

## International Conference

### Artistic Practices between Aesthetics and Power: Propaganda, Mobilization, and Resistance

**June 30, 2026, 9:30 – 10:30**

**Estonian Literary Museum**

Vanemuise 42, Tartu, Estonia

Plenary Lecture

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#### **Propaganda of Memory vs. Politics of Oblivion: On the Possibility of Bearing Witness**

Contemporary wars are accompanied not only by struggles over territory but also by struggles over regimes of memory. In the Russian context, one can observe a paradoxical combination of an intensified propaganda of memory and a systematic politics of oblivion. On the one hand, the state actively mobilizes the memory of the Great Patriotic War, transforming it into a central element of national identity and a symbolic resource for legitimizing the present war (“special military operation”). On the other hand, this same memorial politics is accompanied by the suppression and linguistic transformation of present violence through ideological “necrospeak” — a language that normalizes death, masks war through euphemisms, and blurs responsibility. As a result, a peculiar configuration of public discourse emerges in which the hypertrophy of memory about the past begins to function as a mechanism of collective forgetting of the present.

In this context, the question of the possibility of bearing witness acquires particular significance. What is at stake is not a claim to a final or “truthful” description of reality, but rather the possibility of a non-prejudiced and critically distanced view of what is taking place. In this regard, the strategy

proposed by Marc Richir as a “skeptical epoche” proves particularly productive: witnessing appears as a practice of “highlighting” the unnaturalness of what has become familiar. Such testimonies carry the trace of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) — a gesture in which a world familiar to everyone is at once recognized and called into question. They appeal to our own experience while at the same time exposing the unnaturalness of what has come to be perceived as self-evident (for instance, the normalization of corruption or the assumption that “politics is a dirty business”). However, such a practice of witnessing also demands a certain effort on the part of the observer: a kind of conversion that suspends habitual and clichéd perceptions of the world and shifts us into a state of suspension of ready-made meanings — stable concepts continuously reproduced by propaganda. In this gap — in this suspension of ready-made meanings — a genuinely political space may emerge, distinct from the ideological. In this sense, the capacity to “bear one’s century,” as Grigory Pomerants once formulated it and as Alexei Navalny embodied in his own way, is linked to the possibility of remaining a witness to one’s time without accepting the self-evidences imposed by it.

*Dr. Natalia Artemenko, PhD*, is a philosopher and Visiting Professor at TU Dortmund (Germany). She has been a Visiting Professor at HEPI since 2018 and served as Editor-in-Chief of the international journal *HORIZON. Studies in Phenomenology*. She has held research fellowships at universities in Bochum (2002–2003, 2007, 2010, 2011), Heidelberg (2013), Wrocław (2014), and Jena (2014), and has taught as a Visiting Professor in Lithuania (2017), Bulgaria (2016), and the Czech Republic (2021). She is a member of the Central and East European Society for Phenomenology and the Nordic Society for Phenomenology. She has also worked as a translator and academic editor of major phenomenological texts from German and English, including works by Husserl and Heidegger. Her work focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century continental philosophy and the phenomenological tradition, with particular emphasis on subjectivity, trauma and memory studies, phenomenological psychotherapy, and the political dimensions of intersubjectivity. She is the author of more than 150 academic publications and over twenty collective monographs, including *The Phenomenological Concept of the World* (2024), *What Is Phenomenology* (2024), *Topology of Trauma* (2020), and the monograph *Haideggerovskaja “poterjannaja” rukopis’ / Zu Martin Heideggers Interpretation von Aristoteles* (2012), devoted to Heidegger’s early thought.