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Archiving the Present. Critical Data Practices During Russia's War in Ukraine

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Abstract

Russia's war in Ukraine is also a digital one: war becomes data, managed by algorithmic systems and content moderation tools of large tech platforms. This paper focuses on archiving and disinformation as two key data practices during the war. We explore how these future-facing practices are embedded in fragmented social media temporalities that interfere with the sense-making of the war. We argue that digital archiving, especially through *civic community archives*, is crucial in documenting war data and countering disinformation practices. We also posit that it is crucial to research these data practices by cooperating with local scholars and activists, with the goal of understanding the war and its implications in a manner that respects local knowledge. This is the lead essay for a special feature of *Sociologica*, and it also briefly presents the works by other contributors that make up the issue.

Keywords: War; digital archiving; disinformation; Russia; Ukraine; situatedness.

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1 Data Practices at Work in War[1]

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has caused extensive civilian casualties and wreaked destruction in the physical sphere. Aggression and resistance also take place in digital spaces. Outside of the physical battlefields, the digital dynamics of this war have been put front and center: some call it "the first TikTok war" (Chayka, 2022), and many argue that Volodimir Zelenskiy and his country have invented new ways to fight in the digital sphere (Davies, 2022). Ukrainian authorities have said they are fighting a "hybrid war," one that includes both assaults on the ground and countless cyber-attacks, aiming to hurt important infrastructures that allow the flow of communication or flood the digital sphere with contradicting information (Tidy, 2022).

In current times, accounts of war become data — images, tweets, videos, chat messages — traveling through digital infrastructures which allow people to interact on a global scale, under the control and curation of algorithms and content moderation tools. The first point of access to the war in Ukraine for the global public is through digital platforms, and even people on the ground experience the front lines through the mediation of social media and messaging apps.

Given these dynamics, as social science and media scholars, we ask: "What are the ways to critically engage with the vast amount of digital information that is produced in the course of Russia's war in Ukraine?"

In this article, we will explore the digital dynamics and the hybridity of this war by focusing on archiving and (dis)information from the perspective of data practices. We articulate the complex relationship between digital archiving and (dis)information, arguing that archiving, and especially grassroots decentralized efforts, can be used to counter disinformation and help make sense of war within digital environments in an evolving manner. This is especially pertinent during this war, when different analyses are constantly emerging online, but its place-based experiences are over-shadowed and obscured by a disinformation onslaught.

First, we should briefly define what we mean by *data practices*. Data are generated by describing, usually in a quantitative manner, various phenomena and practices. Production of digital data in particular is common in our current connected societies, and this includes the extraction and monetization by large platform companies of practically every aspect of human life. Some say we live in an era of platform capitalism, where data is the main commodity (Srnicek, 2016). For the purposes of this article, by data we mostly mean information generated on and by using social media and direct messaging apps, such as Telegram, TikTok or Instagram. Focusing on practices, or what humans do with data, brings in a socio-technical approach that addresses processes of datafication. Specific examples of data practices are publishing, sharing, commenting, saving and deleting texts, photographs, video and audio recordings, as well as "offline" accounts of the war, such as war diaries, which make their way online, where informing, disinforming, archiving, and other practices take shape. Data practices do not appear on their own, but rather datafication "is manifested through everyday interactions between people, infrastructures, and established conventions" (Burkhardt et al., forthcoming). This also means that Russia's present war in Ukraine is very much taking place and being mediatized on and by digital platforms that define the affordances of user engagement and dictate the possibilities of their documentation and access. This data also consists of digital propaganda and is used operationally to achieve political goals (Bjola, 2018).

Our academic engagement with the war in Ukraine and its data practices started with organizing a lecture series at Siegen University in Germany, at the Collaborative Research Center,

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Media of Cooperation (*Medien Der Kooperation*), with the support of the German Research Foundation. We decided to address the war taking place in such geographic proximity to us using the means we know best: curating a lecture series hosting Ukrainian scholars and practitioners and activists doing work in the Ukrainian context. We called the lecture series "Memory Under Fire," to describe the efforts to construct different memories of the war, different narratives of Ukraine, and efforts to erase or alter certain memories. We discovered there are many diverse efforts to document, archive and analyze the war, including civic community archiving practices (Fortun et al., 2021), that contribute to knowledge and memory-making about the war from the ground up, and that digital tools and infrastructures are indeed crucial to the experiences of the war outside and also inside Ukraine.

Against the backdrop of the lecture series, this special feature, invited by *Sociologica*, includes curated works by several of the speakers. This also serves to counteract those ignoring perspectives and voices from Ukraine in the analysis of the war. Therefore, in addition to our focus on archiving and disinformation practices, we also argue that in order to better understand what is happening in the country and the region, scholars from beyond Ukraine need to cooperate with Ukrainian scholars and activists in analyzing archived war data.

We have curated this special issue as an attempt to slow down the overwhelming amount of fast-changing information that can be siphoned off from social media channels and news outlets, and to include the work of outstanding scholars and activists from Ukraine and beyond. In the following sections, we elaborate the complexities and potentialities of digital archiving and disinformation for the sense-making of this war. We draw in particular on the understanding that memory is a situated socio-technical practice (Bowker, 2005), extending this to include current prevalent data practices, which also contribute to the construction of memory through digital informing, disinforming, and archiving.

2 Disinformation as a Data Practice and Its Relationship to Archiving

An important data practice entangled and enacted in this war is disinformation, in particular disinformation sponsored and led by the Russian state. In present day entanglements of the political with the digital, Russia is known as perhaps the leading proponent and exporter of state disinformation and propaganda, aimed both at influencing its own citizens, and as part of a foreign policy strategy (Spahn, 2021). During Russia's war in Ukraine, data has been intensively weaponized and strategically used to disseminate false online information to harm individuals, groups, and countries (Tucker et al., 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), thereby affecting their capacity to make sense of and remember this war. This practice follows from the Soviet heritage of constructivist epistemology — the belief that propaganda is capable of constructing realities — the practice of "psychological warfare" and *dezinformatsiya* (Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014, pp. 8–9).

There is a growing body of research on disinformation around the world, although much of it focuses on the US and its political issues. Key insights from this work on the reception of disinformation, are that even after being confronted with a correction and acknowledging it, people continue to believe at least partially the information they know to be false, and further that evidence of disinformation "reduces belief in facts altogether" (Lewandowsky et al., 2017, p. 355). One worry is that citizens might become indifferent to democratic processes that require higher "epistemic demands," a situation defined as "epistemic cynicism" (McKay & Tenove 2021, p. 708). All of this indicates that the problem is thornier than it might seem at

first glance, and that solving it requires considering and engaging with the political and socio-technical environments within which disinformation spreads.

There is evidence of Russian state-sponsored disinformation campaigns directed to influence events such as the United States presidential election of 2016. Some of the consequences and assumed influence may have been exaggerated (Benkler et al., 2018, pp. 235–236), however, it is still agreed upon by researchers globally that the Russian state has a playbook of spreading disinformation, and is a major influence in creating the "post-truth" era and in sowing confusion and general distrust in facts, especially using digital media, both in the West and internally within Russia (Yablokov, 2022). Or, as Pomerantsev (2015) puts it, instilling a sense that "Nothing is True and Everything is Possible." Vladislav Surkov, Putin's ex-propagandist and an influential voice during the conquest of Crimea, said in an interview to the *Financial Times*, shortly after he was dismissed in 2021, that

> People need it [propaganda]… Most people need their heads to be filled with thoughts. You are not going to feed people with some highly intellectual discourse. Most people eat simple foods… Generally most people consume very simple-meaning beliefs. This is normal… Everyone takes advantage of such people all over the world (Foy, 2021).

During the current invasion of Ukraine, the Russian state has bluntly tried to confuse international observers and deny human rights violations and even acts such as the massacre of civilians. One of the starkest examples is the multi-language disinformation campaign around the Bucha massacre in March 2022, which claims it did not happen (Higgins, 2022). A new type of propaganda is also contributing to this — participatory propaganda or, more colloquially, "bunking debunks" (Lazaruk et al., 2022). This practice presents real events as if they were contrived by the Ukrainian government by using the aesthetics and grammar of fact-checking to deny it. For example, photos of dead civilians on the streets of Bucha are circled with red lines and compared to other photos, alleging that the bodies were moving. This is done to encourage people to question certain narratives in a way that is beneficial to the Russian government (e.g. by War on Fakes, 2022)

In the context of this article and feature, we are interested in looking at disinformation as a data practice, to ask what kind of media ecosystem allows or encourages it, and what data flows and affordances it depends on. As Pomerantsev & Weiss (2014) outline in their historical review of the topic, citing also James Sherr, the role of disinformation within the Russian political sphere dates back at least as far as Lenin, who believed that confusion and division could help destroy the bourgeoisie. This view was taken up by the KGB, who created disinformation narratives such as that the CIA developed HIV/AIDS as a weapon (pp. 8–9). We know about these Soviet disinformation practices now due to archived media sources and further research, and digital disinformation requires new archiving efforts to analyze contemporary digital falsehoods. Organizations such as Bellingcat, Forensic Architecture, Center for Spatial Technologies, Sucho, Mnemonic, and The Center for Urban History in Lviv (the last two of which have contributed essays to this special feature), have begun this work by documenting, archiving and investigating digital information, disinformation, and physical attacks, including those on Bucha, Kramatorsk, Kremenchuk, Kyiv TV tower and Babyn Yar (Alfred Landecker Foundation, 2022; Bellingcat Investigation Team, 2022; Forensic Architecture, 2022; Higgins, 2022; IIPC, 2022; IWM, 2022; Sheldon, 2022; Spatial Technologies, 2022; Sucho, 2022).

One problem in resisting and archiving disinformation in current digital ecosystems is the fragmented temporalities and the polyvocal structure of narratives as they are shared and ex-

perienced on social media platforms. Social media, through interactivity, feedback and speed of communication, creates a fragmented sense of time, or multiple times, making it difficult to retain attention and determine what happened "before" and "after," as the newsfeed proliferates with new messages and responses to them (Esposito, 1997, pp. 22–23, 26–28; Gerlitz, pp. 1–2; 2012; Poell, 2020, p. 621; Sora, 2016). Such an anti-chronology and multiplicity of views and storytelling techniques can provide fertile ground for disinformation. It is because strategically false narratives shared, responded to, and consumed at different times and on different platforms expand the time and space to produce information disorders and disrupt the construction of meaning via confusion (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 4).

At the same time, digital media significantly changes and, in some cases, interferes with archival practices. While remembering the past has always been an emerging and unstable process (Bowker, 2005, p. 9), documenting, storing and consecutive meaning-making processes are intensely disrupted online. This is due to the vast amount of continuously emerging data, the possibility of always changing past communication activities (through new comments/feedback), or of no longer being able to discover data as a record because it has been deleted, whether by the user or by platform managers. In this way, the historical reconstruction of digital war narratives is challenging, because both present and past activities become flexible processes of data creation, updating, and deletion framed by multiple online temporalities (Otto, 2015 p. 101).

Another problem with consuming and archiving digital information about Russia's war in Ukraine is the difficulty to sustain individual and societal attention. When people stop talking about the war online, the amount of content created daily about it, and therefore future archival material, will diminish — even as the war continues. This is already evident; according to an interview with Emerson Brooking in August 2022, attention to Ukraine in English-language content has dropped from 30 million social media impressions per day during the peak to 1 million in August (Želnienė, 2022).

Although difficult and uncertain, digital grassroots archiving is crucial to document the flexible and interactive nature of social media and provide access to (parts of) the digital past with the goal of diversifying future narratives about the past.

However, this diversification process also brings with it certain issues. Both certainty and uncertainty are reproduced in archival practices. Certainty, because archives organize and allow access to information, that can potentially provide answers to certain questions. Uncertainty is produced in archival practices because it remains unclear how this information is to be interpreted, what data has been discarded — if not even intentionally deleted — by the archivists, and because of questions as to what the archive itself really contains.

The title of this text addresses one of the unintuitive aspects of archives, and especially social media archives. On the one hand, they archive the immediate and emerging present — the ongoing stream of chatter on Telegram groups or Twitter feeds. On the other hand, they are in fact "future-facing institutions" (Nora 1989, pp. 12–13). Whether state-organized or locally collected, archives are about constructing collective memory, and future-making — the archive will dictate how we will look at the past in the future. They have to take into account in the present how future publics will be willing or able to access the past preserved in them.

We argue that disinformation also shares this forward-looking aspect. Like archiving, disinformation aims itself at a public that is as yet unformed, but that it is assumed will emerge and have certain epistemological needs. One of the aims of disinformation is to deconstruct coherence, disrupting collective meaning-making processes. Its intention is to make it difficult to understand the present and therefore harder to build a shared view of the past.

The context of war, and especially a war such as this one, which wishes to erase Ukrainian sovereignty and national self-identity, creates a need for digital archiving to both document disinformation for future research and counter future disinformation-based historical accounts of the war. Disinformation, as an attempt to confuse or mislead in the present, is hard to decipher and deal with in the ongoing stream of social media and short news cycles, but can become a trace of a contested and constructed past. Importantly, archives provide time to create distance from events, as conflicts are settled and wars end, and enable future disinformation research. When looked at from a distance, disinformation may reveal the (hidden) ideologies that were at play as well as the covert actors that spread them.

Times of war have been crucial in the lives of archives for decades. One reason is that wars are historical events, out of the routine of daily life, and thus bring a burst of records and information that need to be archived. The first world war was one of the major sources in the accelerating growth of information that needed to be archived, and led archivists to start being concerned with scale, a concern crucial to this day, especially in the age of big data archives (Thylstrup et al., 2021, p. 22). Another more current war that changed the way social media platforms are perceived within grassroots archival practices is the war in Syria. This is addressed in one of the contributions to this special feature, written by an activist working for Mnemonic, an organization that manages the Syrian digital archive (Kayyali, 2022).

The use of digital networked technologies during war is different in some forms from daily use in relatively stable states and therefore demands careful specific examination. Current-day scholars situate the archive in times of conflict as an "epistemic structure of war in times of digitization, as well as a practice of critique, opposition, and sensorial-affective response to the consequences of historical and ongoing wars" (Agostinho et al., 2020, p. IX). Digital archives provide new spaces and potentialities for remembering and criticizing wars.

Archiving as a data practice stores and documents particular digital data during war, in *medias res*, and thus allows observers to go back to the stream of information, reconstruct its messy temporalities in a more coherent way and inquire into the truth status of information. In that sense archiving, especially by grassroots organizations, can counteract disinformation, and archiving and disinformation stand in opposition as data practices. There is of course no way to guarantee that all community or grassroots archives act in good faith. However, examining the tradition of existing archives of this sort, that can also be called *civic community archives*, shows that they usually have "expressly progressive political aims, questioning established order, contributing to inclusive knowledge production and prosperity" (Fortun et al., 2021, p. 37).

3 The Present Archives: Between Instability and Pluralism

Archiving is not a stable or immutable practice and is going through massive changes in the digital era. As we have exemplified, side by side with the older, more traditional state archives, such as museums or other memory institutions, there are also local and grassroots archives, collected by racial, social or local minorities and NGOs, based on practices on the ground. The availability of digital data and of more accessible digital storage capacity has democratized archives somewhat and allowed smaller communities and non-institutional or non-state actors to join in and significantly contribute to archival efforts. This includes, but is not limited to, initiatives by groups or minorities who feel unrepresented by nation states, or that have a complicated relationship with the regime under which they reside. They create their own memory institutions to tell different stories to the ones inscribed by the state, or to investigate past tragedies or protect cultural heritage that might be missing from institutional archives. The archival efforts

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represented in this special feature with contributions from Dia Kayyali (Mnemonic) and Taras Nazaruk (Center for Urban History in Lviv) are examples of this *civic community archiving*. They are non-state archives that organize locally and aim to expand the scope of memorializing this war. We argue that such grassroots archiving is an important data practice that more scholarly attention should be devoted to. However, one of the challenges of these bottom-up data practices (Milan, 2016), particularly archiving, is how to not reduce complexity and not echo the older state archives. If reality, and therefore its archival preservation, is messy and polyvocal, and sense-making requires constructing narratives, how can that work be done without overwriting or downplaying that complexity or ignoring the different voices involved?

Additionally, there exists another kind of digital archive — social media — huge and unavailable to most people, saved on vast server farms and "cloud" infrastructures. It includes unparalleled amounts of data traces of human behavior, which become proprietary commodities of digital platform monopolies. This collected and archived social media data is key to the political economy and materiality of contemporary platform capitalism. Big data collected on these platforms and on the web are utilized in machine learning algorithms. The sheer size and scale of this data is part of what allowed the current leaps in so-called artificial intelligence. Social media is therefore a new kind of archival practice, a socio-technical tool that does remember human activity and makes sense of it, but in very different ways than humans would.

Social media as an archive is a confusing and ambivalent notion. On the one hand, at the surface level of the individual user, and in short-term temporality, it elicits the illusion of control, empowerment, and of self-curation. It seems like what is online can never be forgotten and will always be available for retrieval and therefore for remembering. On the other hand, we as users have no control over how the data is kept by powerful digital actors, how it is tagged and archived for further retrieval and use, and specifically on social media platforms, we have hardly any knowledge of the rules that dictate what will remain visible. This last point is of particular concern when considering the documentation of war, which can also be seen as the documentation of violence and harm and is therefore not allowed on large social media platforms and is immediately vanished by ML tools, sometimes even before it has been seen by another person (Gillespie, 2018).

Even before the emergence of digital archives, there has been difficulty making sense of archival material after retrieving it because of the incoherence of some of it, and the challenge of grasping events on a large scale. The larger the sheer volume of preservation, the bigger the holes in our ability to make sense of its contents and synthesize it into a clear narrative, and this particular uncertainty is enhanced by the emergence of datafication and amplified by the scale of digital big data archives (Thylstrup et al., 2021).

Big data are uncertain archives — they do not adhere to human logic or sense-making, they are hidden from the common eye and often completely inaccessible after a certain time. In relation to current day wars, and especially the one in Ukraine, big data from social media includes cultural heritage and testimonies of war crimes and human rights violations, and therefore needs to be archived, but social media companies do not always treat this data differently than the data routinely produced on it, and that creates a challenge for archiving efforts.

Social media platforms are a different type of archive than a public archive also because the primary motivations of their architects are not archival — its archival quality is almost a by-product. This stands in contrast, and often in conflict, with the motivation of some users, who in many cases, and particularly in conflict situations, will explicitly treat social media as an archive, uploading data and testimonies of events to it.

As Dia Kayyali (2022) argues in their essay for this feature, the uncertainty of social media

archives was exampled during the Syrian civil war in the previous decade. Using a new algorithm YouTube deleted thousands of videos documenting human rights violations and war atrocities, suspected by the platform as being radicalizing content (Browne, 2017). That was one of the first encounters of activist archivists with the opacity and arbitrariness with which ML algorithms rule online content. The issues raised at that moment are still not solved, and the position of war documentation and archiving remains uncertain on large tech platforms. As seen in this special feature, activist and grassroots archiving are an emerging data practice during war times, and in this war. On the one hand, they are made possible by open-source digital tools, but on the other, over reliance on platforms is also dangerous to the preservation efforts. On social media, logics such as community guidelines and protecting users from unsettling content take precedence over preservation.

4 Situating Data Practices in Ukraine

Another task we wish to fulfil in this special feature, is to draw attention to who is included in the analysis of this war. In the context of the proliferation of archiving and disinformation practices, it is important to situate their analyses and explorations: to cooperate with researchers from the affected regions, such as Ukraine, or with those who know the socio-technical contexts. Some of the prominent online analyses of the war by public intellectuals outside of Ukraine present an abstracted image of the war and of Ukraine, reproducing historical dynamics of *othering* Eastern Europe; scrutiny and assessments of the war are made without cooperation with situated perspectives and descriptions of events in Ukraine. This follows in the footsteps of historical politics of absent attention in which scholars do not pay interest to the opinions of Eastern European scholars and publics. In addition, the "blind trust" in Western intellectuals is also being questioned and the need for situated narratives is encouraged by Eastern European scholars and publics, especially during the recent war (Klimenko, 2022).

While it might sound obvious that one should cooperate with scholars from Ukraine on an equal footing in collecting and analyzing the war data, this is still not the case. Some of the intellectual discourses on the war in Western Europe and the US, among other places, do not incorporate Ukrainian perspectives and knowledge. As political geographer Merje Kuus (2004) argues, historically, this power dynamic and epistemic injustice is especially pertinent to such fluidly-constructed places as Eastern Europe, with their ongoing *othering* (pp. 474–475). Additionally, the geopolitical imaginary from the period of the Cold War, focusing on the interests of big imperial powers — where Eastern Europe is a necessary buffer zone between liberal freedom and socialist suppression — still persists today with regards to discourses of this war. Ukraine and other parts of Eastern Europe are still seen by some from the perspective of being a space that is geographically and ideologically located between Eastern and Western superpowers. This manufactures the denial of cultural, ethnical, and religious diversity, as well as the realities and interests of Eastern European countries, many of whom were occupied or controlled by the Soviet Union in the past, and this is perpetuated in some influential discourses about the war today.

For example, testimonies of this old-world order were exemplified in commentaries made by internationally renowned public intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky, Alexander Kluge and Jürgen Habermas. In their analysis, they do not take into account Ukrainian perspectives who see the current full-scale invasion as an escalation of what started in 2014 with the occupation of Crimea (Dresen et al., 2022; Habermas, 2022; Scahill, 2022). These abstracted representations were criticized by various scholars, including historian Timothy Snyder and

a group of Ukrainian academic economists — Bohdan Kukharskyy, Anastassia Fedyk, Yuriy Gorodnichenko, Ilona Sologoub — as not trying to seriously consider Ukrainian rationalities and Ukraine as a sovereign state (Kukharskyy et al., 2022; Snyder, 2022).

Lack of focus on Ukrainian perspectives also concerns the widely-criticized Amnesty International (2022) report. The report's main claim was that "Ukrainian forces have put civilians in harm's way by establishing bases and operating weapons systems in populated residential areas". It was made in apparent disregard for the cooperation with Amnesty Ukraine activists, and has already been used by the Russian state as an information weapon (Current Time, 2022; Pokalchuk, 2022; Russian Embassy UK, 2022). Another example is an open letter to German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, written in German, English and French by 28 prominent German public figures and intellectuals, opposing the supply of heavy weapons to Ukraine, warning of an escalation of the war, and questioning the (moral) competence of the Ukrainian government to make decisions on the war on its own. They argue that it is a mistake to believe that "the decision on the moral responsibility of the further 'cost' in human lives among the Ukrainian civilian population falls exclusively within the competence of their [the Ukrainian] government" (Dresen et al., 2022). While there are undoubtedly more nuanced texts written about this war, we still encounter prominent scholarly positions that avoid providing intellectual attention to the cultural, historical, and infrastructural complexities of Ukraine in their analysis.

According to philosopher Gintautas Mažeikis, this lack of Ukrainian or Eastern European voices and perspectives within the debates is also due to local dynamics. According to him, Eastern Europeans have not been able to create their own narratives and remained "absent" in the stereotypical and outdated post-Cold War narratives:

> This is related to the incapacity to be politically autonomous and to deconstruct the post-totalitarian consciousness of the West. It is strange to see Central Eastern Europe being guided by those Western ideals which were formed during the Cold War under a hard binary opposition: the West — the Soviets. These concepts, these evaluations that grew out of the Cold War binarism, are distorted and deformed, but they are considered to be correct [and one tries to adapt oneself to them] even though it is precisely in this set of stereotypes that we are absent (Bareikytė, 2022).

However, the contemporary digital environment, which has fewer traditional gatekeeping mechanisms than legacy media, such as editorial overview, allows the spread of many critical voices from Ukraine. These accounts describe the war in an empirically rich manner and are accessible in English. Scholars including Svitlana Mativyenko and Asia Bazdyrieva write ethnographic narratives and share them online in order to capture the everyday experiences of this war (see Institute of Network Cultures, 2022; Meduzalove, n.d.) Musicians residing in Ukraine describe the realities of war in Youtube conversations (HVLV Bar, n.d.) Influencers on Twitter, Instagram and TikTok provide their perspectives on the wide variety of topics regarding this war, including Russian colonialism, energy infrastructures, and the lives of cats, such as Stepan (loveyoustepan, n.d.) with its 1.3 million followers.

There is, of course, much more diverse digital information about life in Ukraine shared online today that makes perspectives from Ukraine "present" within those "absent" post-Cold War narratives. This includes online conferences, such as "Reconstruction of Ukraine: Ruination / Representation / Solidarity," which brought together dozens of Ukrainian artists, scholars and institutions to share their views on the reconstruction of the country. They emphasize

it "must be a Ukrainian-led project, [and] it ought also to be undergirded by non-invasive but far-reaching and sustainable international support in terms of funding, expertise and shared knowledge."(Center for Urban History et al., 2022) This is in addition to the many solidarity networks and initiatives inside and outside of Ukraine that provide financial aid and knowledge exchange in times of war, such as Artists at Risk (2022) and Museum Crisis Center Ukraine (2022) Some of these online activities and interactions can be digitally archived, as demonstrated by the Telegram archiving initiative at the Center for Urban History (2022) in Lviv. Archiving here is also a means to keep the war experiences and narratives present and to resist. In the words of Taras Nazaruk (2022), from Lviv, featured in this special edition:

> Being in a state of war also means a vital need to act in order to resist[...]. Documenting the war is also a way of getting out of war, processing the shock of invasion and adjusting to the reality of resistance (p. 222).

In all of these examples, we can observe how people in Ukraine act, and produce and archive the stories about this war and thus inscribe themselves in future post-war discourses via digital means.

It is important to stress here that we do not idealize geographic situatedness as a tool for universal war knowledge that allows objective analysis of war data. According to Nazaruk (2022), Ukrainians form fragmented perspectives about the war, as we do too, and it happens often through media, including digital media. Additionally, as Matviyenko & Getmanova (2022) state in this feature, situatedness is not based on a stable place but is a relational process that can go beyond a specific time and place. Bowker (2005) makes a similar point, arguing that individual experience is grounded in and shaped by the aggregation of multiple experiences of others. The multiplicity of dynamic, physically embodied as well as digitally framed experiences in Ukraine — living in a constantly changing city, participating in neighborhood Telegram chats — forms not universal — everywhere applicable — but relational experiences of this war. At the same time, it is clear that being in Ukraine and being from Ukraine now provides a physically and digitally intensively embodied knowledge of the war that is different from the knowledge gained in the safety of Western European cities. Or, as Nazaruk (2022) puts it: "it gives us a perspective to observe the context of current developments while living through them" (p. 222).

This is why it is crucial to cooperate, establish and maintain institutional and personal academic links with scholars from Ukraine and Eastern Europe, whose perspectives are still sorely lacking in parts of Western scholarly environments, in order to exchange and incorporate more and different relational-fragmented perspectives into the analysis of war data and to counter the often disconnected, abstracted explanations of the war, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe. It might be inconvenient because it entails the extra work of finding research partners, language difficulties, contradictory interpretations and cultural misunderstandings, but it is necessary to forge new relations and carry out in this way a situated analysis of war data.

Engaging with scholars from Ukraine to investigate data practices is only one part of situating data of the war. War data is not only productive in terms of its existence and analysis, but is always based on loss and distortion due to the destructive nature of war. As Kateryna Iakovlenko (2022) illustrates in this feature, war destruction eliminates the very possibility of cultural heritage emergence, and what could have been said, happened or created will never be. Moreover, what has been said and will be said can be distorted and suppressed, as described by Matviyenko & Getmanova (2022) in their article about Russian filtration methods that include tracking and recording as much data as possible about the occupied people, and thereby

lead to war victims erasing their online traces and changing their personal histories to avoid torture. While cooperative practices with scholars, activists, archivists from Ukraine may allow us to gather different perspectives and make sense of some parts of this war, it is important to consider how the archived data is being used for supposedly well-meaning academic practices, which discourses it ends up maintaining or excluding, and who might become its victims. Who owns the archived data? How are the "right to be forgotten" and user anonymity maintained?

5 Whose Data, Whose Archive?

In his book *Memory Practices in the Sciences*, Bowker (2005) raises an important question concerned with the politics of data preservation sites: "Really listening to other ways of knowing entails more than databasing[...] How should we record and remember other ways of knowing?" (p. 219). While answering this question is beyond the scope of this article, a situated approach to data practices that includes cooperation with local researchers to archive and analyze war data while acknowledging tensions, losses, and ideologies is a starting point.

However, the use of social media as a preservation tool, and the use of data on it in wartime is complex: although it allows for democratizing archival practices by documenting diverse situated information and knowledge, at the same time, the use of social media brings to the surface concerns about preservation and the spread of disinformation and propaganda. Digital environments allow new techniques and tools of propaganda to spread. We should also take note, that the influence of propaganda is not easily reversible. As Matviyenko (2022) argues, we live in propagandist informational environment, and go through a process of long-term persuasion that affects human subjectivity and cannot be undone quickly by short-term methods, such as fact-checking.

Civic community archiving, we have argued, can be used to counter disinformation, help alleviate confusion, and to help make sense of the war in an evolving manner. But, the practices of digital archiving and disinformation are managed by the fragmented temporalities of social media and the proprietary control of data by private platforms that dictate online visibility norms. They control the ways in which the digital past may be remembered, as the past statements online can be continuously updated according to user feedback or deleted. In addition, users' attention online is focused on many topics and platforms, thus providing multiple spaces and times to consume disinformation.

To counter these effects, activist digital archiving in Ukraine and beyond aims to preserve digital information about the war for future research by documenting online data, when it is possible and allowed by digital platforms. Research based on archived data is future-focused, aims to construct coherence within messy online narratives and criticize disinformation empirically, with one of the goals being to hold those responsible for the war and destruction to account. To do that, it is necessary to analyze archived war data by cooperating with Ukrainian scholars — while acknowledging tensions of cooperation and research politics — in order to better understand what is happening in the country and the region, to counter those accounts of the war that present an abstracted image of the war and Ukraine and ignore perspectives from Ukraine, and to situate data in the process. In our own scholarly practice, this cooperation that began with "Memory Under Fire" continues with this feature, and we are looking forward to further cooperation with scholars from Ukraine and beyond in order to learn about and further research Russia's war in Ukraine.

In this feature, we are proud to present four articles that in their own way situate data practices during Russia's war in Ukraine and reflect on the changing character of archives in

a digitally connected world. Visual art researcher and art critic Kateryna Iakovlenko writes about visual and artistic expressions of the war, online and beyond, and reflects on the art that will not be made, due to the destruction of cultural heritage and the violence inflicted on the war victims. Taras Nazaruk, head of Digital History projects at the Center for Urban History, describes the development, politics and ethics of the emergency Telegram archiving initiative, which collects evidence of the Russian invasion and war data on popular Telegram channels in Ukraine. Dia Kayyali, Associate Director of Advocacy at Mnemonic, tells the story of the Syrian Archive, and highlights the importance of archiving online testimonies of human rights violations, both for legal proceedings and as digital monuments. Gender studies scholar Daria Getmanova, and Svitlana Matviyenko, Assistant Professor at Simon Fraser University, document a case study of the deportation and filtration process of Ukrainian citizens during Russia's war in Ukraine and theorize a contemporary subject of deportation. These texts start a conversation on crucial material and digital aspects of Russia's war in Ukraine, and we hope to continue it by further engaging and discussing with other excellent writers and thinkers from Ukraine and beyond.

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