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Making memories of an unfolding war

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Graf, Sebastian

2023

Document Version:
Other version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Graf, S. (2023). *Making memories of an unfolding war: Virtuality and the emerging assemblage of the Ukrainian Meta History: Museum of War*. Abstract from MEMORY STUDIES ASSOCIATION 7th ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Newcastle, United Kingdom.

Total number of authors:

1

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

Abstract Memory Studies Association 7th Annual Conference

3-7 July 2023, Newcastle University

Making memories of an unfolding war: Virtuality and the emerging assemblage of the Ukrainian *Meta History: Museum of War*

Sebastian Graf, PhD Candidate in History, Lund University

Mail: sebastian.graf@hist.lu.se

This paper aims to shed light on the ways virtuality as a mode of memory-making is deployed by Ukrainian virtual museums to shape the understandings of the unfolding Russian war against Ukraine since 2014. When it comes to virtual museums of war, issues of mediatization, remembering, and archiving take center stage. In this regard, what has been called the ‘connective turn’ (Hoskins 2011) or ‘deep mediatization’ (Couldry and Hepp 2017) has certainly widened the possibilities to engage with war. A multitude of digital spaces have transformed into sites of conflict and contestation, and thus constitute a part of today’s theatres of war (cf. Ford and Hoskins 2022; Kuntsman 2010). Against this backdrop, the illegal full-scale Russian invasion in Ukraine offers a case to map how virtual museums of war are embedded in today’s connective environment of humans, codes, and algorithms. In particular, I examine the ways the *Meta History: Museum of War* (MHMW), a virtual museum linked to the Ukrainian state, aspires to be an active, engaging, and even provoking agent in the war. What renders this case study particularly interesting are the ways and modes through which meanings are ascribed to present events turn into past. More precisely, the MHMW enacts the unfolding of the war through digital non-fungible token artworks. By considering the MHMW as an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 1988), this paper maps and follows the becoming of the museum, not only regarding the exhibition but the infrastructure and affordances as well. To this end, I combine new materialist approaches (Hörl and Burton 2017; Bennett 2010) with digital methods (Rogers 2019) and digital ethnography (Burrell 2016; Calindro 2017; Pink 2016). Such perspectives add insights into the production of the virtual engagement with war and the ways the museum is assembled within the connective environment. Furthermore, the paper illuminates the different modes the MHMW is deploying to reach its objectives of mediating and remembering war to repel the occupying forces, to harvest financial and moral support, but also to archive the war for future generations. Therefore, I argue that the renderings of war by the MHMW are not only a visual representation and textual narrativization of the present becoming past, but rather a way to wield influence on the events that will be exhibited and remembered in the future. All in all, the MHMW is shaping a ‘prosthetic memory’ (Landsberg 2004) which is to be conveyed on multiple levels — visual, emotional, technical. In the face of the multiple wounds the war is inflicting upon Ukraine, the museum seeks support for a just cause: the defense of a country under attack.