

*In Memory of Memory*- context and discussion themes

For the Melikian Center Reading Group, <https://asu.zoom.us/j/98076549674>

Thursday, October 21, 2021. 6 PM MST/PDT, Offered by Jacob Lassin



Maria Stepanova (photo by Andrey Natotsinsky)

Context:

“*Memory* is not a novel but ‘a romance,’ a love affair with memory and its advocates. ‘This book about my family is not about my family at all,’ she writes, ‘but something quite different: the way memory works, and what memory wants from me.’ At first, her mission seems quite clear: she will root around in her familial past and bring each of her ancestors into the spotlight, if only for a moment. ‘None of these people, not those still alive, nor those already dead, were ever seen,’ she writes. ‘There was, it felt to me, an urgency in speaking about them and on their behalf, and the endeavor frightened me.’ Stepanova becomes the medium through which the living and the dead are reclaimed from oblivion and immortalized on the page for all to see. ‘To start writing,’ she writes, ‘was to cease to be a curious listener, an addressee, and to become instead the horizon point of the family line, the destination for the many-eyed, many-decked ship of family history.’”- Linda Kinstler, <https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-altar-of-oblivion-on-maria-stepanovas-in-memory-of-memory/>

Questions:

1. How would you categorize this book? Is it a novel, collection of essays, literary documentary, or something different entirely?
2. Stepanova is best known as a poet, did you see anything in the book that stood out as particularly influenced by her poetic practice?
3. How did you read the book as a coherent whole?
4. Why do you think that she labels some sections as “not a chapter?” How does their inclusion break us from the main flow of the book? How do you think they should be understood and interpreted?
5. How did you find her digressions on different artists and writers? What did they add to your understanding of her family history?
6. How did reading this book make you reflect upon your own family histories?