this book is an ethnographic observation that *Memorial* activists give primacy to singular names of each victim over the final number of people executed during Stalin's reign. A common stance among them is that, in enumerating names of the dead, the activists should remember *all* (*vsekh*) and *everyone* (*kazhdogo*). Their aspiration is to collect every single name of the dead and assemble them into comprehensive lists that, then, go public. Arlette Farge suggests that archived lists of names are quite suitable for quantitative analysis because they are pithy mentions of thousands of people who appear on record (Farge 2013: 13). This has only partial application to the *Memorial* archive. While televised talk shows in Russia stage verbal duels over the *exact total number* of the victims of the Stalinist Terror, the activists see *scale* in non-numerical terms *as a process of documenting all* names of victims of political repressions. In the activists' work, names have replaced statistical numbers. Yet, they occupy the same morphological position. The activists' substitution of numbers with names postulates a peculiar ontology of a name where progression starts from the premise of *singular one* and is limited by an unquantifiable, and thus

infinite, notion of *one* as ‘all’ (*vse*). This process magnifies the singularity of one death through iteration of *one*, without counting *all*. Inversely, one name is a particularisation of all.

At first glance, names are a cumbersome method of adding people. They are accumulated in the activists’ archive to convey the magnitude of the Stalinist Terror and, concomitantly, reject the numerical logic of violent bureaucracies that stripped people of personal names and allocated numbers in prison-like political systems. The fictional world of Zamyatin’s *We* (1921) features a rationalised industrial order where progress and notional humanity displaced humans (Bauman 1992: 4). In the world of *We*, people are addressed as “Dear Numbers!” (Zamyatin 2015: 24). Zamyatin’s as-yet-imagined regime of numerical names such as S 854 or X 123 became a mundanear experience in labour camps and Gulags as described by Solzhenitsyn in his experientially grounded *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (Solzhenitsyn 2000 [1962]). Numbers were central to Stalin’s administration that calculated the number of enemies in percentages and ballpark estimates of tens of thousands (Gregory 2009a: 197). Socio-political categories of suspect and unreliable social classes and ethnicities such as Poles, Germans, and others were sorted into the ratio of enemies per category, simply by counting all 20- to 60-year-old males within a targeted population (Gregory 2009a: 198). The increase in the number of perceived enemies required efficient management of the NKVD that led to the deployment of extra-judicial *dvoikas* and *troikas* operational groups, literally, teams of two or three members of the secret services. Applied to killings of people, productivity ( $\Theta$ ) was translated into “the number of extra-judicial convictions per Chekist operational worker” (Gregory 2009b: 212). Enhanced productivity of mass murder found expression in the use of quotas for summarily arrests and executions, which specified the desired number of convictions to be achieved per region (Gregory 2009b: 214). Quotas and simplified methods of attributing ‘guilt’ without trials led to the three- or four-fold boost to the organisational effectiveness of convictions and executions (Gregory 2009b: 208).

One documentary artefact of Stalinist productivity is the execution lists. According to the historical account published on the homepage of one of the *Memorial* digital archives, the first mention of the word ‘list’ appeared in a document about counter-revolutionary activity in military industry dated July 1929 (<https://stalin.memo.ru/history/>, accessed April 1, 2022). The document proposed to create an execution list of people concerned. From 1934, execution lists became an intrinsic part of the so-called simplified juridical procedures that obligated the prosecutors to conclude investigation within 10 days, notify the accused just 1 day before the trial, swiftly consider the case, refuse appeal against the decision, and carry out the death sentence immediately. From autumn 1936, the use of execution lists became a regular practice within a special committee of the NKVD interior ministry that reached the verdict based merely on annotated lists of names of



the accused. The execution lists signed by Stalin usually contained nothing more than the full name of the accused. Although the number of names on the lists is estimated at 44,500, the sum is an approximation because some names were crossed out and appeared twice on different lists. On one occasion, the historians of *Memorial* presumed that the same name doubled up on two lists when it was two people who happened to be namesakes. The last known list is dated 1950. After the death of Stalin, the existence of the lists came to light, and 383 lists were archived in the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party (Figure 0.5).

The above list is page two of one of the execution lists for Moscow, dated 1937–1938. Column One recorded the submission date of 22 execution lists, between September 7, 1937, and May 3, 1938. The lists were filed at the regular intervals of 5 to 15 days. There are a few longer intervals between January 3, 1938, and February 3, 1938, and March 5, 1938, and March 28, 1938: a 31 and a 33-day gap, respectively. The lists were put in the folders marked with Roman numerals, typewritten in Column Two. The next three columns contain the total number of people placed on the list, followed by two columns that break the total number into Category I and Category II punishment, meaning death penalty and hard labour prison sentence (although death penalty was sometimes commuted to a less severe punishment). The last two columns: Category III and Notes were left blank. The numbers of those executed and those imprisoned were tallied up to a total per list. For example, the list dated October 3, 1937, recorded 563 people sentenced to death plus 73 people sentenced to a prison term. The total of 635 people was accurately entered. The number of people to be executed is nearly tenfold of those to be imprisoned. For example, 2,548 people were marked for execution and 223 people for imprisonment on January 3, 1938. A calculation or typing error crept into the above list on December 7, 1937, when the sum of 2,125 executions and 279 prison sentences should stand at 2,404 rather than the filled-in number of 2,402. The marginal statistical error of two is the difference of two lives.

The execution lists grew out of gruesome practicalities of mass killings in the 1930s. In their disregard of human lives, they are incommensurable with written lists and inventories of literary imaginaries, such as the *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost* or *Moby Dick*, that please and delight the reader (Belknap 2004). Yet, even playful literary lists can be an aperture into an atrocity. Georges Perec, a French essayist, has a keen eye for detail. Fascinated with the quotidian in contrast to the spectacular and the sensational, Perec observes, documents, lists, and catalogues spaces and habitual activities: rooms, streets, contents of drawers, mundane actions, the stuff of memory. His literary method is to describe, compare, and question (Perec 1997: 210). Itemising and archiving everything, he looks at the order of packing and unpacking, at the ways of arranging books and so on (Perec 1997: 150). In contrast to the tragic task of enumerating names of the dead, Perec seems to engage in a light-hearted exercise when he creates an inventory of the liquid and solid



- 2 -

Даты представления списков	№№ томов	Количество представленных			Примечание
		Всего	I кат.	II кат.	
7 сентября 1937г.	III	276	254	22	-
15 сентября 1937г.	III	794	744	50	-
22 сентября 1937г.	III	354	320	34	-
26 сентября 1937г.	III	411	348	63	-
3 октября 1937г.	III	635	562	73	-
21 октября 1937г.	III, IV	1355	1238	117	-
27 октября 1937г.	IV	634	603	31	-
1 ноября 1937г.	IV	187	184	3	-
13 ноября 1937г.	IV, V	1675	1576	99	-
22 ноября 1937г.	V	1395	1237	158	-
7 декабря 1937г.	V	2402	2125	279	-
13 декабря 1937г.	V	352	317	35	-
22 декабря 1937г.	V	1016	876	140	-
3а февраль 1937г.	V	147	147	-	-
3 января 1938г.	VI	2771	2548	223	-
3 февраля 1938г.	VI	1805	1728	77	-
9 февраля 1938г.	VI	1488	1488	-	-
14 февраля 1938г.	VI	408	408	-	-
5 марта 1938г.	VII	1991	1813	178	-
28 марта 1938г.	VII	1298	1173	125	-
19 апреля 1938г.	VIII	2805	2444	361	-
3 мая 1938г.	VIII	1315	1143	172	-

Figure 0.5 A numerical execution list. The image is courtesy the International Memorial in Moscow and RGASPI, The Russian State Archive of the Social and Political History f.17, op.171, d. 409-419). The complete archive of the available lists can be found at <https://stalin.memo.ru/all-lists>.

food that he consumed in 1974. The inventory mentions beef consommés, asparagus, eggs, haddocks, veal with noodles, salads, mousses, other dishes, deserts, and wine varietals (Perec 1997: 244–249). The inventory runs into nearly six pages to include hams, pates, oysters, sardines, croquettes,

one eggs with anchovy, two boiled eggs, two eggs en meurette, one ham and eggs, one bacon and eggs, one eggs en cocotte with spinach, two eggs in aspic, two scrambled eggs, four omelettes, one sort of omelette, one soya-seed omelette, one craterellus omelette, one duck skin omelette, one confit d’oie omelette, one herb omelette, one Paermentier omelette  
(Perec 1997: 245)

Another effort to exhaust spaces and itemise the world (Perec 1997) is moving into a new apartment that involves “cleaning, checking, trying out, changing, fitting, signing, waiting, imagining...” (Perec 1997: 35). This seemingly absurd and obsessive documentation of the self, streets, bus stops, kiosks, and everything else is a massification of history that becomes akin to “a cupboard where everything is packed away, every last person’s every last moment” (Stepanova 2017: 73). The effect is to defamiliarise and attune us to the irrepressible abundance of life, which is altered imperceptibly by Perec’s barely detectible reminders of the everydayness of death and concentration camps.

Robert Belknap suggests that “lists are a framework that holds separate and disparate items together” (Belknap 2004: 2). A list encloses resemblances and differences into a tentative whole; it joins, separates, and leaves out (Belknap 2004: 15, 19). A list can be random or ordered alphabetically, geographically, or by any other organisational principle (Belknap 2004: 7–8). Non-literary, utilitarian lists can serve any purpose. When it comes to counting history and measuring loss, a conventional tendency is to list by using names and numbers as well as calendar dates, items of deployed weapons, itineraries, expenses, destroyed machinery, duration of conflicts, estimates of death toll.

The idea of the list per se is not rejected by *Memorial*. However, their archive resists the numerical list that encapsulates the totalising logic of a mass atrocity. The activists’ own lists are imbued with an alternative human arithmetic without numbers. The activists do not strictly calculate the numbers of the dead but create lists, rosters, and inventories of names of the dead that are moved from a penumbra of history into the activities of the living. Counting with names rather than numbers is a mathematical expression of a relationship between singularity of each life and the multitude of a mass atrocity that brings disparate people together into one framework of historical violence. This mode of counting with names gives priority to the repetition of *one*. It privileges *one* – one name, one life, one memorial plaque – as a verifiable and factual number over the indeterminacy of ‘many’ and their final tally.

Who counts? And who refuses to count? The practice of refusing the number and, instead, counting the dead with names is not unique to

*Memorial* as the ethico-philosophical question of counting the dead and the juxtaposition of names and numbers as denominators of people has many ancient articulations. Ancient Greeks had the Fates, or the Moirae, who span a thread of life for each person and measured out when a person would die by cutting the thread. Plato knew that Ancient Egyptians were overseen by a mythical being, Thoth, writing down the weight of the dead and recording the length of human lives (Derrida 1981: 93). Thoth was a patron of numbers whose ontology enabled a movement of repetition from death to life (Derrida 1981: 93). The association of numbers with life and death illuminates a foundational problem of quantifying people, such as arriving at the total number of every male or every first-born, and, contrariwise, prohibiting numerological understanding of people. The Book of Numbers of the Hebrew Bible contains many biblical references to counting various categories of people and mentions two divinely ordained censuses. God's repeated commandments to "count" in the Book of Numbers are challenged in First Chronicles and Second Samuel where numbering the living children of Israel is treated as a transgression (Heller-Roazen 2021: 209). The divine requirement to memorialise each dead by their name reverberates through time and resurfaces in suspicion of the language of quantification among today's American Jewry and their "refusal to live by numbers" coupled with desire to know the "real people behind the numbers" (Krauel-Tovi 2018: 713, 720). For a diminishing population, the question of "how many are we?" seems irreverent next to a more pertinent inquiry into "why do we want to be a multitude?" (Krauel-Tovi 2018: 721).

Besides elucidating the practical need to count the living, a theological admonition that no one can be measured or numbered is formulated in the story of demonic possession of the wild Gadarene in the *Gospel of Mark* (Heller-Roazen 2021: 205). After performing an exorcism on a man possessed by demons, Jesus asked his name. The answer "My name is Legion, for we are many" signifies a being that is simultaneously one and many, I and we (Heller-Roazen 2021: 205). Once the demons were expelled, the man's multitude was gone. He remained nameless, but "of a determinate number" (Heller-Roazen 2021: 207). That determinate number is one, but it is a strange singularity that denotes a multitude (Heller-Roazen 2021: 222). The Biblical narrative makes two enmeshed points: a name and a number can be interchangeable and singularity of one and multitude of many are equivalent.

Numbers cannot be mistaken for obscure transcendental entities out of time and space because numbers feature prominently in our political and governmental conceptions of the world (Badiou 2008). Numbers are practical adding/deducting mechanisms of governmentality, statistics, and voting practices. Arjun Appadurai remarks that political participation is informed by ideas of majority and minority, where the latter is feared despite its small numbers (Appadurai 2006). "Democracy counts", says Derrida, "it counts votes and subject, but it does not count, should not count, ordinary

singularities” (Derrida 2005a: x). Changing pace, Derrida inquires “at what number does genocide begin?” (Derrida 2005a: x)? Why does the question of number persist in the judicial and ordinary reckoning of death, murder, and genocide? Is it possible to draw a distinction between a small number and a big number when it comes to a killing? If genocide is defined as a mass killing, what number constitutes the ‘mass’? What role does *scale* play in naming acts of violence a mass killing, a massacre, a politicide (Campbell 2011)? If binding definitions and typologies of genocide are detrimental to recognition of violence (Thaler 2014), can justice hinge on counting the exact number of the dead? Derrida says that friends are “incalculable singularities, where it be preferable not to reckon with friends as one counts and reckons with things” (Derrida 2005a: 20). Does this apply to memory of the dead, the known and the unknown?

It seems that, when it comes to things social, mathematical numbers cannot be reduced to instruments of counting, calculating, accreting, and subtracting. In the first instance, social numbers define sets. A set is a technical term in philosophy that names and brackets entities as ‘members’ within it (Papineau 2012: 4). In other words, a set postulates membership and contains members within it. Just like lists, sets can be exclusive, overlapping, overarching, or empty, without members. Sets are riddled with contradictions because they do not neatly conform to requirements for similarity, inclusion or externality that shape various notions of the social. In 1903, two French sociologists, Emile Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde, participated in a debate on the scope and methods of sociology. For Durkheim, sociological research could be modelled on the statistical methods of natural sciences to generate “factual inventories” (Tarde and Durkheim 2010: 29). In reply, Tarde queried the notion of a social fact and the extent to which social phenomena can be reduced to natural laws. At the heart of the debate was a distinction between quantitative and qualitative aspects of the social world, brought into relief by the process of scaling up from a singular person to a collective, an intriguing assemblage that can be a sum of its parts or a distinct entity that stands for itself. Bruno Latour suggests that the debate reflects a broader epistemological and conceptual division between what constitutes quantity and quality and how one becomes another (Latour 2010: 147). It is an ontic question of what is quantifiable, how to collect components into a composite set and if the process entails a loss or transformation of the properties or qualities of a more basic or smaller entity. For Durkheim, Latour explains, quantification involves moving from individuals to society, but for Tarde, the increase in number from an element to a composite is difficult because “the relationship of the element of the aggregate is not the same as that of an ingredient to a structure” (Latour 2010: 150).

One can conclude that numbers and basic mathematical operations are not disinterested. They are performative in a sense that counting produces an interpretation of immeasurable reality through enumeration and value

of fractions, percentages, sums, and subtractions (Day, Lury and Wakeford 2014). Practices of collecting and applying numerical data, deploying numbers to explicate and predict social processes, and other evocations and uses of numbers in socio-political contexts are illuminating of how we live “in and with numbers” (Day, Lury and Wakeford 2014). Recruited into a pervasive “process of composition” (Day, Lury and Wakeford 2014: 150), numbers crystallise how social worlds can scale up and down by addition and subtraction and how social worlds are configured as they zoom, fold, score, knot, rank, pause, pixilate, accrete, and diffract (Day, Lury and Wakeford 2014).

Furthermore, numbers and their logics can be harnessed to *visualise* relations, such as a movement between one to many, a fragmentation of a whole into parts, and gradual accumulation. Sophie Day, Celia Lury, and Nina Wakeford turn to conceptual art that engages with numbers to explore visual and material forms of the above processes. An artist called Chris Jordan looks at how repeated objects such as plastic bottles and dolls can be zoomed on to see one element (one bottle) and zoomed out to see another one (a blurry whole of all bottles). Zooming out does not evince a summative, total number of plastic bottles. It arrives at a different one, “another ‘one’ that is simultaneously a many, a (vague) whole” (Day, Lury and Wakeford 2014: 132). In *Counting (Rocks)*, Mel Bochner draws a line of variously sized and distanced rocks in black ink. Each rock is numbered in writing above the line. Difference in size and distance between rocks and gaps of various lengths between the numbers create an impression of instability of counting (Day, Lury, and Wakeford 2014: 137). Adding one does not result in adding an equivalent object or equal increase between numbers; one becomes a variable measure (Day, Lury, and Wakeford 2014: 137). In another experiment with numbers as “performative inventory” (Chilver 2014: 242), Florian Slotawa, a postconceptual artist, would check into a hotel room, dismantle its furniture, remove the bathroom doors off the hinges, assemble the items into unpredictable structures that he photographed, only to show how inventories and lists of items can be reconfigured into sculpture (Chilver 2014: 245). His artwork explicates how *number* is implicit to documentary, performative and other modalities of devising lists, inventories, and itemised collections (Chilver 2014: 248). Uses of numbers in art practice highlight that number can be an aesthetic mechanism, suitable not only for counting but for composing and manifesting history.

What analytical yield do names of the dead have, in contrast to a more conventional counting of the dead? Arranged in an alphabetical or random sequence, names of the victims of political repressions in Moscow are guarded against the “mania for exact number” (Merridale 2000: 5) of national statistics (de Santos 2009). This way, names of the repressed do not contribute to the sovereign boundary-policing, national mourning, and aspirations to national unity. Brought together, the activists’ lists of names do not make a stark delimitation between a victim and an executioner,

between an atheist and a devout priest, or between a Russian and a Jew. Names neither individuate nor speak of ‘peoples’ in homogenised terms. Hence, in contrast to natural numbers that follow a linear progression, names differentiate and aggregate people into an indeterminate assemblage of victims of political Terror. Openly antagonistic to thinking about a mass atrocity in numbers, this unconventional political arithmetic offers a chance to re-think expulsions and killings, as well as belonging, within a multitude other than a people of national historiographies. In other words, names and numbers are joined in a hypothesis that political participation entails some counting, yet names enable a non-numerical counting that does not aggregate people into populations. Mundane as it seems, the practice of listing names of the dead and the living is a distinct way “to enumerate history” (Derrida 1981: 93) by means other than statistics.

How can we think about numerical history of a mass atrocity without assuming a natural unit yet without dissolving the concreteness of historical violence? For instance, Badiou starts with the Euclidean idea that numbers proceed from a multiplicity to the supra-numeric one that is assigned a value of void (Badiou 2008: 10). The limit of one, Badiou suggests, has been incised from contemporary thinking, swarmed with ever-increasing numbers and calculations. To understand the loss of the prime One, Badiou reads the mathematical theories of Frege and Cantor to question two theories of number as a property of the real world and as an inflection of pure thought. In the process, he poses a series of important questions about truth as an identity to itself or truth as a concern with multiplicity (Badiou 2008: 33–34). Badiou proposes an alternative theory of numbers that reverses the order of finitude and infinity and suggests that multiplicity precedes one. Subsequently, infinite multiplicity is the basic attribute of being while the most difficult operation (in its secular form) is how to add one, or how to build a succession (Badiou 2008: 100).

By analogy with Badiou’s theory of multiplicity, the enumeration of history by listing names one by one – without the hierarchical and moralising opposition between one death and a mass atrocity – achieves something important. As *Memorial* grapples with the largeness of the Soviet Terror, names of the dead furnish a non-mathematical way of laying bare the un-countability of mass executions and introducing an alternative notion of *scale*. By counting with names, memory activists replace the idea of scale as an endlessly expanding death toll of seemingly identical elements with “nonscalability” that presumes enormity without uniformity (Tsing 2012). To paraphrase, nonscalability of memorial inscriptions of names of the dead explicates a movement between singularity and multitude that honours each dead with a name yet conveys the gross magnitude of atrocity without reducing it to a number.

In Mongolia, nonscalability is captured by the word *tüm[en]* that means 10,000. But, in contrast to another strictly numerical *arvan myanga[n]*, it signifies a qualitative abundance, such as plenitude in horses (Bristley



2020: 69). In Moscow, nonscalability underpins the non-quantifiable arithmetic of names of the dead that allows the activists simultaneously to assign each name a value of singularity and to gather names of the dead into infinitely long registers that establish an undifferentiated, non-numerical kind of totality: a *multitude* of the dead. Names of the dead are a different mode of counting the multitude of killing because they play a role of non-quantifiable facts in the activists' historico-juridical project of establishing and repeatedly articulating one story in its endless variations. Contrary to the counting of "a more stereotypical variety", such as a census or body count of missing people (Kockelman 2016: 393), names of the dead speak of the magnitude and intensity of the loss: the many dead, the undifferentiated totality, the infinite number, "the absolutely horrific" (Kockelman 2016: 393). This alternative reckoning of loss – through names rather than numbers – posits a fundamental philosophical question about the relation and even equivalence between one and many – or singularity and multitude – that crystallises the magnitude of a killing through a visual form of a seriality of monuments and public repetition of names. What difference does it make if one person was murdered or a million? And in what way can one arithmetic of murder be more harrowing than another?

The emphasis on singular names as fragments of history is formulated as an objection to a nationalist historiography dominated by numbers and the body count of the dead. Yet, personal names of the dead also behave *as if* they were numbers. Quasi-mathematical properties of names are apparent in their tendency to aggregate and to gather distinct elements into wholes. At the same time, the refusal of number is underpinned by a historiographic argument for factography that presumes that names can be verified with a greater degree of accuracy than easily falsifiable numbers. Numbers can be modified and manipulated. Numbers can include, omit, or simply miscalculate the totality of the dead. Numbers insinuate a possibility of arriving at a determinate result, but it is a result that it is a priori compromised because it can be contested. Against a commonplace assumption that numbers render social reality transparent and accountable, the activists see them as "fact-totems" (de Santos 2009: 467), a powerful performative ruse that creates a version of the real and dictates how it can be perceived. In contrast, triangulated by personal testimony and archival records, names are irrefutable. In a way, names as facts and artefacts, such as textual and monumental inscriptions, enhance the activists' historiographic authority.

Numbers as facts, including their specific orders such as ranking and percentage, are ancient tools of political persuasion (Guyer 2014). For instance, percentages are used as indicators of governance and fairness that evoke a sense of wholeness of an actual fragmented world. A 100 per cent indicates a possibility of wholeness while different percentages are a calculation of fragments of the whole (Guyer 2014: 158). At the same time, numbers are expressive forms used to argue and represent a moment in history (Guyer 2014: 156). Uses of percentages, including their visual and graphic

representations such as charts, are easily understood by a general despite their obscurity. Percentages constitute “persuasive imagery” (Guyer 2014: 161) because they are rendered familiar and uncomplicated in a political rhetoric that deploys numbers to sketch temporal social processes: past, present, and future probabilities. Names of the dead also establish an alternative ground for certainty about the past. Specifically, singular names and the multitude of names collected into lists constitute the “aesthetics of persuasion” (Meyer 2010) that eliminates ambiguity about the history of the Stalinist Terror as anything other than a killing.

Put in a nutshell, collections of names of the dead forego the pitfalls of numbers yet bestow “ethical and epistemological credibility” (Osborne 1999: 51) on the archive. An ethical credibility of an archive lends authority to its keepers and users who, in turn, acquire an epistemological credibility, a form of knowledge that signals certainty and expertise (Osborne 1999: 54). Thomas Osborne suggests that the archival expertise is best described as

a sort of expertise about providence, the right to make statements about the past, about history, about the future; the right not necessarily to predict the workings of providence, still less to dictate to them, but to a certain kind of providential seriousness

(Osborne 1999: 54)

Numbers and names are intrinsic to narratives about violent past, but names escape the additive logic of numbers as they give account of a non-mathematical tension between singularity of a concrete death and the multitude of indeterminate mass killing. Names as facts do not count the dead, yet they are a form of quantification of something that can be understood only non-referentially, the way we imagine innumerable infinity as an abstract sign. Both names and numbers of the dead are an abstraction with social and political ramifications. However, names of the dead are an abstraction of a different kind that facilitates an understanding of how the relationship to an unwitnessed historical mass murder and its absent subjects is instituted.

### **Iterativity of the Dead**

What scares Nikolai, one of the activists, is the idea of total annihilation, being “without a name, without the least symptom, and without even an ash”, as Derrida writes (1995a: 63). At some point, Nikolai read a Second World War story about people pushed by Nazis under the ice of a fast-running river. Nikolai imagined the horror of such death: crackling ice, winter darkness, freezing water, exploding lungs. Nikolai’s commitment to commemoration is derived from a civic and political desire to forestall oblivion and to overcome historical nothingness – a rumour of an unmarked



grave, an unknown KGB file in the classified archives, an empty wall, or an unread diary that can be undone by documenting names of the dead. If some dead are reincarnated in statues and their names are preserved, ordinary and non-descript dead gradually disappear. To return names of the dead into public consciousness is akin to what Francisco Ferrándiz describes as an undoing of the “funerary apartheid” against those killed during the Civil War and Francoism in Spain (Ferrándiz 2019: S62). Descendants of the killed in Spain campaign to disinter and rebury the bodies from mass graves to resituate the remains inside cemeteries. In doing so, they restore some dignity to the dead and create an illusion of civic justice, in the face of persistent reluctance among some state, religious, and military figures to engage with the uncomfortable past (Ferrándiz 2019).

In contrast to the exhumations and reburials in Spain, exhumations of bodies from mass graves in Russia are extremely rare, so the activists’ efforts are geared towards names, without bodies. Preservation of names is an aspect of care of the dead, although memory activism as mortuary work misses two tangible aspects of death: burials and putrescent bodies (Engelke 2019). Mortuary rites usually require a body while names of the dead have a different corporeality of a written sign. How a cadaver is handled might be underpinned by various religious and local conceptions about the dead, habitual funerary practices, and biopolitical regulations of death and burials set by nation-states. Such regulations might be known to funerary experts alone. They might be improvised and, increasingly technologised, digitised, and animated (Hales 2019). Nevertheless, notions of ‘tradition’, ‘culture’, and ‘proper’ ways of dealing with the dead continue to preoccupy the living who ask how someone died, how the remains should be treated, how graves are tended, and who visits them. Funerary practices and rituals of mourning can also influence one’s afterlife. For instance, it has been suggested that the Russian Revolution desacralised the dead body and burial sites, giving rise to mass graves (Malysheva 2017: 234). For many people in Russia, including Orthodox Russians, the duty of the living is to maintain a relationship with the deceased and assist them by feasting 3, 9, and 40 days after their departure (Bouchard 2004). The way someone died makes some dead dangerous (Warner 2000b; Warner 2000a). People who committed suicide, were murdered, or killed in a tragic accident such as drowning are restless dead; they should not be disturbed (Merridale 2000: 4).

Many ethnographic descriptions have pointed out that the anonymous and named dead and their wandering ghosts exert felt influence on the living (Kwon 2013). Ancestors and ghosts expect us to do things on their behalf. Names, graves, and monuments are an example of this otherworldly dictate. Mass graves, derelict Gulag camps, and their graveyards become spectral dwellings for the dead who occasionally posit a certain risk to the wellbeing of the Evenki deer herders of the Amur region as they encounter malevolent ghosts of the dead prisoners (*zeks*) (Ulturgasheva 2017). The

past is overlaid by the contemporary daily cartography of villages and settlements, but it remains deposited like old bones under schools and homes. The past is restless, as the memories of the Gulags and their angry spirits refuse to quieten down and push the living out of their homes (Ulturgasheva 2017: 41).

Historical and ethnographic record contains examples of visitations by the dead, which attest to their maleficent or gentle nature (Vitebsky 1991), and a seeming “instinctive inability to think of a dead human being without restoring to it the life it no longer possessed” (Ginzburg 2011: 34). The ghosts and souls of the dead have no corporeal existence in the activists’ everyday practices of researching, writing, and memorialising the history of Soviet mass atrocities. Nevertheless, the activists’ archival labour carries mortuary undertones as historians often perform the task of undertakers of names of the dead as they painstakingly dig out names of the dead from the pit of history and then give them a paper or monumental funeral that many dead had been denied. The version of memory activism I learned about in Moscow deploys name of the dead rather than corpses to bring history and law into a single framework of seeking justice for the dead. In inscribing and articulating names of the dead publicly, the activists make implicit accusations against the Soviet past in the name of the dead to tackle what they see as the “culpable indifference” (Derrida 1995a: 21) of the contemporary state to their posthumous fate. To restate, the activist archive is tied to historiography of a mass atrocity that cannot be separated from questions of justice, human-rights advocacy, and criminal law (Burgis-Kasthala 2021). At the same time, the *Last Address* plaques bring the forgotten dead back to the city. The plaques are a sign of the invisible corpse, superimposed on the city’s map (Steeves 2007). These commemorative installations and, especially, their propensity to spread across Moscow and other Russian cities have incurred vehement criticism. In December 2020, key member of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs angrily denounced the project (<https://echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/23333667-echo>, accessed 11.06. 2021). The detractor spoke about the right to privacy and imperturbability of the dead and their descendants and the need to establish specific reasons for each arrest to determine the worthiness of the dead to be remembered. Other critics called for a concomitant commemoration of every ordinary person who fought for the country in the Second World War. More, the proliferation of the plaques in Moscow was posited as a threat of turning Russian cities into graveyards (*kladbishcha*). They were lampooned because they conjure unsolicited, intrusive images of cemeteries and improvised graves.

In Athens, death memorials, known as “little graves”, are erected for the unfortunate ones who died in a road accident or alone on the streets (Seremetakis 2016: 76). Being ornaments and monuments at the same time, little graves let death leak into the world of the living, reconfiguring cities into “deathscapes” (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010: 4). Deathscapes

encompass sites of death and mourning, which are transgressive because they return the dead from their containment in the graveyards, “the archetypal ghettos” (Bauman 1992: 2), into ordinary public spaces (Seremetakis 2016: 84). In the context of historical violence in Moscow, the plaques are nothing short of “a thanato-political street act” (Seremetakis 2016: 84). Hence, the resentment that the plaques might transform Moscow into a vast cemetery is a refusal of commemoration and accountability for the multitude of the killed in the capital of Soviet Russia. In the activists’ view, the whole debate insinuates an attempt to scotomize history.

However, the accusation that the plaques have become “a conveyer belt” (*konveyer*) of commemorative signs is inadvertently insightful about the ontology of the activist archive. To remind, the plaques are an iterative monument. They comprise a set of self-similar, or nearly identical, architectural objects that are designed to multiply and dissipate across the city and beyond. Each plaque is a self-contained, stand-alone monument and a fragment of the larger memorial assemblage. Sometimes, several plaques are placed next to each other in one or two rows as some buildings were scenes of multiple arrests of family members, neighbours, and colleagues. Thus, each plaque enciphers one death and invokes a seriality of killings that targeted whole families or workplaces, as many Soviet citizens who worked together were given apartments in the same building. Agamben makes a striking observation the fabrication of death in Auschwitz created “a conveyor belt of corpses” unnatural precisely in its seriality (Agamben 2002: 71) “Serial death” (Agamben 2002: 72) encapsulates a machinery of murder that depends on supply chains of the living. The scale of the serial death borders on unimaginable even though most of us know and some wish to deny the ballpark number of the dead. In this regard, names are a particularly apt way to capture and cogently manifest the depersonalising seriality and scale of a mass killing.

Devoid of spectral presence, the plaques are a public art project that puts to work “the archival impulse” (Foster 2004: 3) or an artistic experimentation with the archive as an aesthetic model. To enable a reflection about history, archival art produces a concatenation of objects, images, and texts<sup>5</sup> that have a tendency “to ramify like a weed” (Foster 2004: 5). By multiplying, the plaques are an ongoing intervention that transforms the city infrastructure and historical voids into a visible archive replete with documentary objects and artistic artefacts (Jiménez and Estalella 2013: 163–164). The *Last Address* plaques proliferate to constitute the commons archive of unlawful killings. Almost accidentally, the plaques morph ques-

5 The archival art includes works of Douglas Gordon, Alexander Rodchenko, Gerhard Richter, Ilya Kabakov, Thomas Hirschhorn, and many others. A common feature of archival art is a piling up of things to create overflowing or regimented displays and allegories of producing archive and futility of its completion (Foster 2004).

tions of pure memory into matters of justice. Iterations of names create a structure of repetition and accountability for the horrific history, which mirrors the repeated violation of law and human life. The iterative principle of the plaques as monuments to a mass atrocity reinforces Koselleck's argument that repetition is intrinsic to the praxis of law because repeated application of law is necessary for justice (Koselleck 2018: 131). To repeat names of the dead in the absence of institutional judicial proceedings is to enact a claim of historical justice, again and again. Noa Vaisman notes that historical justice in post-junta Argentina is constituted through "sedimentation of innumerable repetitions" (Vaisman 2021: 2) that are not alike. The search for the disappeared, official trials and campaigns for memory and historical truth in Argentina are characterised by multiple repetitions, such as legal retrials and reliving a witnessed event. These are generative repetitions in Derrida's sense of iteration where justice is premised on slight variation of "the singular event that transcends every specific instance" (Vaisman 2021: 7).

The distributed character of the plaques creates a "de-totalizing condition of justice" (Derrida 2006: 51) that hinges on iteration with a difference. Despite their seriality, each plaque is dissimilar as it refers to a different person by their personal name. The overall number of the installed plaques is relatively small, which rules out an accidental repetition of a common name. Repeated 500 times in Moscow alone, the plaques reproduce the same sculptural form but contain a variation of letters and numbers. In this regard, the dissimilar iterativity of the plaques – a formulaic inscription that contains the alterity of each proper name – renders an insight into a mass atrocity as something simultaneously personal and generic (Figure 0.6).

The letters and numbers on the plaques are written signs or graphemes that convey biographical details of the dead, which are meaningful only to a few descendants. To strangers, they do not index a concrete person as somebody who was alive, had thoughts, emotions, longing. For all the diversity of names of the dead, their inscriptions are variations of the same historical event - a killing - and of the same architectural form. Any plaque is a prototype of other plaques, in the original sense of the prototype (*prototypon*) as the infinite or indeterminate number of things (Heller-Roazen 2017: 115). This is not a prototype in the sense of an original copy. A prototype can be re-thought as an incomplete artefact that is "always on the move and proliferating into affinal objects, yet never quite accomplishing its own closure" (Jiménez 2013: 385). A prototype is "more than many and less than one" (Jiménez 2013: 345). Such a prototype replicates itself rather than the original model to elucidate a principle in thought (Küchler 2010). Thus, iterativity of names of the dead and their capacity to be singled out and accumulated into lists posit an ethnographic, aesthetic, and conceptual question about how the specific and the abstract of a mass atrocity can be crystallised into an image.



Figure 0.6 A series of eight plaques in the arch of a building near Pokrovka.

### The Graphic Image of a Mass Atrocity

Hidden in the lists of names of the dead is a fundamental philosophical problem of conceptualising a relation between singularity and multitude and between specificity and abstraction of a mass atrocity. In the context of *Memorial* activism, names of the dead are historiographic anchors and

claims to justice in the aftermath of the Soviet Terror. Beyond this, names are given a physical monumentality through acts and processes of inscribing names of the dead in different artistic media such as texts, monuments, embodied performance events, and sound. My contention is that names of the dead are monumental images that transduce a conceptual relation between a concrete instance of one death and the abstraction of a mass atrocity into a material aesthetic figuration. These permutations across material registers and media constitute the materiality of names of the dead as inscriptions that eschew questions of representation or symbolism of history to constitute a critical archival aesthetics of *Memorial*.

Intuitively, to speak of a name as an *image* is to evoke a visual register like that of a painting, a portrait, or a photograph. Yet, a possibility exists to re-think names as multimodal, typographic, pictorial, plastic, and embodied images. For a start, names consist of written, textual signs. Simply, a written name is a grapheme that is composed of letters. At the same time, a typographic image, a text, doubles up as a pictorial sign, or a *calligram* (Foucault 1982). A calligram is an imbrication of text and image (Foucault 1982). Foucault looks closely at Rene Magritte's well-known painting of a pipe, whose realism is negated in the caption 'This is not a pipe' ('Ceci n'est pas une pipe'). A distinct element within Magritte's painting, the text undermines the temptation to find resemblance between reality and depiction (Foucault 1982: 3–8). In this case, the calligram annuls two principles in Western art: plastic representation that implies an affirmation of a representative bond, and linguistic reference that excludes it (Foucault 1982: 32–34). Image and text penetrate each other: "name of an object takes place of an image, a word takes place of an object in reality, image takes place of a word in a proposition" (Foucault 1982: 38).

In his critique of representational, mimetic character of images, W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that a sensitive iconographic analysis of images debunks a commonsensical view that images (graphic, optical, perceptual, verbal, or mental) schematise yet reflect the world of physical objects or "original impressions" (Mitchell 1984: 514). Alternatively, the diagram of reality-images can be reworked as a sequence of signs where a textual or spoken word is gleaned from a pictogram (another sign) and, before it, a picture (Mitchell 1984: 517). A simple diagram of this process would move from a real-life object to an idea as a mental image to a verbal image, such as a written word. As a "graphic mark" (Mitchell 1984: 520), a written word, such as an inscription of a name, is just another material image since painting, writing, sculpting are instances of modification of materials and scratching of surfaces. Because "graphic images" are endowed with materiality (Mitchell 1984: 505), they consist of pictures and also of artefacts, monuments, statues, designs, etchings, bodies, sound, and so on. What stems from broadening the ontology of names of the dead from an instrument of historiographic justice to an inscription, or a *monumental image*? Maurizio Ferraris contemplates the idea of cataloguing everything in the world to



destabilise the ontological distinction between object and subject, concrete and abstract, by outlining an augmented empirical rule: “Object=Inscribed Act” (Ferraris 2013: 30). For him, the real tends to be modulated into thought, fantasy, and memory, saying, writing, and doing, institutions, things, images, and the rest. The passage between them happens through an equalising work of inscription that brings relations and sociality into the “sphere of being” (Ferraris 2013: 55). Acts of inscription are dependent on subjects who inscribe and generate social objects; for instance, a stone is a natural artefact that becomes a social object – a tombstone or a monument – when it is inscribed (Ferraris 2013: 49). Ferraris calls it “weak textualism” where social objects are constructed from physical stuff (Ferraris 2013: 139).

Acts of inscription are so central to Ferraris because they foreground the profound historicity of social objects (Ferraris 2013: 127). Inscription is a form of fixing various traces, in writing, counting, ritual, images, landscapes, knotting, gesticulating, thinking, and more, which are instances of something that Ferraris names “archiwriting” (Ferraris 2013: 207). Under some conditions, inscription gives rise to documents, on paper or another physical medium, when a trace is concretised as a document (Ferraris 2013: 251). Inscribed on interrogation documents, a personal name becomes part of the official archive that memory activists re-inscribe as their own archive and its commemorative practices. A name is given the key property of documentality, an ability to materialise traces of the past and, potentially, to perform them as evidence (Ferraris 2013: 267). In other words, names of the dead instantiate archiwriting, a material rendering of history into documentary images of various sorts.

The multimodal materiality of inscribed names constitutes their monumentality. By qualifying names of the dead as *monumental*, I underscore how their referentiality and documentality bring into play ideas about history, justice, and ways of concretising them in acts of inscription. In their materiality, monumental names are predicated on inscription, such as an architectural artefact or a performative act of enunciation. Indeed, the monumentality of names is a long-standing element of mortuary law that stipulated a possibility of a substitute of a missing or dead person with an image, such as a sculpture, a portrait, or a name. For instance, pre-Hellenic and Greek *kolossos* referred to a sculpted or painted image of a missing person; a kolossos is a sculpted substitute for the dead (Heller-Roazen 2021: 58). Kolossoi were cremated on the absence of a body of a person presumed dead (Heller-Roazen 2021: 59). Later, instead of kolossoi, names and painted portraits became images of missing or dead people. For example, names of offenders and those in debt were inscribed on public buildings such as Palazzo del Podesta in Medieval Florence if the living people were absent (Heller-Roazen 2021: 69). Names and portraits were images of shame and ignominy that took place of transgressors (Heller-Roazen 2021: 72). A reverse procedure, known as “memory sanctions” or a “condemnation of



memory” (Heller-Roazen 2021: 106), saw a removal of names of disgraced official and sovereigns from buildings and monuments. Since antiquity, the practice of meting out punishment to names has persisted in various contemporary forms of striking names out of official registers and other bureaucratic records and assigning numbers instead of names, thus creating political and social nonpersons (Heller-Roazen 2021: 108).

In contrast to portraiture or figurative sculpture (the representational modes that are not prevalent in the *Memorial* archive), names of the dead are quintessential abstractions. They fail to denote a living person. By severing the link between an empirical person and their name, a monumental graphic image, such as inscriptions of a name, produces the archival aesthetics, revealing, in Bataille’s terms, the monstrosity of time that substitutes co-presence for a hoard of “human faces jostling together in the shadows in search of a common identity” (Cox 2011: 215). The archival aesthetics that depends on inscriptions of names of the dead highlights the indistinctiveness of the generic dead, making it impossible to conceal the “formless figuration of the humans” (Cox 2011: 217), resistant to the illusion of living presence. Later, I will explain that historiography of violent deaths gives rise to a compulsion to find a face on a monument or to link a face with a name. The opposite trajectory that dismantles the link between images and living people shows not only how the past is irrecoverable or its representation is impossible. It conjures up a image of a generic infinity of the mass of the dead that is unrepresentable in the named portrait but offers a vague possibility of mutuality towards an untitled face, or a monument without a face or a name, or a list of faceless names.

To press the point, while drawing on the ethnographic analysis of the activists’ practices of collecting and inscribing names of the dead as references to violent history, the conceptual shift from names as facts to names as images brings to the fore the ontology of names of the dead as an infinite diagram of a mass atrocity that pertains to no-one but involves everyone and all. My treatment of names as an abstract aesthetics rather than an accurate representation of reality endows inscriptions of names of the dead with the extraordinary power to point beyond individual human biographies. Biographies of the dead, including their photographs, proliferate in paper and digital archives of *Memorial*. Nevertheless, mainly names of the dead are ceaselessly moved by the activists into public spaces, including monuments on mass graves and performative events in city squares. For many names, there is a digital counterpart that contains a nuanced life history. However, names of the dead inscribed in memorial books and carved on monuments are an abstraction of those biographies, their illegible image. Through an act of abstracting into an image, names of the dead accrue the political force of disclosing a history of mass atrocities by means other than realist historiographic writing. Thus, monumentality of names of the dead gives them a material presence and an aesthetic valence. It forces names outside informational language.

My approach can be criticised. Monumentalisation might appear detrimental to living memory (Huyssen 1995: 258). It has been suggested that “desire for materiality” risks a reification of the past as a separate category (Meskell 2002: 560). In contrast, Dorota Golanska writes that monumentality of memorial art can generate intensive, physical contact with the past (Golanska 2017). A monument seems to visualise history and concretise it as an artefact, a material locus of commemoration. To this, I would add that a mass atrocity requires a particular archival aesthetics of violence to sense its scale. Didi-Huberman (2008) suggests that images of history allow us to engage with the question of the figural and, thus, offer a possibility of finding an abstract rather than realist aesthetics for unimaginable, unthinkable, formless, or “inestimable” horror (Didi-Huberman 2008: 26). Didi-Huberman refuses to see an image of an atrocity as an instant of truth (Didi-Huberman 2008: 33). One can only have fragments, iterations, silences, pauses that he calls “the lacuna-image”, or “a trace-image and a disappearance-image” (Didi-Huberman 2008: 167). The disappearance image entails an aesthetic rendition of history as “an amalgam, an impurity, visible things mixed with confused things, illusive things mixed with revealing things, visual forms mixed with a certain thought in action” (Didi-Huberman 2008: 65). This mode of understanding history entails a re-evaluation of the relation between thought and history, and between the singular and the abstract (Didi-Huberman 2008: 61) that can be done through a non-mimetic image, such as a name.

In other words, names of the dead mediate the physical specificity of each death and the abstract, non-specific immensity of the mass killing without dissolving singular beings. Names of the dead are a mechanism of “temporal reckoning” (Kockelman and Bernstein 2012: 322) that entails an ordering of history through a repetitive movement from the concreteness of a singular event to the abstraction of recurrent or replicated events (Kockelman and Bernstein 2012: 324–325). Repetition of singular names and iteration of nearly identical monuments refuse a settlement of a particular history. On the contrary, names of the dead are a perpetual device that keeps history going. A movement from concreteness to abstraction entails not only temporal shift from a specific experienced event to its non-specific historical commemoration but also an ontological shift from singularity of a concrete being to the multitude, or the mass, of the dead. As a result, names of the dead disclose a latent work of history that gives shape to “a specificity of the nonspecific” (Smith 2018: 115). In their paradoxical concreteness and vagueness, names of the dead are both immanent to history and transcendent of its instantiations.

Simply put, inscriptions of names of the dead can be interpreted as an image-thought of history, as names have a particular salience when it comes to remembering a mass atrocity as something both abstract and concrete. To illustrate how image-thought can be immanent yet grounded in acts of abstraction rather than representation, Deleuze refers to “transcendental

memory” that is distinct from recollection because the former is never an accurate, clear account of the past (Deleuze 2004: 176). Transcendental memory is neither an error to recall correctly nor a subjective and partial mode of remembering and reworking the past that we describe as a contingent memory of a contingent past (Deleuze 2004: 176). Transcendental memory is an encounter with alterity in time, including the present, rather than a search for a simulacrum of the present with the past. For that matter, historiographic and philosophical practices of finding examples and naturalising difference as the unknown that can be discovered through available categories fail to abandon “dogmatic images” of thought (Deleuze 2004: 201). Herein, we are tasked with forming a thought-image and rendering it concrete to make the unwitnessed mass atrocities of the Stalinist past graspable.

In sum, in addition to the language of political activism and philosophy, the archival aesthetics that commemorates mass atrocities is driven by the desire to find a visual, sculptural, and conceptual articulation to something that has historical or empirical concreteness yet transcends our sense of the real. I aver that studying names of the dead as multimodal images – textual, architectural, and performative inscriptions – furnishes a possibility to re-imagine names in their monumentality, which, in turn, gives a radical figuration to history and philosophical thought by virtue of the names’ double, even paradoxical harnessing of an abstraction to point to a specific being. Along these lines of thought, *monumental names* can be tactically defined as a complex historiographic, political, aesthetic, performative, and philosophical form that traces a movement between the singularity of a specific person and the multitude of the abstract many, which is decisive in our experience of history, including violent history of mass atrocities.

For the memory activists, names of the dead have explicit historiographic and political utility as vehicles of historical truth-making and justice. However, the scholarly emphasis on politics of history alone runs the risk of occluding the aesthetic and philosophical capacity of names to mediate a relation between singularity and multitude that have been a subject of conceptual and artistic attention among many European philosophers and artists. I do not seek to extenuate the activists’ project. On the contrary, I rely on their perspectives and practices to amplify the political, aesthetic, and philosophical potentialities of their archive by holding anthropology, history, aesthetic theory, and philosophy in a single analytical framework to tell a familiar story of politically motivated repressions in Soviet Moscow otherwise. Drawing on practices and conceptual premises of the *Memorial* archive, it is also significant to open other analytical opportunities by looking at names of the dead as *a dense, massified image of a mass atrocity*.

## A Note On Methodology

To follow through the intricacies of *Memorial* historicity, I have used ethnographic and historical research methods and eclectic analytical

frameworks to produce a bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966: 21) of practical methods, description, and theory that contains many layers and baroque folds, “pleats of matter”, and thought (Deleuze 1993: 3). Next, to make extended creations, I have appropriated baroque mechanisms of using and re-using quotations and citations (Bal 1999: 8) that “function as shifters, allowing the presence of multiple realities within a single image” (Bal 1999: 10). I like such compound, transdisciplinary work since it involves oscillations between anthropology, history, philosophy, and art and produces differentiation and assembling, comparisons and analogies, intertextuality and other fragmented and pluralising operations in thinking and writing that not only bring other-than-humans into patchy historicities (Viveiros de Castro 2019) but also re-invent human configurations and categories of historicity.

I am particularly intrigued by the distended, creeping presence of the past inside and outside the archive. In contrast to future-laden potentialities of many anthropological studies, *Memorial* is permeable to the past. Just like many continental philosophers and artists, *Memorial* activists are confronted with the abstruse problem of how to collect documents, conceptualise historical violence and give a material form to the process of memorialising, distinct from recollection. In approaching some of these themes, I could not decide whether they are conceptually primary or well-trodden as an array of critical thinkers have touched upon the pivotal questions in this book with reference to the history of 100 years ago. However, the activists’ archive is unapologetically focused on the past, perhaps because the temporality of extreme violence is a durational eventuality. Roland Barthes writes that “the Greeks entered into Death backward: what they had before them was their past” (Barthes 1993: 71). *Memorial* activists move through time backwards, facing the distending past and pressing with their backs against the obstructed temporality of the muddled future that cannot be planned or anticipated. When the disaster, such as a mass atrocity, happens, it is “always past, even in the past, out of date” (Blanchot 1995: 3) because it has already happened when we think of it and when we name it. To think of the disaster is to admit to the past (Blanchot 1995: 3). While the past might be read as synchronous with the present, the future is a distinct zone of impossibility. While some anthropological studies indicate that the future can be known in succession to the present, some temporal orientations accede to the radical opacity of “presents without future” (Nielsen 2014). As a librarian in *Memorial* only recently told me, “We are in the dead end (*tupik*) of history”.

# 1 Everyall of the Kommunarka Mass Graves

Saturday morning, October 27, 2018. The weather was surprisingly clement and sunny although the forecast had mentioned a sharp temperature drop and snow later that day. I had just boarded a private hire bus – one in a fleet of five or six – that would take me and other passengers to attend the opening ceremony of a monument to the victims of the Stalinist Terror in Kommunarka, the site of a mass burial dating to the 1930s–1950s.

Most other passengers on the bus were in their late 80s, cocooned in beige and brown woollens. They greeted each other and accepted bottled water from one of the event coordinators amidst incontinence jokes. Many knew each other from the days of creating and tending make-shift memorials on the site before it was officially recognised as a mass grave. A few dozed off as our bus wove through the city traffic. Some 15 minutes later, the bus pulled over at a parking lot, outside the brick fence. The sign by the gate stated: “Here lie thousands of victims of the Stalinist terror of the 1930s–1950s. Eternal memory!” The location was peaceful; I could hear a woodpecker.

“Good forest”, said a female passenger. Others nodded.

Very close to central Moscow, Kommunarka was a coveted district of summer residences (*dachas*) of the Soviet government. Its idyllic ambience only enhances the shock of realisation that one of those dachas was a site of mass burials (some say mass executions) of many high-ranking Soviet officials, executive members of the Soviet, Mongolian, and Latvian governments, politicians, army officers, and denounced NKVD workers, among others. The *dacha* originally belonged to Genrikh Yagoda (born Yenokh Ieghuda), a secret service commissar, executed in 1937. It was confiscated for the use of NKVD by Yezov (executed in 1940) and then by Beria (executed in 1953). Their lives and death are an indication of how fluid the categories of victims and perpetrators were.

Most killings of the people buried in Kommunarka took place in the period between 1937 and 1941, though some executions continued intermittently until the 1950s. Many people were shot on the same day, one by one. The dead bodies were piled into deep vertical shafts. To my knowledge, the remains are still buried among birch trees and pines. The mention that the bodies were buried (*zaharoneni*) upset one of the passengers, who

said, “They were dumped”. The angry rejoinder brought home that mass violence operates with dehumanising practices of disposing of the dead in mass graves without funerary rites the way rubbish is placed in landfills (Anstett 2018).

“Imagine! This *dacha* was chosen to reduce the commute time. You could have a nice breakfast with your family, pop around the corner for a quick killing and be back home for lunch!” said the Head of the Presidential Committee for the Development of the Civic Society.

The first thing I saw inside the memorial ground was a cross. Next to it stood three corpulent Russian Orthodox priests in black robes. Behind them, a little mobile stove kept buckwheat porridge and a pot of black tea warm. One of the organisers of the memorial event greeted me and explained that things were running late. I could hear the frantic hammering as the lists of names etched on metal plates were being hastily mounted on wooden poles to my right. That was the new monument, unfinished minutes before its inauguration. The organiser, a middle-aged woman, suggested that we, the early arrivals, should take a walk around to see a new church, recently built on the territory of Kommunarka. She handed me a leaflet that explained how the site was sold to the Russian Orthodox Church that, after years of campaigning by human rights groups and memory activists, now provides maintenance of the place. One way or another, the state washed its hands of the moral and financial responsibility, while the memory activists acknowledge that the Church is currently in a more influential position to appeal to a broader audience through the tropes of compassion and “traditions” of care for the dead.

A few more buses pulled over, and more visitors gathered at the entrance. I trailed behind a small group of women who headed towards the church and a few other wooden buildings. The church, the Temple of the New Martyrs, glowed golden and white; a few wooden buildings and extensions around it were under construction. Two content cats licked their paws on the steps; the air was filled with children’s voices. The women stepped into the wood and walked around the perimeter of a tall fence with barbed wire. They admired the gravel path that had replaced the muddy track of last year.

“But why did they keep the barbed wire? Scared the dead will run away?” one of them laughed.

The path suddenly ended. The conversation stopped. I stepped off the path on the mulch of autumn leaves to wander among the trees that grow over the dead bodies. Many trees had been turned into improvised gravestones. Of course, there is no way to know where someone was buried exactly. Nevertheless, many trees were appropriated as individual tombstones. Metal plaques and paper printouts were pinned to the trees; some had fresh flowers, wreaths, and candles. Many of these memorial objects were damaged by the elements. The ink got smudged by the rain; the plastic wreaths faded in the hot summer sun. I read the signs that included a name, professional occupation and rank, the date of birth, date of arrest, date of execution,

and, sometimes, the date of rehabilitation – a familiar template that appears on the *Last Address* memorial plaques. According to the leaflet I had picked at the gate, some of the dead had famous names including members of Politburo, Nikolai Bukharin, and Aleksei Rykov, People’s Commissars, functionaries of various local governments, doctors, writers, newspaper editors, and international Communist leaders, including the Hungarian communist Bela Kun, a Communist International figure. In the brochure, names of “ordinary Soviet citizens” (*prostiye sovetskiye grazhdane*) were omitted and listed as employment categories: a shoemaker, a housewife, a toy maker, a police officer, a postman, and “so on” (Figure 1.1).

I returned to the front gate, where a standing microphone was already in place. The first speaker, a prominent memory activist and the coordinator of this project, tapped the microphone, greeted the audience, and announced the minute of silence to remember the dead.

“It’s so important to enumerate all names (*nazvat vse imena!*)”

The next speaker was the priest and the guardian of the site. He mentioned eternal memory of the dead but an anonymous heckler in the audience opined that the metal sheets with the names were so flimsy that the first winter wind would blow them away. The priest continued unfazed, but the microphone glitched and we could hear only the fragments of his speech: “sorrowful place ... inclusive list of victims and perpetrators ... suffered on the cross ... show mercy ... all killed ... Amen!”

The next speaker was another prominent memory activist and a former Soviet dissident:

“The joint research effort has rendered 6,609 names. Names could be destroyed like the people. We have raked through all archives, this is an exhaustive, comprehensive list of the names of the people buried here”.

The coordinator leaned towards the microphone to add that now that they had produced the exhaustive list of names of the dead at Kommunarka, the task was to find other names elsewhere:

“There are many blind spots. We still do not know where some names can be, where they might be recorded (*nazvani*). We have to restore all names, find all lists...”

A whisper in my ear: “We do not need to find them all! (*Vseh ne nuzhno*)”.

The Latvian ambassador thanked the activists for finding all the names and creating a place to read them out loud.

ANOTHER WHISPER: “This is a rubbish monument. You need to see faces – nothing like that here. The screws are missing.”

ANOTHER WHISPER: “This is just temporary.”

ANOTHER VOICE: “Strange, isn’t it? To include *all* the names? Some Bolsheviks were killed here, later rehabilitated.”

It was time to sacralise the secular monument to the political victims. The priest apologised hastily for performing a Russian Orthodox Christian





*Figure 1.1* The make-shift gravestones of Kommunarka.

ritual. “I am so sorry. I know that many victims were atheists, Buddhists, Catholics, Jews. I will bless the monument without differentiating between the victims. It is inclusive” (Figure 1.2).

On the way out, I noticed a very old woman, embroiled in an angry exchange with a Soviet dissident historian. She seemed to be on the brink



*Figure 1.2* The blessing of Kommunarka.

of tears because she had discovered a memorial stone erected by the KGB, inscribed with the names of their colleagues and predecessors, executed and then interred in Kommunarka. She had noticed the name of the person who had signed her father's execution order. "Why is he here?" she asked.

The dissident historian tried to comfort her:

We must include everyone. How can you know about one person and refuse to learn about somebody else? It is a perpetual dilemma, but we need to include them all, the guilty and the not guilty. Everyone who is buried here, in the ground. This is not their trial. It is a concrete killing ground, not an abstraction.

### Addition and Subsumption

What stands behind this exhortation to name all (*vseb*) and everyone (*kazhdogo*)? Explicitly, to name all the names indicates completion, a kind of totality that reverses erasure and forgetting. Why be so emphatic in stressing the value of a comprehensive list of names? What is behind “this fantasy of completeness” that inheres in some archives (Hall 2001: 92)? And why suspend the judgment of the dead who had killed others?

The activists’ declaration that the subject of their political remembrance is everyone and all is significant. The two lexical forms of a singular *everyone* (*kazhdiy*) and a plural *all* (*vse*) have a conceptual concomitance, yet the two words are not entirely the same, which makes it difficult to translate them precisely. Their interchangeable use in sentences like “everyone is dead” and “all are dead” obfuscates a more nuanced, contextual meaning. Everyone is a word that particularises. It implies number *one*, but it is not an infinite, all-encompassing category like the inclusive ‘all’. ‘Everyone’ does not count people or organise people into a bigger set. Everyone is an invariant gesture of singling people out.

In contrast, *all* is a word that gathers dissimilar particulars. *All* is inclusive but it does not specify differences among its elements. *All* can consist of radically different things. At the same time, the notion *all* implies assimilation; it gives an impression of a non-differentiated group. Hence, there was the objection at the Kommunarka mass grave that the killed and their executioners, or victims and perpetrators, were collapsed by the activists into one mass category of *all* the dead.

Another example of the encompassing *all* is the activists’ refusal to mention ethnicity and religion of the dead. Corpses of Russian Orthodox Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and atheists of various ethnicities were gathered in Kommunarka. Despite the nominal idea of being Soviet, ethnicity was officially used to mark people. It was stated in Soviet passports and personal case files kept by NKVD and KGB. Only the post-Soviet legal reforms (spearheaded under Yeltsin’s regime) abolished ethnicity graph 5 in Russian passports in a double-edged shift from what could be deemed as a discriminatory practice towards a neutral ‘Russian’ citizenship, although ‘Russian’ is another flawed translation. One English word ‘Russian’ glosses over two Russian words: *rossiyskiy* to signify various legal categories and *russkiy* to mean Russian language and Russian ethnicity. The abolition



of graph 5 in *rossiyskiy* passport inadvertently marks a departure from a multi-ethnic federative notion of statehood to a mode that subsumes categorical distinction into an assimilated statehood.

Walking past the newly built monument, it was hard to ignore many German, Jewish, and other last names that also appear on many memorial plaques. The executive director of *The Last Address* personally felt that Jewish families honour their heritage more. However, she thought it was not essential to identify the dead by their ethnic background on the monuments to the victims of the Stalinist Terror. A mixed heritage German, Jewish, and Russian woman herself, she argued that the dead and their names were concrete in their individuality but belonged to the whole of humanity rather than an ethnic group, even though many became targets of mass purges, or mass operations, which threw people into general, often racialised, categories of the undesirables and potential traitors.

“You are right”. Tatyana told me in her office. “Stalin carried out mass operations against many ethnic groups. But these ones here are crimes against the many, even against humanity, all of it”. One of the researchers, who overheard our conversation, concurred with her.

One of the premises of the memory activists in Moscow is that the Soviet order crushed people one by one, as singular historical beings, and created a summative excess of unnatural death. Horrifically, people were shot one by one; a machine gun was rarely used<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, the superordinate category of ‘victims’ appears to subsume everyone even though the category already carries out two distinct classifications: identitarian and ethico-juridical. Frederic Jameson writes that, in Marx’s writing,

subsumption means turning heterogeneities into homogeneities, subsuming them under abstractions (which he defines as idealisms), standardizing the multiplicity of the world and making it into that terrible thing that was to have been avoided at all costs, namely the One as such (Jameson 2015: 119).

He adds that subsumption is not a vice of thought; it is a real totalisation of the world into one whole, with dire consequences. Subsumption represses historicity into a perpetual presentism and assimilates singularity into a universal category. In contrast, Zygmunt Bauman notes that assimilation is neither tragic nor creative (Bauman 1996: 569). Perhaps optimistically, Bauman infers “a world integrated through diversity” (Bauman 1996: 550) where nationalist assimilation has morphed into conformity to mundane rules of co-habitation.

If one suspends the statistical assumptions behind the accumulation and subsumption of singular names of the dead into lists of the dead,

1 I am grateful to Yuri Slezkine for this insight.

there exists an analytic opportunity to understand how notions of identity and commonality that persist in national imaginaries of ‘people’ as a totality of entities can give way to a seemingly contradictory “idea of an open whole” (Evens 2012: 8). An open whole, according to Evens, is a conception of unity that begins with a critique of dualism and entitism that underpin descriptions of the world composed of taxonomic units and divisions into entities, such as an isolated human or mutually exclusive species (Evens 2012: 8). His argument harkens back to the anthropological conundrum of how to account for a statement that twins are birds. Recorded by Evans Pritchard among the Nuer of West Africa in the 1930s, the statement is absurd only if we see ‘twins’ and ‘birds’ as distinct categories that are not mediated by any “encompassing taxon” (Evens 2012: 7). The proposed alternative is governed by the logic of gradation rather than the excluded middle. The category of victims as *all* constitutes the encompassing taxon that rejects the essence of an assimilated and homogenised group.

To name “all and everyone” (*vseh i kazhdogo*) is evidentially more complicated than just a mandate to remember. On the one hand, it highlights “the entitlement of all the hitherto unnamed to a memorial” (Koselleck 2002: 315). On the other hand, the tension between *all* and *everyone* connotes a mode of historical justice that cannot be easily mathematised. The memory activists and other speakers at the Kommunarka mass graves did use numbers of the dead rhetorically but the rest of the event depended on names for an alternative counting of history that is presented as an infinite inclusion of found names into an exhaustive totality. In the present case, *one* is the biggest number.

The peculiar arithmetic of adding people one by one to *arrive at one* of a different qualitative scale has few parallels and precedents. Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* describes “the mathematical sublime” (Kant 2008: 79) to qualify the estimation of multiplicity as number of homogeneous units, a measured estimation of magnitude, and the sublime as a magnitude or greatness beyond the magnitude by number (Kant 2008: 82). The mathematical sublime discerns the latter as a foundation of aesthetic judgement of the monstrous and the colossal, the things too big to represent (Kant 2008: 83–84). The imagination of magnitude by means of numbers involves “the production of magnitude being earned out by the successive aggregation of units” (Kant 2008: 84–85); it is a progression. For Kant, this is distinct from the “comprehension in *one* intuition” that thinks the infinite holistically. An ability to think by numbers is contrasted to the ability “to think the given infinite” (Kant 2008: 85). To think by numbers is mathematically logical, while to think by the infinite wholes is mathematically sublime. Kant gives a comparative empirical example. The measurement of a tree height can be expressed in various integers and divisible units, while the nebulae of stars, such as the Milky Way, are an immeasurable cosmos (Kant 2008: 87).

For Kant, the mathematical sublime is a mode of apprehending of history that requires an image rather than an exact number to conjure the “inestimable magnitude ... that the manifold in the unity annihilates the condition of time and makes co-existence intuitable” (cited in Harvey 2018: 97). For us, the “readers of witnessing” (Harvey 2018: 98) of a mass atrocity, counting the dead obscures the Kantian mathematical sublime, the mechanism of counting what cannot be counted. Hence, the mathematical sublime is the absolute magnitude that confounds imagination and ability to compare (Doran 2015: 226).

Kant’s mathematical sublime might seem remote to the activists’ daily practices of political remembrance of Soviet mass atrocities. Yet, the mathematical sublime of *one as the biggest number* reverberates across their apprehension of *one* as a singularity and *multitude* of a mass atrocity. This principle is articulated in a poem in the collection *One Times One* by e.e. cummings when he writes “we are everyanything more...” (cited in Wing 1990: 181). Adrien Katherine Wing borrows the term *everyanything* to illustrate the poetic of intersectionality of race and gender and the paucity of the US legal frameworks that fail to address the “multiplicative” quality of being black and female (Wing 1990: 181). Wing suggests that, despite the simultaneity of racial and gendered violence, the legally imposed requirement for a plaintiff to choose which form of violence to argue in court obfuscates a principle that “multiply each of my parts together, one  $\times$  one  $\times$  one  $\times$  one  $\times$  one, and you have one indivisible being. If you divide one of these parts from one you still have one” (Wing 1990: 194). Here, *one* refers to a multiplicative subjectivity of a person that is conveyed by a mathematical arrangement that ‘one multiplied by one equals one’.

In contrast, the memory activists deploy a quasi-summative principle of one + one + one + one + n-times equals *one as all*, which contradicts the conventional mathematical order where addition results in the increase of the final number. A somewhat similar principles is intimate in the transcendentalist literature exemplified by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature* and his catalogues of items where each countryside item is analogous and representative of nature as an equalising whole (Belknap 2004: 47). For the memory activists, the quasi-summative principle of listing names of the dead is more than the indefinite postponement of the final number. Although this arithmetic of listing names one by one defies the mathematical norms, it achieves a desired historiographic effect where a singular life is co-eval to the life of all. The scale differentiation between everyone and all is negated.

While a proper name might give a rise to the fallacy of individualisation, the “one plus one equals one” inventory of the names of the dead rejects it. The plurality of “everyanything” in e.e. cummings’s can be reworked as the *everyall*, a term that expresses a simultaneous operation of political remembering of everyone and all. In *the everyall*, the crude antinomy between singularity and multitude is resolved in a particular way to make palpable the magnitude of a mass atrocity. The *everyall* does not subsume

every death into a numerical total. Instead, every death instantiates the multitude. We have an inventory of multitudes rather than fragments and parts of the whole. Every name and every death can generate the image of the multitude. Thus, a seemingly pragmatic task of preserving names of the dead is more than an act of political commemoration of a mass atrocity as it reveals a movement that differentiates and sublates singularities into multitudes. Each singularity can denote the multitude, while the multitude contains all dissimilar singularities. There is such a likeness between singularity and multitude of a mass atrocity that each singularity is a multitude while there is only one singularity and one multitude. The infinite, and biggest number, of a mass atrocity is *the everyall*.

Georges Perec writes that “in every enumeration there are two contradictory temptations. The first is to list everything; the second is to forget something. The first would like to close off the question once and for all, the second to leave it open” (Perec 1997: 198). The way to understand the activists’ desire to name everyone and all is to recognise the radical gesture of non-numerical counting and commemorating the dead through names. The gesture is latently political in its impetus to oppose the erasure and oblivion of violent history, staged by the atrocities of the last century and the presumed indifference of today’s broader public in Moscow. However, the danger of successful enumeration of *all* is the redundancy of memory activists’ quotidian activities. Explicitly oriented towards closure, memory activists are hopeful about the perpetuity of their project. Their unstated hope is that archives and diaries might render more names and that there are places, practices and records not yet known to the activists. When one of the researchers shared the beguiling rumour that Leningrad dissidents might have documented names of the Soviet political prisoners on small stones and cast them in the forest outside the city boundaries, the speculation caused some agitation and daydreaming about what the actual finding of the stones could reveal. A year later the rumour seemed forgotten. The significance of this excitation and subsequent forgetfulness is in the awareness of both limitless and finite supply of history.

### Subtraction and Erasure

The formative tension between everyone (*kazhdiy*) and all (*vse*) embodies a possibility of equivalence between a singularity of *one* and the heterogeneous multitude as if *one*. The movement of everyone into a list of all creates a catalogue of the dead. In the archive of the *everyall*, every bit of documentary evidence is valued. Each scrap of paper, be it an envelope, a typewritten letter, or a handwritten postcard from a victim or witness of the past injustices, is carefully enclosed in sepia or grey paper folders. All documents matter despite their unvaried nature, often speaking of a similar event in stock words and phrases. When one activist noticed that I had skimmed through a few formulaic letters from Jewish applicants to leave the Soviet Union for



Israel in the 1970s–1980s without reading all letters, he was disappointed with my selective approach. “You have to copy everything (*nuzhno vsye sdelat*)” he chided me. One engages with every occurrence of injustice, which is measureless and distinct from the numerical tally of the dead.

Archiving and enumerating with names foregrounds the three intertwined operations of a mass killing: addition, subsumption, and subtraction. These are also integral to remembrance, establishing a kinship between commemoration practices and preceding violence. A sinister affinity exists between a bureaucracy of violence and that of the archive; the order of killing and the order of remembering mirror each other. To move people between the realms of the living and the dead is to produce a record by erasing people, adding them to folders and lists of absentees, and creating general categories such as victims and those who remain. Subtraction is an inversion of archiving the dead.

Subtraction and erasure are no identical. Yet, they co-constitute acts of political violence, including physical annihilation and destruction of buildings and things. For instance, Russian archives contain texts and images with names and faces of Soviet celebrity revolutionaries, such as Trotsky, who were disgraced by Stalin, killed, and purged on paper. David King’s study of inking, rubbing out, and cutting out of faces of the dead from Soviet books and photographs gives a vivid account of official elimination of traces of the dead. Seizing, locking up, and shredding books that appeared on the “Summary List of Books Excluded from Libraries and the Book Trade Network” were common (King 2013 [1997]: 12), even trivial in their predictability. In tandem with book removals from public libraries and homes, censors and publishers cut out, glued, and brushed over faces and figures of the killed. Professional editors skilfully altered group portraits to fill space where leaders, associates, and opponents of the Bolshevik committees, commissariats, and other institutions had been originally depicted with empty interiors, landscapes, and urban architecture. Equally striking are the examples of ordinary people who attacked with scissors and ink their own books and other print materials to pre-emptively obliterate textual evidence and images of high-profile revolutionaries such as Trotsky, Kamenev, and many others (King 2013 [1997]: 10). Scribbling over a name or scrubbing a photographed face off a page would imperfectly delete a record of a person. The imperfection is suggestive. Rubbing out of faces, just like dismembering and openly stitching together family photographs to banish the memory of a family member or a friend, is a histrionic way of making absence visible (Weller 2021: 619). Robert Weller recalls how foreign newspapers in Taiwan were sold with words and faces redacted in heavy-handed black pen with little effort to conceal this pen or “scissors-wielding censorship” (Weller 2021: 621). Redacting names and photographic portraits is a basic mode of political manipulation of history. In this case, the imperfect rubbing out of photographic faces is primarily evidence of violence of the Soviet state and its ordinary citizens. These are

demonstrative acts of publicly recognised defacement rather than silencing of murders. This is how violence comes to light. It is meant to be known.

I came across an example of gradual subtraction in the personal archive of a prominent sociologist, a member of an informal philosophical seminar in Moscow. Informal philosophical seminars gained ground in the 1960s–1970s in some Moscow universities. Some were convened along corridors of research institutes or as peripatetic, pop-up events in the partial secrecy of private apartments, dachas, street corners, and a café on Lenin Avenue. One famous group gathered around Vladimir Bibler, who worked on paradox and poetics in philosophy. Their stated objective was to meet for enlivened discussions of theories of bureaucracy, methodology of research, cultural anthropology, structuralism, space/time, ethical normativity, value, and many other topics that were neglected during official academic seminars. Some participants translated and discussed Western European books on sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. Bibler’s seminars frequently involved role-play, when the participants assumed a role of a philosopher, such as Hegel and Spinoza, and argued a philosophical point from their perspective. Those impersonations required meticulous self-instruction in philosophical and sociological theory.

Although the seminars were conceived by its participants as ‘pure’ (*chistiye*) intellectual experiments in philosophy, anthropology, literature, poetry, conceptual art, physics and more, they appeared politically seditious. Once in the purview of the KGB in Moscow, some participants were summoned for interrogation to Lubyanka, the KGB headquarters. Having experienced political intimidation, including threats of a prison sentence, many participants started to leave the informal philosophical circles. It was a steady flow of the departed, a gradual subtraction of people. In a fictionalised reflection on memory of unexperienced violence in Chile, Alia Trabucco Zerán reflects on how one can count the dead as corpses and as remainders, somebody who is yet to become dead, and how to subtract them from the official account of the living dead (Zerán 2018: 8). Instead of arriving at the death toll – a futile exercise when the numbers of the dead do not match the numbers of graves (Zerán 2018: 71), subtraction muddles the distinction between the killed, the missing, and the presumed dead, and the survivors to concentrate on how people are taken away rather than added up.

Despite being busy, Gleb Aleksandrovich found a couple of hours to talk to me about the archive of the philosophical circle in the Moscow State University (MGU). In the late 1960s, intellectual freedoms were reappraised as an “ideological mistake”. Gleb Aleksandrovich and his friends were pushed out of lecture rooms into private homes and basements. Initially, the informal seminars of this philosophical circle gathered 20 to 40 people. The meetings were organised by telephoning each other (known as *obzvon* or telephoning in sequence) or by word of mouth (*sarafannoye radio*). The participants discussed theories of activity that were not covered by Marxism.

They read cultural anthropology and presented their own research and theoretical papers. Gleb Aleksandrovich was interested in the methodology of studying social processes, including the logic and mathematics of sociological investigation. He grappled with the problem of fragmentation of the whole and how the whole fissures and self-organises into a coherent system. The seminars were followed by scathing, “radical” critique of the speakers’ ideas and interests. Tough questioning was appreciated as many hoped to publish. “It was the time of spoken sociology”, Gleb Aleksandrovich laughed. Critique was offset by joking, partying, and feasting, especially on the Old New Year eve, celebrated on January 13, according to the old calendar.

Gleb Aleksandrovich acted as a secretary and preserved the minutes of their circle’s meetings. The minutes show that the year 1972 marked a downturn. Persecutions intensified. The scholars protested and wrote letters to the Soviet government. They signed petitions using their own names, which inadvertently created a full list of participants to purge from various academic institutions. Some participants were transferred to work outside of Moscow, which effectively “scattered” their circle. They were sent to work in libraries, institutes, and organisations that did not have the remit to do research. Gleb Aleksandrovich repeated several times: “We were dispersed (*razbrosalo*)”, either for emphasis or in recollection.

Gleb Aleksandrovich was arrested and interrogated twice. He was asked simple questions about the seminar, what was discussed, who was involved. However, Gleb Aleksandrovich felt immense psychological pressure. “It was terrifying”, he told me in his spacious office decades after the event. Then (and now), Gleb Aleksandrovich denied political motives and associations with dissidents even though politics and the state were discussed among the closest friends within the circle who sometimes spent holidays together. Even today, Gleb Aleksandrovich sees the political as a delimited rather than pervasive phenomenon; “only a totalitarian state sees every aspect of public activities as political”. The repressions that followed crushed the circle and instilled the sense of despair (*bezishodnost*) and groundlessness (*bespochvennost*).

Gleb Aleksandrovich shared with me the typewritten minutes of the seminars that contained a list of the names of those in attendance, the agenda (for example, a discussion of the structuralist theories by Levi-Strauss), and another list of the names of the presenters. Upon the dissolution of the circle, Gleb Aleksandrovich came in possession of approximately 20 posters that he and his colleagues painted to document the gradual disappearance of their informal “Institute of Concrete Sociological Research” (*Institut konkretnih sotsiologicheskikh issledovaniy*). Gleb Aleksandrovich is a reading and writing person, so it might seem unusual that he and his colleagues created posters to make a record of their seminars and New Year parties. However, poster making and painting amateur ‘wall’ newspapers (*sten-gazeta*) was widespread in institutional settings and had many enthusiasts.

Gleb Aleksandrovich keeps the A3 posters in a large folder on top of a massive and messy bookcase in his office. Some posters are dated, others are not. In the folder, the chronological order of the posters was jumbled up. Once reconstructed, the posters' chronology has revealed a poignant archival effort to track the subtraction of people from that experimental intellectual circle and its eventual disappearance.

Except for two to three posters that are strictly painted images, the posters that the group produced have a dual textual and pictorial form: they are usually captioned. The early posters are satirical in tone. For example, a poster dated March 13, 1972, is a pencil sketch of stationery objects and a typewritten list of the things the informal Institute needs: a tape-recorder, 2,000 meters of tape, four boxes of large staples, five glue brushes, and some glue. Another poster dated July 16, 1972, depicts a rather symmetrical pink splash against black background and contains a bureaucratic order to liquidate the non-existing Department for the Research Methodology of Social Processes for their failure to fulfil the planned state objectives. A few posters dated 1971 and early 1972 are a pictorial version of the seminars' minutes; they include the seminar's agenda and occasional quotes from well-known thinkers, such as Weber and Parson, and obscure or made-up philosophical and literary sources.

Many of the early posters mark attendance of the seminars. Like the typewritten minutes that mention all in attendance by their last name, two posters dated October 22, 1970 and February 15, 1971, include a list of 17 and 18 names of the attendees, respectively. A few later posters simply state "all present" (*prisutstvovali vse*). The attendance lists and the caption "all present" allow us to trace even those posters that have no date to the days of relative freedom in 1971, 1972, and the first weeks of 1973 when the group convened without a risk of persecutions. That was the period when the seminars took place practically every week although the posters are fewer as they were not produced for every seminar (Figure 1.3).

The above poster is characteristic of the posters created after the onset of the repressions. The poster reads "Patsiorkovsky is leaving. 6 people remain". That ominous caption: "[the personal name] is leaving" appears on most posters created between January and March 1973. Among the first to leave was the founder of the group. Then, the posters become formulaic. Their images are often black and white sketches of two rows of train tracks, Cyprus trees, monuments, rocks, tall posts, and multiple arched aqueducts that converge at the vanishing point. The mathematical decline of numbers is unsteady. When P. left, six people remained. Later, when Sh. left, seven people remained. Either someone joined or attended in the meantime, or the numbering on the posters (Number 1 and Number 5) is not sequential. It is difficult to know whether the dissolution of the group can be accounted for by a linear temporality or quantitative decline of the numbers of those in attendance. Large numerals 29, 1, 4, 5, and 21 are the dates in February, March, and April 1973. One poster has no date. The



Figure 1.3 The caption reads “Patsiorkovsky is leaving, 6 people remain”. Courtesy Lev Gudkov.

caption mentions that the group gathered in the house or flat of G and that “all are present”. Another poster dated April 18, 1973 consists of a collage of Soviet newspapers, a quote about normality of crime and deviance from

Durkheim and a pretend advertisement of multiple job vacancies at the informal Institute.

The last image in this inventory of the posters is the black, inked in square superimposed on the photograph of a pine forest. The caption reads: “Vitkin is leaving on May 3. Two people remain. Nothing else has happened this year”. This is probably the final archived poster. If more posters were painted after this date, they had been left out of Gleb Aleksandrovich’s archive, or lost. The Institute disappeared in May 1973.

The posters suggest that, in 1973, another expression entered the circle’s vocabulary: “he left (*uyehal*)”. Gleb Aleksandrovich explained that it meant something like “becoming dead (*kak umer*)”. The members of the circle cut their networks; they started to feel like strangers (*neznakomiye*). The breakdown of friendships was hurtful as many members of the circle enjoyed writing and staging amateur theatre performances, sketches of the theatre of the absurd. Unfortunately, the scripts of those performances had “self-destroyed” or “burnt”. Gleb Aleksandrovich’s joke about self-combusting manuscripts is telling because the closure of the circle was a plunge into intellectual non-existence (*nesuschestvovaniye*). Involvement in the realm of ideas was essential for his sense of freedom (Figure 1.4).

The Institute’s pictorial archive is finite. It ends with the depletion of that history. The textual/pictorial archive of the informal Institute for the Research of Concrete Social Processes is not a depository of archival documents in a conventional sense of stable archival collections of materials, accidental and non-accidental for archival purposes. Non-accidental archival materials are a priori destined for keeping as a historical record: minutes of various meetings (party meetings, editorial meetings, staff meetings, conference meetings, and so on). They form the bulk of archival collections in many official state archives in Moscow. The posters are also a non-accidental archival agglomeration as they were intended to be an exclusive archive for the circle’s participants. Accidentally, the posters became a record of the circle’s dissolution and “an archive of experience” (Battaglia, Clarke and Siegenthaler 2020: 8) that provides an account of collaborative production of an archival practice. Creating the posters was a moment constitutive of the experience of dissolution and of archiving of that experience.

In other words, the posters are the archive of loss and ruination, which is saturated with “anachronistic vitality” (Finkelstein 2019: 6). Archives of traces and loss draw attention to obdurate ruins and urban palimpsests (Huysen 2003), the layering of history that reminds us that some aspects of the past might soon be gone. Insofar as ruins and palimpsests are positive about historical survivals brimming with vitality, the posters are subtractive as they document disappearance of intellectual labour and evanescence of material, embodied practices and of moving ideas among people. The posters are a monument of irreversible disappearance. They show how, under the conditions of political violence, the members of the informal Institute withdrew from a vibrant intellectual space. They incised themselves from



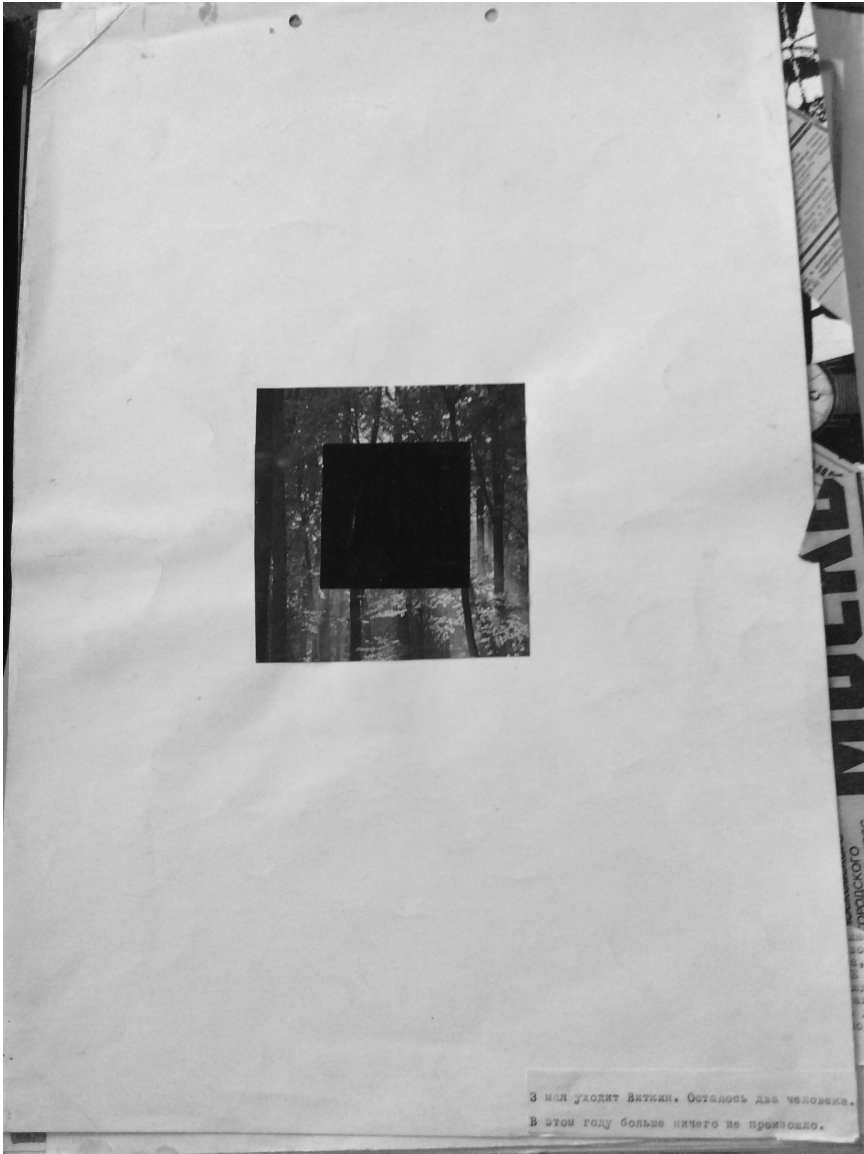


Figure 1.4 One of the final posters, with the black square. Courtesy Lev Gudkov.

a space of thinking and grounded the memory of experimental, irreverent intellectuality in archiving gaps, voids, holes, and diminishing numbers of those who left. In this regard, the black square hole in the last image elicits a sense of absolute absence. However, this shape recurs as the permanent aesthetic feature on the *Last Address* plaques. I will return to this question



shortly as the commonality of this trope – a cut-out black square and cubic memorial sculpture – calls for further reflection.

### Singularity and Multitude

The *everyall* is an all-encompassing yet heterogeneous multitude with a value of *one*. It is *one* that does not presume sameness or assimilation because it is qualitatively distinct. It is the biggest number within the non-numerical human arithmetic that is denied by the logic of subtraction and erasure that counts the uncountable: a human life. Grounded in this radically different *one*, the *everyall* is the third category that encompasses singularity and multitude and eliminates the gap between remembering everyone and remembering all. What would *everyall* mean in political rather than strictly philosophical terms?

The problem of singularity and multitude as scale – which should not be confused with individuation and multiplicity as diversity – has been theorised by Sylvain Lazarus, a French Marxist philosopher. He specifically tackles the problem in relation to the *name* as a political designation such as ‘workers’ – or victims – rather than a personal appellation. As such, the *name* prompts us to think in singularities rather than generalisations of “methodological populism” (Lazarus 2015: 4, 6). Names are singularities which make the name unnameable, “not reducible to anything other than itself” (Lazarus 2015: 6). At the same time, the name is an instance of a totality that is derived from its diverse parts (Lazarus 2015: 21). For Lazarus, the *name* expresses a mode of thought that does not negate singularity or disregard multitude but makes them “co-thinkable” (Lazarus 2015: 22–23). Applied to duration and historical events, subjectivities and people, the multiplicity of the real posits the question of how to grasp the concrete whole or the “composite ensemble” of the real (Lazarus 2015: 115) from singularity.

In political philosophy, the notion of multitude has been popularised by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri who evoke it as a non-unitary political subject composed of many members. It is neither a group consisting of individuals nor a class (Brown and Szeman 2005). Rather, the multitude is a utopian mass formation: a living fleshy alternative democracy on a planetary scale (Hardt and Negri 2004). An expansive network of the commons, the multitude is a political formation that has freed itself from “the One of sovereign Power” (Žižek 2017: 49). The intellectual or practical possibility of a large political collective without the notion of the monolith One has been the object of desire for many thinkers. In his *Grammar of Multitude*, Paolo Virno compares Spinoza’s notion of multitude to the Hobbesian notion of people. For Spinoza, multitude is a plurality of collective action that does not collapse into unity. Nevertheless, it holds *One* as the premise of the Many. In contrast, the empiricism of Hobbes sees the relation between one and multitude as counting up towards ‘people’,

whose political will is monopolised by the state. For Hobbes, multitude is abhorrent because it is defiant of the state that is invested into a biological summing up (via a centripetal movement) (Virno 2004: 42) of individuals into populations. For Virno, the orientation to multitude enacts a different kind of political solidarity. It is a common polity that sustains oneness and difference and involves an orientation towards a world in its abstract totality and in its simultaneous concreteness. Abstraction is given a positive meaning.

For the activists, to arrive at a definitive list of the real dead is to reverse acts of erasure, such as killing and exile. However, their refusal to draw a boundary between the killed and their executioners, victims, and perpetrators, us as witnesses and us as accomplices, advances a narrative of collective suffering that does not discriminate. In the past, anyone could have been arrested and killed. Anyone could have betrayed. In the present, anyone can be arrested, and anyone can betray. The activists' flight into non-differentiation is not tantamount to generalisation or disregard of historical nuance. Instead, it affirms the Being as sharing of time-space with the dead, the strangers, and the other and brings us to the philosophical question of being-with, being-together and being near that stipulate Being as "the condition of the spacing of an indefinite plurality of singularities" (Nancy 2000: 35). The task of this version of historiography is to speak of multiple singularities to shield the notion of 'truth' from fragmentation and to shift commemoration of historical violence into the realm of law and comprehensive justice. Finally, we arrive at a contradiction. Placing everyone, victims, and perpetrators, on one list is a political statement that feeds into the activists' historiographic principle of all-inclusive archiving of names of the dead.

Simultaneously, their project bars us from being mere onlookers on history and resorts to the language of retribution against the state. For instance, many participants use the phrase "We will not forget; we will not forgive (*ne zabudem, ne prostim*)". During the opening of the Kommunarka monument, the idea of the trial of perpetrators was played down, yet it is implicit in the invocations of dangers of oblivion and need for retribution. As a result, the activists' mode of commemoration of historical violence merges history and justice.

## 2 The Judgment Day of History

### Historians and Judges

The activists are both historians of the Stalinist atrocities and, implicitly, their witnesses and judges. Most are too young to have been eyewitnesses (although there are a few people who have a first-hand experience of Soviet labour camps and prisons in the 1970s–1980s). However, a historical ‘witness’ insinuates a modality of being beyond experience. With the rise of witnessing as commemoration practice and a genre of writing, to be a witness is a performative outcome of self-constitution (Givoni 2014: 126). One becomes a witness or assumes the identity of a witness. Givoni writes that witnessing comprises an ethical gesture and a critical endeavour of knowing and getting involved in the past as a secondary rather than primary participant. Secondary witnessing is an active stance of overcoming the silence of the dead or the inability to speak among the survivors. Witnessing is “an expandable act” that encompasses the living and the dead, participants, and spectators, those who experienced an event directly or by proxy and those who aim not only to reconstruct history from archives (Givoni 2014: 126) but also to arbitrate it.

A historian of a mass atrocity does not only chronicle and document the violent past. They often enable “a form of juris-writing” (Bell 2016: 137) where historiography goes beyond uncovering traces and addressing gaps in historical knowledge. In a push back against Ferraris’s notion of documentality that involves recording of traces and inscriptions that give rise to a manifest sociality of ideas, objects, and institutions, Vikki Bell notes that history as juris-writing presumes that the past co-exists with the present; it remains an unsettled political issue (Bell 2016: 138). Historiographic juris-writing is a form of inscribing and “putting into relation” justice that cannot be achieved through institutions and available legal mechanisms (Bell 2016: 144). Drawing on Ferraris, Derrida, and Nancy, Bell explains that this is not justice in a conventional sense of a concluded court hearing or legislated compensation, but justice that falls beyond the extant law (Bell 2016: 146). Historiography as juris-writing is comprised of various acts of marking, inscribing, and exhibiting violent history. It is record-keeping with a political promise.

The activists' archival politics is governed by a compulsion, an objection, and a substitution. The compulsion is to collect every name and generate a comprehensive list of all the dead, of all the victims of politically motivated murder in Soviet Russia. A list is "always *indefinite*, without beginning or end, ongoing and unfinished, always beginning with 'And' and ending, provisionally, with 'et cetera'" (Savransky 2021: 2). However, the memory activists work towards "an ideal of exhaustivity" (Hartog 2000: 386), that pushes them to collect all names, make lists and compilations of precedents (Hartog 2000: 386). Overdocumentation and saturation of historical and archaeological writing with accounts of numerous minor events might trivialise history to the point of reducing it to a cliché or a familiar platitude (González-Ruibal 2008: 2008). However, history as juris-writing avoids this danger as every event is a historical document and a body of evidence. Hartog links the modality of exhaustive historical record-keeping to the work of ancient Mesopotamian and Roman soothsayers whose work as diviners and royal biographers was distinct from contemporary historiographic practices yet covered some common ground. Instead of forecasting the future, soothsayers accumulated archives of omens and historical precedents that could illuminate contemporaneous events (Hartog 2000: 388). The category of history that was seeded in ancient Greek epics promoted a vision of history as an eye-witness account, a story told by somebody who was present or heard about an occurrence from a witness (Hartog 2000: 390). While both soothsayers and historians are intrigued by the past, soothsayers were closer "to the way a judge works" (Hartog 2000: 387).

In their role as witnesses on behalf of the dead, historians can be summoned to testify to someone's guilt. However, as mentioned above, many activists refrain from a black-and-white distinction between victims and perpetrators. They do not condone the crimes of the Stalinist era, but the public suspension of moral condemnation of those who killed in the service of the Soviet state is yet another instantiation of their purported historical objectivity. This standpoint corresponds to the reality of the Stalinist Terror that bestowed privileges, treated some with suspicion and cast people out of favour in a flash. Some gave or followed orders. Some were complicit while others were implicated or drawn into things beyond their agency or even discernment. The implicated subject is "a participant in history and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which people do not occupy such clear-cut roles" (Rothberg 2019). Implication creates grey zones (Agamben 2002: 17) and an ambivalent, shadowy existence that Agamben attempts to comprehend in relation to Sonderkommando units recruited from Jewish prisoners and charged with clearing out concentration camp ovens and burying of their fellow Jews. Agamben neither exonerates nor condemns them because victims and perpetrators participated in one horror of human destruction. Aptly, Rothberg calls it "an entanglement in injustice" (Rothberg 2019: 2).

To be sure, the possibility of implicit judgment is never too far. In the Kommunarka example, the activists denied their wish for a trial.

Nevertheless, although the activists inscribe the names of victims and their executioners next to each other, a list of NKVD employees has been published in a separate volume. The focus is on remembering the lists of names of all the dead, but the exposure of the names of the killers as a separate category is equally important. By means of the distinct database, the activists issue an implicit indictment which is a substitute for legal prosecution rather than a challenge to the parameters of the debate.

Called into courts to give evidence for the prosecution, historians often expose the interwoven character of historical interpretation and legal adjudication of guilt. As expert witnesses, historians bind law and history by reconstructing a historical trajectory of a conflict, its antecedents, omissions, tensions, and animosities (Wilson 2011: viii). Doubts exist over what good can come out of the marriage between history and law. Wilson writes that, after the death of Slobodan Milošević, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was criticised for prioritising the sentencing of one person over writing a reliable account of the war crimes during the conflict (Wilson 2011: 1). Some discommended that the court failed in its duty to administer justice because it was bogged down in the remote history of the Ottoman Empire, struggling to write a definitive narrative of a conflict, with self-serving aims and impoverished results (an opinion Wilson does not endorse) (Wilson 2011: ix, 18). There was a palpable disjuncture between the open-ended, interpretive labour of historians and the finality of a legal process that terminates with a reliable (in principle) verdict.

On the one hand, history can be utilised to corroborate a legal judgment; on the other hand, as Hannah Arendt suggests, it is irrelevant to law (Wilson 2011: 4). According to Wilson, some see law and history as incompatible because law exists within a realist, even positivist paradigm of factual evidence that pertains to individual acts rather than broader contexts (Wilson 2011: 7). In contrast, historians are invested in a more relational and indeterminate portrayal of the past. At the same time, the legal use of history is partial and instrumental in scope while historians see complexity as a virtue (Wilson 2011: 9). To be sure, law and history can be reconciled (Wilson 2011: 19). Within a realist paradigm, history and law share – or presume to share – a common principle of factuality. They aspire to be determinant. For instance, the activists' account of the Stalinist atrocities is presented as the only credible, implacably fixed narrative in place of a phantasmagorical, counterfactual trial of Stalin and his accomplices. Arguably, if the trial of Stalin was ever to take place, it would brook no defence. In its absence, history becomes a substitute for law and its faults.

Nevertheless, the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials involved mutual “transfer processes” between law and historiography, as well as a blurring of competences between historians and judges (Petrović 2018; Hedinger and Siemens 2016: 493). In particular, the Nuremberg trial was an arena of trial-and-error experiments with evidence and its scarcity (Delage 2005: 491). The trial itself became a subject of historiographic research of its

proceedings and consequences (Hedinger and Siemens 2016). Instead of being drawn directly into court deliberations, historians might feature as “dispensers of justice” (Spivak 2004: 524) on the outside as they participate in the ascription of wrongs. Spivak notes that a serious difficulty is how to address a discrepancy between a self-driven ethic of righting wrongs and a normative or re-imagined ethic of responsibility through the agency of others (Spivak 2004: 541). These are two different undertakings that stress the potentialities of justice outside the courtroom and the questionable efficacy, even parody, of procedural justice. The arguments apply to the activists’ simultaneous yearning for a trial and their assertion of their historiographic credentials as impartial witnesses; they are a historico-legal team for the dead.

Carlo Ginzburg, a celebrated historian of the Inquisition, sees similarities and divergences between a historian and a judge. They share an understanding that historical writing is grounded in the search for evidence or proof that must be argued vividly and persuasively (1999: 11–12). A judge and a historian presume a possibility of finding evidence and using it in rhetorical argumentation. Thus, some historians reproduce a judicial model in historiography, while judges take part in “historiographic experimentation” (Ginzburg 1999: 17). An important distinction between a historian and a judge is that the former deciphers and pieces together already existing documents, while a judge is involved in their active creation. For example, a judge questions a defendant or a witness who might doubt, contradict, withdraw, or retract their statements. Historical and judicial sources are a complication of silences, omissions, inconsistencies, absurdities, mistakes, and lies. For Ginzburg, the difference between a judge and a historian is that the former evaluates evidence to adjudicate the culpability of a specific individual, with or without considering broader mitigating circumstances. In contrast, a historian unreservedly investigates a social constellation, or context, sometimes at the nexus between named and nameless protagonists (Ginzburg 1999: 12). Ginzburg argues that a judge and a historian rely on documentary and conjectural analysis, but a judge is oriented towards the possibility of a verdict (Ginzburg 1999: 117). Ginzburg concludes that

if one attempts to reduce the role of the historian to that of a judge, one simplifies and impoverishes historiographical knowledge; but if one attempts to reduce the role of the judge to that of a historian, one contaminates – and irreparably so – the administration of justice  
(Ginzburg 1999: 118).

The reframing of the above events from a proclaimed personal and collective remembering to a brushed aside question of a desired trial of the dead committers opens a possibility to speak about death as a killing and memory as justice. Derrida cites J. Hillis Miller, a literary critic, who transformed the noun ‘justice’ into an active verb ‘to justice’ to theorise how



poetic events emanate justice, by “shining it forth” (Derrida 2005b: 692). For many of the activists, a trial of Stalin would entail a theatre of justice, a re-enactment of an alternative course of history that never happened. Such a trial would mark the beginning of a counterfactual history that would rewrite the consequences rather than the actuality of the Stalinist Terror. Hence, there is an inherent ambiguity to their commemorative work. They are impartial historians who suspend judgement (hence, the “this is not a trial” remark). The refusal of a trial is an extension of the activists’ commitment to ‘factual’ rather than interpretive history, which would undermine their effort to expose the facts of killings rather than arbitrate who was or was not ‘innocent’ of a crime. Yet, they are active agents of justice; they ‘justice’ rather than judge. Neither an impartial determination of the past events nor a partisan evaluation of the past, the activists’ work of history does justice.

Remembering as a personal memory and commemoration as a configuration of history, justice, and law, are interrelated but they constitute different “claims for action” (Koselleck 2018: 117). Koselleck traces the links between history and justice to Herodotus and Cicero who saw a search for rigorous truth as their foundation. The subsequent debate in Hellenistic and Christian customs of history writing was whether a historian should pass judgment or let a reader deduce it (Koselleck 2018: 119). For a contemporary historian, “the determination of fact and the formation of judgment cannot be separated from each other” (Koselleck 2018: 119). The main question for Koselleck is what kind of justice is intrinsic to writing history (Koselleck 2018: 119).

Koselleck gives five possible answers. One goes back to the times of Herodotus but continues in contemporary rhetoric of, for instance, Churchill’s wartime self-justifications. It is a model of human blind error and atonement for their crimes under the watchful eye of gods who both mislead and punish. This is the justice that is lodged within history itself as a sequence of closely interconnected events that contain a possibility of retribution. In contrast, the Thucydidean model is unflinching in attributing responsibility for history to humans (Koselleck 2018: 121). For Thucydides, history is not self-evidently just as it is driven by power that leaves theologies out. In contrast, Augustine argued around 400 CE that true justice can only be meted out by God (Koselleck 2018: 123). A historian is exempt from justice-writing as “all justice in this world remains unfulfillable, unattainable, and if attainable, only in an incomplete matter” (Koselleck 2018: 123). In a world after an atrocity such as Auschwitz, justice itself becomes inconceivable. The fourth model is absurd history where no amount of justice compensates for the event that cannot be adequately interpreted in intellectual, theological, or moral terms (Koselleck 2018: 124). However, it allows us to reinstate a position that history itself is the Last Judgment rather than a transgression that awaits justice (Koselleck 2018: 125). History is without hope or punishment because, in a nod to

Hegel, “history itself becomes a trial or process, its realization becomes the final authority” (Koselleck 2018: 125).

It does not matter which of the above models the activists’ archive matches fully or partially because Koselleck’s effort is to articulate the necessity of justice as a condition for experiencing history (Koselleck 2018: 127). Without God or political power, the activists make a secular claim to justice through writing history that follows the expulsion of gods and a critique of historical determination. Shaped by neither priests nor Hegelian or other Marxists, the activists’ scholarship is underpinned by a logic of mining history as a pursuit of justice. It is a secular affair, constrained by its temporal frameworks of a life span of the participants, the failing memories of some witnesses and disappearing, fraying documents. This time frame might not have been shared by the participants at Kommunarka, some of whom were dead atheists, dead Buddhists, and others, while the living included memory activists, relatives of the dead, and the Russian Orthodox priests. Without presuming personal religious feelings, the distinction between the earthly project of the activists and the theological commitment of the Russian Orthodox priests at Kommunarka paves the way for asking how to remember the dead, in their singularity and collectivity, and how a desire for political justice is articulated with or without the recourse to the extended temporality of the afterlife.

## The Judgment Day

The memory activists count neither on history nor divine providence to achieve justice even though one of the architects involved in designing the *Last Address* plaques coached the project in terms of “a moral obligation” to remember and “a method of repentance” (*sposob pokayaniya*) in an archived interview (08.07.2014, <https://www.poslednyadres.ru/video/ass.htm>, accessed 11.06.2021). Yet, the activists are not alone in this crowded realm of remembering the Stalinist past in contemporary Moscow. The activists’ projects are replicated by other memory agents, for example, some state officials, state-sponsored organisations such as The Gulag Museum, and religious figures, commonly Russian Orthodox priests and religious laypersons. The latter organise parallel events and stage similar or alternative ritual practices of commemoration. They duplicate and posit an alternative to the activists’ secular temporality and political justice.

Consider the Brethren. The Brethren are a civic religious association rather than an official Russian Orthodox brotherhood. The Brethren supported an installation of eight plaques on Pokrovka Street when a few of them sang psalms in the presence of a priest swinging a thurible, or incense burner. For nearly 10 years now, they have been organising commemoration events, including public name readings that run parallel to the activists’ initiatives. Initially, the Brethren approached the activists and borrowed their books of names. Today, they encourage Russian citizens to email them new

names. The activists interact with the Brethren, but they do not collaborate on any projects. The Brethren's work resembles the activists' activities in form and content. In general, many activists feel that, by and large, the more people participate in commemoration of the difficult past, the better. However, some regard the idea of "a duplicate" (*duplikat*) of the activists' public events as puzzling and unnecessary, an opinion that is accompanied by shrugging shoulders and offering a humorous disavowal of any knowledge of the Brethren's project.

The Brethren take to the streets in Moscow and other Russian towns on October 30. The events are scattered around the city rather than localised around one monument or place. At any given time, the events gather a small number of people, queuing with candles and hot drinks, offered by the association. People keep coming and similar looking gatherings can be observed on street corners and in parks till late at night.

During one of the prayers in October 2019, a representative of the Brethren made a small announcement to succinctly explain the Brethren's mission to remember victims of the Stalinist Terror. Then, a Russian Orthodox priest took the microphone to speak dolefully of the difficult past in Russia and the need to live in hope and show mercy to those who erred out of ignorance or fear. In contrast to the memory activists who are chroniclers of the Soviet mass atrocities, the Brethren suggest that their relationship to the past is resonant yet distinct to the archival work of the activists (Figure 2.1).

I was late to meet the Brethren's spokesman in a small coffee shop opposite the Temple of the Holy Trinity on Pokrovka Street. He picked this modern arty café because of its proximity to the concrete arch of the building where his association sponsored the installation of six memorial plaques. A soft-speaking man of 35 or 40, Stepan explained to me that while he endorsed the activists' multifarious archival work, the Brethren's approach was distinct in principle (*printsipialniye otlichiya*). Like the activists, Stepan sees proper names as a "human prerogative (*prerogativa cheloveka*)". To name (*imenovat*) is to summon a person from "non-being", a denial of being, a nothing of history.

Stepan recalled a trip to the Mednoye Memorial to Russian and Polish prisoners of gulag labour camps. The Mednoye Memorial is situated 35 kilometres north-west of Tver, an old Russian town. Established in 1996, the memorial consists of two cemeteries for Russian and Polish victims of the Stalinist Terror in the 1930s–1950s. The Russian cemetery contains symbolically marked mass graves. It is an architectural complex that incorporates a monumental boulder, a wooden museum with two exhibitions about the events of the Stalinist executions and the tortuous process of rehabilitation of the dead. The monument is inscribed with "To our compatriots – victims of the wars and repressions. 1995" (<http://mk-Mednoye.ru/foto/territory/>).



*Figure 2.1* The Memory Prayer organised by the Brethren on Pokrovka Street in Moscow, 2019.

“The Polish cemetery at Mednoye enumerates the dead by their names, by their concrete, personal names. They probably had lists of Polish names. Not the Soviet site. I thought it was a call to do something”.

The Polish cemetery at Mednoye includes a memorial wall inscribed with names of the executed Polish soldiers, police officers, border patrols, and others who perished in the nearby Soviet camps. Names are also engraved on individualised memorial plaques. For Stepan, neglect of the names of the Soviet dead was shocking because personal names are not people's own names. They are names of the saints; they are often given in baptism and belong to the previous generations of believers. Names fall into God's chronology of ownership. They are God's provenance.

Names of the dead and the living are in God's archive, as God is the only one who keeps a complete record. "Completeness is only in God", Stepan explained. That is why the Brethren pray for those they know by their first name and those they do not know. In many Russian Orthodox Churches, it is possible to fill in a simple form to ask a priest to pray for the dead or the living and the health. Personal names are listed on the form and subsequently used in prayers that invoke a person to remember God (*pomnya Boga*). Names are an instrument of reclaiming verisimilitude to God (*vostanovit podobiye*).

The condition of salvation is, however, to read "the list of names" (*spiski*). Stepan sipped his cold coffee and quoted from a poem by Aleksandr Velichansky. The poem increases a numerical scale of a murder "when one was killed ..., when ten were killed ..., when a hundred were killed, when a million were killed" to trace a mounting indifference to murder. The ten killed, the poem goes, were remembered by the name. Nobody asked the names of the hundred killed. The million killed provoked people's boredom (*skuka*), a deathlike slumber (*smertniy son*). Stepan continued:

We look for a personal connection with the dead. We remember everyone. Then, we collate the dead together (*sostavlyаем вместе*). We arrive at massification (*massovost*).

Massification for Stepan is neither about people nor nationality (*narodnost*) but a sense of collective responsibility. However, Stepan didn't think that the memory activists and the Brethren can easily reconcile their approaches to remembering the dead even though the Brethren had been dependent on the activists' lists of names of the dead. Phenomenologically (rather than doctrinally), the Brethren regard the activists' philosophy of perpetual commemoration as flawed, not because it unfolds within a secular or even atheist framework and fails to factor God's divine presence in, but because it propagates vengefulness. Even though the activists generate all-inclusive lists of the names of the dead, their condemnation of the Soviet period is poorly disguised. Implicitly posited as an alternative to the activists, the Brethren rebuke the activists for their failure to reconcile with the past. They argue that the slogan "We will never forget; we will never forgive" spells division, alienation, and lack of absolution. Seemingly innocuous, the Brethren's peace-making stance ossifies historical debates

and enshrines the absolute value of national unity. Their endeavours are comparable to various Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in locations such as Northern Ireland that have been founded to achieve nation-wide “psychological healing” and symbolic closure at the expense of continual political process and prolonged grieving (Hamber and Wilson 2002: 37). Partly to consolidate the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as an institution that binds people together, and partly to reinstate a felt relationship with God, the Brethren argue that commemoration cannot be reduced to the enumeration of names and knowledge of facts. For them, commemoration is a public prayer that heals the trauma of the past. It is oriented towards love, mercy, and hope.

The name reading ritual during the Brethren’s Memory Prayer commences and ends with a liturgy that reminds listeners about the historical past and the obligation to restore a relationship with God (*vosstanovit otnosheniya*) and strengthen the union among people. Their name reading is interrupted every hour with one of the penitence prayers for Russia, the “fatherland” (*otchizna*), to the exclusion of humankind. Picked from a small collection of prayers dating back to the 15th century, a prayer can ask God to witness the weakness and agony of the soul, the corruption of minds and hearts, transgression of commandments, and sorrow that comes with illness, hunger, floods, fire, and conflict. A prayer can plead for saving Russia, calming down dissension, healing strife, and neutralising discord. Thus, the Brethren’s theological worldview inflects their commemorative labour; it gives coherence to their interest in the difficult historical past and forms an eschatological vision for the ethical and political future of the united Russia and a strong Russian Orthodox Church. Their theological tenets and overt disagreement with the activists’ condemnation of the past coalesce around a notion that vengefulness fosters infighting that is damaging to the soul and to the Russian state.

For the Brethren, the Stalinist Terror exemplifies a recurrence of the Years of Discord (*Smuta*) in the 16th century when the Russian statehood was on the verge of collapse. This implies that the Stalinist Terror and, some say, the Revolutions of 1917 show the cyclical nature of the Russian national history. Hence, the notion of *Smuta* is coupled with the theological tropes of martyrdom and resurrection (Bogumil, Moran and Harrowell 2015). Where the activists conjure a collective history of suffering and mass murder, the Brethren subjugate this collectivity to a specific discourse of nation-state building.

The Brethren overlook, however, that reconciliation and harmony might not be desired. Theirs is a specific paradigm that sees discord as a recurrent aberration, a lapse of national or other co-existence. The paradigm has many opponents, including anthropologists who find the language of reconciliation too hegemonic. Rothberg notes that a violent past is irrevocable and unresolved (Rothberg 2019: 9), despite the existing formal mechanisms of justice and reconciliation such as trials. For the activists, reconciliation



signals rehabilitation and impedes historical justice (Adler 2012). The Brethren both replicate and implicitly contest the memory activists mode of historical commemoration of the Stalinist past. Although the activists have not offered a coherent vision of future politics, they merge commemoration with advocacy for civic and human rights. They make legal and moral demands on the current state to acknowledge a political crime. The Terror happened but it has no metaphysical meaning or teleology. It is to be remembered as a historical fact for its existence rather than signification. The Brethren, just like the Russian Orthodox Church in general, operate with a more nationalistic rhetoric (Bogumil, Moran and Harrowell 2015) that constructs the continuity between medieval and contemporary Russia.

In *Memorial* eschatology, there is no conceptual or ethical equivalent to a secular court. The Brethren inhabit the world of divine intervention and extended temporality beyond the empirical frame of being alive. There is a hint of eternity where justice in the afterlife is not only possible but also inevitable and punitive. Thus, they do not strive for administering justice themselves, in the here and now, but pass it on to God whose divine justice is a thing that has already happened. They see themselves as sojourners in this empirical world, in transit to a divine place where God presides over a trial of the sinful. Justice will inevitably catch up with the wrongdoers. Stalin will have been tried in God's court of justice. It is a completed act within God's time. Their trust in justice after death simply eliminates the need for staging a secular trial. The activists do not let Stalin rest in peace. In contrast, furnished with theological arguments for compassion and situated in the stretched temporality of the afterlife, the Brethren acknowledge the violence of the Stalinist period but defer justice till the Judgment Day where it will have been meted out. Justice in the divine court is a delayed yet completed action. In other words, the activists' fantasy of a trial is circumscribed by the historico-empirical and secular principles of their politics of history while the Brethren possess a beguiling vision of retribution as sanctified violence of God against the dead.

Agamben states that the confusion between legal and theological premises and between juridical and ethical elements of truth inhibits our understanding of justice, responsibility, and accountability (Agamben 2002: 17–24). For him, the notion that law is not about truth but about judgment and the necessity of a trial represents a mistake when it comes to an incomprehensible atrocity because the demand for a trial imposes a closure of history. A trial thus both inaugurates and halts a process of justice. The philosopher raises the question of not only how the law enables judgment yet contaminates responsibility but also how entanglements between law and ethics add to the confusion.

The demarcation between legal guilt and moral guilt is added within secular ethics (Agamben 2002: 24), which are inadequate for understanding the profundity of atrocities such as the Holocaust and the ambiguities between victims and perpetrators. The memory activists and the Brethren

replicate each other's work, but their perceptions of judgment are anchored in different temporalities of juridical life and theological afterlife. The memory activists agitate for a trial of the dead according to the principles of this-worldly law. In contrast, the Brethren imagine an afterlife and a divine court of justice where Stalin and other detractors of the holiness of the Russian state will have been tried in an indefinite point in the future. The memory activists are focused on the past to the extent that they cannot articulate a vision of the future. In a way, time has stopped in their archives that are replenished with evidence of the failed Soviet utopia. While the activists excavate the past, they confine themselves to the Soviet period. They live intellectually between 1917 and 1991. In contrast, the Brethren have created a fold, bringing the pre-revolutionary period closer to the present. Their time extends infinitely from the pre-Soviet history of the Church into the future point of the Judgment Day. Perhaps, the Brethren are not resentful of history or the past, as Rancière (2012) would put it, but in their orientation to eternity, the Soviet history is something to overcome rather than face.

### **The Trial of the Dead**

Is it possible to take the dead to court, put them on trial? The place of an accuser or a victim can be legitimately filled by family members or legal experts, regardless of a gap in time or lack of personal involvement. Historians and memory activists can step forward as indirect witnesses. But, who can fill the role of the accused of a mass atrocity by proxy? Who can be placed in the stead of an agent of injustice, a person or the state as an abstract collectivity? Why is it not possible to try an empty chair after death?

Somewhere, law and theology, law and ethics, shade into each other, masking a common point: a possibility of the end of history. There is a longing for a posthumous trial or the divine last judgment, in this world or pushed into a different realm of eternity. Yet, it seems morally right but legally impossible to bring the dead to justice. The European Court of Human Rights and the International Court of Justice highlight the importance of right to historical truth and duty to remember, yet both operate with a temporal "statutory limitation" on prosecution of crimes committed before November 1950, the year of adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights (Schabas 2018: 37). Even though an exemption from the time-bar on prosecution of war crimes, atrocities, and crimes against humanities has been proposed by the Council of Europe, few members have ratified the convention (Schabas 2018: 38). The expiry date for prosecution of historical atrocities, such as the Armenian genocide, applies to the state accountability and criminal responsibility of individual perpetrators. The trial of Slobodan Milošević was terminated with his death. When high-rank perpetrators die before they testify in court, they are transfigured into

unavailable “imaginary documents” (Caswell and Gilliland 2015: 615). Death of a perpetrator involves a loss of non-textual, intangible evidence that is construed in courts as essential for establishing undeniable truth. Still, why did it not seem practical to conclude the trial after Milošević’s death and arrive at a historical verdict of his culpability and responsibility for violence in the former Yugoslav republics even if he could not serve a prison sentence? This underscores an ontological incapacity of judicial systems to prosecute the dead even through courtrooms are haunted spaces. For instance, transitional justice courts in Germany are haunted by ghosts of Nazi judges and failure to prosecute them in the past hangs over recent trials of East German judges and prosecutors (Wilke 2010). The temporality of justice is ‘out of joint’ here, Wilke suggests, because accusations of miscarriage of justice and complicity and subsequent convictions of GDR judges in 1990s were construed as a corrective to historical juridical missteps (Wilke 2010: 76). The compromised post-war trials enter courtrooms as ghosts, or “spectral constellations” (Wilke 2010: 78) that demand a reckoning.

What matters more: an attribution of guilt and a subsequent punishment, or a commitment to justice? Jacques Derrida says that the work of justice turns on the “I”, a person who declares “I am responsible”, even though the “I” is performative rather than nominal (Derrida 2005b: 689). The mechanisms of justice presuppose an “I” of intentional or accidental guilt that can be established in court. A self-contained “I” is not an anthropological “I”. Erin Manning reminds us that the individuated “I” is a complex ecology rather than a predetermined subject (Manning 2013). Derrida, who is interested in a phenomenology of coming to feel like oneself or having a taste of oneself (Derrida 2005b: 690), notes that the just one is outside the self as the just self is responsible for the other to the other.

In his “Critique of Violence”, Walter Benjamin notes the relationship between law and justice is underpinned by a moral distinction of legitimate and illegitimate violence as a question of violent means to a just end, justifications and justness that configure this antinomy (Benjamin 1996: 279). He argues that violence is the origin of law, whether it is death penalty and policing or an instrument of “law-making or law-preserving” (Benjamin 1996: 287). Violence of law is different, however, from divine violence that “expiates the guilt of mere life and doubtless also purifies the guilty, not of guilt, ... but of law” (Benjamin 1996: 297). Benjamin does not ask what deters us from prosecuting the dead. Instead, he seems to suggest that divine retribution makes amends for the crimes of the dead – or it can satisfy the application of the law to the dead. Yet, the dead are among us, secular juridical subjects, who inhabit and transform the world made for us by the dead as we tend to their past and future. While graves of the dead can be desecrated or the dead can be honoured with a new tomb, a medal, or a monument, it remains unclear to me why the guilty dead escape from a secular frame of justice into empirically indeterminate bureaucracy

of divine judgment. As some dead are granted the rights to procreate and to enforce wealth and inheritance control after their death, why is it that the trial of the dead has been so profoundly singled out for divine jurisdiction, the remit of God rather than secular courts? How did justice become conditional on being alive?

Names of the dead do not help us define history or describe the craft of a historian. But they put an image on history and, by analogy, an image on law. In what follows, I will describe the architectural efforts to arrive at a monumental image of a mass atrocity. Political memory is an authoritative “mnemonic doxa” (Mihai 2019: 52) that constitute affective management and chronological suturing through practices of creation and collection of emotionally charged images and things (Oushakine 2013). First, I look at the specificity of commemorative use of portraits of the dead, in contrast to inscriptions of names of the dead. Then, I will move to a discussion of a viable architectural alternative to names, such as an abstract sculptural form of the *cube*. The cube gives rise to a powerful generic image of the dead, whose lived distinctiveness is compressed into the mass of the mass killing.

### 3 A Faceless Name

What do we observe when we look at the face of the dead, their portraits, and photographs? Conversely, what else if not the face of the dead can position us towards them? What is particular to faces or names of the dead when they are installed on a monument to a mass atrocity?

When Pyotr was asked to design the Kommunarka monument, he accepted gratefully as commissions from the memory activists are an important source of income for him. His design was shaped by pragmatic decisions and compromises. Pyotr argued that the aesthetic value of his monument was subjugated to the political objectives of remembering the Stalinist Terror. Previously, he had worked in graphic and interior design, including theatre props, shop windows, and pubs (*kabaki*). In self-deprecation, Pyotr felt that a decorator of pubs was a demeaning job and an admission of his lack of talent. Nevertheless, he took pride in his ability to select appropriate materials and graphics, especially fonts.

Pyotr thought that concrete would be too rough for the Kommunarka monument. Toughened plastic used in making gravestones was rejected as an inferior building material. The cost of beautiful, “solemn” materials such as granite and marble would push the project’s cost over the budget. So, Pyotr picked structural steel, rolled into flat sheets to achieve uniform thickness. Used in industrial and infrastructural construction, rolled iron and steel are inexpensive and weather resistant. Some types of rolled iron are used to make train tracks, a visual allegory that fascinated Pyotr enough to become transposed into two of his projects, the front entrance of the activists’ archive and the Kommunarka burial ground. He particularly liked the aesthetics of train carriages, their architectural brutalism. He contrasted it with the glossy high-end architecture of the new Gulag Museum in central Moscow that, despite its power to evoke the horrors of the Stalinist camps, is an expensive, highly finished building. For Kommunarka, wooden railroad ties were chosen as the good-enough beams to support six sheets of rolled steel. The ties were treated with creosote, a tar-based chemical, to protect them, although the Kommunarka beams started to crack almost immediately after the installation (Figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1 The architectural model of the Kommunarka monument, by Pyotr Pasternak. Courtesy Pyotr Pasternak.

“Ultimately, Kommunarka is a monumental document”. Pyotr said. “Just like the name reading ceremony (*chteniye imyen*) outside the Solovetsky Stone”.

The sheets had to be broad enough to accommodate all the names and execution dates and to literally recreate the paper lists of names of the dead in steel. Engraved with the alphabetised names of the people buried in Kommunarka, the monument could not be taller than an average person, level with an observer’s line of vision. Its expressivity would come from its minimalism. Names as a laconic grapheme would convey the victimhood and singularity of the dead. Like the materials, inscriptions of names of the dead were an artistic compromise because Pyotr doubted that he would be able to create a sculpture, or a sculpted bust. He was yearning to paint portraits but had little confidence in mastering verisimilitude. With sadness, Pyotr confessed that he just could not capture the human form, especially faces. He tried, but he never achieved the desired likeness with a sitter. “I thought likeness was essential”, Pyotr said genuinely. His anxiety about the artistic value of a portrait as a realistic representation of a sitter was not dispelled by his knowledge of the critique of representational realism and historical veracity in painting.

An enduring assumption about portraits is that they bring us into a frontal relation with the dead. With a nod to vernacular theories of representational



realism, this line of thought sees the relation between a portrait and a person as that of resemblance between an image and a presence. This contentious notion of likeness has featured prominently in the European history of portraiture and sculpture (West 2004: 21). Keeping in mind the questionable value of authenticity of art and history, the necessity of realism in a painted portrait is dubious. Portraits are prone to distortions and embellishments, such as found among ancient Greek legislators who outlawed caricature and depictions of ugly human beings (Douzinas and Nead 1999: 6). Later in history, idealised representations entered a competition with likeness to the physical appearance of a sitter and their social persona and subjective, spiritual, and ethical being. For example, the 13th-century European artists were entranced with the physical appearance of saints as they tackled the question of what exactly was reproduced in a painted or sculpted face and whether a depiction of a face was theologically desirable or permissible. Saints were described, painted, cast in silver, and carved in stone to capture minute details of their complexion, faces, bodies, and even bodiless voices (Gardner 2008). Mounted on buildings and altars, stone saints were plastic images of textual hagiographies that noted everything: a lazy eye, delicate hands, thinning hair. However, resemblance in portraiture is a decidedly historical tenet. Famous portraits of the 16th-century merchants and kings tangled physical resemblance with symbolism of their power and status (West 2004: 9–11; 26–32). Some portraits aimed to capture the psychological ‘essence’ of a person or a family. Other portraits depicted people as a perfect sample of a ‘type’ or an embodiment of a mythical or romantic ideal. In other words, with portraits, we cannot be sure if we are looking at a reified icon or symbol, a socio-historical actor, a concrete perceptible appearance, or an inner self.

In parts of Medieval Europe, imprints of faces of dead saints offered a fairly accurate copy of a dead rather than living face that was subsequently used in sculpture and portrait busts. Interestingly, death masks had contradictory properties of perceived veristic sculpting of the dead face and its geographical dispersal along a web of reproductions that shaped a “corporate identity” of busts, paintings, saints, and monastic orders (Krass 2015: 13). The old busts served as models for new ones, creating primary, secondary, tertiary, and other traces of the face that remained recognisable. This seriality of death masks was not seen as detrimental to the singularity of the original. So, when paintings and sculptured figures of appeared around alters and on facades of cathedrals in Italy, France, and Spain, “rhetorical representations” of saints and their authority mattered more than likeness (Gardner 2008: 130). At odds with the Old Testament prohibition “Thou shalt not make myself any statue, or any likeness”, tomb effigies also touched upon the “question of inherence, the conflation of image and person, or, more traditionally, image and prototype”, but they aimed to persuade rather than resemble (Gardner 2008: 128).

The original Latin sense of image is *imago*, or a death mask: “a mask reproducing with remarkable fidelity both the features and the complexion of the deceased” (Heller-Roazen 2021: 162). In fact, cognates in different European languages, such as *like* in English, Gothic *leik*, Swedish *lik*, suggest that *imago* meant “cadaver” (Heller-Roazen 2021: 163). So, in addition to matters of resemblance between a face and a sculpted, painted, or photographed image of the deceased, death masks give rise to further inquiries into a contingency of a clear-cut distinction between the living and the dead (Heller-Roazen 2021: 165–166). Furthermore, displayed in niches and atria of family homes, *imago* was not a pictorial image but an unmediated impact of matter (face) on matter (plaster) that established legality and legitimacy such as genealogy and inherited rights of a family (Goodrich 1999: 106; Didi-Huberman 1999: 79). Only later, *imago* was superseded by a familiar notion of an image as a painted or pictorial resemblance such as a portrait and occlude its centrality to practices of law. For instance, first photographic portraits were carefully crafted to fake a continuous life of a deceased child (Burke 2001: 23) rather than establish succession.

A portrait, including a photographic portrait, might communicate a plethora of intentional and accidental meanings, assumptions, techniques, and sensations. In general, photographs are eagerly accepted as a source of historical knowledge and evidence (Burke 2001: 22). However, any painted or photographic image is constructed through narratives, captions, publication venues, and interlacing interpretations. Without them, a photograph seems largely mute because, in its immediacy, a photographic portrait rarely tells us who a person might be; biography can be entirely occluded without a contextual placement (Burke 2001: 22). Yet, paradoxically, the more a photographic portrait is stripped of background context, the more truthful it becomes. A passport photo, a mug shot in prison, or a cut-out photograph of a dead face against the white background on a tomb are endowed with a more overpowering aura of the living presence than a more elaborate, rich in detail picture of a frontal figure of a person in a furnished room, surrounded with symbolic, evocative, and plainly meaningful paraphernalia of one’s life. As a technicality, at border crossings, we are asked to produce a black and white photograph without glasses or anything else that can mask or overshadow a ‘pure’ identity that suppresses a situated depiction of us in a vortex of our everyday comings and goings that would illuminate a more complex, social, or relational self.

Portraits and names of the dead can be seen as different ways of referencing likeness. Then, what difference does it make to remember the dead by their face or name in the aftermath of mass atrocities? A face, or *prosopocentric*, mode of remembering is apparent in the marches of *The Immortal Regiment* (*Bessmertniy Polk*) across Russia. The Immortal Regiment is a procession to remember the fallen Soviet soldiers and civilians during the Second World War. It gathers family members and citizens in cities

and villages across Russia, mainly. The living carry portraits – or, as an exception, names if photographs are not available – of the participants, survivors, and veterans of the so called Great Patriotic War. The event takes place on or close to the Victory Day on May 9th that officially ended the Soviet Union’s involvement in the planetary conflict ([www.moypolk.ru](http://www.moypolk.ru)). The sea of faces, put on display during the Immortal Regiment’s marches, are faces of the dead before the event of death. Like tombstone portraits in many graveyards in Moscow, some of the portraits show retouched and rejuvenated faces as relatives pick photographs of much younger ancestors. Photographs of 30- or 40-year-olds are paraded through the cities even when they depict people who died in their 80s.

The Immortal Regiment has a kin project, *The Immortal Barrack*, which was established in May 2015 to generate another exhaustive list of all victims of political repressions in the former Soviet Union, in parallel with the activists’ archive. The Immortal Barrack offers two viewing modes of their list of the dead. One option is to see the portraits of the killed while the other option offers alphabetised digital plaques that reveal a portrait or a blank avatar icon as well as the name, occupation, dates of birth and death, and a few procedural details of the arrest and execution of the person in point. The names are many more than the faces. What is worth highlighting is that the Immortal Regiment and the Immortal Barrack aspire to remembering the dead by their faces. They stipulate names of the dead as secondary to their archived faces.

Is a photographed face of the dead a trope of political remembrance of violent history that erased them? Why are faces so desirable as a constellation of intimate and historical memory? What is left of the face without presumed presence? According to Valentin Groebner, different modes of violence are linked to anonymity and/or defacement that renders people “formless” (Groebner 2008: 12). Defacement and anonymity threaten to reduce people to “nameless exemplars of horror” (Groebner 2008: 12). In a string of equivalences, Groebner poses a similarity between being faceless, nameless, and unidentifiable, or without a sign (Groebner 2008: 143). An atrocity, such as extreme violence, makes people indistinguishable (Groebner 2008: 143). Violence, then, targets faces and names. Groebner suggests that an age-old mechanism to undo the dehumanising effects of excessive violence is to name the dead and re-affirm the potency of an association between a face, a biography, and a name (Groebner 2008: 155, 168). *Prosopocentric* memorials might be guided by an analogous desire to reconstitute the dead to humanity.

The make-shift gravestones in Kommunarka also have photographs pinned on trees that grow on the mass burial ground. These faces of the once living and now dead are for us to look at and for the dead to look at us, as if the natural reflex of the dead to keep their eyes partially open defies a convention in Russia that the dead should not reciprocate the gaze. In contrast to the forlorn graves in Kommunarka, the mass graves of the killed,

transported, and cremated at the Donskoye Cemetery are a crowded space. The Donskoye cemetery in central Moscow was built in the early 1900s next to the Donskoy monastery that was demolished and rebuilt as the first Soviet crematorium in 1927. In a video lecture at the International Memorial in Moscow (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lekvKsqaNjE>, streamed April 18, 2020; accessed January 13, 2021), Fedor, a leading researcher of the Donskoye Cemetery, explained that the burners were installed in the basement of the monastery that was extended and fitted with a chimney. Cremation was promoted as a technological breakthrough of the Soviet industrialisation and an instantiation of the materialist worldview, according to a review of a subsequent exhibition that provided images and testimonies from the Moscow crematorium published by A. Levitsky's in 1931 (Levitsky 2015: 553). Once the crematorium began operation in the 1920s–1930s, educational trips and excursions were arranged to view the burning of corpses of ordinary people despite the relatives' protests. Some distinguished Soviet citizens, such as Vladimir Mayakovsky, a futurist poet, were cremated there. Ashes were put in urns and immolated in the adjacent columbarium's niches in the monastery's interior halls and in the purpose-built walls outside. Some niches still contain busts and figurative sculptures of airplanes and other symbols of the dead people's identities.

Fedor organises history walks around the cemetery. I joined one of his walks in October 2019 to learn that, in the mid-1930s, the crematorium workers complained that the director, Petr Nesterenko, had neglected the maintenance of the crematorium and the glasshouse that grew fresh flowers for the funerals. Some employees reported that he spent his nights drinking heavily with unidentified military men. Soon the rumours began to circulate that the crematorium was used to burn the corpses of “those who were shot” (*rasstrelyanniye*) at the peak of the Stalinist Terror. Later, historians and the public found out that, during those terrible nights, thousands of corpses were brought on trucks through the main gates of the cemetery and buried in three mass graves, whose exact location became known in 1989.

Today, the three mass graves at Donskoye have been transformed into a memorial complex that consists of a small, paved square with a kneeling sculpture of a woman in the centre and several granite slabs with commemorative messages such as “Time will preserve your names”. This site includes a remembrance book with the names of those victims who have been identified so far. Many names of the people who were buried at Donskoye in the first, oldest mass grave have been established through archival research. In spite of knowing the names, the dead bodies cannot be retrieved from the pit as their burnt remains cannot be differentiated from a multi-layered, compressed clump of mixed ashes and soil. Nevertheless, the surviving family members and friends attempt to disaggregate the dead by inserting into the mass grave a personal graveyard plaque, usually with a portrait, a name, a year of birth, and a more precise date of execution. Some families have erected empty graves, or cenotaphs, in full view of the mass grave, to

mark and single out their ancestors from the cumulative grave and create a focal point for personal mourning. The cenotaphs resemble an inhabited grave with a marble gravestone, flowers, and candles; it covers a standard rectangular surface of other graves at the Donskoye Cemetery. The empty graves would have passed for a grave with human remains if attendees of history walks were not taken to the cenotaphs and their emptiness was not purposefully brought to attention (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2 The oldest mass grave at the Donskoye cemetery.



The crematorium was closed in the 1970s. The building was handed back to the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1990s that has demolished it and rebuilt the church. The internal and outdoor walls of the columbarium are in a state of disrepair, with some walls leaning and crumbling away. While families continue to visit and lay flowers at the mass graves of the killed, some niches in the columbarium have not been visited for a long time and bear a note that the relatives should contact the administration of the site immediately. Otherwise, the ashes are in peril of being removed. It is likely that the decrepit Soviet columbarium will be relocated, even though the memory activists have been running a campaign for its preservation as a heritage site of Soviet violence.

In his essay on “the aesthetic significance of the face”, Simmel asks what is it about human face that makes it a “preeminent human site of signification” (Siegel 2011: 8)? A face pulls together a multiplicity of elements into a unity, a process of convergence that is essential to a picture, a sentence, a concept, a living organism (Simmel 2020: 231). Simmel speaks about the face as fragile and susceptible to disfigurement that other body parts, such as the “marvellous interrelation” of fingers, do not have to the same degree (Simmel 2020: 231). The unity of the face is attained through the synthesis of its multiplicity that sets the face’s aesthetic value and its articulation of a human being (Simmel 2020: 232). The centripetal resistance to the fragmentation of parts that characterises baroque art (in anticipation of cubism and conceptualism) is the process that signals an animated person, endowed with personality, emotion (Simmel 2020: 233). For Simmel, a symmetrical face is a principle – or virtue? – of inner individuality that, in a painted portrait, is unveiled by the intuited movement of the eyes (Simmel 2020: 235).

Contra Simmel, Levinas regarded the face as an essential site of alterity or strangeness of the other. The strangeness of the other cannot be successfully mediated by an image (Kenaan 2011: 151) as it requires a presence, an argument that insinuates Levinas’s suspicion of graven images (Kenaan 2011: 153). In the essay “The Real and Its Shadows”, Levinas asks if an artwork, in its closure, immobilises the real and imposes “a fundamental passivity” on the world (Levinas 1998: 131). The philosopher’s distrust of images is contrasted to language as an intelligible substitution of the object for a concept that “initiates life” (Levinas 1998: 139). An image exemplifies a conversion of objects into non-objects which precipitates a loss of presence (Levinas 1998: 135). An image – be it a realist or abstract representation – gives shape to the absence of an object and reveals a dialectic of being and non-being (Levinas 1998: 136). An image is in “the meanwhile, never finished, still enduring – something inhuman and monstrous” (Levinas 1998: 141).

In contrast to an image, the direct “relationship to the face, an event of the collectivity – speech – is a relationship to a being itself, as a pure being” (Levinas 1998: 9). Simply put, it is pure because the face is not mediated



by an image or a concept (Levinas 1998: 29). Levinas works towards “a phenomenology of sociality based on the face of the other” (Levinas 1998: 128). Although an image of the face is not determined by the relation of likeness or resemblance to a ‘real-life’ person, its uniqueness “lies in its manner of being ... [namely] facing us” (Kenaan 2011: 144). To see and speak to the other involves a meeting of the face. The face exposes us to the loneliness of death and demands a refusal to let somebody die alone (Levinas 1998: 128). For Levinas, the presence of the face of another human being is an ethical stance of inability to kill (Levinas 1998: 9–10). Once confronted with the face, the other cannot be dismissed. For Levinas, being face-to-face is an ethical requirement for the responsibility for the other. In place of resemblance, Levinas foregrounds responsibility.

Levinas’s negative view of the image of the face, its “ontological inferiority” (Kenaan 2011: 143), has many parallels. For instance, Pavel Florensky, sentenced to the Solovetsky Gulag, was a mathematician and a Russian Orthodox mystic who supported the alleged heresy of Name Worshipping, a trance-inducing incantation of God’s name (Graham and Kantor 2009). He studied faces on Russian Orthodox icons (*iconostasis*) to challenge a phenomenological orientation to face as a nexus of sensual and material interaction (Kozin 2007: 294). Florensky argued that revelatory objects such as icons do not represent faces but allow them to manifest themselves (Kozin 2007: 304). While Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas looked for traces of otherness in an absolute face of an absolute stranger, Florensky treated icons as “sightings” of mysterious and religious events (Kozin 2007: 303). Having misread the literature on the phenomenology of senses, Florensky felt that phenomenologists made a metaphor out of the iconic image of face. The mathematician-priest traced the Russian etymology of face, *lik*, to jubilation rather than face in an ordinary sense (*litso*). This way he designated the painted *face* of an icon as a passage between two realms and an encasing of the realm of the divine (Kozin 2007: 304). For Florensky, face comes not from the world of metaphorical encounter with the other but from the “world of witnesses; it testifies” (Kozin 2007: 306). The wooden icon witnesses this world by shining the light (hence, the use of gold) from the world of the witness into our world of the witnessed.

One of the most famous monuments to the victims of the Stalinist Terror in Russia is all face, yet it is a peculiar face without resemblance. Ernst Neizvestny’s Mask of Sorrow is erected in Magadan, a notorious site of Gulag camps in austere Kolyma in north-eastern Siberia, partly within the Arctic Circle. Conceived as a triumvirate of monuments to be built in Magadan, Vorkuta, and Ekaterinburg, the monument in Magadan is a 15-meter-tall concrete mask that incorporates smaller, non-identical masks around its left eye that are usually interpreted as tear drops (Bogumil et al., 2015: 1436). Scattered below and above the eye, the clustered masks evoke a growth of skin tags that both disfigure and mirror the main face as partial reproductions.

On surface, the Mask of Sorrow is replete with commemorative symbolism that over-signifies sorrow. For example, the Magadan monument has an in-built prison cell and a mourning female figure at the back. However, the interesting aspect of Neizvestny's work is not its symbolism or realism. The Mask is schematic; it does not resemble or conceal a face. One could say that it replicates a generic human face rather than its individualised features. The Mask of Sorrow – a brutalist mask with many ingrained masks on it – puts into an architectural form a philosophical idea of multiplicity that questions the existence of a posthumous subject of memorialisation. The large mask and its smaller tags might be an expression of Neizvestny's hope that a sense of magnitude of historical violence can be conveyed in sculptural unification that takes place “without uniformity” (Neizvestny and Vaksberg 1999: 92). Abstracting by degree, the concrete mask conceals a face as it connotes a relation to the dead of a mass atrocity through a different ontology of the dead as the other without selfhood. Many of Neizvestny's sculptures show rigid, rectangular forms or broken up, mutilated human torsos, faces with missing eyes, amputated legs to articulate an idea about death as a partial fragment and a singularity that “contains nothing but itself, which is nothing” (Berger 1997: 101).

The mask connotes a generic countenance of the multitude. It negates a concrete person. Like a grapheme of a name, the mask is an ellipsis of a concrete being. It flattens the human face to convey a possibility of an indeterminate corporate self: one mask with its many tags. Furthermore, the flattening upsets the dimensionality of the face. It involves a gradual reduction of representation of a human face to sheer volume. These two techniques – flattening and reduction – remind not only of the Russo-Byzantine icons but also of the Russian avant-garde portrait of Stalin by Pavel Filonov in 1936 (Prendeville 2000: 54). This portrait possesses a monumental quality of a chiselled death mask as the artist used shadows and sharp lines to convert the Communist Party leader's face into a Byzantine icon (Prendeville 2000: 54). The painting is focused entirely on the face without context. It is the face that is familiar and public; it could never be mistaken for somebody else's. Overtly, the portrait resembles the sitter, so to speak. But only overtly, because Filonov's iconography of Stalin articulates a critique of portraiture as a parade of life-like faces. Instead, the portrait is a death mask, an *imago* of Stalin that is unnervingly specific and transcendental, rendered instantly recognisable and other-than-human.

Common in Soviet frontal portraits of generals and Hall of Fame workers, decontextualisation of portraits in the photographic work by Andrei Lenkevich of the Minsk School of Photography is a deliberate effort to situate people in empty spaces and impede historical interpretation (Oushakine 2022: 80). Lenkevich's portrait of two soldiers depicts the same person twice, looking vacantly past the viewer. One soldier is dressed in the Soviet military uniform, the other in the Wehrmacht cap and jacket, but

the faces of two soldiers are identical. This juxtaposition is poised as a semantic defacement (*obezlichivaniye*) and depersonalisation in photographic portraiture that investigates seriality, repetition, and accumulation of visual readymades in a historiographic gesture that reconfigures Soviet photographic portraits of synthesised masses of faces or faces devoid of subjectivities (Oushakine 2022: 84, 91). Another critical exposition of depersonalisation involves the blotted out faces in Igor Savchenko's series of photographic portraits titled "Without a Face" (dated 1990) that abnegate individuation to speak about a generic human (*o cheloveke voobshche*), a de-historicised subject of "replication" (Oushakine 2022: 124–125).

In addition to flattening, decontextualisation, and depersonalisation, a painted face can be subject to fracturing and perspectival deforming. Picasso's distorted faces are, in effect, non-portraits, although critical and lay audiences have repeatedly affirmed the identity of a sitter, even when Picasso did not have one (Cox 2011: 200). For instance, Picasso's 1909 painting titled *Woman with Pears* was appended with a name *Woman with Pears (Fernande)* in 1996 (Cox 2011: 200). Instead of staying with a generalised face that is doubled and spliced, renaming returns the non-portraits into the realm of representation and identification. Yet, Picasso introduced disproportion, dismemberment, and intermingling of planes and perspectives precisely to question the metaphysics of a human face, to render it uncanny and anonymous (Cox 2011: 206–207). Playful as they are, Neil Cox links Picasso's non-portraits to Bataille's theory of monstrosity of human faces (Cox 2011: 206). Looking at an old wedding photograph of the bridal pair and their guests lined up in front of a camera, Bataille detected a gap between the living and the "vain ghosts" of the image (Bataille and Michelson 1986 [1929]: 17). What we see in their faces is an "odd decline of reality", a lack of common measure between the photographed people, a non-relation between "the self and the metaphysical whole" (Bataille and Michelson 1986 [1929]: 19). Why, then, do people persist in regaining a human face, Bataille asks (Bataille and Michelson 1986 [1929]: 21)?

Like Bataille and contrary to Levinas, Derrida rejects the face as a figural locus of a particular self. He writes against *prosopagnosia*, or a "diabolical impulsion to find resemblances in faces" (cited in Simmons 2011: 131). For a long time, Derrida refused to be photographed not out of a desire to be unrecognisable but because a headshot – a photographic portrait of his face – would conjure an image of the dead face, of "a revenant" (Simmons 2011: 131). For Derrida, the face is a ghostface that "signals an unreadable alterity, a disfiguration where it gets caught in the process of a folding back to the absence of the face" (Simmons 2011: 131). Thus, self-effacement of Derrida is a refusal of identification of his face with his presumably time-bound and inalienable self. While looking at photographs and portraits can be a powerful tool for imagining a presence, Derrida moves away from the face as the locus of the bereaved memory because the face is an instance of spectrality that displaces presence elsewhere (Simmons 2011: 137–138).

## On Biographical Paucity of Names

*Portraits Not Made* is an artwork series by Robert Filliou that substitutes a portrait with a typographic painting of a name. The series is comprised of nearly blank canvases that are inscribed with names of artists, short phrases, and arrows (Fredrickson 2019: 27). Some canvases are stamped with a round seal bearing the words “Principle of Equivalence” and “Permanent Creation” around the perimeter and three phrases: well-made, badly made, not made (Fredrickson 2019: 29). Although described as portraits, the canvases are not depictions of faces but a collage of typographic characters, letters, names, and texts, and a few photographic images of friends and families. Instead of relying on mimetic likeness, Filliou’s portraits are open-ended creations, oriented towards empty spaces and textual images rather than biographies or facial identities of subjects that Filliou had not met. As a result, portraits not made explore arbitrary links between human names and faces as people are reproduced in an alphabetic lexicon of terms such as “age”, “admiration”, and “ample food”. According to Fredrickson, names constitute a potentially endless chain of variations and contingencies that upset expectations of identifying portraits with physiognomy and personality (Fredrickson 2019: 44). Instead, *Portraits No Made* ask “on what basis can a name, a phrase, or a stamp on a canvas be a portrait?” (Fredrickson 2019: 44).

“Knowing someone’s name brings us closer to a stranger and rehumanises an unknown, abstract person. It creates a mystical connection to a stranger”, a young woman told me at the Solovetsky Stone, a monument to the Victims of Political Terror, in October 2018. From this perspective, to retain a name is to separate a human being from a presumed domain of nameless objects. Names contribute to a mystical connection with the dead because proper names are granted an immanent relation to their beings, a view that prohibits speaking names of God in different religiosities (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997: 23). A similar opinion is voiced about the Vietnam War Memorial where the semi-magical tactile contiguity of proper names with the dead is evident in visitors’ touching and tracing a contour of inscribed names with their hands<sup>1</sup>. Recently, a selective list of names of people who died of Covid in the United States was published in New York Times (Sunday, May 24, 2020). Headlined “U.S. deaths near 100,000 an incalculable loss”, the article suggested that the dead “were not simply names on a list. They were us”. In the comments, some readers claimed that personal names made the dead more intimate, more real to them. Hence, one could argue that to preserve a name is to carry out memory work that restores “the lyric singularity of each name” (Harrison 1997: 189). In other words, names (just like portraits) are often given the power to

1 I am grateful to Jonathan Spencer (Edinburgh) for this ethnographic insight.

forge a felt connection – a co-presence between the living and the concrete dead even when they are unknown to us.

Indeed, names give rise to “a biographical illusion” (Bourdieu 2000: 297), a rife speculation that people lead a coherent, narratable life that constitutes their psychological or social person. A biographical self is not a universal expectation. Yet, even among socially partible, or dividual, people such as the Mapuche of Southern Chili, biography is a totalisation of the self that is achieved, albeit after a person’s death by means of funerary oratory (Course 2007). Like Mapuche funerals, a proper name is a tool that perpetuates the idea of a constant self because it assigns a fixed identity that seems the same everywhere and all the time (Bourdieu 2000: 299). Taken as “the nominal constant” (Bourdieu 2000: 300), a proper name incorporates a person into bureaucratic and police records, birth certificates and obituaries, biographic narratives, and so on. However, a personal name designates but poorly describes a historical self. Bourdieu writes that “the proper name cannot describe properties and conveys no information about that which it names; since what it designates is only a composite and disparate rhapsody of biological and social properties undergoing constant flux” (Bourdieu 2000: 300).

The move away from a subject of a portrait to an arbitrary abstract signifier, which is the name, is meaningful only if the *name* is dissociated from an individuated person whose identity is revealed in auto/biography. In his essay “Autobiography as De-facement”, Paul de Man asks why we insist that “autobiography depends on reference, as a photograph depends on its subject or a (realistic) picture on its model?” (de Man 1979: 920). While a visual reference is created by a face (more so than a figure), biographical reference is often established through a name. Paul de Man writes that autobiography tends to be understood as “a mode of referentiality” (de Man 1979: 920) between the author and the autobiographical self. The presumed correlation between the real and the writing subject can be re-articulated as a conjuration rather than determination of the writing subject by their life. Thus, autobiography cannot be judged as fact or fiction because it is a moment of alignment of the author and the reader. To paraphrase, it is the reader who authenticates a text as autobiographic by using the name on the title page of a book. The name on the title page grants a text its legal authority because it “is not the proper name of a subject capable of self-knowledge and understanding, but the signature that gives the contract legal, though by no means epistemological, authority” (de Man 1979: 922).

In and of itself, the *name* has more in common with a signature rather than with a biographical identity as we trivially assume. It mingles singularity and iterability (Ferraris 2013: 299), yet stays opaque, referencing rather than describing a person. To illustrate, de Man turns to William Wordsworth’s *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810). For this Romantic poet, epitaphs induce “a universal feeling of humanity” (Wordsworth 1974: 57–58), a commiseration in death. A good epitaph would give a clear documentary

sense of the deceased: “circumstances of age, occupation, manner of life, prosperity which the deceased had known, or adversity to which he had been subject” (Wordsworth 1974: 57–58). Nevertheless, the dead are hollowed out because epitaphs on tombstones say little about the character of a person who died. For Wordsworth,

the writer of an epitaph is not an anatomist, who dissects the internal frame of the mind; he is not even a painter, who executes a portrait at leisure and in entire tranquillity: his delineation, we must remember, is performed by the side of the grave. What is more, the grave of the one whom he loves and admires”

(Wordsworth 1974:57–58)

An epitaph is no more than a delineation of a character. In death, biographical specificity gives way to abstraction of “the naked name” (de Man 1979: 926).

Nevertheless, de Man suggests that the name is an example of *prosopopoeia*, a literary device that extends biography beyond death (de Man 1979: 927). *Prosopopoeia* is a mode of personification, a figure of a dead face (*prosopon*) emergent from beyond the grave by means of language, image, and ritual. Looking at the graveyard portraits at the Donskoye Cemetery or reading monumental names, we can only presume a historical self since textless or uncaptioned faces and portraits are reticent about a personal biography. Names of the dead lack any informative content as naming somebody prevents us from knowing them in any substantive sense. National leaders visit graves of military cemeteries even though the tombstones are inscribed with nothing but a name; “viewers are told nothing sociological at all, nothing about parentage, region of origin, religious affinity or marital status” (Anderson 2011: 113). An inscription of a name does not compensate for the paucity of biography of a dead person, absorbed into a collective body of the dead, buried on the same patch of land, or obscured in a mass grave.

Just like a photographed or painted face, a monumental name is not a guarantee of metaphoric or felt presence when one speaks the name of a stranger from a place “outside of intimacy” (Barthes 1993: 106) of a family history and grief. Saidiya Hartman writes that an archival discovery of a photograph of a black girl taken in the early 20th century Harlem has not rendered the child’s name (Hartman 2021: 13). The omission of the name made Hartman’s task of reconstructing a personal biography through conventional historiographic means of checking a census or looking for police records simply unfeasible (Hartman 2021: 15). Still, is this not “the fiction of the name” (Hartman 2021: 14) that a singular life can be established with certainty? Hartman suggests that, against a historical convention of knowing, a nameless child on a photograph captures how singularity is intertwined with other singularities that defy early photographic representations of human types. The girl on the photograph is herself and every other.



Instead of attributing personal names a capacity to create an identity or “a fixed portrait of him or her” (Azoulay 2005: 59), names of the dead are no-one’s names. Ancient Greek philosophers sought a word, like ‘thing’, ‘genus’, ‘something’, or ‘no-one’ (*outis*) that could encompass all other words without a possibility of negation (Heller-Roazen 2017) and, thus, engender infinite naming that is not predicated on limitless counting. Such a “capacious” word would describe a transcendental that contains everything (Heller-Roazen 2017: 62), a name for all. It follows that names are “oblique offerings” (Derrida 1995b: 25) that disclose the hidden and elliptic dimension of the observable reality rather than index a person.

To restate, a portrait and a personal name of the dead do not illuminate inconstancies of life in history. However, they can teach us a great deal about violent histories that people dwelled in. Drawing on theological discussions of the name of God, “the unnameable nameable” (Derrida 1995b: 58), Derrida suggests that a name expresses not only an autobiographical singularity but also self-transcendence, that is, a possibility to go beyond oneself towards one’s historical contingency.

Whether dealing with intimate friends or the unknown ‘other’, we peruse pre-constructed, almost transcendental clues to generate and navigate in the world of abstraction and opacity. A name confirms existence but, as Maurice Natanson reminds us, factual existence contains a transcendental moment, as everyone enters the world predetermined by its historicity and, in large parts, derived from reflection rather than immediacy (Natanson 1986). Even though we join face-to-face interaction, our now-world is a “home of anonymity” (Natanson 1986: 21). We apprehend only fragments. It is not only that the world is anonymous to me; I, as an ego-centred self, am anonymous to others (Natanson 1986: 22). Building on Schutz’s notions of the stranger as the other who is nameless (Richter 2007: 119), Natanson concludes that the distinction between a concrete person and an anonymous anyone is not as steadfast as it might seem because acting in the world is predicated on abstraction (Natanson 1986: 52–64).

A portrait calls into question the logic of likeness. So does a name in relation to personal biography. Instead of being true to the dead, portraits and names of the dead relocate them from the sensorium of memory into the realm of justice and political commemoration. Does such relocation stymie a value of life or ground it in a different ontological order that dethrones strictly empirical relationality? I suggest that to seek a personal connection through a name or a portrait of the dead is to misconstrue how the living might involve themselves into the history of a mass atrocity.

Eelco Runia writes that the discussion about the opposition between memory and history is misleading because the debates should be shaped by the tension between commemoration and history (2007: 316). Commemoration diverges from a positivist history of recording and collecting in that it posits a question of who we are as people. Remembering the past presupposes a self-congratulatory moral mode where we situate

ourselves outside the past events. Simply, we observe what others did in the past. In contrast, commemoration is a rejoinder to us, the living beings, that we could “commit history” (Runia 2007: 317) by analogy with committing a crime under certain conditions. In other words, commemoration does not exempt us from complicity with the horrors of a mass atrocity. Commemoration sustains a realisation that, through a series of “sublime mutations” (Runia 2007: 317), we have committed the atrocities of the past. We know history because “we have made it, because we are history” (Runia 2007: 317).

### Archival Aesthetics of a List

Pyotr argued that monumentalised inscriptions of names of the dead artistically inferior to portraits. Nevertheless, he mentioned that portraits and names could be partly commensurate in their documentary quality. He intuitively apprehended that documentality and referentiality rather than likeness underpin memorial architecture focused on names. Multimodal inscriptions of names of the dead shift away from the immediate, witnessed history to the idea of documentality and scale of a mass atrocity that can be diagrammed all at once, without numerical reckoning. John Tresch talks about “cosmic things and cosmograms” as things and images that disclose the world of events in history and poetically materialise connections between them in concrete objects and images that muster a totality of heterogeneous things as one (Tresch 2007: 92–93). Archives are a striking materialisation of a cosmogram of political violence with the aesthetics of unending totality and simultaneity of time (Jardine and Drage 2018: 9). Having rid of the biographical bias, inscriptions of names of the dead can be read as a particular instance of “cosmogrammatical action” (Tresch 2017: 138) that assembles and shows the whole of a mass atrocity as a conspicuous typographic image of the movement of singular names into lists of names of the dead.

In many contexts, a proper name is primarily an institutional record, a legal act (Bourdieu 2000: 301), that serves various purposes of identification, nomination, and categorisation of people. Prior to photography, the legal identity in the imperial Russia was established through a name and a physical description of a person, a kind of “anthropometrics” that included height, age, hair, eye colour, face and chin shape, a mention of scars and distinguishing birthmarks (Smith 2019: 369). Because full names were frequently not known to people themselves, not to mention the state authorities, lists of names were less useful than a description in identifying a real person, frequently a fugitive serf or a vagrant (Smith 2019: 384). Similarly, Albert Baiburin (2021) narrates how proper names in tsarist Russia were frequently pliant and interchangeable with nicknames, diminutive pet names, and names given in baptism, a process that, at least in the past, did not differentiate an individual but initiated them into a community

under the protection of a saint. In the first decades of the Soviet Union, names, including first and last names and patronymics, were recorded in new books of registration of births and death. As texts, names were reproduced on documents to seal their facticity. However, names doubled up as signatures that, in contrast to a legible form of a written name, became increasingly ornamental visual signs. Another change in recording names in the revolutionary times was a seemingly insignificant interchange of the sequencing of first name, patronymic, and last name, *И.О.Ф.* (in Russian) to its partial mirror image *Ф.И.О.* The latter abbreviation that starts with the last name has become a mundane grapheme on various documents and application forms.

In other words, the emergence of mandatory forms of identification, such as passports and signatures, in the 20th-century Russia has given personal names a stable written form with two key properties: documentality and visibility. Premised on documentality and visibility, the modernised Soviet system of record keeping gave rise to another phenomenon, that of alphabetical lists (*spiski*) of names. A *list* is a device for ordering of things, numbers, action, and much more (Phillips 2012: 96). A list has many functions including that of organisation of labour, imposed on us by institutions or self-administered (Phillips 2012: 97–98). However, its composition makes apparent a list’s “visual predicate” (Phillips 2012: 96). A list has an immediately recognisable form, irrespective of its layout of columns, lines, alphabetised, or numerical rows. Visuality of lists has been a motif in the artwork of Richard Serra who created hand- and typewritten columns of verbs to explore artistic and conceptual lineaments of lists (Phillips 2012: 101). One of such conceptual lineaments is a list’s paradoxical ability to give an impression of being closed while it remains partially or latently open (Phillips 2012: 96). A list is simultaneously bounded and boundless (Phillips 2012: 104). In other words, a list contains an intimation of an endless image that Peter Osborne describes as “indeterminacy or infinity inherent in their [lists’] linguistic expressions” (cited in Phillips 2012: 102).

The visual predicate of a list is most apparent when a list is perceived as a holistic image, before its constitutive elements are dissected, read, or translated. Documents that contain lists are a good example of bureaucratic tools that are also “graphic artefacts”, produced and circulated by bureaucratic agencies (Hull 2012: 1). While paying attention to documents’ capacity to mediate transactions and produce socialities (Hull 2012: 21), their graphic appearance is worth a closer look. Documents that are “aesthetic objects” (Riles 1998: 378) acquire their visual appearance through layering of patterns and interlacing of materials that we find in allegedly bodily practices such as weaving mats and baskets (Riles 1998). By analogy, paper and ink interact to produce the document’s non-representational aesthetics that oscillates between its concreteness as an object and abstraction as a repetitive pattern that permits potentially infinite expansion and addition (Riles 1998: 388, 390) (Figure 3.3).

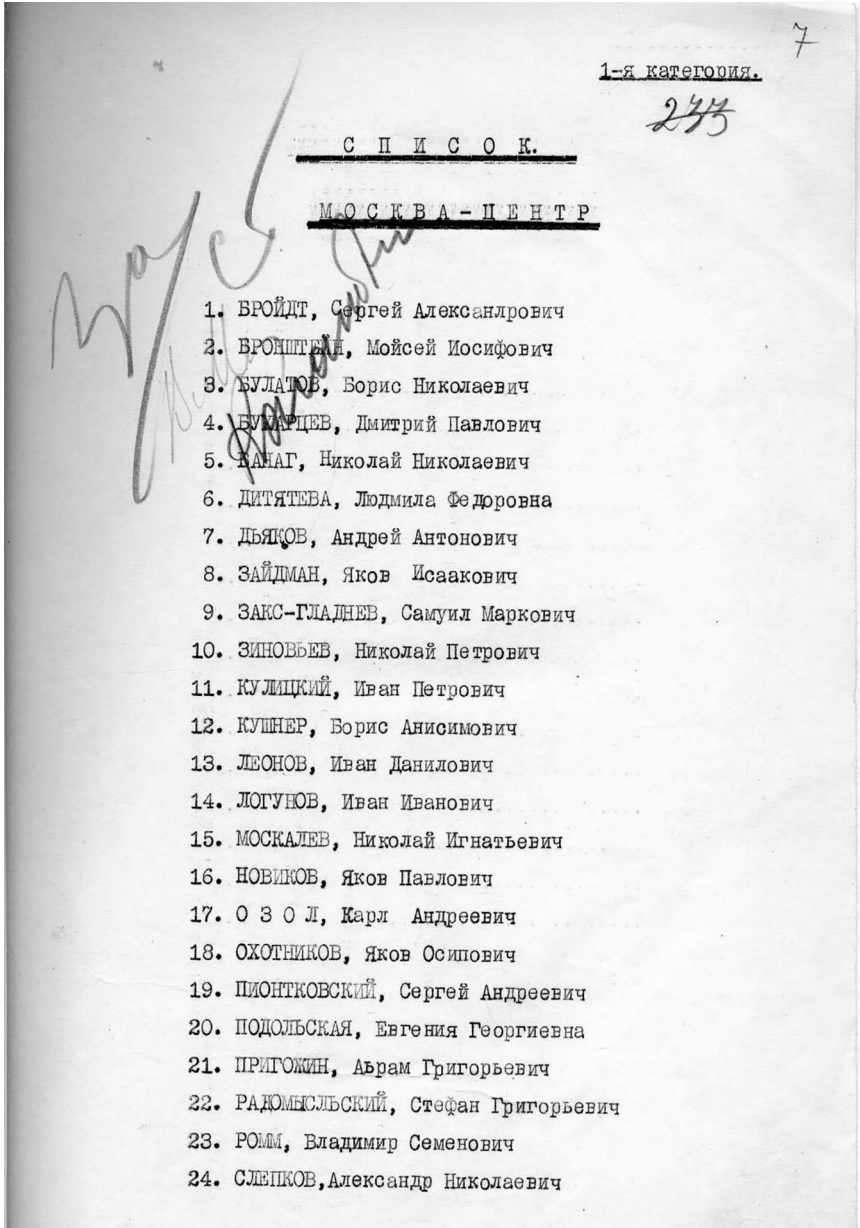


Figure 3.3 An alphabetical list of names of those sentenced to be executed by shooting (*rassrel*). Courtesy International Memorial, Moscow.

Figure 3.3 above is a page from a longer list of names of those sentenced to death during the Stalinist Terror. Just like the already-discussed numerical execution list (*rasstrelniy spisok*), the execution lists with names are an organisational device of a killing. It is also a poignant typographic image of names of the dead and a conceptual intimation of the endlessness of a mass atrocity. Thus, these lists are a compound of political technicality, aesthetic expression, and sinister conceptual underpinnings. The Stalin's execution lists are typewritten and signed usually in pencil lead of red or blue colour. The names are numbered and catalogued in the alphabetical order. The surname is typed in block letters. It appears first, separated by a comma from the first name and the patronymic that are both capitalised. The list's pages are numbered. Despite including personal names, the lists operate with the elision of persons.

The execution lists' visual arrangement strikes me as significant (<https://stalin.memo.ru/all-lists/>). Execution lists of names of the dead are typographic image; they are a text that is transduced into an image. Medieval scribes exploited the pictorial effects of handwriting and scripts to foreground the “iconicity of scripts” (Hamburger 2011: 251) and to amplify the visual effects of “numinosity” that is derived from “artistic possibilities of lettering” (Hamburger 2011: 253, 249). In Russian semantics, an artist *writes* a painting (*pisat kartinu*) as well as draws it, a point particularly valuable for the understanding of Russian icons that incarnate the Word rather than represent from life (Taroutina 2019: 6). This turn of phrase prefigures a question by Boris Groys, a Soviet dissident philosopher and art historian, about the rigid border between word and image, language and pictorial medium, in his analysis of modern artwork where text enters into image (Groys 2011a). Groys offers a close reading of Lessing's essay “Laocoon” that classifies an image as a spatial arrangement and language, especially the language of poetry, as a temporal sequence, an occurrence in time. Groys dispenses with the opposition between text as spatial and image as temporal because text appears in modern art paintings, graphic art, and graphic novels where typography speaks about its own medium and the process of making itself.

Examples of an image-text abound. The distinction between image and text is collapsed in the work of Moscow-based artists, such as Lev Rubinstein, Erik Bulatov, Dmitrii Prigov, and Eugene Dobrovinsky, the author of *Last Address* plaques' font. Lev Rubinstein used cards with typewritten descriptions, definitions, and instructions, such as “That is All – an avalanche of forebodings, crashing down for no reason at all – the voice of longed-for repose, drowned out by other voices...” (Groys 2010: 41). Some instructions command to perform an act of reading: “read the following”, “turn the page” (Groys 2010: 42). Here, text corresponds to image as “discursive paintings” (Derrida 1995b: 118).

This infatuation with pure textuality as the “meat of space” (Degot 2014: 37) rather than meaning is a conceptual element of Dmitrii Prigov's visual “dramatization of the scene of writing” (Shakov 2016: 241). Prigov

incorporates text as physical objects in painted landscapes and space. Text appears as a “writing installation” (Degot 2014: 42), or a spatialised graphic object within a painting. Alternatively, Prigov experiments with text as a poetic and typographic image without any figurative or painted background. For instance, he created typewritten scraps of paper with bizarre, indecipherable messages that were posted in public spaces. Visually reminiscent of private advertisements glued on lampposts (such as offers of a room to let), those messages demonstrate that “the singular multiplicity of the pragmatic act of communication is challenged by the incessant flow of unique artistic statement, which have no apparent practical purpose and overwhelm the reader with their quantity and content diversity” (Shakov 2016: 242). The typewritten style of Prigov’s artwork transforms purposefully confusing and colloquial messages into “graphic-visual signs transcending the standard limits of textuality” (Shakov 2016: 243), predicated on semantic emptiness and locutionary indeterminacy.

Letters as graphic-visual signs appears in the work of Yevgeny Maksimovich Dobrovinsky, the graphic designer of the font of *Last Address* plaques. Yevgeny (or Eugene, on social media) Dobrovinsky has been teaching calligraphy in various art schools in Russia. His recent exhibition of political graphic posters at the Bakhrushin Theatre Museum in Moscow was censored for its explicitly political allegories and visualisation of historical continuity between the current government and its predecessors starting with 1917, the year of the Russian October Revolution that created the communist state. Interestingly, the allegory is built graphically. One poster that was banned, or “advised against” being exhibited by the Museum’s director, is a black canvas with the yellow letters that read “Only consonants”, followed by a vertical row of the acronyms of the Soviet and Russian secret police. Once the notorious KGB and now FSB or Federal Security Bureau, the government agency has been renamed several times in the last 100 years. On Dobrovinsky’s poster, the agency’s acronyms – VChK, NKVD, MVD, KGB, FSB – are arranged chronologically. They are of commensurable size and font to hint at their historical likeness.

The paintings of Erik Bulatov, a Moscow-based conceptualist influential since 1970s, are often scenes of everyday Soviet life, painted in a socialist realist style but superimposed with Soviet propaganda posters and floating words such as “train”, “do not lean” and Soviet soundbites such as “unanimously (*edinoglasno*)” (Watten 2003: 219). Bulatov often uses spacious, objectless landscapes that are traversed by text. For example, one of his paintings depicts white clouds on a blue sky with the word “I am going (*idu!*)”, wedged across the left part of the painting. Barrett Watten suggests that the painting exemplifies “historical nonnarrativity” (Watten 2003: 215) that is derivative and derisive of Soviet representations of history as formulaic, exalted narratives of Soviet communism with its presumed historical inevitability and, once established, durationless present (Watten 2003: 221). Bulatov’s recurrent deployment of typographic images situated on



and above the horizon line signals his scepticism about a Soviet memorial out of time and a concomitant reflection about language and art as generative of a critical aesthetic about immobilised time and stagnating history (Watten 2003: 219).

Texts as images are central to archival aesthetics and materiality. Some artists appropriate conceptual principles and material forms of archives themselves, their spaces, and objects, such as documents, photographs, reels of microfilms, card indexes, digital catalogues, desks, filing cabinets, table lamps, and folders and drawers, sometimes labelled with names and dates. Things found in archives, such as documents and photographic images associated with portraiture, have an intrinsic aura of artwork (van Alphen 2014: 27–28), making archives mythical places that embody “a dialectical tension between the poles of order and disorder” (Benjamin 2015 [1955]: 62). In his novel *All the Names*, Jose Saramago allegorises an archive of births and deaths as a maze the Minotaur’s Labyrinth where clerks and registrars can be lost for days unless they use an Ariadne thread to find their way back from the darkness of the records of the dead to their desks and the living (Saramago 2000).

Modelling of artistic practice on the archive exposes political complicity of archives in practices of racial classifications and taxonomies of colonial, racial, and socio-political hierarchical regimes (van Alphen 2014: 36–44) and, also, utilises special arrangements of prisons, corridors, barracks, trains, cities, hospitals, calendars, and timetables. Several art schools and art collectives in the 1920s Moscow, such as *Zorved* (an acronym of ‘vision and leading’), exemplify the cataloguing aesthetics of the revolutionary era that strove to reflect real life and focus on *archiving* and *documenting* new Soviet events and themes in oil and acrylic paintings. Many artists, including Ivan Vladimirov and Efim Cheptsov, created a painted chronicle of street life, meetings, transport networks, and so on. Writers, such as members of the collective *Lef* (Left Front of Arts), similarly advocated a new “art of fact” (*iskusstvo fakta*) (Tretyakov 2000 [1929]: 149) that documented the allegedly real.

Later, the art of fact movement morphed into socialist realism, which itself became a foundation for Moscow conceptualism that recast archives, chronicles, and index cards as gestures of subversion. Initially, conceptualist archives were an act of survival for precarious, unofficial art forms under the Soviet order (*Tate Etc*, issue 2017/41). In the early 1980s, the Moscow art scene witnessed an ascendance of the archive as an art form (Zakharov 2017: 250). First, Moscow conceptualist artists began a collection known as the *MANI Files* (Moscow Archive of New Art) in “an attempt at a universal accounting of Everything” (Zakharov 2017: 250). They compiled descriptive and theoretical essays, artists’ biographies, and photographs of artworks into the sepia MANI folders. Later, the MANI folders received a conceptual elaboration in Zakharov’s 2003–2004 exhibition in Berlin. Reconfiguring the folders into the aesthetics of the archive, he used five

giant black and white office folders to represent a history of Soviet art, moving from Russian Avant-Garde identified with Utopia to Socialist Realism and its overweening ideology, followed by non-Conformism coupled with Art and Soz-Art (or Sots-Art) with Self-Criticism. The last folder carries the inscription Moscow Conceptual School and Archive ([www.vadimzakharov.com](http://www.vadimzakharov.com)). Zakharov explains that the archive, for him, has always been an antithesis of utopia and cosmos, the Soviet ideological preoccupations. For him, the opposition between the archive and utopia emerges out of a perception that the Soviet orientation towards future eliminated people “as individual archives” (Zakharov 2017: 250).

Archive as art is not confined to Russian history. For instance, Marcel Duchamp’s famous *The Green Box* and *The White Box* contain sketches, notes, and reproductions of his works that lack coherence needed for a functional collection (van Alphen 2014: 63). Marcel Broodthaers has created a museum-like exhibition of eagles, in different pictorial and sculpted forms, each numbered and labelled “this is not a work of art” in French, German, and English (van Alphen 2014: 67). Christian Boltanski has produced an inventory of belongings of a woman who had died in New York and a separate installation of second-hand clothes hanging on four walls and referencing Nazi warehouses in the concentration camps (van Alphen 2014: 68–70). For him, an archive stands for “a morgue of useless objects” (van Alphen 2014: 72). He suggests that a reconstruction of a destroyed life is inherently impossible. In his work *Missing House* (1990), Boltanski has installed plaques with names, dates of residence, and professions of the last Jewish inhabitants in a neighbourhood in Berlin (van Alphen 2014: 74). These artistic reconstructions of archives and address books point to the failure of affirming history in the present. Instead, Boltanski offers an explication of loss, absence, and deprivation (van Alphen 2014: 74).

Some works of art resort to listing, alphabetical collecting, sequencing, using, or rejecting captions and enumeration, record keeping, and repeatedly questioning the referential and narrative functions of the archive. Kawara’s art experiments with archives have resulted in two book-like projects that list 1 million years in descending order (from 1969 to 998031 BCE) and 1 million years in ascending order (from 1981 to 1001980) to demonstrate a process of reduction of history and biography to dates and numbers (van Alphen 2014: 168–170). On Kawara, and Hanne Darboven in her *Cultural History* installations of postcards, diagrams with mathematical operations, photographs, and typewritten A4 pages of dates, have visualised history as a seriality of numbers, words, and images, treated as empty signs without substantive context. Hanne Darboven’s *History* is an itemised and indexed list of a 100 years of history on hundreds of wooden frames arranged in lines and rows (Adler 2009: 2). A reflection on documentary and aesthetic value of history, the installations offer an allegorised version of historical memory that is composed of textual fragments, misappropriated consumer objects, handwritten notations, photographs, pages from encyclopaedias,

newspaper articles, and so on (Adler 2009: 10–12, 18). This frenetic compositional work replicates the regulatory logic of the archive and systematic knowledge like an atlas and sabotages its obsession with “comprehensive totality”, in one fell swoop (Adler 2009: 39–40, 44). We are in front of “the kiosk” of historical images and things (Adler 2009: 85).

The archival aesthetics exposes the difficulty of managing time and history and frustrates unexamined expectations that collections of documents, photographs, and other visual and material objects can index the past. The above artists dispense with the dichotomy between memory and presence to invoke a sense of infinity of the past that it is susceptible to “perpetual reworking” (van Alphen 2014: 148) and erasure. For instance, Jenny Holzer, a contemporary conceptual artist and author of *Dust Paintings* series, uses redacted US government texts to create image-texts and her own vocabulary of compromised truth-telling (Carson 2021: 20). Her work is a play on production and destruction of history, documents, and archives and a critique of the archive as a politicised institution for production and storage of knowledge.

The above artists perform and concretise the material, spatial, and temporary procedures of the archive that alludes to mass atrocities that pursued depletion and anonymity (van Alphen 2014: 216). First, they frustrate museological and archival promise to remember lives as being. Second, modelling art on archive attends to the political dimension of archival and artistic practice. Parastou Forouhar has created an art installation that uses documentation about her parents’ murder in Iran and a photocopier to allow visitors to photocopy and take any documents with them, dispersing the original archive indefinitely (Bublitzky 2021). Her archive is informed by an activist objective of transforming the “archive-as-activist art” into a performative search for political and historical justice (Bublitzky 2021: 309). The above examples of archival art underscore how archive is a model of art not only because art making creates its own archives in artists’ studios but because some artists translate visual and material aspects of archives into radical works of art (Osthoff 2009: 23). Archives become an art medium (Osthoff 2009) rather than a documentary repository of an artist’s oeuvre.

These artistic experiments with the archive are disturbing because, instead of reviving the dead, they conjure the antithesis of living memory. They evoke spaces of history crammed with abstract, repetitive, self-identical, and self-systematising objects and images that do not resemble people. The archive emerges as a meaningful aesthetics that foregrounds finitude of being and infinity of history, in its repetitive retelling.

### The Conjunction of History

Inscriptions of names of the dead are built into the critical archival aesthetics of *Memorial* and *The Last Address*. Their collections and reproductions on paper and monuments, and in embodied performances demonstrate how

graphic signs can configure into a politically relevant work of art that operationalises names as images. To discern a conceptual image of violent history behind the typography of names of the dead, it is important to call into question the distinction between history, philosophy, and image-building.

Walter Benjamin's descriptions of urban scenes in Weimar Berlin go back to the Dadaist obliteration of distinction between text and image in the practice of photomontage (Benjamin 2016: 6). Benjamin insisted on the possibility of using texts graphically as "picture-writing" (Benjamin 2016: 42–43) to harness the capacity of image/text/thought to elicit an experience of history as a visual fragmentation of totality (Benjamin 2016: 8). Walter Benjamin interpolates image, philosophy, and history, and like, Bergson, interprets time as a flow of images (Lazzarato 2007: 93). His writing style is an effort to catalogue the ambient place, its buildings, persons, and sounds. Writing becomes an archival collection of fragments of the city produced by a chronicler. A chronicler, Benjamin writes, does not distinguish between minor and major events: "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history" (Benjamin 2015: 246). However, no amount of detail can restore the past as it happened, because history is a flitting occurrence, "an image that flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" (Benjamin 2015: 247). Sigrid Weigel concurs that the experience of history entails "image-thinking" where the past and present are understood in terms of images (Weigel 2018: 43). Image-thinking is distinct from finding a pictorial or plastic, mimetic, or symbolic representation of history. Image-thinking creates non-chronological configurations of looking and knowing that are aligned with poetic language that condenses meanings and deploys simultaneity, juxtaposition, ellipsis, and the successiveness of disjointed temporalities. Image-thinking taps into the irrepresentability of history; it draws on the power of the "an-iconic, non-figurative" (Weigel 2018: 46).

Benjamin's picture-writing and image-thinking about history extended into experiments with *Denkbild* among the Frankfurt school philosophers who tried to draw a figure of thought through writing. *Denkbild*, translated as thought-image, is dense writing like an epigram or an allegory that posits and reconfigures a relation between the aesthetic and the speculative, between art and philosophy (Richter 2007: 2). The Frankfurt school philosophers assumed that the image of history can be read and organised through literary tropes, but they also argued that *Denkbild* as a textual image does not describe reality but determines what is indeterminable, without a concrete form (Richter 2007: 27). *Denkbild* is a relentless refusal to settle on one medium: a text, an image, or a thought. It is not surprising since *Denkbild* was envisaged to provide speculative thought with an experienceable and "sensuously graspable" form (Richter 2007: 17). *Denkbild* is thus not a model but a gesture that connects the aesthetic, the philosophical, and the political into a "construction site" of history, in Benjamin's vocabulary (Richter 2007: 47).

*Denkbild* is relevant here for its “textual materialism” and its ability to theorise and visualise what has been a subject of philosophical speculation, a figuration of history that cannot be verified or fully understood. Rather than a proposition or statement about history, *Denkbild* is a means to bind philosophy and historical experience, to give them a shape, be it a spiral, a fold, or a circle (Tschofen 2016: 141–151). Lisa Stevenson suggests that image-thinking or thinking in images is particularly suitable for showing the aftermath of violence as well as making and unmaking of scenes of fear (2020). When a Colombian woman spoke to her about a terrifying experience of seeing the face of her child’s killer, the face might have belonged to an innocent stranger (Stevenson 2020: 651). The sense of horror conjured up a thought-image of the killer’s face, a spectral aspect of the “fear-world” (Stevenson 2020: 652).

Deleuze complicates the point further. He asks if thought proceeds from and through images or if images (usually cinematic or painted) stifle thought and must be denounced, even purged (Dronsfield 2012). Strikingly, Deleuze proposes that, to escape a need for representation, thought can be grounded in an abstraction (Deleuze 2004: 164–171). Thought that is an abstraction delves into “de-figuration”, such as the paintings of Francis Bacon (Dronsfield 2012: 407). As a result, Deleuze affirms a transcendental quality of abstraction as something that can be grasped conceptually, “without tracing it to the empirical” (Deleuze 2004: 179). The transcendental and the abstract in Deleuze constitute “a disturbing unfamiliarity” (Deleuze 2004: 178) that does not negate the empirical but cannot be reduced to the observed and recollected either.

To forego a representational aesthetics in art, history, and thought is to pave the way for the *antiprosopon*, a nonface, as a precondition of justice (Douzinas 1999: 36). For instance, in 626 AD, the Patriarch Sergios protected Constantinople from the Slav Atars by holding an unpainted icon of the Virgin above the city walls (Douzinas 1999: 37). An unpainted icon was powerful without a face. Like some relics, such as *acheiropoiatoi* (not made by the human hand) painted images, a blank icon was already a divine image imbued with vitality that can concretise rather than depict the invisible, the ethereal, the phantasmic, and the dead (Douzinas 1999: 37–38). Costas Douzinas suggests that, in monotheistic religions, the gesture of emptying the divine image of likeness has freed up space for law as the written word, ontologically distinct from images. Consequently, God is an articulation of law rather than a self-representation (Douzinas 1999: 41). Names of the dead are faceless, but they are not antinomical to images. Instead, inscriptions of names of the dead traverse the spurious distinction between text and image, facticity, and aesthetics, to suggest that an abstract image can serve as a counterpoint to justice marshalled by legal texts.

When we abandon the ideal values of likeness and presence in representing the dead that many seek in portraits and names of the dead, a possibility opens to ground a history of mass killings in a paradoxical concrete

abstraction that, in this case, is signified by typographic images, namely inscriptions of names of the dead. To remember the dead as an abstraction, or a naked name, in Wordsworth terms, might appear as a loss of memory of a specific human being. However, the aftermath of an atrocity is teeming with spectres that dwell in the past, the present, and the future, the not yet born (Derrida 2006: xviii). They are not to be confused with visible and audible ghosts of popular, cinematic, anthropological, and literary imagination. In Derrida's philosophy of hauntology, spectres are insubstantial (Derrida 2006: 10). They are vague, amorphous demands for justice; their spectrality prompts us to speak "in the name of justice" (Derrida 2006: xviii). Hauntology is essentially a theory of justice and spectres are a modality of justice that extends beyond the actual existence of a given person. Hence, spectres of violence are "an unnameable or almost unnameable thing, something, between something and someone, anyone or anything" (Derrida 2006: 5).

Derrida's hauntology is founded on irreversible loss rather than hope of presence. After all, Reinhart Koselleck reminds us, "the dead are remembered – as dead" (Koselleck 2002: 287). A photographed face and a documented name orient us to our own or somebody else's dead. Behind them are strangers, the non-relational others who are only noted as absence. A faceless name, a name without a portrait, desists from casually slipping into presence. In this respect, historical consciousness of a mass atrocity is comprised of concrete and abstract visions of many dead, named and nameless, with or without a portrait. A faceless name re-situates specific deaths in a peculiar conjuration of history that attends to abstraction, empty spaces, gaps, and intervals where the dead are not a reference to themselves, not even a relationality. A faceless name is an *imago*, a juridical funeral mask, of the dead denied justice.



## 4 The Mass of a Mass Atrocity

The Wall of Sorrow, or The Wall of Grief, is a long-awaited state-approved monument to the killed during the Stalinist Terror. It was opened by President Putin on October 30, 2017, the official Remembrance Day of Victims of Political Repressions in Russia. The monument is situated at a busy junction of the Garden Boulevard Ring and the Sakharov Avenue, renamed after a Soviet physicist and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov in 1990. Designed by Georgy Frangulyan, the monument consists of a wall made of distorted human shapes, growing on top of each other, like a colony of long filamentous structures. The wall has several human-shaped openings of different height, which allow a passage to several stones embedded in the ground and engraved with numbers that refer to numbered lists of the Gulag camps on the perimeter wall of the monument.

October 30, 2019 was a cold day, with intermittent wet snow. With his hand deep in the pockets of a slim cut black coat, the director of the Gulag Museum stood not far from a bell made of a piece of a rusty train rail that visitors to the monument could hit with a hammer. Few people came here on the day of national remembrance of victims of political repressions; the monument site felt desolate except for a dozen journalists and camera operators. When I stepped out of a Yandex taxi with my young child to meet a friend called Semyon, whose family experienced the gross injustice of the violent purges against the first revolutionaries, we were instantly surrounded by the journalists, microphones with windjammers, and flashing cameras. The journalists focused on me, a mother with a child, and let Semyon roam around. For 15 minutes, we were closely followed by the persistent journalists asking about my family's "tragic history" (my grandmother escaped repressions by staying silent) and getting disappointed with my lack of cooperation.

"This event will not take root", Semyon remarked as we fled the scene.

A few days earlier, Semyon and another activist were relieved to find out that the Mayor of Moscow had not approved a procession from the Solovetsky Stone, the activists' main memorial site, to the Wall of Sorrow. The procession was proposed by a coalition of smaller political parties who did not declare the intention behind organising a march before the main

events at the end of October. Semyon particularly disapproved of the route that would symbolically link the Solovetsky Stone with the Wall of Sorrow, built by the presidential decree.

Ironically, the memory activists and the Russian government seem to agree on the need for a national monument that would be a hub of national remembrance of the Stalinist Terror although there are already over a thousand monuments to victims of political repressions scattered across Russia and the neighbouring states (Smith 2019: 1318, 1323). Despite the general acceptance of the fact of many political repressions under the Stalinist rule and the exigency of commemoration of its victims, the memory activists describe the new monument as a site of posturing by the state (*ofitsioz*) rather than a sign of serious commitment to remembering the past. They are appreciative of the state-promoted monuments and museums, in general. Yet, the two state initiatives – the Wall of Sorrow and the Gulag Museum with its expensive premises – seem forever tainted by the proximity to the state power. These locations are treated with suspicion as nothing more than a public relations stunt. There are concerns about arrogation of history by the state. When the Wall of Sorrow was finally revealed in 2017, it failed to diffuse the tensions between the activists and the federal government as the monument was dubbed a poor substitute for a more rigorous process of historical accountability envisaged in the state's policy papers (Smith 2019: 1324).

One such paper is the document titled *The Conception of the State Politics of Immortalizing the Memory of the Victims of Political Repressions*, Number 1561-r, dated 15 August 2015. It is a political declaration that does not dispute the facticity or scale of the Terror and makes a pledge to ensure access to archives and continuity of commemoration activities. However, the memory of the Stalinist atrocities is a means to an end. The official stance is that the Terror had ruptured so-called cultural traditions and intergenerational relations, while commemoration of the difficult past promises to heal divisions, calls for national reconciliation and unity, propagates feelings of patriotism, and contributes to economic growth. When first released in 2015, the memory activists voiced no objections to the document. Nevertheless, the activists' own commemorative policy strays from the Russian government's conception of the past in an important way. Since the late 1980s, the activists' work has expressed an obligation to publicly acknowledge the past illegalities and crimes (Smith 2019: 1316, 1321). In contrast, the Russian government adopted a passive voice of Russian people suffering appalling tragedies, which reduced the state's accountability for the past and diminished the importance and urgency of memory activism (Smith 2019: 1324).

Apart from tense political relations between the state and its critics in Russia, the analysis of the monument's design competition in 2015–2016 offers an additional insight into a search for an appropriate visual representation and architectural form for a national monument to victims of

mass atrocities. An endemic refrain is that representations of an atrocity are “unimaginable” or “unsayable” (Agamben 2002: 34). Visual images and words falter in the face of the Holocaust. Like a photographer in Auschwitz who said he could not bear to look at dismembered bodies and the living dead in the camp (Agamben 2002: 50), Agamben raises an aporia, or an objection, to a flippancy to aestheticise a mass atrocity. What architectural or sculptural forms have the efficacy to convey recognition of an unfelt crime against thousands and millions of people? What is ‘the right’ commemorative figure of a mass atrocity? Would a figurative human-like sculpture do? Should it convey accessible symbolic meaning or engender obscure, disturbing effects?

The competition for the national monument to victims of political repressions in Moscow involved a search for the appropriate memorial aesthetics and a coordination of the project between different agencies namely between the state-run Moscow Gulag Museum, the Russian Union of Architects, and other stakeholders, including different memory activists and their associate organisations. During the preliminary discussions, it was argued that existing monuments relied on non-figurative forms and incorporated a cliché stock of object-images, such as boulders, barbed wires, crosses, and candles (Smith 2019: 1325). An ideal national monument should convey the scale of human loss and foster an opportunity to instruct visitors about impermissibility of state violence. The entries were submitted to an expert committee that evaluated their technical aspects and expressed a clear preference for a design that did not imitate or closely resemble existing European models of commemorative public art (Smith 2019: 1327). The qualifying designs were passed to the jury consisting of state officials, human rights activists, arts and culture figures, and historians such as Ludmila Alexeyeva and Arseny Roginsky, although what was meant to be an inclusive jury was instantly criticised by trained architects as an over-bloated committee of non-experts, that is, not architects (Smith 2019: 1326). Another point of contention was the insufficient drive for public consultations about the design proposals or location at an off-centre square next to a busy junction with limited footfall or space for staging public events or protest (Smith 2019: 1336). In fact a public exhibition of the design entries was organised after the winners had been announced.

Clearly, the complexity of the message and a proliferation of critical voices presented architects and designers with a daunting task of finding an architectural form that would appeal to many and tie together the symbolic themes and meanings and creative possibilities of monumental art (<http://zamonument.ru/vote/index.html>, accessed November 2019). For example, many entries featured references to prison life such as barbed wire, a falling prison wall, bars on cell windows, a watch tower. Although some seemed artistically trivial, those entries were defended for their clear, unambiguous messages about the past, something that “everyone can understand” (entry v-36, e-91). Some proposals utilised a binary between life and death by

juxtaposed living, moving elements such as trees (d-24), doves, bells, and water with invocations of death, such as dark spaces, piled-up stones, concrete pillars, and tree stumps (for example, entries j-22, v-33, y-36). Many proposals incorporated real-life objects (such as barbed wires), known as readymades, or ordinary things recycled into works of art. One of the best-known readymades is the porcelain urinal by Marcel Duchamp. Joseph Kosuth deployed chairs while Mikhail Roginsky once painted a red door with an attached door handle. Yet, in contrast to uncertain meanings of Roginsky's door, the barbed wire on a monument to Gulag crimes prescribes an understanding of history as a collection of tangible and objectively existing things. Here, monumentalised objects are overdetermined as pedagogical signs as their main objective is instruction about the past.

While some entries used familiar objects to symbolise the daily life of Gulag prisoners during the Stalinist Terror, others proposed more immersive, spatial arrangements to convey the Terror's effects such as breaking, crushing, puncturing, rusting, and ripping apart human lives and relations. These monuments were endowed with a theatrical quality to establish the ambient space where monumental art corresponds to its experience (Fried 1998: 160). Although experience-focused monuments eschew realist objects, object- and experience-based monuments alike attempt to control the perception of their visitors. Several entries presented overhanging boulders and concrete slabs (i-87), labyrinths (f-26, v-79), prison cells, and narrowing walls and passages, sometimes underground and inverted spaces (e-00, d-96) and pits (k-86, m-97, w-30), to make visitors relive the experience of being pressed as if in a vice or clamp (b-93, c-72, v-17) or ground down (t-40) by the machinery of the state. Some entries (j-75, s-56) intended to cause discomfort and used sharp, angular surfaces, confined spaces, and low ceilings to force visitors to bend (r-78). A few designs tried to capture the scale (*mashtab*) of the loss of human lives, *en masse* (*massovost*). Entry v-00 proposed at least a thousand spikes of slightly varied height to give form to the "countless multitude" of the dead. Mirrors were occasionally suggested to articulate an infinite number of the dead and integrate the living in their ranks (p-85). A few entries made recourse to flattened, crushed, bound human figures. Other proposals translated the human body into an abstract mass or implicitly anthropomorphic geometric pillars of concrete, metal, or marble (i-55, n-39, q-53, q-59, t-11).

Notably, object-like monuments aspire to conceptual objectification of the past, while the immersive installations focus on its subjective apperception. However, both modes subjugate artistic elements of monuments to the political task of commemoration. Sometimes, works of art, even conceptual ones, are used intentionally to comment on and dramatise history (Chametzky 2010: 3). Intended as exploration of history and its political facets, some artists use images, objects, and their absence to "encourage and challenge spectators to confront recent history" (Chametzky 2010: 3). For example, Joseph Beuys's "social sculpture" is an extended artistic

process that aligns an aesthetic form (sculpture, installations, performance, photographs) with a social “in-forming”, or, literally, putting a political and philosophical idea into an art form that can be any object or shape (Michaud and Krauss 1988: 41). Beuys frequently repurposed household items, such as a chair, a bathtub, or a sled, and deployed unstable, perishable materials such as fat and wax (as well as honey and blood) to articulate notions of historical traces and human residue (Chametzky 2010: 159). Having served in the Nazi air force during the Third Reich, Beuys poised his sculptural art as a counterpoint to its political and aesthetic models of strong athletic bodies (Chametzky 2010: 164) to epitomise his own complicity and redemption through a conception of art as a “form of participatory democracy” (Chametzky 2010: 165).

If Beuys’s social sculpture absorbs the political into art and obviates their distinction, the proposed entries for the National Monument reduced art forms to their political function as symbols of violent history. Thus, the competition entries for symbolic object-based and atmospheric monuments seem to bypass Michael Fried’s question whether modernist paintings and sculptures overcome theatricality (a degenerative condition for Fried [1998: 164]) through a sense of “endless or indefinite duration” and “perpetual present” (Fried 1998: 166). Fried’s argument for recognising a sense of temporality as inherent in art goes far beyond a simplistic conclusion that art and history are mutually inflected (Chametzky 2010: 3) or that history, including distant and mythical past or unfolding and topical present, is a subject-matter of art.

Many competition entries for the Moscow’s monument did not overtly address the relation between art and the political or art and history as they alluded to the past atrocities through simple, linear associations between history and its obvious representation as historical artefacts and presumed experience of the Stalinist era. By comparison, some Holocaust memorials in Germany frustrate efforts to represent the past (Young 2000). Instead of referencing history, these monuments are experiments in conceptual and self-destructive art that undermine a possibility of mirroring and articulating the realities of a mass atrocity. Known as “countermemorials” (Young 2000: 7), they are premised on negative spaces of forgetting and interrogating the mechanisms of commemoration and its redemptive narratives. Young gives several examples of memorials and images that favour architectural abstraction over representational forms. Artists such as Horst Hoheisel, Micha Ulman, Rachel Whiteread, Jochen Gertz, and Esther Shalev-Gertz, and Peter Eisenman are prominent in their refusal to index the past, figuratively or allegorically, and choosing names, books, and self-similar repetitive objects to convey irretrievable loss and uniformity of destruction of Jewish lives during the Nazi reign. For example, Horst Hoheisel asked children in the city of Kassel to find and write a name of a deported Jew, wrap the paper around a cobblestone and archive it in an impermanent box at the local train station (Young 2000: 103). Rachel

Whiteread formalises absence by using blank books as building blocks in Vienna's Judenplatz, while Jochen Gertz's installation *Exit/Dachau* features a dim-lit corridor with rows of tables and chairs and bureaucratic signs and prohibitions that prescribe the terms of being in this space (Young 2000: 122). In Saarbrücken, Gertz asked his students to dig out cobblestones, inscribe them with names of the murdered Jews, and replace them with the names down, making the name invisible again (Young 2000: 141–142). The invisible cobblestones have affinity with Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews that consists of blocks of concrete that remind of tombs that replicate each other on a different scale (Young 2000: 213–215), but they leave the promise of memory unfulfilled.

In Moscow, the idea that monuments and commemorative practices integrate the past into the present-day fabric of the city life and resist “efforts to compress or make abstract the complex history of repression” (Smith 2019: 1319) was pervasive during the competition. However, a few competition entries foregrounded faceless (*bezlikiye*, entry a-61) and nameless (*bezimyanniye*, b-26) monuments or used abstract, non-connotational forms (<http://konkurs.gmig.ru>). Several entries, including the winning design, experimented with disfigurement to materialise dehumanising nature of a mass atrocity and confront visitors with the opacity of history after witnessing.

This paradoxical artistic gesture that disfigures to affirm being alive is inherent to Frangulyan's Wall of Sorrow. Like other competition entries that use trees, pillars, skyward walls and crosses, candles, and a field of wooden matches, the winning design by Georgy Frangulyan is centred on the image of upright figures compressed into a wall. It concocts a standing crowd or a mass of semi-abstract naked human bodies. The bas-relief of the wall was interpreted as conventional representation of human mourning and as an abstract rendition of human forms, such as incomplete and broken shapes and clusters (Smith 2019: 1334).

Despite its political and symbolic trappings, such as a marble plaque that credits President Putin with the opening of the monument or a metal piece of a rail track, the most significant and politically potent aspect of the monument is the gaps, or rents within the solid Wall of Sorrow. To remind, the monument is not a smooth wall of oblique figures as it includes gaps that allow visitors to insert themselves into the multitude of the dead, or a different people-image of victims of political repressions. Frangulyan's Wall of Sorrow and Neizvestny's Mask can be described as participatory as they contain crevices. According to Bakhtin, grotesque bodies (and statues) expose protrusions, holes, and orifices, such as a mouth or anus, to subvert the need for eyes (Bakhtin 1984: 317) or facial portraits (Seremetakis 2016: 90). Nadia Seremetakis highlights that a polished body of heroic monuments is sealed off; “that which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is eliminated, hidden, or moderated” (Bakhtin 1984: 320). Frangulyan and Neizvestny's



monuments encourage people to penetrate the obscene temporality of violence, to overcome its separation from the present. This interesting development in monumental architecture inaugurates not only an abandonment of figurative or symbolic forms in favour of minimalism and abstraction but an incorporation of the public, as bodies and even thoughts, into a sculptural form (North 1990: 860). The aesthetics of previous monuments shifts from artwork to an experience of space and an experiencing subject (North 1990: 860) (Figure 4.1).

Frangulyan's aesthetics is an allegory of the dead that incorporates human figures but changes their appearance into an abstract and physical objectless event. Rather than symbols of history, Frangulyan's distorted, fused figures declare "the radical melting of biographical and political identities into one complex, contradictory, and indissoluble collective corpse" (Ferrándiz 2019: S69), which is the human subject of a mass atrocity. To me, uncertain figures of Frangulyan's monument suggest that history of a mass atrocity has aspects that cannot be easily formulated in words or symbolic objects even if the monument remains a connotational sculpture. The monument contains a reference to a mass atrocity not as a counted number of isolated killings but as an indeterminate totality of many deaths. In its aspiration to become a monolith, the monument does not negate a singularity of each life as they become indistinct and transposable. Rather, the monument offers a solution to the representation of the tension between the singularity of one and the multitude of the many dead.

At the same time, the Wall is a poorly representational object that, according to Merab Mamardashvili, a Soviet poststructuralist philosopher, forces us to suspend an obsession with discrete things and their ability to demonstrate something in the world (Mamardashvili 2010: 116). Merab Mamardashvili speaks of "objects-Centaurs" (Vladiv-Glover 2010: 35) that are evasive phenomena of consciousness without a trace in our experiential world. Such phenomena are impossible objects, because they can only be represented as an absence of representation (Vladiv-Glover 2010: 36). Objects-centaurs have a time and space of their own as "quasi-material outgrowths of the subject in the world" (Vladiv-Glover 2010: 36), located in the gap between subjectivity and the world. For Mamardashvili, an activity of thought such as, in my understanding, a perception of unexperienced history, is phenomenally material and spatial in its own way yet independent of the world of unambiguous artefacts. Such historical consciousness is realised in absences, intervals, or empty spaces between what exists as objective events and events of representation that transcend crudely empirical and mimetic description of the world (Mamardashvili 2010: 120). In other words, Mamardashvili adumbrates a historiographic theory of how history can be known in a shift, such as substitution, transformation or abstracting, to unrepresentable yet material phenomena (Vladiv-Glover 2010: 31, 36). This argument puts forward a question of what plastic, monumental form does a historical mode of thinking take if historical thinking is a concrete but objectless event.



*Figure 4.1* The gaps in the Wall of Sorrow.

Neither likeness in portraiture of the dead nor objective materiality of sculptures seem relevant to an accurate representation of a mass atrocity. When Picasso and Bacon painted distorted faces and bodies to challenge representational aesthetics of war-time violence (West 2004: 198), their artistic explorations of history questioned a link between factual art and truthful representation as a premise of history. Rancière (2012)

draws a distinction between new history made of traces and silences and “history-as-chronicle”, or fact-driven history (Rancière 2012: 21). History can be a story of exemplars or non-descript “anonymous” subjects (Rancière 2012: 66). It contains an ontological power of time to force out a recorded sequence of events and an unaccounted-for texture of the ordinary. None of these distinct senses of history deny the value of facts, but they configure a different “storyline” (Rancière 2012: 8) and raise a question of a material medium of history in its various forms. Documents, photographs, and monuments are material objects that do not express the past as it happened. Instead, they are various senses of history. Thus, Rancière argues against Adorno’s notorious rejection of representation of history of a mass atrocity and suggests that the proliferation of senses of history enhances radical possibilities of art to “face to history” (Rancière 2012: 87).

On my last visit, the Wall of Sorrow had not become a focal point for remembering political repressions. Notwithstanding, its design has an aesthetic potency to generate a new kind of “people-image” that Ludger Schwarte defines as a procedure that renders visible and operable the optical unconscious, not reflecting but rather piercing reality and creating the vacuum that then creates the conditions for a collectivity in the process of becoming (Schwarte 2018: 83). Schwarte brings together Deleuze’s idea that an image disrupts the cliché of representation and Didi-Huberman’s notion that an image has potency to give a figuration to an unrepresentable past (Schwarte 2018: 83). Both Deleuze and Didi-Huberman are interested in how images not only (or not always) reconstruct and document the past but can draw attention and introduce holes, gaps, voids, and fragments that cannot be repurposed in the politics based on power and substance, or reactionary populist agenda (Schwarte 2018: 85). Substance underpins claims to a named political population; it invokes a clearly demarcated people. Therefore, it contains an element of political tyranny. In contrast, a people-image pertains everyone as it “makes visible those without a name” (Schwarte 2018: 88). The people-image that we see in Frangulyan’s monument are not the figures, but a lacuna, or a cut, between them, a cut that addresses anyone and can be filled by anyone. It is a gap that opens a public space for a vanished, or overlooked, category of people without documentation, representation, or even a reference (Figure 4.2).

### The Solovetsky Stone

The memory activists’ alternative to the Wall of Sorrow is the Solovetsky Stone. The Solovetsky Stone on Lubyanka Square is the fulcrum of the activists’ commemoration practices, including the annual name reading ceremony, *The Return of the Names*, on October 29. To remind, the national remembrance day for victims of political repressions is October 30. Cutting the ties with the state-sanctified historiography, to visit the Solovetsky Stone on October 29 sets the monument doubly apart since it is detached in space



Figure 4.2 The Solovetsky Stone on Lubyanka.

from the Wall of Sorrow and in time from the last day of October. Built in 1990, the monument stakes its reputation on being *the genuine* monument because it predates the Wall of Sorrow by nearly 30 years.

In 1989, a design competition for the first monument to “the millions of victims of political repressions” was announced in *Ogonyek*, a popular



illustrated magazine that was admired for some free speaking. The open public competition for the monument had many entries from lay citizens rather than professional architects and artists. Many design entries focused on the meaning of their models, seeking to articulate a univocal message through symbolic and figurative means. Placed in a chocolate or cookie cardboard box, one entry made a granite map of the Soviet Union traversed with the cobweb of links between gulags. The caption provided a pithy informative message about the cruelty of the political repressions. The proposal hesitated to give the total number of the dead and replaced the exact estimate with three question marks before the millions of the dead: “??? millions”. Some entries highlighted the educational impact of commemoration, questioning whether one monument would be enough to “guarantee the non-recurrence (*nepovtorimost*)” of the Terror. It was argued that an effective monument would be a dispersed archival grid of telephone lines, archives, newspapers, and educational centres with their own statistical organisational systems of rubrics, codes, and catalogues.

Other proposals refused to caption their monuments and brought forward the self-evident symbolism of their architectural plans. Many models contained obelisks, pyramids, and stelas. Some featured figures of prisoners or fragments of a human body such as hands or a head. The omnipresent iconography of train tracks, barbed wire, prison barracks, and guard towers was incorporated into open spaces of public squares and juxtaposed with rows of trees to create a contrast between the organisational structures of the Terror and a redemptive, living presence of nature. Many entries explored the relation between political violence and architecture, seen as a relic of crime (such as gulag material objects). One commemorative theme was an attempt to express the criminality of repressions by showing its attributes and consequences (Figure 4.3).

Although nearly three decades have lapsed between two competitions, one is struck by the repetitive and limited repertoire of political architecture. The problem of finding an architectural solution to speaking about profuse numbers of the dead without reductive quantification was a shared concern among many entries, some of which described their ideas in writing rather than sketching their monumental proposals. According to some letters, scrolls engraved with names of the dead could be complemented with an archival space where new names could be added to an endless list of names of the dead. With the emphasis on incompleteness of the lists, the enormity of the human loss was invariably calculated in millions. One entry proposed to translate sculptural volume into density of the dead; the entry worked out the co-relation of 13 dead people per 1 m<sup>2</sup> of a truncated pyramid. In some letters to the activists, the numerical estimate of victims was replaced with an ephemeral appeal to eternal remembrance projected for “centuries” (*na veka*) into the future. Many entries were accompanied by letters that fantasied about a pristine depository of memory that was unmediated by humans and protected from

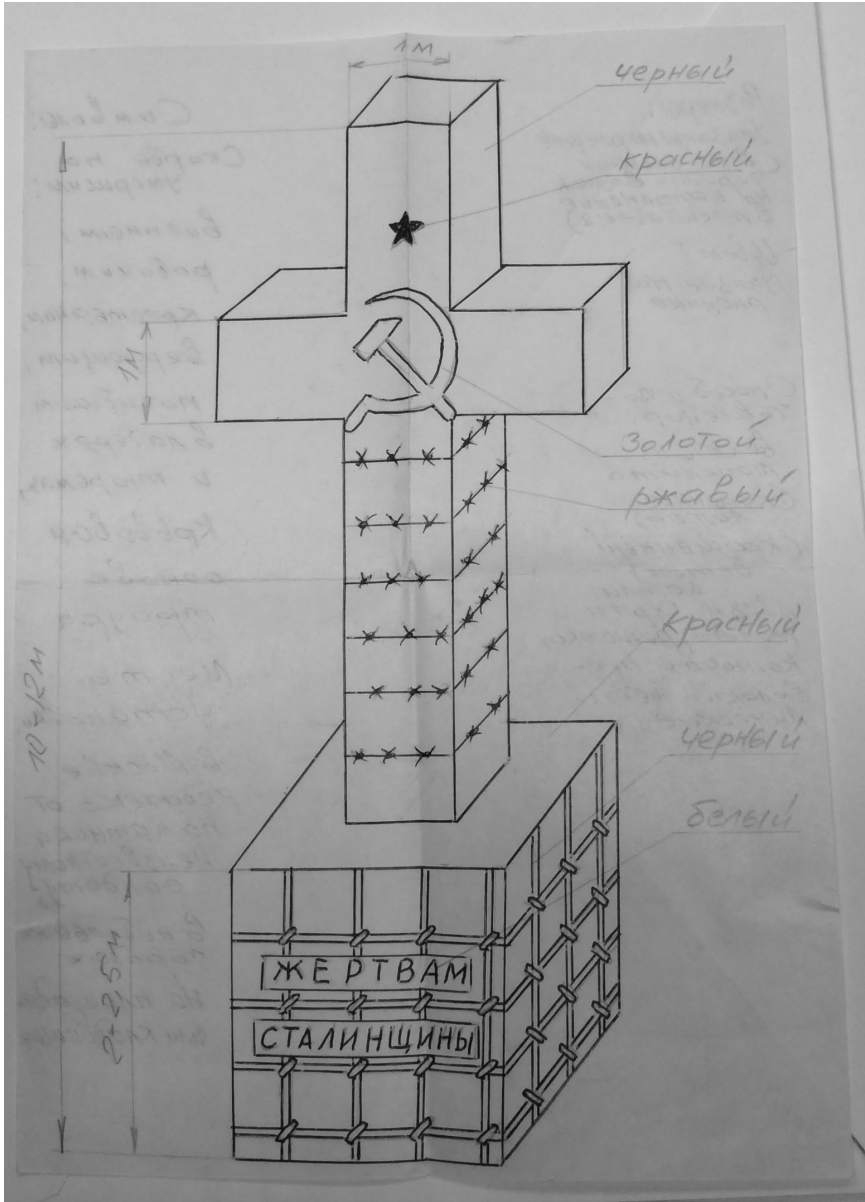


Figure 4.3 Another biro-drawn model that incorporates a rusty hammer and sickle and barbed wire. Courtesy: International Memorial, Moscow.

meddling and corruption yet aimed at fashioning a “democratic public”, compared to a heavily romanticised medieval political assembly (*Veche*) in the old Russian town of Veliky Novgorod. Inanimate monuments or



artificial intelligence were given as examples of historical memory that would be external to human beings and, therefore, “truthful. In the end, the model for the Solovetsky Stone in Moscow was chosen by Veniamin Iofe and members of *Memorial* in 1989. It was decided that four boulders would be brought from the Solovetsky Islands in the cold White Sea near Arkhangelsk (<http://gulagmuseum.org>). A home to a Russian Orthodox monastery for half a millennium, the Solovetsky Islands are seen as a phantasmatic location of the allegedly first Gulag (Bogumil 2022: 24). The Islands were a site of a labour camp for political prisoners from 1923 to 1942, when they were repurposed for a Soviet Navy training centre. The islands’ beaches are strewn with “countless” boulders of red marble (Butorin 2011: 23). To take the stones from the Islands would transmute the Islands’ history into a monument because the boulders, it was said, are same in essence (*homoousion*) with the islands. The activists and an architect from Arkhangelsk, Gennadiy Lyaschenko, roamed one of the islands in search of the right stones. A boulder by the harbour was selected for Moscow and another one from a crossroads for Arkhangelsk (Butorin 2011: 25). They were transported by a motor ship in the summer before the autumn temperatures froze the Arctic waters. After some bureaucratic rigmarole about how to convey the freight by train to Moscow, one of the boulders was delivered and installed on Lubyanka Square (Butorin 2011: 28). Another smaller boulder was placed near the memory activists’ branch office in Moscow. One more boulder exists in St Petersburg. A plaque with an armless, contorted male figure was subsequently installed on the Solovetsky Stone in Arkhangelsk.

The Solovetsky Stone in Moscow was opened to the public on October 30, 1990. Its simplicity was meant to serve as an empty signifier or question mark (Etkind 2013: 185). According to Etkind, the location mattered as much as the architectural form of the monument. Placed outside the former secret police, NKVD-KGB- FSB, headquarters, the Solovetsky Stone stood in front of the later demolished statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, a founder of the first Soviet secret police and one of the engineers of the Red Terror and mass killings in 1917–1922 (Etkind 2013: 185). In contrast to realistic, human-like forms of official historiography, Etkind suggests that “the general rule seems to be that guilt monuments are nonfigurative, while pride monuments tend to depict people, on horseback or otherwise” (Etkind 2013: 186). Because of its location and dissenting monumentality, the Solovetsky Stone has gathered the force of historical redemption.

What interests me most is the sculptural form of the Solovetsky Stone: the cube. To be more precise, the Solovetsky Stone is an errant boulder that reminds of a cuboid balancing on one edge. The cube has lost its strict symmetrical proportions, but its three-dimensional solid shape is detectable in the overall composition. It is mounted on the flat granite slabs that form a rectangular pedestal of 3.1 × 3.7 m<sup>2</sup>. Tilted precariously, the Solovetsky Stone in Moscow is without ornamentation.

The cube is not a dissenting sculpture per se, as it crops up so often among the design entries for the National Monument to the Victims of Political Repressions competition where Frangulyan's monument triumphed. In fact, the cube could be compared in frequency to sculptures with barbed wire. A few times, the cube was signalled by a two-dimensional square shape. The cube appeared as a focal conceptual motif and was incorporated as plinths and pillars within a more elaborate composition (entry h-14). It was explicitly presented as an abstracted object such as a personal record file with two profile and forward-facing silhouettes (entry a-34) or a schematised prison, a prison cell, or a cage (entry b-67, k-04, k-14, m-3). It was indicated by a black square and 40 times 40 columns that stand for a multitude of victims as an aggregate of being (entry b-94), although the black square and hundreds of columns exude the same idea. Some entries proposed cubes made of glass and mirrors as exterior materials to bounce off the light and reflect the surrounding world back on itself (entry d-54, e-09). Other cubes were thought of as black self-contained space (*zamknutoye prostranstvo*) devoid of time and life (entry h-80, k-01, r-48). In its form, the cube was almost generic despite divergent formulations of the cube's meaning by the designers. So, entry u-43 identified the square with human life and proposed a public park with a monotonous (*monotonniy*) pattern of square openings for trees in the heavy concrete. By contrast, entry u-66 referred to the cube as a symbol of totalitarianism.

Though both nostalgic and avant-garde monuments can give rise to "a thinly disguised nationalism" (Martin 2004: 222), the cube is a recurrent modernist form of commemorative architecture that purports to make a break with figurative conventions of heroic "memory industry" (Martin 2004: 223). Statues and monuments are an important mechanism of memorial politics and state-building. Monumental propaganda (*monumentalnaya propaganda*) in revolutionary Russia was put to work when Lenin, Stalin, and Lunacharsky, the Commissar for Enlightenment, signed a decree to remove the monuments in honour of the Tsar and his court (Dickerman 2018: 178). The revolutionary monumental architecture not simply replaced the imperial sculptures but ushered a new architectural aesthetics. Some avant-garde artists in the early Soviet Russia experimented with materials, shapes, and ideas of movement, spectacle, and perspective. For example, Vladimir Tatlin envisioned moving metal structures and cubist busts. However, monumental architecture in Russia and other Soviet Republics was soon dominated by gigantic statues and unbuilt ideations such as the Monument to Lenin designed by Ivan Shadr (Dickerman 2018: 181–182). Moscow's Victory Park that launched in 1995 is an archive of monumental propaganda. It features an obelisk, a museum, and grandiose statues, including a golden soldier in a circular hall inscribed with names of decorated soldiers (Schleifman 2001: 24–25).

Conventionally, the heavy monumental style is associated with Socialist Realism although Soviet socialist realism as an aesthetic paradigm

combined the pathos of quantity, size, and weight of large-size sculpture with a warmer depiction of common, unexceptional persons and more humane portraits of communist leaders (Elshevskaya 2008). This historico-political aesthetics was rejected in 1924 by an avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich. His best-known work is *Black Square*, a 53.5 × 53.5 oil on canvas painting of a black square with a white border. Its geometric lines are slightly distorted to create pulsations (Andreyeva 2019: 8). It is a planar form without perspective and objecthood of a representational or figurative real-life painting. Malevich described it as a universal “transrational shape” (Andreyeva 2019: 9) and a theosophical sign of the mystical ideal of the immortal self (Andreyeva 2019: 31–32). Unsurprisingly, Malevich proposed the cube as a revolutionary ritual object and a reincarnation of Vladimir Lenin, the recently deceased communist leader (Andreyeva 2019: 62–64). He even suggested that “every Leninist worker should keep a cube at home” (Andreyeva 2019: 64), an idea that did not appeal to the Party, or to the selection committee of the National Monument nearly a 100 years later.

Nevertheless, the square shape enticed the architects of the Ground Zero Memorial to the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York. The Memorial consists of two square voids that reproduce the footprint of the buildings reduced to dust (Sturken 2004: 322). Titled *Reflecting Absence*, the voids are vessels, filled with cascading water from two square-shaped pools. The bigger squares of the footprint and the pool contain two smaller squares of the void. The voids are framed with backlit names of the dead, seemingly arranged in a random order although the impression is misleading because the architects have been guided by a principle of “meaningful adjacencies” (<https://www.911memorial.org/visit/memorial/about-memorial>; accessed 22.08.2020). Where possible, the names have been grouped together to trace a pattern of lived relations among the victims, including friendships, kinship, and circumstances of their death. Although the relational context is not transparent to visitors, the architects did not trust the names to make the memory of the people real. The emphasis is on remembering the towers as absence rather than retrieving the dead for mourning (Sturken 2004: 322). The monument plays with “abstract aspect (the non-specific) within a material specificity of the artwork itself” (Smith 2018: 116).

The cube is a minimalist sculptural form, which explains why it has been used as an indeterminate symbol in memorial architecture. Its iconography is unclear. As mentioned above, the cube was contradictorily explicated as a political symbol of the Soviet state and liberation from it. The architecture of the cube is indicative of how political and aesthetic effects of national commemorative architecture are intertwined. For instance, the tensions between “conservative” and “progressive architecture” (Martin 2004: 218) give expression to architectural historicism with its nostalgia for classical, figurative, and symbolic codes or, conversely, to an avant-garde vision

of minimalist forms, such as incomplete cubes of Sol LeWitt, as well as cuboids and planar squares, cuts, and openings.

In 1987, Sol LeWitt, an American geometric artist, created a monument shaped as a black block of stone and reminiscent of a black coffin (Young 1992: 267). Placed in front of the baroque Munster Palace, it provoked public anger as a “black blight” that jarred with its architectural surroundings and impeded traffic (Young 1992: 267). It caused intense discomfort: physical, aesthetic, and moral. The decision to remove the installation was taken a year later. In contrast to the Vietnam War Memorial, where the controversy aroused around alternative interpretations of historical events, LeWitt’s *Black Form* probes into modalities of commemoration and notions of monumentality as such. The aesthetic incongruity of monuments (Young 1992: 268) disrupts not only architectural space and people’s aesthetic judgment but posits questions about the necessity of enshrining historical memory in objects.

The cube of 12 self-replicating planes is interesting for reasons complementary to its politico-historical symbolism. In a palpable shift from a figurative aesthetic to abstract geometry, the cube and its flattened, planar reduction, the square, rupture a tie to an empirical person even when it is implied. For example, Tony Smith’s *Die* is a cube of approximately human proportions, which appears to turn the minimalist sculptures into a surrogate of a person (Fried 1998: 156). In other words, a minimalist sculpture can be read as inherently anthropomorphic. Yet, Fried notes, it is a specific conception of a person as a unitary being with unknown interior who is a member of a symmetrical, infinitely repetitive order (Fried 1998: 156). Arguably, the cube constitutes “a radical cut or refusal of relationality” (Colebrook 2019: 185) and creates a space external to human cohesion. It suggests that history is not necessarily ineffable, but it is unrelatable either as alterity or non-specific magnitude. The cube alludes to a human being who is non-relational yet, as a succession of its sides, bound into an unceasingly reconstituted impersonal multitude.

Writing about Giacometti’s sculpture *The Cube*, Didi-Huberman suggests that Giacometti saw *The Cube* as a stylised head, refracted and broken down to a polygonal construction (Didi-Huberman 2015: 35). However, drawing for Giacometti was also a sculptural process; he inscribed shapes and lines on paper with a hard pencil that literally cut or “chiselled” the material (Didi-Huberman 2015: 26). *The Cube* exemplifies the conjunction of a typographical image, with sharp line and angles that have the geometry of writing and of a sculpted form (Didi-Huberman 2015: 27). Both embody “the architecture of ridges” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 27) with mass, lines, monochromatic tone, and blankness as its key aspects.

Giacometti’s *Cube* has a distinct fold at the foot of the sculpture that Didi-Huberman sees as a buried face, another geometrical side or a 13th hidden face. While other faces can be seen and the one touching the ground can be imagined, that little fold delineates “the contour of an absence, a

loss, the loss of a face. Does this buried or lost face have a name?” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 13). Or is it “deprived of something?” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 14). Is it deprived of a name, a story, or signification? *The Cube* does not instruct how to see it: as a whole, a collection of faces, or a singular fragmented side because “the cube, as we can see, isn’t one. It is an irregular polyhedron which [art] catalogues describe as having twelve sides” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 11). By alternating between seeing a continuous whole and seeing only a fragment, *The Cube* involves a “geometrical massification of volume” that erases all traces of human referent (Didi-Huberman 2015: 19). This sculpture, like many other of Giacometti’s plastic and sketched creations, collapses the distinction between an object and “a quasi-subject” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 49) capable of absorbing human faces and bodies within itself, “a faceted machine for embedding them, burying them, devouring them, depleting them – but also as the subtle principle of its own destruction, or in any case of its self-alteration” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 49).

This strange object, the cube, pins down a “paradoxical meeting place of an absence of body and a latent anthropomorphism” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 61). Here is the essence of Giacometti’s fascination with cubes. He persisted in seeing cubes as dead heads to foist on us the recognition of “the capacity for a head to become the restricted support for the absence of a face” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 71). The faceless cube is cut off from the body and from the living as it assumes the work of death. The cube, thus, demonstrates how death “abs-tracts” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 66) as it imposes impossible, contradictory dimensions on beings and objects. Giacometti held that “only people themselves ... are genuinely true to life” (Didi-Huberman 2015: 106), so the cube is a monument that is not figural of a person. It is a reduction and disfiguration of a human head to a mask or a plaque, a “gathering” of the loss of faces (Didi-Huberman 2015: 78).

To succinctly overview, Giacometti’s cube is a massification, a gathering of lost faces or people. The cube as a monumental shape invokes a human head, yet it does not aspire to resemblance. The cube as a monumental form urges to suspend the reality effect of recreated violent history by anchoring its visualisation and materialisation in abstraction rather than faithful representation. To swap a symbolic representation for an abstraction is not to abandon documentary and factual dimensions of commemoration and intelligibility of a monument in favour of a nameless and faceless shape. Rather, it involves working through a problem of visualising and concretising our relationality to a mass atrocity by different means. As a monumental structure, the cube offers an image of death (rather than of a specific dead) and of the scale of the atrocity. It alludes to death as a process of abstraction, flattening, and emptying as well as overfilling a form with referents. A figurative monument, such as a sculpted face, would suitably memorise a specific person in their imagined immediacy, but it might discourage from grasping, precisely, *the mass* of a mass killing that the cube seems to convey so well. Thus, it can be argued that the face concretises a

personal story while the cube, just like a list, shifts towards a distinctive monumentalising of collective history.

## The Hole

It appears that inscriptions of names on monuments disaggregate the mass murder into personal stories, while the cube condenses them into the innumerable abstract mass. Inscription of names of the dead and the monumental cube enable a passage into abstraction as the image of names and the geometry of the cube substitute resemblance to the concrete dead for a non-representational objecthood. However, the cube signals intensification of death that follows a mass atrocity because it is imbued with the volume and density of the multitude of the dead. The paradox of the cube is that it does not approximate a representation of a human life but suggests that an abstract image – be it a sculpture or a grapheme – can be a viable archival aesthetic to ground a sense of history in absence as a finality. Monumental names and monumental cubes locate the dead beyond the realm of meaning since the dead do not signify a concrete being, which generates history out of a paradoxical concrete abstraction.

I would like to return for a moment to the *Last Address* plaques that instantiate a tension between an absent face of a mass atrocity and a specific name of the dead. The plaques are physical objects that are suffused with symbolic meanings and intimate connections. At the same time, they are fungible things as their abstract, non-connotational and non-figurative artform seems to suppress isolated histories and presence. To remind, the plaques include, to the left, an empty square cut that reminds of a missing photographic portrait. To the right, the plaques give specific details of the dead: their name, and facts of life and death, including dates of arrest and execution. The juxtaposition of an absent face – a square hole – with a typographic sign of a name, indicates that the political and conceptual aesthetics of names of the dead can question the mode of being as presence and immediacy of a face. A facticity of names overturns the pre-eminence of face as a nexus of selfhood to generate a different sense of concreteness that affirms abstraction over likeness.

The name and the hole are indelible within the plaque. Holistically, the plaques yield a powerful multimodal image of a mass atrocity that mediates the tension between the cut instead of a portrait and a graphic image-name instead of a biography. Within the plaque, an inscribed name of a dead person exists in relation to the square cut, a tear, an opening into a numerically indefinite history, just like “the archival document is a tear in the fabric of time, an unplanned glimpse offered into an unexpected event” (Farge 2013: 6). The juxtaposition between the abstraction of the square hole and the inscription of a name of the dead forces the name outside its administrative function of a bureaucratic identifier. The plaques in Moscow contrast singularity with multitude as well as concreteness with abstraction



but they do not assert a straightforward hierarchy of a personal name over the minimalistic square hole. Both the name and the cut-out square to the left are images that possess “the intensity of a concentration of the world” (Nancy 2005: 10) as the hole is prototyped on the cube that has inverted on itself and pushed its mass and volume inside (Figure 4.4).

In Vermeer’s painting *The Lacemaker*, Georges Didi-Huberman singles out one detail, a dark shapeless patch between the lacemaker’s fingers that could be an accidental brushstroke (Didi-Huberman 1989). It is not an absence but a dense zone of “material opacity” (Didi-Huberman 1989: 153). The patch is a void of representation (Didi-Huberman 1989: 156); “there is in fact nothing there to see other than a meaningless, ragged-edged run of paint – the material substance, paint...” (Didi-Huberman 1989: 154). The patch appears in Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* that deals with the link between photography and death (Barthes 1993: 15, 31). A photographic image does not simplistically bring to life the events it depicts but foregrounds their



Figure 4.4 A close-up of the cut-out hole on a memorial plaque.

mortuary function. Barthes is unapologetic about the failure of photography to capture an encounter through pictorial representations as if a living presence. If one can imagine an infinitesimal gap between a present being and a moment an image is taken, the next object is a photographic image (Kaplan 2010: 55). A photographic image is a layer peeled of a living being, who is already absent. Most photographs are motionless and incapable of moving us. Yet, some images have the power to animate us or make us assume a posture of being alive by inflicting on us “a wound” (Barthes 1993: 21). A wound appears as discontinuities, intervals, gaps, and other disjointed elements that Barthes names a “punctum” (Barthes 1993: 26). A punctum is often “a detail” (Barthes 1993: 43), a thorny fragment that disperses the unity of a photographic composition. The square hole instead of a photographic portrait on the *Last Address* plaques is a patch or a punctum.

In his essay “Masked Imagination”, Jean-Luc Nancy traces a rectangular shape of a photograph to a sacred space of a Roman temple (Kaplan 2010: 46). He suggests that a photograph acts similarly as it entombs faces. This way, as has already been suggested, a photographic image is akin to a death mask moulded of a corpse, just using light rather than plaster. However, as discussed above, a death mask is also an image of making a mask and making a likeness to the dead (Nancy 2005: 90). Rather than deploying the Latin etymology of image as *imago*, which consolidates the idea that an image is a question of appearance and a representation of the dead (Nancy 2005: 85), Nancy moves away from a mimetic function of an image to an idea of an image as *Bild*, “as an aspect that makes itself seen” (Nancy 2005: 86). For Nancy, a death mask is “the-how-a-dead-man-shows-himself” (Nancy 2005: 90). Used in this sense by Benjamin and Heidegger, an image as *Bild* has a diminished capacity to index presence of a living being, to act as a keepsake of the dead. Instead, an image is a possibility of seeing and “grasping presence that is singular or plural but always in some way *one*” (Nancy 2005: 86) and always concealing the self. This is a vacillation between self-showing and self-withdrawal that Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy call “absence as presence” (Kaplan 2010: 48). Incidentally, photographs and death masks (as well as monuments) constitute a secondary image, an image of a withdrawn image, “a tracing out of the effacement, a modelling of an absented gaze” (Nancy 2005: 96). According to Blanchot, there is a “morbid strangeness in the image”, which situates a photographic image on the outside or at the limits of understanding (Kaplan 2010: 56). In sum, a photographic image reveals alterity rather than identity of the self. This vector of philosophical arguments underscores the idea that an image contains a movement of self-hiding (as removal of presence) and self-showing. Once the expectation of representational likeness is set aside, an image as *Bild* constitutes an act of showing, something that Blanchot identifies with truth, without veiling or unveiling<sup>1</sup> (Blanchot 1993: 55). It is

1 Blanchot plays with the literal meaning of the Greek word for truth *aletheia* that means disclosure and unconcealedness or showing and seeing.

almost as if the act of peeling a cover off a portrait is more truthful than the portrait's pretence to resemblance. Finally, since an image is not a likeness of presence, it makes ostensible an image of death, that is, an image of what it is that makes a dead person dead (Nancy 2005: 96).

The key difference between a monument borne out of an inscription of the name or a cube and those that are predicated on human figures and faces, is that the inscription of a name is an abstraction that substitutes resemblance for referentiality. Nevertheless, it does not constitute a lessening of an image of history. On the contrary, monumental names are a kind of objectless aesthetics that exposes us to a different experience of a mass killing in its enormity while a portrait, a face, or a human figure would debatably rivet us to a personal tragedy. This is not a matter of artistic judgment but another configuration of a sense of history grounded in abstractions, fragments, and intervals that signal *absence of face and figure*, yet, simultaneously, allow us to insert ourselves in those gaps and step into the ingress left behind by a mass murder.

Politically inspired monuments are often overdetermined by their symbolism and historical controversies. According to Michael Levine, overdetermination is preferable to ambiguity that might be detrimental to the function of monuments designed to remember historical mass atrocities such as the Holocaust or war memorials such as the Vietnam War Memorial (Levine 2006). Instead of celebrating the monuments' polyvalent meanings, Levine suggests that monuments should clearly communicate a didactic message about the past, excluding those interpretations that can condone or glorify historical violence (Levine 2006: 119). For instance, Levine offers a scathing critique of the Vietnam War Memorial's ambiguities as undermining a clear message against the War as an act of terrorism (Levine 2006: 120). The Vietnam Memorial permits an interpretation of the War as a heroic, righteous effort and aids forgetting. The location of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC, next to other architectural landmarks, sneaks in a narrative of patriotic wars. Furthermore, the praise of the Vietnam Memorial architectural and design obscures its incessant politicisation and co-optation across the political spectrum, including by the nationalist right. Because Levine cautiously binds the key function of a monument with its capacity to alleviate anxiety (Levine 2006: 129) and arrive at a unitary understanding of the past, he ponders if a monument's success can be judged by the monument's withdrawal from the politics of memory, an unquiet realm of disagreement and counter-narratives.

When it comes to the memorial plaques and monuments like the Solovetsky Stone, the opposite is true. Their political and historiographic purpose can easily obscure their aesthetic form, attenuating the monuments' conceptual and political effects. The primary function of a monument to a mass atrocity might be its unmistakable denunciation (Levine 2006).

At the same time, "the imagining of meaningless suffering requires nonhuman, abstract, or monstrous symbols" (Etkind 2009: 638) because

mass atrocities are a limit case of imagination. Architectural abstractions and monstrosities can reveal the latent movement of violent history in the seemingly immobile stones and plaques. The density of the Solovetsky Stone and the materiality of the hole on the *Last Address* plaques are one possible expression of a movement of history as a subsumption of singularity into the multitude of the dead, and decomposition of the multitude of the dead into the singularity of those we attempt to remember. The movement is not achieved by a play with perspective but given immanence in the architectural gestures of massification, opening, iteration, and paradoxical conceptual equivalence of the place value of the one and the infinite many. The massification of a cube, a mask that incorporates numerous face tags, a boulder, and a planar square cut on the plaques confound us with a thought about similitude of killing one and killing many, of enunciating singularity through a cumulative mass of the killed or of occurrence of the many through the non-numerical one of a name. To restate, the process of cruel abstraction that reduces a concrete life to an undifferentiated mass can be detected in the abstract architectural forms that commemorate an atrocity.

The square hole of the memorial plaques, the density of the boulder, and the fused figures of Frangulyan's monument convey the scale of an uncountable mass killing. These monuments avoid the limitations of figurative monumental objects and symbolic art forms because the volume of a monument made of stone and the open-ended emptiness of a hole on the name plaques do not signify an atrocity but bring it to the surface. A mass atrocity is present as a cubic capacity, a scalar volume, plane, density, shape, flatness, and depth. Perhaps, the kinetic quality of these monuments, their ability to move thought and propel us to imagine the concreteness and the mass of the dead by spatial and material rather than linguistic means such as metonymy can capture the scale of an atrocity and, at the same time, affirm the value of a singular life. By condensing the scale of the mass atrocity into a mass or an opening, the irregular cube of the Solovetsky Stone and the precise square opening of the plaques point to an infinity of death, its overwhelming abstraction, while the names of the dead render it concrete. What matters most is the relationship of simultaneity of singularity and multitude, concreteness and abstraction, and concreteness that cannot be properly understood in terms of numerological history. In disregard of a trivial view of the dead where each victim of violent history is little more than a summand to the total, the cube that subsumes the infinity of names and the hole that accommodates them, conjure a material figuration of history where singularity and multitude have the value of non-quantifiable *one*, the human mass of the mass atrocity.

In a discussion uploaded on YouTube, two activists – both professional historians – mentioned that the ashes of the bodies burnt at the Donskoy Crematorium were placed in a bucket. Then, the ashes were carried to one of the mass graves at the Donskoye Cemetery. With a sinister sense of

humour, the historians speculated how heavy the bucket might have been. Although articulated as a joke, this is a serious question. How many cremated bodies fit in a bucket? How does the weight of the dead translate into the mass of human loss? The conversation between two historians demonstrates an awareness of a violent process that re-writes human lives into “the register of undifferentiated generality” (Mbembe 2003: 35): a pile of bones, a bucket of ashes, an unmarked mass grave, an archive of names of the dead.

In an architectural drive to fuse the multitude into *one*, the above discussed monuments take the shape of bodies, masks within masks, the volume of the cube, and the emptiness of a square hole. The Wall of Sorrow and the Solovetsky Stone are the monuments without a face or a name. Yet, they are framed by names of concrete people to foreground a non-representational historiography of a mass atrocity *inheres in the relation* between singularity and multitude, and concreteness and abstraction. It means that the object of commemoration is the relation itself. The implication is straightforward: the relation between singularity and multitude and concreteness and abstraction is sustained through a perpetual set of reminders of the significance of *each* name and gestures that negate their concreteness and accumulate them into lists of *all*. It follows that the mass inventory of names of the dead and the strangely abstract cubes and square holes that engross an infinite number of the dead are combined to constitute an image without likeness, an image of a mass atrocity itself.

## 5 On Infinite Return of Names of the Dead at the Solovetsky Stone

October 29 is the day when names of the dead return into a public square. To remind, the eponymous event, the *Return of the Names*, was initiated by *Memorial* to break away from the official day of remembering victims of political repressions in Russia on October 30. The official day seemed blighted with political sloganeering and recriminations. In contrast, the *Return* assembles a solemn crowd of mourners who swiftly form a meandering line around the Solovetsky Stone. From 10 am, the mourners arrive in a continuous stream and queue for several hours, often in bitter cold, to read out loud a name of *one* victim of the politically motivated mass murder. When the event was launched more than 10 years ago, each visitor could read a score of names. Today, so many people come that each person can only say a single name of the dead from the list of names prepared by *Memorial*.

The Solovetsky Stone on Lubyanka Square is cut off from the surrounding shops and streets by heavy traffic. Bolshaya Nikolskaya Street leads off the square. Bolshaya Nikolskaya is the address of the former Military Tribunal of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union where the execution lists of thousands of people were prepared. It is rumoured that human blood flowed freely from its basement towards Kremlin in the late 1930s. Today, the Military Tribunal stands vacant, awaiting a conversion to a department store, festooned with fairy lights to cynically disinfect what happened here a 100 years ago.

The Stone can be accessed by the labyrinthine underground passages radiating from the Lubyanka metro station. On the day of the *Return of the Names*, security gates are installed at the bottom of the metro stairs and bags are quickly examined by a silent police officer. Just outside the metro exit, memory activists greet the arriving participants, while younger volunteers distribute pieces of paper, a half of the standard A4 sheet cut with scissors. A singular name is serendipitously handed for the name reading ceremony from the list of all names of the dead. This plain piece of paper contains the text one needs to read aloud at the Solovetsky Stone. It states the name of a victim, their profession, the date of arrest, the date of execution, the date of rehabilitation: the same visual template as the



name plaques of *The Last Address*. The paper name plaque I was handed in 2019, the last time I could read the names in person, stated a name of the murdered person in bold capital letters: **EFIM PROHOROVIC VASILYEV**. It mentioned the victim's age, his occupation, place of residence, and the execution date. Efim Prohorovich was a 70-year-old village priest. He was executed on February 26, 1938. The rest of the paper was blank. The scarce biographical detail is barely enough to reconstitute the life of a stranger. Printed on office paper in the most ordinary font, the name of the dead priest is a hollowed out, notational understanding of his violent death. It is letters and numbers arranged into a few pithy lines.

On October 29, 2018, one activist explained that names of the dead are selected every year with the intention that the whole list might be eventually read in full. It is a slow process because the event is paced at the rate of 1 day per year, which maintains the ceremony's status as *the event* and defies its incorporation into the daily rhythms of the city. Certainly, the Solovetsky Stone is visited all year around. It is clearly marked as a city landmark on tourist map boards, erected in popular locations in central Moscow. Nevertheless, the monument becomes a focal point of collective mourning once a year when people arrive to read the names from an indefinitely long list of all the dead. In 2018, there seemed no end to reading the complete list that is replenished every year.

“What if some names are never read?” I asked. “What if some names are read twice?”

“It is not likely,” A female volunteer responded scornfully.

The list with the names of dead strangers is seen as a progression towards the final name, even if that cut-off point is pushed into infinity. However, the general list runs in parallel with the improvised list of close friends and relatives that the survivors and descendants append to the list of strangers. This parallel list is recurrent, provided a living family member or friend comes to the Solovetsky Stone. The parallel list with names of the dead one knew intimately loops around the straight line of the activists' own list of dead strangers. In other words, the name reading ceremony at the Solovetsky Stone draws a straight line as many names are said once, while the list dependent on kinship folds around the official list, in a kind of “eternal return of the same dead” (Nancy 2003: 31).

One must dress warmly for the *Return*. Inevitably, the temperatures drop on the day and the first snow and sleet cover central Moscow. Coffee and hot chocolate are distributed by the activists. The queue edges towards the Stone a step at a time. In 2019, I was tempted by one of the organisers to jump the queue because I brought my daughter with me. Embarrassed, I laughed the offer off.

“It’s an ordeal!”

“Yes, it is!” He answered and waved. There was no hint of vanity in his response but a satisfaction in finding a commonality in understanding the event.

In 2019, two microphones were placed to the left of the Solovetsky Stone for the first time to speed up the reading of the names as more and more people come every year. The microphones were adjusted to different human height. At the point where the queue branched off, one memory activist was sorting people out into the tall and short ones and ushering them towards a taller or shorter microphone with his hand. People read the names efficiently. A few added a short proclamation such as “never again!” and “we will not forgive or forget!”, as the role of many memorials is not only to remind but to issue a warning and an admonition for the future (Cherry 2013: 4). Only occasionally, someone attempted to narrate a full story with many biographical details of the deceased as the descendants tend to reminisce about the people they once knew. They were tolerated, yet the line of people pressed them to step aside and did not give each mourner enough time to paint a verbal portrait of the deceased (Figure 5.1).

By noon, the Stone was covered in burning candles and some red carnations and roses. By 10 pm, when the police moved in to end the event, the candles were burning bright, and the procession of the living did not dry out.

I wonder if the austere event brings the dead into the world of the living or situates the living among the dead. The annual cycle of commemoration of dead strangers and the repetition of the names of the intimately known dead depends on putting one’s body into the human line, hence enfleshing the list of names. This poses several congruent questions. What difference does it make to inscribe a name on stone and paper or to enunciate it out loud? How can an archival list of names be enfleshed, given a human body and a force of history? What kind of community is formed out of speaking the names of the dead, who are strangers to us? And how can enfleshment of names of the dead give a physical form to a conceptual question of infinity?

## To Say the Name

Saying names of the dead is a polyvocal moment as, first, it can be read in line with the activists’ overriding principles of archiving and historicising the past. Alternatively, a far-reaching distinction can be made between the archival utility of names of the dead and saying them as a performative utterance rather than a written sign. What is the significance of this distinction, mediatically? The monumental life of the Solovetstky Stone has



*Figure 5.1* The line of mourners around noon.

durability or, more accurately, duration. Yet the monument is silent. It does not speak, on this occasion. It remains to find out what is achieved by shifting from the textual and sculptural commemorative practices to enfolded registers of archiving names of the dead and saying them out loud in the

open city square. What is entailed in the medium specificity of speech, or saying the name?

Saying, or speaking, names of the dead is a mode of concretising in sound the mass atrocities of the Stalinist Terror. To speak is not to conflate speech with vocal communication. To speak names of the dead is not a reflection of an essentialised notion of humanity, but the political prerogative of mourners. To speak the names out loud may be a guarantee of personal, affective memory, or an affirmation of the connection to the dead. In addition, it is a factographic moment as to say names of the dead is to affirm them as documentary facts. I suggest that the use of spoken language, its sonority, add another dimension to the potency of *Memorial* historiography as factual ‘writing’. Scriptures double up as liturgy (Keane 2013), and Gaidinliu notebooks, belonging to the Heraka religious movement in India and kept in the Pitt Rivers Museum, contain a prophecy that is meant to be spoken and sung rather than read and understood (Longkumer 2016). Written language is actualised in ink and voice, creating a relationship between conventional history as text and historicity as something enacted by a being that speaks (Ranci re 2004: 31). For Walter Benjamin, a historian writes history as it happened to produce “the itemized collection of every past moment” (Azoulay 2005: 58). A chronicler or a storyteller converts history into a narrative that is auditory, repetitive, and not our own (Azoulay 2005: 65, 69–70). For Benjamin, a chronicler foregoes an explanation of history because transmission of information is incompatible with storytelling (Benjamin 2015: 88–90).

Bewilderingly, another form of storytelling is premised on suspension of sound and writing. It entails visible muteness that Benjamin sees as the most appropriate mode of transmission of history of an atrocity (Benjamin 2015: 84). Ariella Azoulay examines how Benjamin’s Ninth Thesis of history proposes an account of a painted angel of history by Paul Klee. The angel’s mouth is opened to create an image of speaking without sound. Its face is turned to the past. The angel is mute but not silent because the autonomy of his speech is problematised (Azoulay 2005: 70). The angel of history can only reproduce God’s words rather than generate its own. For Azoulay, this is the moment that opens a potentiality of developing an audio-visual conception of history as something predicated on acts of speech, image, text, and muteness in equal measure. Notably, muteness as a mode of historiography is not a trauma of survivors unable to speak. Muteness, or “cessation of speech” (Heller-Roazen 2021: 159), is one of the conditions of the dead, a condition that can be shared or subverted by the living who utter names of the dead.

An auditory apprehension of history is familiar to the Western Apache of Arizona. Instead of collecting scraps of recorded sound history (such as, historical interviews), the Western Apache ensure that topography and communication are intertwined as places are described, represented, and named to connect to ancestral past (Basso 1988: 101). Naming places such as “water

flows inward underneath a cottonwood tree” (Basso 1988: 111) is valued not for its propositional content but for its capability to evoke “a collective voice that no one actually hears” (Basso 1988: 106). This collective voice is attributed to absent persons and ancestors who are attached to spaces through acts of speaking with names. Their approach is not akin to giving voice to a particular person. Rather, Keith Basso insinuates that place names foster a connection between landscape, language, and history as “remote and inaccessible, anonymous and indistinct” plane (Basso 1988: 99).

The annual ritual of name reading on Lubyanka restores sound to names of the dead in a specific matter, as their names are spoken in a mode of self-introduction. When the living step towards the microphone, they speak names of the dead as if their living voices replace the voices of the dead victims. Subsequently, the living end up projected into the realm of distant history through locution of names of the dead. The mourners say names of the dead in an address to a vague audience and video cameras that make a record of the event for the activists’ social media channels. Yet, the living do not introduce themselves in contrast to some solitary protests in Moscow that involve a lone person holding a placard that reads “I, so-and-so, has experienced injustice”. In front of the microphone at the Solovetsky Stone, the names of survivors, descendants, and mourners are occluded. The personal “I” of the speaker is omitted. The effacement of the “I” of the speaker foregrounds a single name of the dead in the imaginary greeting or farewell. In everyday life, personal names are repeatedly resaid to introduce oneself or address another person regardless of whether such conversational routines are propositional, formulaic, expressive, or not (Jucker 2017). Repeatability and addressivity are important elements of deploying names to initiate and respond to speech, to produce auditory signatures, and to evoke history.

Saying names of the dead out loud is a moment of endurance of acts of remembering rather than memory. Edward Shils, who concerned himself with the relevance of the past traditions in the present, writes that encounters with the past imaginaries are requisite to our intellectual and creative endeavours as they intensify our thought, creativity, and experience (Shils 1981: 163). Outside the realm of ideas, harsh realities of daily struggles and labour might give the misleading impression that the past is superfluous to the bare existence (Shils 1981: 164), a popular argument among those in Moscow who object to offering restitution and financial compensation to a few surviving children of the killed during the Stalinist terror. Against this impression of irrelevance of history to everyday sociality, Shils suggests that the actuality of the past imparts a sense of membership of the living among the dead that is distinct from blood lines and vague genealogies (Shils 1981: 166). To this basic argument, Shils adds a striking nuance by indicating that a human society suffers from a kind of “evanescence of physical movements, sequences of words, social actions” (Shils 1981: 166). He writes that words “cease when they have been performed. Spoken words

are dissipated into nothingness, they cease to generate sound waves; actions cease when they are enacted” (Shils 1981: 166). The brevity of a spoken word or performed action is significant here because Shils does not refer to writing as essential for preservation of memory. Rather, he points out that memory is a performed action that needs *re-saying*. A spoken sentence ends at the point when it has been spoken. In contrast to the written forms, such as *unread* books, the peculiarity of spoken sentences and performed actions is that they have “to be commenced anew when desired or demanded or required. To exist, society (and history) must be incessantly re-enacted; its basic communications must be repeatedly resaid” (Shils 1981: 166).

In “The Statement and the Archive”, Foucault demarcates a distinct modality of language that he calls a “statement” (Foucault 1969: 92). The statement is neither a proposition nor a sentence as it can consist of “signs, figures, marks, or traces” (Foucault 1969: 95). Nor is it a signifier, a sign of an object or person, despite the statement’s materiality (Foucault 1969: 100). Using an example of a proper name ‘Peter’ and its relation to its signified, Foucault suggests that the statement emerges in its enunciative recurrence, rather than in the correlation between the name and what it designates (Foucault 1969: 100–103). To paraphrase, the statement is marked by its enunciative function, a need for someone “to emit” a statement repeatedly (Foucault 1969: 104). The enunciative statement does not describe an object or a subject but their “laws of possibility and rules of existence” (Foucault 1969: 103). *Archive* in Foucault’s definition is the law that shapes modes of enunciability, occurrences, and events that constitute it (Foucault 1969: 146). In this regard, archive is not a collection of documents, their location, or repository but a formation that illuminates enunciation and “temporal dispersion” (Foucault 1969: 144) rather than origins or complete biography.

Spoken during the name reading ceremony by nameless mourners, a proper name of the dead is the enunciative statement that discloses the multiple conditions of their existence: the state-led political violence of the past and the conditions of their remembrance in the here and now. As an enunciation (in this case a material, verbal performance), a spoken name of the dead is a historical, repeatable form that foregrounds the working of the law of archive, its enunciative trappings that are elided by the primary purposes of the activists’ archive. In giving their archive of names of the dead a physical medium of human body and voice, the activists imply that archive is an event that can be said.

In a lecture-essay on “impossible possibility of saying the event” (Derrida 2007: 441), Derrida questions if saying the event is possible at all since the event is unexpected. However, he continues, the event is what happens and what is said. Drawing on linguistic theory, Derrida distinguishes between constative and performative speech to explore their political dimension (Derrida 2007: 446). Constative speech conveys information, or knowledge of what happened. Names of the dead are facts of killing; they epitomise



political potentialities of constative speech. In contrast to a constative saying that informs, performative speech mediates the singularity of an event (Derrida 2007: 446). To say and re-say performatively is a public event that enfleshes truth through speech and puts the already-known history on display.

Truth-speaking was a mode of Soviet dissident writing which, surprisingly, grew out of idealised ethico-political tropes of the Soviet order, such as self-criticism, transparency, sincerity, and glasnost. These ethical principles inspired a literary trope of sincere speech and writing that many Soviet citizens actively engaged in (Hellbeck 2001). A personal name, or a signature, was a seal of speaking the truth, as many complaints and scornful letters to the Presidium of the Communist Party were signed with one's full name. Nevertheless, a famous protest against the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was violently suppressed on the Red Square (Gorbanevskaya 2017 [1969]) because speaking a known truth in public was a transgressive, dissident practice. Comparatively, Annette Weiner explains that Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea ascribe properties of durability, rarity, and weightiness to truth-speaking which makes saying true words in public dangerous for the existing social relations even if everyone knows the truth of a situation (Weiner 1983). Among the Trobrianders and Soviet dissidents, "the actual truth of the situation is not at issue. What is imperative is the public declaration, the act of going on record, to say the way things are or were" (Weiner 1983: 696). Saying names of the dead at the Solovetsky Stone reminds us that the truth of history is not something postulated a priori to be discovered but formed and shown in public. It is apodictic language, a passion of historiography.

Alfredo González-Ruibal shows that archaeology of the contemporary past, such as archaeological research of mass graves and ruins, does not interpret the recent past but reveals it (González-Ruibal 2008: 248). Making manifest is not motivated by the need for the reconstruction of truth or a new meaning but by "a need for presence" (González-Ruibal 2008: 249). Rather, it enables a disclosure of what has been already researched. Revelation is what haunts us (González-Ruibal 2008: 251) during the *Return of the Names* to the public square. In other words, the performative re-saying of the names of the dead on Lubyanka allocates a political and historiographic value to the iteration of an event, an event specific to each act of killing and, at the same time, generic to them all. People who come to the Solovetsky Stone on October 29 already know the event. They gather to perform the myriad of its singularities. Names of the dead are perennially resaid without adding new content because each name is an iteration of the same history. In their capacity to index the past and to allude to counting what is non-quantifiable, names of the dead refer to the mass atrocity as the singular event that is endlessly repeated to stay the same and, at the same time, to introduce difference. To say and re-say names of the

dead is to articulate and iterate *the same known event*, in its generality and, through the endless variation of personal names.

To sum up, the activists' archive is premised on factual, or constative, statements that repeatedly affirm on paper that a particular death had happened. At the same time, speaking names of the dead is performative. By changing the register from text to speech, the name reading co-opts the force of speech acts that the textual chronicles produced by the activists do not exert. The shift from inscribing on paper to speaking names of the dead abandons the question of representation of a mass atrocity that is so central to the character of the above-discussed monuments. Insofar as they are spoken, proper names nominate the dead for justice and, due to names' addressivity, create an obligation to respond.

In other words, a name is a recurrent claim to memory, but its vitality lies beyond commemorative instrumentality that underlies the activists' socio-political purposes of arriving at a definitive, constative history. Once a year, the human procession animates the archive around the Solovetsky Stone with human bodies and human voice. The re-saying of names of the dead traces violent history and binds the living to the list of names of the dead. Both the dead and the living are fragments that exist through "the improperness of its name and the disappearance of the proper name" (Blanchot 1995: 40). Saying names of the dead involves self-archiving and self-effacement that bring to light the inchoate archival aesthetics of a list that that is part of the materiality of the archive of mass atrocities.

Thus, saying names of the dead is a political gesture since it forces violent history out and assembles the living and the dead into a political gathering, a gathering of souls (Bell 2016: 140). In an ethnographic discussion of Penan death-names in Malaysia, Rodney Needham shows that a practice of replacing kin names such as grandparent or first-born child with necronyms afforded a sense of social solidarity that disintegrated with migration and dispersal of the Penan (Needham 1965: 71). Far from being a wistful comment on the passing of Penan 'culture', the example underscores the centrality of mourning terms and death-names for composing relations. So, what does the encircling of the Stone with speaking and moving people materialise? And what kind of sociality and temporality emerge in the aftermath of a mass atrocity that is both specific and abstract, finite and endless?

### **Archival Monstration**

Names of the dead are spoken next to the cuboid boulder which is neither a tomb nor a figurative monument. Conceptually, it is closer to a cenotaph than a grave filled with human bones or other traces of the physical life of a person. The stone monument itself cannot be tended like a grave. It needs little maintenance as a tough piece of natural material – a rock, with

its own longevity. Just like names without biographies, this monument is seemingly dissociated from the concreteness of the dead.

Nevertheless, the Solovetsky Stone itself recalls a human corpse. Erik Mueggler reflects on moments of substitution of corpses for stone objects in a study of how tombstones in Southwest China replace cremated corpses to open doors to the underworld and serve as a surface for diagrams of kinship relations and biographies (Mueggler 2017: 35). In this case, tombstones stabilise human remains and kinship relations as the stones themselves are inscribed with lineages. The outcome is that monumentality and textuality jointly materialise a relation between the living and the dead even though inscribed names of the dead tend to be forgotten after three to four generations. The analogical relation between the Solovetsky Stone and a corpse is visible on approach to the monument. Mourners follow a circular trajectory and move slowly towards the Stone as if it were an open casket. Mourners avoid any shortcuts, as they are guided to form a neat line behind the shrubs that temporarily obscure the view of the Stone and then reveal it again. Even without physical presence of corpses, the Stone (just like the *Last Address* plaques) conjures the spectacle of death in the public square.

The ritual is openly reproachful. The Solovetsky Stone was placed in the face of the now removed monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky, an architect of the Soviet secret services, on Lubyanka Square. ‘Lubyanka’ is a notorious placename in Moscow. It is the location of the headquarters of the Federal Security Bureau (former KGB). The setting of the *Return* endows the event with a presentiment of a political protest. Alan Klima speaks about a necromantic power of violence and opposition to it in his historical ethnography of student protests in Thailand that were modelled on funeral rituals (Klima 2002: 54–55). The students made a pact with the dead to garner their power but, most strikingly, they drew the dead into the purview of the state by parading cadavers or reproducing their images (Klima 2002: 63–66). In plain sight of the state, the living speak names of their dead outside the FSB building in Moscow. The location and the embodied mode of saying names of the dead inflect the space with wounds of names. A name is not a thing in possession of its bearer (Derrida 1995b: 84) but a wound, cut, secret, gulf, chaos, interval, and *khora*, a third space of effects (Derrida 1995b: 90). A name is irreducible to its referent; like *khora*, it has no essence (Derrida 1995b: 95). For Derrida, a name is not a description but an imprecation – making somebody respond (Sherbert 2011: 128). An imprecation that emanates from the activists’ archive “does not theorize, it is not content to say how things are, it cries out the truth, it promises, it provokes” (Derrida 2006: 52).

As the mourners assemble around the Stone on October 29, the monument is wrapped in human bodies. In the case at hand, the Solovetsky Stone is integrated into a different sculptural formation: an archival monstration. “Monstration” (Derrida 2007: 447) is a showing of the event. The word *monstratsiya* is used in Russia to describe an ambiguous street protest,

including performance art flash mobs. When the mourners trace the perimeter of the Stone with their bodies, they show and perform the archive of names as something alive (Osthoff 2009: 43); they monstrate it. This way, the living convert the archive into flesh and, in the process, enliven the unmoving granite monument. Conversely, as the Stone is enclosed in the perishable matter of human bodies, the procession, as Pyotr Pasternak told me, becomes “a kind of sculpture”.

Briefly, it is important to distinguish between archive as performance and participatory archive. Participatory archives depend on open access and user contributions to a collective, frequently digital archive (Benoit III and Eveleigh 2019). A good example is the Mass Observation Archive in Britain. Participatory archives are collectively built and, occasionally, curated. Its collections are formed of numerous submissions of documents, such as diaries and family archives. Once tagged, transcribed, and digitised, the documents become available to researchers and general users. In sum, participatory archives are vehicles for engaging volunteers and general publics in collecting and organising an archival collection. Distinct from the participatory archive, archive as performance stages a relation to history (Taylor 2006: 68). Like cosplay and theatrical or ritual re-enactments of historical and cosmological events, performativity of archives requires a presence of living human bodies to underscore generativity and instability of history and the archive. October 29 is 1 day a year when the Solovetsky Stone is transformed into a performance installation. Alongside being a factographic mechanism, the *Return of the Names* at the Solovetsky Stone is “the activated *now* of performance” (Taylor 2006: 68).

Performance and mass participatory art is premised on human handling of materials, active manipulation of objects (Osthoff 2009: 111), and use of human bodies as physical material for artistic projects (Bishop 2012: 2). Instead of looking at artwork, participants intervene, translate, and cut to transform viewing of a static work of art into a collective action that is centred on mediating capacities of human bodies (Osthoff 2009: 114). For example, Lygia Clark asked her participants to pull coloured threads from her mouth onto the body of another participant, lying flat on the ground. This work of action art was titled “Anthropophagic Drool” and described as a disconcerting relational event of “collective vomiting” (Osthoff 2009: 115). The gathering around the Solovetsky Stone can also be understood as a transformation of an abstract cuboid monument and of a textual list of names into a performance of a mutual archive for the living and the dead.

One could cite the performative “necroaesthetics” here (Yurchak 2006: 238–249) that was used by a group of artists called Mit’ki in the late Soviet Union. Mit’ki acted as if dead to deliberately provoke and shock the unsuspecting Soviet public. In jest, they played out murder and pretended to be the living dead, covering themselves in bloody bandages and disguising as decomposed cadavers. The outrageous pranks of Mit’ki have little to do with the long queue of people on Lubyanka Square. Instead, by walking

around the Stone, the living situate themselves among the dead and stage participation in violent history.

The membrane between the living and the dead seems porous at times but the tendency is to assume a one-way seepage of the dead into the world of the living. The procession of mourners outside the Solovetsky Stone is different as it blurs the distinction between the living and the dead and fills the square with spectres of a different kind – “neither simply presently living nor simply absently dead and yet also both living and dead in some way” (Cohen and Zagury-Orly 2022: 61). The procession of the shuffling living and its temporal peculiarities, such as a long wait, a brief utterance, and an annual repetition, are carried out at the behest of the dead, and for the sake of the dead and the living. The human effort to speak as the “living-dying” (Cohen and Zagury-Orly 2022: 61) creates an amalgamated politico-historical subjectivity that involves the returning dead of the past and the living who will die in the future.

The living-dying is an ontology that shows how the living inhabit the time of the dead, on the periphery of their phenomenology. This proposition makes an aberration of being alive by questioning the normative description of the living summoning the dead into the world of right now. It is the living who are on the edge, whose death is postponed but inexorable. Instead of the categorical distinction between the ontologies of the corpse and the living, both are granted immanence and physicality during the name reading. Boris Groys flips the question of whether the dead resemble the living to suggest that it is the living, who are the incarnation of the dead (Groys 2011b: 82). Boris Groys premises the identity of the living and the dead on “radical materialism” (Groys 2011b: 81). The corpse is matter that decomposes and rots over time, which gives it a peculiar agency of its own. He mentions the inevitable process of decay that gives us the existence of “living corpses” (Groys 2011b: 82).

An elderly poet in a Jewish cultural centre in Maryina Roshcha shared a poem with me that reads “Corpses, we are together, open your eyes”. The eyes of the corpse are not meant to see; we cover or close them to become unseen by the dead. However, saying goodbye, the Jewish poet joked that I might find him dead on my next visit. I would be able to see him, he said, only he would be a corpse who cannot reciprocate seeing me. To be a living corpse is not a poetic metaphor. It is a durable historiographic vision that does not depend solely on the analytical categories, such as memory, and temporalities of the living. The durational process of becoming a corpse is accompanied by a translation of the self into an archive. The living are adept at creating traces of themselves, traces that are deposited in photographs, objects, and other archival relics of the self. These are profane relics in contrast to official museum collections or valorised spaces of formal archives (Groys 2011b: 71). Nevertheless, the idea of the self as a perpetually archived collection of ordinary traces expands the realm of the archive

from documented history to an all-encompassing archival endeavour to create an infinite mutuality of the living and the dead.

In *Memory of Memory*, Maria Stepanova gradually unravels the past and the present of her family as she describes objects and photographs that belonged to her deceased aunt Galya. Her aunt obsessively filled her diary with trivial details of her life to exhaustively document everything she did and experienced without an explanation (Stepanova 2017: 23). One diary entry from Galya contains the following

couldn't sleep. Didn't much want to get up or get going or do anything. 10.40 post was delivered, and I went back to bed after that. Sveta came just after that. She's such a good girl, she gets the best of everything for me. Had tea and spent the day in bed. Thanked V.V. for bringing up post. Bobrova rang after 12. She came on Thursday ...

(Stepanova 2017: 26)

The practice of self-archiving and itemising one's own life establishes a complete record of the self, one's routines, habitual events, and thoughts. Instead of superficial identification with the dead, Stepanova notes that we, the living, move into their archive because "we live in their houses, we eat from their plates, but we forget these previous owners, we throw out their fragile reality, putting our own thoughts and hopes in its place..." (Stepanova 2017: 104). By inheriting spaces, objects, and images from the dead, we externalise ourselves to create "not autobiography, but auto-epitaph" (Stepanova 2017: 198). The living and the dead meet on the surface of the self.

Giambattista Vico traces the etymology of 'human' to 'humare', or an imperative to bury the dead (cited in Runia 2007: 324). It is a commonplace practice that ensures "closure and perpetuation" (Runia 2007: 324) as we dispose of the rotting bodies of the dead and, through burial sites and rituals, shape our habitual practices and imaginaries of transcendence, tradition, and being. Thus, the *Return of the Names* complements or, in this case, substitutes a burial that, for Runia, is a moment when "by burying the dead we create, not our future, but our past" (Runia 2007: 325). The act of speaking the names of the dead assigns the living to the past, the moment after we have died. It seems that the re-saying of the names imbricates the annual procession of the living into a political sociality of mourning with the dead (Figure 5.2).

## **A Sociality of Infinite Mourning**

In a short story "The Library of Babel", Jorge Luis Borges narratively builds the mythical space of a library with infinite hexagonal rooms that are reflected in mirrors to trick a visitor into thinking that the library can





*Figure 5.2* The Solovetsky Stone in the evening.

be curtailed (Borges 2000: 78). Yet, everything in this library is endless: the bookshelves, the “incessant light”, “a spiral stairway, which sinks abysmally and soars upwards to remote distances” (Borges 2000: 78). The library is a regimented world, filled with books that have 410 pages each. Each page is 40 lines. Each line is some 80 letters written with 25 orthographic symbols:

“the space, the period, the comma, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet” (Borges 2000: 81). Despite the unvaried architecture of the library and the standardised format of the books, the books’ contents are unintelligible. Letters are thrown together without order; only occasionally they make up a word or a sentence; it is a chaotic accretion. Borges’s library is infinite and repetitive; it contains every variation and combination of the limited stock of letters. The finitude of each book comprises the infinity of the library.

For Borges, the library is an allegory of time and history, iterative and cumulative at the same time. Allegory is erroneously seen as an inferior trope, “an outmoded, exhausted device” in literature, painting, and architecture (Owens 1980: 67). Craig Owens upends this misconception by showing how allegory emerges as an impulse to constitute history out of fragments, disjointed images, ruins, opaque meanings, fissures, splits, chasms, and ruptures (Owens 1980). The textual and visual language of allegory does not aspire to unity of meaning and form, or metaphorical parallels between the past and the present. Allegory is “a strategy of accumulation” (Owens 1980: 72) that obsessively piles up elements, sequences, things, and ornaments into a filing cabinet (Owens 1980: 74).

Many city dwellers have been coming to Lubyanka for years to read names of the dead from the cumulative archive of singularities. The archive is apparent in the list that folds on itself, stops, and resumes at an indefinite point. Only in principle, the list contains no repetition, although the activists refuse to see it like that, as I have mentioned above. There is a presumption that the activists and mourners read through *one* list that progresses teleologically yet extends into infinity replenished with new archival findings. It is important to bear in mind that the infinity of the list does not mean an unimaginably large number of the dead. Rather, infinity is visible in *one*, or more accurately in the possibility of finding and adding one more name to the list of *all*. Furthermore, the infinity of the list is shaped by a necessity of repetition of some names and the possibility of starting again. “Even if we can say that we have accounted for every person, we will have to start reading the names again”, one memory activist told me. Indeterminacy of the list and the necessity of its partial or full repetition suggest that the list is finite and infinite at the same time.

In addition to recognising finitude is a property of the subject and object of mourning, the mourning tied to the abstraction such a typographic image of a name is a conceptual entry point into a twin notion of “infinite grief”, in Hegel’s words (Godley 2018: 99). Infinite grief is a description of “endless or impossible mourning” and “a mourning of the infinite” (Godley 2018: 100). Infinite grief tangles intimate and generic. It delineates a mutuality towards violent death with or without personal bereavement (c.f. Danely 2018: 131). This is a mutuality that is shaped by encounters with a singular death and lists of names of the dead that compel movement of bodies and thought towards an image of an infinite mass atrocity. Persisting as an abstraction rather than presence, names draw attention to the way we and others confront a

possibility of our own death in this context. Infinite grief ties people into a political community of mourners, who live in relation to a history of killings.

What temporal collectivity arises out of speaking names of the dead from the infinite list of names? Is it a collectivity “composed less of those alive than of those left alive in the absence of some others” (Heller-Roazen 2021: 203)? Names of the dead generate the archival aesthetics of the magnitude of a mass atrocity and re-accentuate archival work and understanding of history from biographies and identities to what Elisabeth Grosz calls “a politics of imperceptibility” (Grosz 2002: 463). We often construct social categories on the taken-for-granted premise of presumed sameness and shared experience, a social process of drawing boundaries, marking some people or ‘groups’ as different from others, and “objectifying memory” (Seligman and Weller 2018: 24). While such mundane socio-political classificatory practices are underpinned by identity politics that align performative, unstable identifications with the necessity of being seen by the other, a politics of imperceptibility re-writes human subjects as “a surface catalytic of events, events which subjects do not control but participate in, which produce what history and thus what identity subjects may have” (Grosz 2002: 468). Instead of interiority and fixed selves, a politics of imperceptibility gives us a human that is a profoundly historical being that is active yet exposed to various forces that gain intensity, expansion, and magnitude. The shift from a politics of recognition to a politics of imperceptibility is significant because a politics of imperceptibility situates an undifferentiated multitude of humans, inhumans, and objects within a force field that is “a singularity without identity” (Grosz 2002: 469).

Resonant with the politics of imperceptibility is Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of “inoperative community” (Nancy 1991). Inoperative community is not a grouping of individuals into political units exemplified by nations bound by ideological principles such as Nazism and communism or by notions of commonality of blood and nostalgic belonging to a fantasied ethnic group (Nancy 1991: 9, 15). By contrast, inoperative community consists of singularities who are exposed to death and to the finitude of being, that, for Nancy, is a space of immanence (Nancy 1991: 18). Drawing on Heidegger’s ontology of “being-toward-death” (Nancy 1991: 14), Nancy recalibrates inoperative community, or “community of finitude” (Nancy 1991: 27), as something that is revealed in an experience of “triple mourning” of the death of the other, own birth, and own death (Nancy 1991: 30).

According to Heidegger, integral to being-toward-death is a possibility of experiencing the death of the other (Heidegger 2010: 229). *Dasein* is a murky notion, a string of philosophical intuitions about being, such as being in the world, being in time, being in history, being with-one-another that contain a potentiality of the end and wholeness. However, *Dasein* is always outstanding (Heidegger 2010: 228). The death of the other is a given facticity that does not signal the end of the dead as a presence to the world (Heidegger 2010: 229). Acts of mourning place us into proximity,

the nearby of the dead, which allows us to access death only as the death of the other when our own coming-to-death is out of reach. The death-of-the-other constitutes our own being-in-time, notwithstanding its mundane character since the death-of-the-other is often the death of a stranger, and “this one is *no one*” (Heidegger 2010: 243). The death-of-the-other is “the nearest nearness” we come to death, in its anticipation (Heidegger 2010: 251). This nearness can be read as a subjective anxiety about one’s own non-relationality and irreplaceability. Yet, it is a generative insight into historicity of what has already happened, any event of truth (Cohen 2022: 73), with political and aesthetic inferences. In other words, our own death emerges from being towards the death of a stranger is the “they-self” (Heidegger 2010: 255). This insight can be given a political rather than existential or ontic reading. Framed as a sociality of mourning in the aftermath of a mass atrocity, the death of the stranger-other is anterior to us. Yet, our death is yet to come; it is outside our historical subjectivity and experience of time. Nancy resorts to Heidegger once more to illuminate how the death of the other is not something we can fully experience because we are “therealongside” the dead (Nancy 1991: 33).

This placement on the margins of death is what defines an *inoperative* community because no social texture or workable society can emerge out of finitude of uncountable singularities. Blanchot, who responded to Nancy’s notion of the inoperative community, underscores its alterity, an impossibility to be fused, named, or presented as a ‘community’ (James 2010: 177). However, in the face of atrocities, it brings about mutuality in the finitude with others without resemblance and identification with them. Maurice Blanchot notes enigmatically that the disaster “does not touch anyone in particular” (Blanchot 1995: 1). The writing of the disaster can be carried out only in the language of shattering and dispersal that emerges out of concurrent detachment from the other and the self (Blanchot 1995: 7). To have a foothold on writing about a disaster, one finds an outside that is external to the self and where being lacks without giving rise to a negativity of not-being. A place without being, without selfhood, would show signs of transcendence through multiplicity, which creates a possibility of inscribing oneself into anonymity and establishing continuity with humanity (Blanchot 1995: 7). Transcendence is essential here as the disaster for Blanchot is “unexperienced” (Blanchot 1995: 7), either because of its pastness or sheer otherness. So, what exemplifies the language of shattering that exists at the limits of writing? Perhaps, Blanchot muses, disaster has innumerable names and the only way to name it involves “reciting all words one by one, as if there could be for words an all” (Blanchot 1995: 6). After all, the disaster is a “boneyard of names” (Blanchot 1995: 7), of appellations of any kind that might include names of the dead.

The inoperative community creates an affinity *to* the context of mourning a mass atrocity because the essence of the inoperative community is its orientation towards empty space rather than shared identity (James 2010: 173).

This is a sharing that entails “compearance before NOTHING” (Nancy 1991: 30). Almost echoing *Memorial’s* anti-totalitarian historiography, Nancy contends that the inoperative community opposes the community of a totalitarian formation that requires “sovereignty and intimacy, self-presence without flaws and without exteriority” (James 2010: 174). Since the inoperative community does not presuppose a common ‘identity’, it is a different coming together or “being with of finite beings in excess of any project or work of identity” (James 2010: 174). The inoperative community is premised on “infinite finitude” (Nancy 2003: 103) that is a finitude of one, with its infinite iterations.

The inoperative community – a philosophical thought in Nancy and Blanchot – and a practicality of remembering mass atrocities in Moscow carries the political outside the identitarian belonging towards the idea of political commemoration that places emphasis on infinity of the living-dying. The political sociality that confers pre-eminence to infinity repudiates the possibility of the final reckoning of history. The inoperative community of mourning are underpinned by a mode of finitude of singularities and the infinite expansion of lists. Remembering all and everyone, just like saying all names one by one and then the whole list again, is coupled with a non-numerical possibility to add one more name.

Numerical infinity in theoretical mathematics refers to the “nonfinishing as a constituting abstraction” (Rotman 1993: 3) that can be expressed as progression of integers, continuum of points, or division by zero. It is underwritten by a possibility of “never-ending counting” and repetition of mathematical signs (Rotman 1993: 9), which naturalises numbers and their summation as something “qualitative alike” (Rotman 1993: 50). The numerical difference between  $3+1$  and  $4+1$  appears as a steady accretion of *one*, which obfuscates counting as “a dissipative process” where *one* introduces a difference (Rotman 1993: 50). In other words,  $1+1$  in simple mathematics might appear as a preordained truth but it does not easily apply to counting humans or tree leaves that are susceptible to variation and scalar transformation (Nirenberg and Nirenberg 2021: 181–182). Furthermore, counting with names is not a consecutive increase in number but a realisation of a qualitatively different reckoning with violent history where one is a dual sign for singularity and multitude.

In the realm of history, the possibility of adding one more name to the archive – thus, failing to complete the list – constitutes an “infinite regression”, in Paolo Virno’s terms (2011). Paolo Virno writes that an essential metaphysics of “being qua being”, such as the relation of the One to the Many, has a basic premise of infinite regression, “and so on, into infinity” (Virno 2011: 63). Infinite regression involves positing and overcoming of a limit, which only re-instates the limit again (Virno 2011: 64). To apply this to names of the killed, we can identify any number of the dead, but we cannot presume that the list is complete as a chance of repeating or finding one more name remains. In other words, infinity is a possibility of  $n+1$ . Virno



suggests that infinite regression entails both creativity as a sequence moves backward or forward; it is a progression and recursion as the problem of  $n+1$  reigns (Virno 2011: 65–67). Natural numbers illustrate the progression well:  $11+1$  gives us 12, which subsumes 11. In this case, 11 is not identical to 12 but the operation of adding one is the same. When it comes to enumerating names of the dead, the list consists of non-identical items (personal names) but, with every addition of a new name, the previous order of incompleteness is re-asserted. Another interesting aspect of infinite regression is that overcoming of a limit – and its concurrent restoration – moves the whole list to a new level of abstraction but does not introduce any new content (Virno 2011: 67). Despite the difference in number and distinction between personal names, infinite regression enables “the eternal return of an identical declarative content” (Virno 2011: 68). Twenty-two names of the dead are different from 23, yet they convey the same idea of an unlawful killing. During the *Return of the Names*, finite singularities enact a figure of infinity as  $n+1$  practically by saying and re-saying names of the dead and adding a singular name to expand the archival list of all names.

Lists are finite and infinite at the same time. Umberto Eco writes that lists operate with the countervailing “poetics of “everything is included” and the poetics of the “etcetera”” (Eco 2009: 4). His book *The Infinity of Lists* is a critical anthology of texts, paintings, and spaces, ranging from descriptions of lists in Homer to contemporary fiction by Joyce. Eco explores descriptions and images of street markets, weddings, military parades, curiosity cabinets, paintings of museum interiors, catalogues of names of angels and demons, menageries, indexes of heaven, orders of encyclopaedias, congeries, and sequences of words that signify the same thing. Homer’s *Iliad* includes lists of places and things, such as ships and spears, as well as names and numbers of people that constituted the enormity of the crowded Greek army (Eco 2009: 14). *Theogony* enumerates names of divinities and genealogies of gods and their progeny. Literary lists have been rendered into visual lists, converted from strictly texts to images (Eco 2009: 19). Correggio’s *Assumption of the Virgin* (1526–1530) depicts a swarm of angels. René Magritte’s *Golconda* (1953) is a painting of floating male figures attired in bowler hats, long coats over a white shirt, dull ties, wide-leg trousers, complete with a pair of black shoes, and, sometimes, a briefcase. According to Eco, lists that appear in works of art and literature evoke a subjective sense of infinity while alternative aesthetic forms attempt to capture an “actual infinity” of things that might never be enumerated (Eco 2009: 8). It is this physical or objective, in Eco’s terms, infinity that he describes as “the list, or catalogue” (Eco 2009: 9). The “pervasive poetic of the list” (Eco 2009: 321) creates interminable catalogues and inventories of creatures, things, and places that are enumerated, accumulated, and organised into coherent or chaotic collections of incalculable life.

Infinite lists of Eco elucidate in visual, narrative, and material form what might not be “phenomenally apparent” (Doran 2015: 227). Indeed, infinity



of time is difficult to articulate. However, it is experiential. In his study of Iqwaye counting in Papua New Guinea, Jadran Mimica redefines number as a “systematic expression of determinate multiplicities of things” that are both sensuous and abstract (Mimica 1992: 7). Iqwaye counting system is more than a formal mathematical system not only because it involves counting with one’s body but also because it inflects different realms of their lives, practical and cosmological (Mimica 1992: 17). As practised by Iqwaye, “non-quantifying enumeration” of objects and relations (Mimica 1992: 17) is experienced as an intimation of oneness with a cosmic being (Mimica 1992: 122). Infinity among Iqwaye is “ontologically real”, essential for the reality of cosmic totality (Mimica 1992: 96). Infinity has bearings on the *Memorial* archive even though it is oriented towards history rather than cosmological universe. Infinity, that is manifest in their inventory of names of the dead and the procession of living mourners is given a tangible form, in the context of mass atrocities and their accompanying element: the archive. Voiced at the Solovetsky Stone, the infinite list of names of the dead is the archival aesthetics that elicits a heterogeneous community-toward-death and reproduces an endless order of names of the dead, an order that refuses the closure of history. Robert Pogue Harrison notes that we think of life in terms of singularities, but our existence is time bound into a collectivity that traverses the past and the present (2003: 134). Thus, life in history reproduces a movement from seemingly isolated singularities into a “vast-accumulation of the dead” (Harrison 2003: 134). Part of the inexhaustible archive, names of the dead are amassed to constitute “an imaged form of counting” infinity (Rotman 1993: 109). Names – these quasi-mathematical entities that can be added to or subtracted from a list but have no numerical value – flow in different directions across the ontological boundary between the living and the dead to inscribe the history of a mass atrocity in the metropolis. The dead and the living co-create the image of infinity that holds this disparate multitude of humans together in a continuous relation to history.

# Conclusion

## The Aftermath of the Archive

In closing, one recaps and synthesises to arrive at a provisional endpoint. During my historico-ethnographic research in Moscow, I have come across names of the dead without biography, portraits without a face, unsculptured stones, proliferating steel plaques, and events made of human flesh. I have also learned about a conception of justice and history, which are rooted in concrete abstractions, such as factual names that point to the multitude of the dead without relationality: the *everyall* of violent history. After the initial mistake of seeing *Memorial* and *The Last Address* as a mere repository of documents that could clarify a chronology of past events, I have gained a new appreciation of their *archive* as a massification of facts of killings and a site of participatory and performative engagement with the past.

Through a study of monumentalisation of names of the dead in the context of remembering victims of the Stalinist Terror in Moscow, I have looked at how names of the dead transcend their instrumental uses as archival entries and coalesce into lists. The seemingly mundane handling of names of the dead – archiving them and generating catalogues of names – crystallises the relation between the specific and the non-specific, which is inherent to an experience of history. History relentlessly transforms the living into the dead and sublates concrete people into the abstract many. And while the process has many configurations and manifestations, history's peremptory nature generates multitudes and abstractions out of singularities and specificities. To restate, my key argument, which is a cascade of descriptions, citations, and analogies, is that, in addition to acting as a public archive of facts of killings, names of the dead victims of the Soviet Terror are aesthetic and philosophical devices that give figuration to a difficult to pin down, almost amorphous conceptual relation between singularity and multitude of a mass atrocity.

Ethnographically, the activists' own perspective yields important insights into how they attribute facticity to names of the dead, something that is intuitively lent to numbers and simple mathematical operations such as addition and subtraction. However, the activists differentiate names and numbers insofar as the latter are not entrusted with a task of enumerating the loss of human life during the mass atrocities in Soviet Moscow,

especially during the Stalinist Terror of the 1930s. The activists' aspiration is to establish and document everyone and all the dead of the politically motivated mass atrocities in the Soviet Union. In the process, names of the dead fall into a third category, sitting comfortably neither with the dead nor with the living, yet encompassing them all. The third category is the *everyall* that is distinct from statistical aggregates and group memberships. Personal names of concrete dead people are accompanied but not negated by gestures that refuse identification, resemblance, and even intimacy with the dead who are repeatedly evoked as named but faceless beings. The *everyall* signifies the intense equivalence of everyone and all that is manifest in the activists' respectful recording of each name and their subsequent accretion into collective lists of names of the dead. Grounded in the activists' radical human arithmetic, the equivalence of one as singularity and one as a multitude is an expression of conceptual and practical care for the dead who are waiting for justice.

Political, aesthetic, and philosophical aspects and implications of the activists' archival work are intertwined, albeit not seamlessly. I have argued that iterative name plaques, paper, and monuments etched with names of the dead and speaking name of the dead at the Solovetsky Stone, a monument to victims of political repressions in central Moscow, are instances of articulating, in material form, the tension between singularity in its concreteness of a death of one specific person and an abstract, almost ineffable multitude of the dead generated by mass killings. An important moment for me has been a realisation that names of the dead have a utilitarian archival purpose while they also possess an aesthetic quality of a typographic image: a fusion of text and image. As a grapheme inscribed on monuments of different kinds, names of the dead exceed the expediency of commemoration and move from a strictly textual register into an image, rendered in typographic, alphabetic signs on paper and stone, as well as in human voice and bodies. This shift towards the understanding of names of the dead as inscriptions of mass atrocities has opened a space to discuss the critical archival aesthetics of *Memorial*. What, then, is an acceptable image of a mass atrocity other than a documentary image, such as a photograph, of a past occurrence? How does one capture the whole of violent history? What is an image of such indeterminate infinity of names? These questions suggest a shift away from the immediate, witnessed history and its documentary record that could illustrate what happened and integrate photographic and other visual sources into historical narratives to a problem of conceptualising the scale of a mass atrocity by other means. Despite various difficulties of crafting a history of mass atrocities and their memorialisation, the problem of giving form to immensity of a mass atrocity is foundational to some modes of historiography, philosophy, and art. It is a tantalising question of finding an adequate textual, visual, sculptural, and other forms for extreme history of violence that, in addition to historical writing, has produced many experiments with figurative and abstract monuments. In

this regard, names of the dead actualise a version of historiography of a mass atrocity that is predicated on the archive not as a locatable storage of information but on the archival aesthetics, a historiographic image of the archive as a site for articulating demands for justice.

Archiving names of the dead creates conditions for mourning beyond the temporality of a finite, comprehensive account of a mass atrocity. This mode of historiography probes the limits of remembering and representing a mass atrocity in its simultaneous concreteness and abstraction. To restate, names of the dead allow us to concretise an abstraction of the multitude of the dead by non-representational means. At the same time, they abstract a concrete singularity, cut a name from its biographical referent, and displace it into an infinite order that lists of names bring to light. A kind of social justice that the memory activists advocate involves an optical, architectural, and conceptual moment of seeing the multitudinous many without losing sight of the concrete one. They train our vision and our thought to recognise the infinite open space of the multitude of the dead and its ontology: the one specific human being who fills the whole space of history. One is the biggest, infinite number that sublates millions of lives without collapsing them into a generalisation that would threaten their significance.

Some of the above intimations of history of a mass atrocity are embedded in the archival work of the activists as “a difficult thought” (Nancy 2003), a thought that is unknown to itself. Nancy also calls it a concealed thought. A history of a mass atrocity involves thinking in the absence of solution (Nancy 2003: 6) and in the absence of a name (Nancy 2003: 113). We speak of political violence, the Stalinist Terror, to encode an event. However, this blunt term falls short of naming the loss of human life, its singularity and finitude, the scale of the atrocities, the absence of a just trial. Speaking, writing, or finding an opportune form for articulating a difficult thought highlight the difficulty of tracing acts of killing and acts of mourning, historical concreteness, and transcending timeless abstractness of death all at once. Partly, this is the difficulty of situating ourselves after the atrocity and before our own death, in a place that is alongside. To give a memorial form to a mass atrocity is challenging not because we lack the means to symbolise a mass atrocity, but, because to paraphrase Maurice Blanchot, any writing of the disaster threatens us (Blanchot 1995: 2), encroaches on us, and confronts us with a thought that, in the immanence of a disaster, even dying is too late (Blanchot 1995: 4).

Inscribed or spoken, names of the dead do not bring the killed back to life as we wishfully imagine. What we learn from each name is restricted to the context of its inscription. Rather, names of the dead articulate the truth of their killing in a radically non-figurative way. Names of the dead are an abstraction that does not index but creates a demand for truth and justice in the aftermath of the already known atrocity. In their insistence on facticity of names of the dead, memory activists do not symbolise truth about the past to demand political justice; they speak it during the annual name

reading event at the Solovetsky Stone. As speech acts, names of the dead intimate an “onomatopoeia of truth” (Nancy 2003: 113), the sound of truth or truth that resounds with itself. Onomatopoeia of truth is a possibility of naming itself with its own sound (Nancy 2003: 114) or its own visual and plastic form, cutting out any mediation. Names of the dead elucidate this possibility. Nancy suggests that “truth presents and names itself” (Nancy 2003: 114) and nothing else. Each name presents and names only itself; it is in relation to itself (Nancy 2003: 113). Each name tells its own truth, which is a singular fact of a violent death. This is the truth that resonates in every name, spoken or inscribed, but no name can be a substitute or a gloss for another because they do not have the capacity to signify something outside themselves. Nancy says that

truth does not reside in a generality, or, at the very least, this generality does not have the consistency of a homogeneous other world or of a subsumption. On the contrary, its “consistency” is that of the discrete, singular disjunction of all in one and one in, at once the same for all, just like that identical for all, and each time identical to itself alone  
(Nancy 2003: 118)

This is the ontology of the activists’ *everyall* of names that ties a singularity of each concrete name to the multitude of the list of all, a singular death to a mass atrocity.

And then, an event happened that threw the durability of the archive, its documents, and monuments into disarray. Monuments and memorials only give the impression of longevity as they have their own “biographical trajectories” and afterlives (Cherry 2013: 1). A monument that holds a commemorative statement is susceptible to subsequent material and semantic alterations as monuments are “re-modelled, re-used, re-sited, re-made, cast aside, destroyed or abandoned” (Cherry 2013: 1). While the Solovetsky Stone is still located on Lubyanka, the *Memorial* archive, the affiliated human rights centre, and their branches have been liquidated by the Russian court. The material monument of the Solovetsky Stone is co-extensive with *Memorial* itself; the closure of the archive violates the performative, enlivened presence of the Stone. Momentarily, all we have is the immediacy of the closure of the archive and a possibility of a void.

### **Dissolution and Iconography towards Nothing**

I did not foresee the closure of *Memorial* by the Court of Appeal in Moscow, on February 28, 2022. In 2016–2019, when I did most of my research, the resonance of the Soviet historical violence with consumer economies in Russia, entertainment, and even precarious conditions of freedom, seemed tenuous. Unexpectedly, the past atrocities and those yet to come have produced a knotted temporality of suffering, death, ruination, and injustice.

The *ur*-imaginary of recurrent violence is an uncomfortable thought for anyone wary of crude historical parallels. Yet, it is a persistent thought. The shared offices of two juridically separate organisations, *Memorial*, the archive, and *Memorial*, the human rights centre, were raided by a group of thugs in November 2021. Perversely, *Memorial* activists, not the thugs, were detained and interrogated on the archive's premises, while the iconic photographic image of the handcuffed front door of *Memorial* was circulating online. Subsequently, the General Prosecutor, backed by the Ministry of Justice and Roskomnadzor (translated as Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media) filed a request to shut *Memorial* down to the High Court in Moscow, in early November 2021. The prosecution cited Article 44 of the Federal Law (No. 82-FZ) pertaining closure of public organisations on the grounds of repeated violations of human rights and freedoms. The open trial that consisted of several court hearings was covered extensively in Russian and international news channels, newspapers, and social media. Each time, a small group of supporters gathered outside the court buildings.

Initially, the archive was accused of repeatedly failing to attach a label “foreign agent” to all their publications even if some editions predate the law itself. The formulation created a legal paradox of non-compliance to law that did not exist. The judges listed a string of violations of the ‘foreign agent’ labelling requirements, for which *Memorial* had already been fined. The lawyers on behalf of *Memorial* pointed out that the fines had been paid and the organisation cannot be retried on cases that had been resolved, quoting the legal principle *non bis in idem*, meaning not twice for the same thing. The judges dismissed the objection, together with the plea for proportionality in ‘sentencing’. During the proceedings, new accusations were made against *Memorial*, namely ‘treasonous’ inclusion of names of a few Nazi collaborators into the lists of unlawfully killed. *Memorial* retorted that the available lists of millions and millions of names of the dead were carefully checked for possible oversights. The final ruling mentioned that in 2013–2016 *Memorial* was involved in political activities with the aim to influence political opinions in the country and, this way, shape the politics of the state (*vliyaniye na gosudarstvennuyu politiku*). *Memorial* was reprimanded for criticising the law on foreign agents and obstructing the public efforts to control their activities. The arguments by *Memorial* that various constitutional and international norms and regulations to which Russia was a signatory at the end of February 2022 apply to *Memorial* as an international organisation, registered in France and the Czech Republic, were overruled by the court, saying that *Memorial* is juridically registered in Russia and subject to Russian law that clearly stipulates permissible limits of freedom of public organisations. A request to suspend the closure on the ground of Article 38 of the European Court of Human Rights to allow for deliberations on the soundness of the ‘foreign agent’ law in the ECHR was also disregarded on March 22, 2022 (Figure 6.1).





Figure 6.1 A drawing from the court room by Katya Guschina, courtesy Katya Guschina. “Roskomnadzor and the Ministry of Justice are bored” says the caption on the right. The Memorial lawyers and representative are named, so is the Judge in the centre.

The trials were predetermined despite tireless efforts by *Memorial* and their lawyers to enact a degree of justice. The court drawings made by various artists show the legal vagaries of the archive in the courtroom and demonstrate a keen recognition of intense rivalry between law and image. An often-remarked separation between law as a matter of convention and censorship and art as a matter of aesthetic creativity sounds trite (Douzinas and Nead 1999: 1), not least because law is not the only ordinance to decide on truth and falsity and to address historical wrongdoings (Douzinas and Nead 1999: 7). Reminiscent of graphic art novels, the drawings map an iconography of recalcitrant yet vanishing justice by using images to challenge the textual authority of law (Goodrich 1999: 109). The court drawings are a pictorial figuration of the entanglement between judges, historians, and artists, and their registers. In addition to the graphic representation of the court room, the drawings posit probing questions about judicial impunity and institutional complicity with the state that go beyond surface meanings.

Days after the Court of Appeal upheld the decision to close *Memorial*, the archive’s offices were raided again. The FSB agents, as they introduced themselves, broke in to remove the wall safes that were carried away without keys. A week later, foul-smelling liquid was sprayed on the door of a smaller administrative office of *Memorial*. Despite the outpouring of public

support, international condemnation, and the members' determination to carry on in a new form, the archive is confronted with the arduous challenge of dismantling its infrastructure of bookshelves and of critical historical thinking that has been suddenly and violently deflagrated in spring 2022.

A novel sense of 'We' has emerged during the trial. The old *Memorial* icon with a candle flame above the capitalised *M* has already been replaced with *We* with a capital *M* in Russian; *Memorial* and *We* are alliterative in Russian (the word 'we' translates as 'my'). From an institutional sign, the *We* of the last 2 years has crystallised the ephemeral and uncountable yet tangible sociality-in-common between the living and the dead. This is not a sociality of shared experience or exactness of identification. It is a sociality that involves living in the aftermath of violence, a mutuality of what it takes to produce the archive and make inscriptions in time. Even without an experiential or identitarian foundation, the *We* is a "conrescence" that, in Whiteheadian terms, stands for "concrete togetherness" (Whitehead 1978: 22). Conrescence is an actual entity that results from potentialities of togetherness made of disjointed diversity of singularities, multiplicities, facts of relatedness. This is a non-organisational *We* that refers to an exigency of history as justice for the infinite collectivity of ones. Each face and name of the dead and the living are a conrescence, an inventory of actualised facts in their immediacy that the archive affirms. Fearlessly, one of the directors of *Memorial* reminded in a recent newspaper interview that, in the aftermath of the court decision, the matter of concern is not juridical "faces", namely *Memorial* as an institution, but "faces" whose memory the archive preserves. A better translation would render 'persons' in place of the Russian word 'faces' (*litsa*), but the director's language game is an admonition about pre-eminence of human life that the Prosecution inverted in favour of misapplied law and complicity with the state.

Now is the aftermath of violence against the archive. In a pre-recorded tribute to *Memorial* in March 2022, Carlo Ginzburg spoke about what struck him as significant on the first visit to *Memorial* and what remains central to the archive's mode of being in history: *names, names, names...* It is springtime in Moscow, and nothing hinders the renewal of killings; the conditions of possibility are set. Nothing else needs to happen, no other ethical principle or legal provision dismantled to fully recreate the repressions that commenced in the name of anything but the living and the dead just over a 100 years ago. I quote Derrida in full that such extreme violence, a foreboding of a nuclear missile, is launched:

... in the name of something whose name, in this logic of total destruction, can no longer be borne, transmitted, inherited by anything living, that name in the name of which war would take place would be the name of nothing, it would be pure name, the "naked name". That war would be the first and the last war in the name of the name,

without only the non-name of “name”. It would be a war without a name, a nameless war, for it would no longer share even the name of war with other events of the same type, of the same family. Beyond all genealogy, a nameless war in the name of the name. That would be the End and the Revelation of the name itself, the Apocalypse of the Name. (Derrida 1984: 31)

For Derrida, the war in the name of nothing would destroy the archive and produce “absolute effacement of any possible trace” (Derrida 1984: 28). Violence in the name of non-name exceeds “a killing of history” that stems out of debates over versions of history (Curthoys 2005: 351) and monopolistic encroachments of state-sponsored historiography into schools and universities. War can lead to historicide, the total annihilation of the archive, which does not simply delete written historical record or touches upon interpretive difficulties. Obliteration of traces, a nothingness, begins with the archive, maybe because it is the first and the last one to disappear.

*Memorial*'s precipitous dissolution is contemporaneous with the acceleration of shelling of Ukrainian cities, rape, torture, hunger, exile, overcrowded trains, death, and subtraction. Lists have begun to assemble: lists of killed children, lists of civilian casualties, lists of the missing, presumed dead. There are blacklists, petitions that put your name on historical record, police statistics of people detained, human rights organisations' databases of the abused, a frightening inventory that sifts people into humans and “non-humans? (*nelyudi?*)” in thrall of state power. The black square has replaced Instagram photos of those in Russia who self-effaced in shame. There is evidence of shallow mass graves, sites of atrocities of a week ago. There are rumours of execution lists. Would these dead require a new archive? Or would their names become an extension of the current archive, against the odds? Is it possible, now, to apocalyptically imagine a complete closure of the archive, its “remainderless destruction” (Masco 2012: 1121; Derrida 1984: 27)? Coming to the end of writing, I am left with an expectation of the archive's return, “a coming back, a spectral revenance” (Derrida 2007: 452) that will herald the return of names of the dead and the return of *Memorial* itself, without assurances.

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