Critical Criminology (2024) 32:139–153
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-023-09738-0

Between Crime and Commemoration: Human–Object Relationships in the Treasure Hunting for World War II Objects

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Accepted: 20 November 2023 / Published online: 26 January 2024
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Abstract
Drawing on the sample of data gathered from Russian treasure hunting forums and from other social media platforms, this paper looks at human-object relationships that exist in the grey area of treasure hunting for World War II objects in Russia. It explores the confluence of criminal or criminalised acts with acts of commemoration as they are mediated through the network of relationships between object and human. As a result, it is possible to argue that objects have certain agentic qualities that affect people in their group and networks of relations. This suggests that further research on objects and their influence is necessary, particularly their role and influence on crime.

Introduction

Criminological research tends to focus on social aspects of law-breaking. Summarizing the criminological research of the past century, Warr (2002: 3) argues that there are only a few conclusions that can be drawn with a great deal of confidence, one of them being that: “Criminal conduct is predominantly social behaviour (…) and the single strongest predictor of criminal behaviour known to criminologists is the number of delinquent friends an individual has”. Not surprisingly there has been an interest in criminological research to use methods which focus on social environments and on the (social) connections someone has (see McGloin and Kirk 2010; Papachristos et al. 2012).

However, what exactly do we mean by the ‘social’? If we turn to Latour (2005: 43), he, for example, criticises viewing the ‘social’ as something that “has already been assembled and acts as a whole”. Instead, he proposes to view ‘social’ as something that is constructed every step of the way by actors that can be both human and non-human (Latour 2005). He argues that every human society is made more stable by enlisting non-humans (Latour 1993). Although the ‘agentive turn’ in social theory has inspired new ways of thinking about object agency (for a brief review see Hoskins 2006), this perspective that includes non-human actors has not been fully addressed in criminological research and the influence

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of objects on criminality remains under-researched. Brown (2006: 225) argues that criminological theories are preoccupied with polarization and binary oppositions by doing so they exclude the possibility that “the most effective explanations and understandings of crime and control arise at the interstices”.

Maurice Halbwachs (1992: 38) developed the concept of collective memory and argued that individuals can coherently remember only as part of the group; as he writes “there is no point in seeking where they [memories] are preserved in my brain (…) they are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them”. Collective memory “is the active past that forms our identities” (Olick and Robbins 1998: 111). As such, commemoration is an important part of collective memory. This implies that a memory is a social event, and as such is influenced by social networks. If we include objects as being part of the social, then it follows that objects are agentic in at least the sense that they will affect memories in social networks that they are part of.

By observing how Russian-speaking metal detector users express themselves on so-called treasure hunting forums and other platforms, this paper aims to clarify the human-object relationships that exist within a poorly defined grey area between legal and illegal activity. It explores the confluence of criminal or ‘grey’ acts with acts of commemoration as they are mediated through the network of relationships between object and human. I argue that the use of metal detectors to locate low-value cultural objects in the context of possible illegality is, in itself, a commemorative act. The result is the creation of a human-object hybrid that transcends the boundaries, limitations, and social norms of individual human and individual object.

Methodology

The majority of the data for this paper comes from treasure hunting forums and from other social media platforms such as online blogs. Some of the narratives discussed in this paper were initially observed during a snapshot analysis of the Russian treasure hunting forums, which was carried out as part of a European Commission-funded study into the illicit trade in cultural goods (Brodie et al. 2019; Bērziņa 2021). The snapshot itself focussed on the types of objects found, estimated financial values and the quality of the objects. However, it was also possible to get a glimpse into treasure hunters’ viewpoints as these forums, unlike more traditional online marketplaces, offer a space to express opinions about different topics ranging from discussing the importance of finds to how to avoid legal trouble (Bērziņa 2021, Bērziņa forthcoming).

The initial narratives encountered during the snapshot were then further explored by conducting an online search attempting to uncover specific blogs, forums, and other media to thicken the initial data. Wang (2016) uses the term “thick data (with nod to Clifford Geertz)” to talk about data “brought to light using qualitative, ethnographic research methods that uncover people’s emotions, stories, and models of their world. It’s the sticky stuff that’s difficult to quantify”. Wang (2016: online) argues that it is “the best method for mapping unknown territory”. The data can be thickened by using ethnographic principles, by long-term observations “with an agility in following users from one [online] platform to another” (Latzko-Toth, Bonneau, and Millette 2017: 204).

This study does not claim to offer an exhaustive list of all the narratives pertaining to treasure hunting for World War II objects. Instead by using a small sample data uncovered

by following the narratives that were initially encountered during the snapshot analysis, it attempts to chart the unknown territory that then can be further explored in the future with a bigger data set.

Conceptual Framework: Following the Affective Objects and Commemoration Practices

To explore the confluence of criminal or criminalised acts with acts of commemoration, I explore the 'grey' treasure hunting activity from an object-oriented perspective. When it comes to treasure hunting and subsequent collection of cultural heritage objects, it is problematic to justify the view of objects as being completely passive (see Bērziņa 2021) and the relationships between humans and objects as being one-directional. For instance, Molotch (2003), when talking about the objects of one's life, argues that objects cannot be reduced to a simple representation of a particular brand; instead some of the objects have a meaning that to a degree only that person can sense. Molotch (2003: 11) writes that:

> "(…) every object, and each aspect of every object, is rich with meaning and affect (…) Sometimes, in ways inexplicable to those who experience it, the "charge" can be especially strong, calling forth socio-psychological associations that move the observer".

Therefore, in this paper I view these cultural heritage objects as more than just passive, interchangeable things. They can affect human behaviour.[1] Objects are part of social networks. By adding objects to our analysis, we can view this activity in a more nuanced way than if we just focussed on the social worlds and meaning making by the treasure hunters. Perhaps by shifting our focus on the things and following them, when we cannot follow the humans, we can fill in the gaps in our knowledge. This could potentially lead to new conceptions of processes pertaining to the commodification and trading of certain types of objects such as cultural heritage objects.

Follow the Thing

Before we focus on collecting and trading of low financial value antiquities, we first need to consider that a commodity is a "thoroughly socialized thing" (Appadurai 1986: 6). Anything can become a commodity at different stages of its existence, and during the commodity stage the most important feature of an object is its exchangeability (Appadurai 1986). As such Kopytoff (1986: 73) argues that commoditization should be viewed as "a process of becoming". In a similar way that one can write a biography about a person, one can write an object's biography asking the same questions one would ask of a human (Kopytoff 1986). Therefore, objects have a "capability of accumulating histories" (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 170). A 'follow the thing' methodological approach, inspired by authors such as Appadurai (1986), Harvey (1990) and Marcus (1995), aims to explore the social

[1] There are many people who have taken objects from sites such as Pompeii, Italy and Petrified Forest National Park, the United States, and then returned them because they believe that these objects are affecting them by cursing them or bringing bad luck (see Giuffrida 2020 on a tourist returning artefacts from Pompeii). It might not appear rational, but it is rational to those people.

lives of things and trajectories these objects can take. One could argue that the social life of a thing can be more important than its physical attributes as different people can connect with different aspects of its social life. For instance, Saunders (2005) writes that trench-art[2] objects created by soldiers can hold experiences and emotions not understandable to civilians whose attraction to the same type of objects is not understood by veterans. All of this considered, if we must 'follow the thing' to understand the lives of the objects, then we also must include them as being part of the 'social'. People are connected by and with non-human entities; their lives are intertwined. As Hoskins (1998) discovered during her ethnographic fieldwork with the Kodi, she could not collect histories of objects and the life histories of humans separately as they were so intertwined.

Collective Memory and Commemoration Practises

Human social life consists of many different commemorative practises that mark and give meaning to it (Saito 2010). When people commemorate, they do so as part of a social group. Membership in a social group: "does not simply pre-exist this process, but is actually constituted *through* commemoration" (Saito 2010: 630, emphasis original). However, while humans do much of the remembering together, it is "individuals who remember, not groups or institutions" (Coser 1992: 22). Yet inevitably objects of war, soldiers, their relatives, and the state are all connected in networks of relationships and commemoration. For example, the state-funded military ceremonies connect the fallen relative member to their families. Danilova (2015) recalls her personal memories associated with Victory Day in Russia. She recalls visiting with the family her grandfather's grave, a veteran of World War II, located in a different city or visiting the graves of the unknown soldiers at the central military cemetery instead. They paid "equal tributes" to both their member of the family and the unknown soldiers (Danilova 2015: 196). Looking back at those experiences as a researcher, Danilova (2015: 197) suggests that "annual tributes to fallen soldiers constructed a strong connection between the experience of [her] family and the country".

Commemoration practise provides participants with "objects and performances" that create a narrative of the particular event which is intertwined with a shared identity of a group and as such "commemoration constitutes social groups" (Saito 2010: 630). In this view, commemoration can be seen as a group-making activity— participants are provided with objects, rituals and performances that link all of them together. Yet I would argue that these objects are not passive tools, they are also affecting humans in particular ways.

Objects can stand in for fallen soldiers and provide emotional relief to the family of that soldier. Saunders (2009) describes how the remains of private George Herbert Parker who died during the First World War have never been identified, but in the year 2000, a cut-throat razor inscribed with his service number was found. Saunders (2009: 51) writes that while the remains have not been identified, "the inscribed razor—in a sense standing in for the body—has reclaimed the identity (…) of a soldier missing for some 90 years and reestablished his individual humanity". The importance of objects is also expressed in civilian memories. In 2010, the state-owned TV channel Rossiia aired a series of short videos, each of which contained a mix of historic footage such as the fall of Berlin with an interview

[2] Term 'trench art' itself has been described as "notoriously vague", and as evoking inaccurate images (Saunders 2000: 44). Saunders (2000: 45, emphasis original) describes it as "any item made by soldiers, prisoners of war, and civilians, from war *matériel directly, or any other material, as long as it and they are associated temporally and/or spatially with armed conflict or its consequences*".

of a famous Russian personality who would recall a memory associated with World War II (Oushakine 2013). Oushakine (2013: 292) highlights a key element of some of these interviews—a remembrance is linked with a tangible trace of the past such as a piece of fabric or a toy soldier. He writes that "[a]cting as a metonym of the Great Patriotic War, the object, then, provides a necessary point of entry into a personalized and affectively charged version of the nation's history" (Oushakine 2013: 292–293). As such the objects play the part in remembering and remaking memories of World War II. These objects have a meaningful and impactful role; it could be argued that objects are agentic in at least the sense that they influence and encapsulate memories in social networks that they are part of.

Commoditization and Commemoration

Commoditization can be seen as a process and a performative action. Particular things can also be excluded from this process and therefore made less commodifiable or not commodifiable at all. Kopytoff (1986: 77) notes that "everyone is against commoditizing what has been publicly marked as singular and made sacred" such as national memorials and public parks. Commemoration also can be seen as a performative action where people are provided with "objects and performances" (Saito 2010: 630). Through commemoration specific collective memory is sustained, and therefore collective memory "is both social and tied to materiality" (Borgstede 2010: 386). This suggests that when it comes to World War II, its symbols and objects could be important for commemoration and as such perhaps excluded from commoditization. Kopytoff (1986: 80) writes that there is "clearly a yearning for singularization in complex societies". This can turn into "a collective hunger" where objects become singularized and turned into collectibles (Kopytoff 1986: 80). Yet paradoxically when an object becomes "more singular and worthy of being collected" (Kopytoff 1986: 81), it also becomes valuable, and as it becomes more valuable it receives a price tag and as such it becomes a commodity (Kopytoff 1986). As memories can be influenced by objects, it follows that objects also play a part in certain actions being taken. Some of these actions can potentially violate law or societal norms as humans pursue objects that through commemoration have gained value. However, for some things commodification might not be their "socially relevant feature" (Appadurai 1986: 13). In a similar way, certain things and events are considered "untouchable" and this notion transcends the boundaries of time and space. This is evident in the case of a military heritage.

Military heritage evokes strong emotions and is both connected to local and national traditions as well as intangible heritage (Klupsz 2008). Collins (2014: 301) writing about interaction rituals, notes that successful interaction rituals produce "membership symbols– i.e. Durkheimian sacred objects" and emotional energy. Successful interaction rituals "build up into what Durkheim called collective effervescence, the rhythmic entertainment of all participants into a mood that feels stronger than any of them individually" (Collins 2014: 299). He further writes that "symbols are significant because they are infused with emotion, the solidarity that came from the situations in which attention was focussed upon them" (Collins 2014: 301). Coser (1992: 25) notes that in Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence, "physical props, be they works of art or totemic figures (…) assured continuity between the active and passive phases of collective life". The issue with this, as Coser (1992: 25) writes, is that "in many instances such physical objects of reference seem to be absent". This is something that Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory overcomes. For him, the periods between collective effervescence and ordinary life are "filled and fed by collective memory (…) that both commemorates the events through

calendar celebrations and is strengthened by them. There are no empty spots in the lives of groups (…) an apparent vacuum between creative periods is filled by collective memory" (Coser 1992: 25). What is interesting when it comes to World War II, however, is that it is possible to see the confluence of all of these ideas. The state-sponsored events (rituals) infuse and charge objects and symbols associated with World War II with strong emotions, and these objects remain there also in the periods of ordinary life; also in the periods of ordinary life, carrying that charge on continuously.

Additionally, as many small, low-value objects are found with the dead, these objects also inevitably become connected with concepts such as 'soldier' and 'sacrifice'. War and the death that is inevitably part of it are often linked to 'sacredness'. The death of the soldier is seen as "the ultimate sacrifice" which implies "that this act has no peer", it is "unique and singular" and "[i]n that sense shares a fundamental characteristic with the sacred" (Brænder 2009: 30). Fallen soldiers are seen as "victims of duty" who sacrificed themselves for the cause (Castillo 2009: 40). Even though archaeological objects or trench art of modern conflict might have almost no "intrinsic value", their importance comes from their ability to "recall via memory and imagination the circumstances of their production" (Saunders 2009: 39). Considering the strong government-sponsored nationalist narrative and almost ritualistic attention to World War II events and symbols in Russia, it is possible to speculate that World War II objects will evoke emotions and actions that influence human engagements with these objects. Saunders (2005: 78–79) writes that we must acknowledge that "objects make people just as much as people make objects".

This notion of "sacredness" has been used to inspire soldiers during military battles. One of the most famous Soviet songs about World War II, called "The Sacred War", was written in 1941. In its chorus it calls World War II "the people's war, a sacred war".[3] The song reportedly gained huge popularity on the fronts of World War II and helped to maintain high morale of the Soviet troops, especially during the hard defensive battles (победа.екатеринбург.рф n.d). Even nowadays, World War II in Russia is arguably seen as "sacred". The "untouchability" of World War II memory is even written into Federal Law. On 5th of May 2014, the President of Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, signed the Federal Law N128-FZ. This law aimed to counteract attempts to infringe on historic memory related to the events of World War II (Presidential Administration of Russia 2014). Considering the special treatment of World War II, Russia will form the basis of the exploration of sacred war objects and the relationships that people have with these objects.

Russia as a Case Study

Despite the large number of people who allegedly participate in treasure hunting using a metal detector (see Zubacheva 2017), Russia is nearly absent from research on the global antiquities trade (with some exceptions such as Hardy [2016]). Metal detecting in Russia is not forbidden, however; the legality of the act depends on what type of objects someone finds and where they are looking for them. It is forbidden to look for objects over 100 years old without a permit and the use of metal detectors counts as an aggravating circumstance. It is possible to break the law even when looking for objects that are younger than 100 years old. For example, if someone finds, transports, or keeps weapons (their

[3] All translations and anglicizations from Russian to English are my own.

main parts or ammunition) of World War II, they can find themselves in legal trouble as these weapons are covered by article 222 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. Therefore, people who treasure hunt using a metal detector (from here on abbreviated as metal detectorists) in Russia operate in a legal grey area.

Russia has developed a strong government-sponsored narrative concerning the World Wars, especially World War II (Klymenko 2016). In Russia, the low cost of creating websites facilitates a large proportion of the population to "play a significant role in the creation of online memorials" (Bernstein 2016: 423). Many sections of the population are collaborating with the Russian government "to create a usable past out of the supposedly apolitical (non-communist) Soviet World War II legacy" (Bernstein 2016: 423). Furthermore, many people from the general population work to keep the memory of the fallen soldiers alive. In Russia alone, there are over 40,000 official searchers, united under "Search movement of Russia", who are looking for missing-in-action Soviet soldiers (Поисковое движение России n.d). These searchers look for the remains of soldiers, try to identify them based on their belongings, notify any relatives, and give the soldiers a proper burial. On the opposite side of the spectrum are people who comb the battlefields for military memorabilia purely for personal collection or marketization. In between these opposite poles are people who find human remains, notify the appropriate authorities, but keep spent ammunition, shell fragments and medals for themselves (Losh 2017; Поисковое движение России n.d). A Polish metal detectorist was quoted in the press saying "I never take jewellery or gold teeth from the dead. But medals—that's OK."(Losh 2017: online). Although this is a quote from a Polish metal detectorist, one could speculate that similar patterns are also evident in Russia. What these varied examples show is that individuals are "caught between the cultural structure of commoditization and [their] own personal attempts to bring a value order to the universe of things" (Kopytoff 1986: 76).

The strong government-sponsored World War II narrative makes certain aspects of that period "untouchable". These notions of "sacredness" and "untouchability" extend the boundaries of time and space. In the case of Russia, this was seen in the conflict relating to the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn. In 2007, the government of Estonia decided to go ahead with the relocation of the war memorial, which is more widely known by the informal name Bronze Soldier, from central Tallinn to the Defence Forces Cemetery located outside the centre of Tallinn. This decision escalated tensions between ethnic Estonians and the Russian community and triggered riots, known as the Bronze Night, in Estonia. Many Estonians view the statue as representing Soviet oppression, while for many Russians it represents the triumph over the Nazis (Tapon 2018). This particular incident emphasised that events, symbols, and objects surrounding World War II are emotionally and politically charged and as such should be considered as affecting the actions of people.

The World War II Narrative in Russia

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, contemporary Russia was in search of historical foundations that would be accepted by its people. World War II, or rather "a sanitized version of 'Russia's World War II', became an event "that many amongst both leaders and led could agree on" (Edele 2017: 93). The World War II "myth" is "the only Soviet myth that survived the destruction of Soviet mythology" (Khapaeva 2009: 367). World War II has become sacral and references to it "appeal to [its] *iconicity*" (Wood 2011: 175, emphasis original). It is "perceived visually and through affect rather than through reason"

(Wood 2011: 175). Wertsch (2008) when analysing a civil disorder between ethnic Estonians and ethnic Russians in Estonia, introduced a notion of 'deep collective memory'. He argued that "cultural tools, especially in the form of narratives, shape the speaking and thinking of individuals" and tools of collective memory are shared by members of a group (Wertsch 2008: 139). These toolkits, however, are usually provided through education, public holidays, and media rather than being a result of individualistic research (Wertsch 2008). One example of such a 'toolkit' is a school history textbook which can be viewed as "a policy document that is produced by historians on behalf of the state" (Klymenko 2016: 39). For instance, it has been noted that Soviet-era educated people draw on specific narrative tools provided to them by textbooks and use specific phrases that are not found in the accounts of other countries such as the United States to describe historic events, indicating that the state plays a role in the creation of a collective memory and remembering (Wertsch 2002, 2008). This can be seen as part of creating a particular collective memory where "accounts of *the* collective memory of any group or society are usually accounts of the memories of some subset of the group (…) whose opinions are more highly valued" (Olick 1999: 338–339).

Identification with a particular group is an important feature of collective memory, the ritualistic nature of commemorative events providing participants with "vicarious experience of a past event" and through that people without a first-hand experience might start to experience their second-hand knowledge as a living memory (Saito 2010: 630). Similarly, Oushakine (2013) views acts of public remembrance as performative rituals, however he adds to them the emotional dimension. Historical events and facts are "emotionally relived and reenacted" rather than viewed in terms of their historical significance (Oushakine 2013: 274). It is important to note that traces of historic events produce and sustain "a certain emotional charge" and "[t]angible traces of the past" map out past events that were not witnessed first-hand (Oushakine 2013: 274). As such in this view, it could be argued that objects have a certain emotional appeal that could influence how people engage with them. For example, for Latour (2005), this is enough to suggest that these objects have a degree of agency, as in Actor-Network Theory an actor, or, more suitably for nonhumans, an actant (Latour 1994), "can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action" (Latour 1996: 373).

Commemorative events reinforce the merging of second-hand knowledge with a first-hand experience by putting people with first-hand experience at the centre of attention (Saito 2010). This is particularly evident with Putin's focus on veterans. For instance, Putin has renewed the Soviet era practise that can be translated as Memory Lesson, where students meet up with World War II veterans "to remember and grieve collectively" (Wood 2011: 178). These lessons amongst other things teach pride in one's country, respect towards elders, and that greater good stands above individual needs and interests (Wood 2011). However, as the war myth continues to be embraced and "its heroes live on", some have asked "[w]hat will be remembered when the last of the heroes is no more?" (Kirschenbaum 2011: 103).

Crime as Violation or Co-Creation of Memory?

It is evident that there is a certain aura of sacredness that surrounds World War II in Russia. One would expect that based on this sacredness, World War II objects would not be as widely commodified (see Kopytoff 1986). However, despite this there exists a market

for World War II objects in Russia. A portion of these objects is sold on treasure hunting and antiquities forums, while others are kept for personal collections. Although often not explicitly stated, it is implied that metal objects[4] are found with the help of a metal detector. Although at first glance this appears to be a commodification of World War II objects, is it reasonable to argue that is all there is to it? Furthermore, does this act of treasure hunting for World War II memorabilia in fact violate the sacredness of World War II? These issues might not be as clear-cut as they appear.

Certainly, there are cases where money is the main motivator and the actions of diggers are being driven primarily by profit (EconomistUA 2016). On the opposite side of the spectrum, those thousands of people in Russia who spend their free time legally searching for fallen soldiers in order to give them a proper burial are engaging in arguably the most sacred act of remembrance and commemoration. Regarding their motives, they say they have "no selfish goals" and they do "not chase artifacts" (quoted in Шагулин 2015). These examples show two very different attitudes and behaviours—one which focuses on objects and on profit-making, while the other focuses on humans and their sacrifice. However, some diggers have argued that division between legal and illegal diggers and those who look for fallen soldiers is arbitrary. They argue that all of them behave in the same way, but what distinguishes some of them is that they managed to get an official permit from the government (Чихачёв 2011). People who metal detect for archaeological objects as a hobby might be between these two extreme categories of diggers but still might find themselves in the grey area between what is legal or illegal. However, they argue that they are not criminals at heart and, in their eyes, that is their saving grace (Горбачев 2016: 9). A similar notion is expressed by another metal detectorist who says that in his eyes, the most important thing is "to be in harmony with conscience"(Vapour 2020).

As discussed earlier, commodification is a process and a performative action that needs to be continuously engaged in. However, as argued by Appadurai (1986: 13), for some things commodification might not be their "socially relevant feature". This might be the case for World War II objects found by the hobbyist metal detectorists. Instead, these objects might be viewed as tangible traces of historic events (see Oushakine 2013) which deeply affect certain groups of people. Through commemoration people without first-hand experience might start to experience their second-hand knowledge as a living memory (Saito 2010: 63) and through commemorative events symbols and physical objects can become infused with emotions and have a strong charge. For example, Pavel Gorbachev, a self-proclaimed 'black archaeologist[5]', describes in his book titled *Diaries of the black digger* how he felt seeing for the very first time photos of the World War II objects found by the official search groups in Russia and Ukraine. He said:

> "When you look at them for the first time, you are seized by incomprehensible trembling. These are seemingly ordinary objects. But they have such a powerful energy, such a strong charge that you want to keep looking at them, you want to hold them in your hands." (Горбачев 2016).

[4] Not all metal objects appear on the market with the help of treasure hunters. Some objects such as medals were sold to auction houses in the 90s by the World War II veterans themselves to survive poverty while others were stolen from the veterans' apartments (Ившина 2019).

[5] A 'black archaeologist' is a term used in many parts of Eastern Europe and Russia to refer to illegal diggers of archaeological sites. For more details see 'Tchorniye arkheologi ('Black archaeologists' or чёрные археологи)' by Thomas (2014) on https://traffickingculture.org/.

This is in line with what Molotch (2003) talks about when describing some objects as having a "charge" that can move certain people. This adds another layer to treasure hunting and collecting of low-value antiquities and objects. The idea of a "charge" that objects can have and the importance of being in harmony with conscience as expressed by treasure hunters make it important to move beyond the pure financial motivation behind metal detecting for World War II objects and beyond the focus on just humans. More broadly, research has shown that objects appearing on Internet marketplaces such as treasure hunting forums usually feature items of lower financial value and of poorer quality (Brodie 2015, 2017; Fay 2011). This, at least in hobbyist metal detecting, makes a pure financial focus unlikely: there's little discernible profit to be made. Considering the intense connection that many Russians have with World War II, these human-object relationships may be a key factor in understanding why people engage in metal detecting for World War II objects. A tangible trace of the past can act as "a metonym for the Great Patriotic War" (Oushakine 2013: 292) and provide personalised and strong connection to this time period. While collective memory is sustained through ritualistic commemorative events, it is individuals who remember, but they can only coherently remember as part of a group. Therefore, individuals can get caught between commoditization and singularization of World War II objects and this can lead to an internal conflict which can lead to "what appear to be anomalies in cognition, inconsistencies in values, and uncertainties in action" (Kopytoff 1986: 82).

For example, a reporter (Чихачёв 2011) going on a dig with a 'black archaeologist' described finding remains of a soldier. However, the remains were not the bones of the soldier, but the objects. The acidic and bog-like soil of the area completely dissolved the body so that all that remained was a helmet, two pouches with cartridges, and boots containing some of the toes. Where human remains were no more, objects stood in for them. The reporter and the digger put everything they found in a bag and reburied the objects. Apart from some toes, there were no physical remains of the human body, just objects that were arranged in a pattern as they would have been located on the body—helmet on the top, pouches around mid-body, and boots at the bottom. The reporter (Чихачёв 2011) said that their actions did not have a particular meaning attached to them, but that in seven decades they were the first and only people who took pity on soldiers who died in their foxhole on a damp slope on an unknown hill. For some diggers, helmets are a "fetish": it is an important piece of equipment for a soldier, it is easily identifiable, and being able to detect a helmet is a way to see how good a specific metal detector is (Горбачев 2016: 51). However, according to the reporter, the digger did not keep any of the finds, instead they chose to rebury the objects. Why? They could not explain their actions, but could it be that the social context and social qualities of these objects beyond their potential value as commodities are of importance here? I believe in this example it is possible to argue that objects have agentic qualities. These objects such as helmet, boots and pouches are part of a network that consists of humans, objects, and social context (i.e. commemorative events and collective memory that they are part of). In this example, the human body is no more, objects stood in for it, and yet even without the human body, the objects received reburial. Reporter and digger could not explain their actions, but by following objects rather than humans, we can attempt to provide one. These objects have a charge, and they are infused with meaning through commemorative rituals.

Criminological studies tend to focus on social environments that include family, friends, neighbourhood and so forth as a predictor for criminal behaviour (Warr 2002; Ou and Reynolds 2010). However, maybe social (as in the only human social world) is not as important here as the social world that also includes non-humans, in this case World War

II objects. Many diggers argue that the government of Russia does not care about all the iron objects that are laying in the forest. If the government cared, it would have collected both the iron and the remains of fallen soldiers a long time ago (e.g. see opinion of a digger quoted by Ившина 2012). Furthermore, could the answer to the question "[w]hat will be remembered when the last of the heroes is no more?" (Kirschenbaum 2011: 103) be that objects and memorabilia will eventually stand in for the humans? As such, by looking at this from an object-oriented perspective it is possible to see the importance of objects in what at first might seem like human-centred networks of relationships. For example, the previously mentioned practise of Memory Lesson and its focus on veterans excludes silent masses of objects that were intertwined with these veterans during the war. Removal of objects from this commemoration or by focussing only on a select group of objects leaves parts of cultural heritage unprotected. It creates a situation where it is possible to artificially "cut" these networks of relationships and protect humans but not objects.

Maybe these interactions with World War II objects should be viewed in terms of commemoration that co-exists along the official narrative created by the Russian government. The Russian government has created a strong narrative pertaining to World War II, but as criticised by some diggers they might not do enough to collect all the World War II objects and human remains. Maybe these hobbyist metal detectorists' actions are not as much a violation of this sacredness of World War II but rather a contribution towards it. Yet through sacredness and singularization of these World War II objects, they become more valuable and as such a commodity (see Kopytoff 1986). These actions however occupy the area between legal and illegal, socially accepted and unaccepted norms, making understanding of them important to antiquities trafficking research. As mentioned earlier, commodification can be seen as a process and commodities are "thoroughly socialized" (Appadurai 1986: 6) where people ascribe meaning to them. However, if we consider what has been discussed in this paper so far, perhaps the influence should not be seen as one-directional moving from humans to objects only. Rather, the objects also exert some power on humans or what has been referred to as "charge" by other authors (e.g. Molotch 2003). By being part of social networks, objects also influence, represent, and create memories in social networks that they are part of. These memories can lead to certain actions being carried out as singularisation makes objects more valuable and therefore makes them a commodity. Value then encourages crime, which means that objects have inadvertently caused crime to happen while collective memory has played a role as an intermediary variable. If we move into a more macro-level thinking, perhaps reconceptualising trafficking networks as consisting both of humans and objects with degrees of agency is what is needed to better understand and counter this crime.

Conclusion: Confluence of Memory and Crime

This paper only scratches the surface of the different types of treasure hunting that can be legal, illegal or somewhere in-between, and types of diggers in Russia. I do not advocate for or against treasure hunting or metal detecting activities. Instead, I argue for the need to look at the bigger picture and emphasise the importance of the context of any place where these human-object relationships emerge within a space that is, at times, criminalized. In this paper, I briefly touch on one type of them. In Russia, when it comes to hobbyist metal detecting and low-value objects, the human-object hybrid created through this practise and potential violation of social norms or even the law becomes a commemorative event in

itself. At first it seems to go against the officially supported narrative of the sacredness of World War II, but at a closer look in certain situations it actually runs parallel or contributes to the official state-sponsored World War II narrative and protection of this time period. Context is extremely important and there are multiple important aspects that we must consider if we hope to devise effective strategies to protect cultural heritage or mitigate the negative effects of comparable crime.

By following the objects and by allowing for the possibility that objects have a degree of agency or charge that influences humans, we are able to observe engagements with low-value objects in a different light. Rather than viewing these engagements in terms of the social worlds and meaning systems created by a particular group such as metal detectorists, we can view these interactions as being influenced by more than just [human] social networks. It is possible to argue that objects have certain agentic qualities that affect people in their group and networks of relations. This suggests that further research on objects and their influence is necessary, particularly their role and influence on crime. The notion that objects may play a role in the crime and have a criminogenic effect on people might seem absurd at first, but by diving deeper into human-object relationships, it is possible to see the belief that these objects have a certain pull that makes some people violate societal, political, or legal norms. Therefore, we should incorporate objects into criminological theories in order to explain crime that occurs in spaces that usually escape the attention of traditional criminology.

Funding The funding for this research was provided by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 804851).

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