Dislocating literature

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Introduction. Transnational literature and literary studies in the Baltic Sea region

Crossing the boundaries in the Baltic Sea region inevitably involves crossing the tracks of vikings and tradesmen, smugglers and duty free ships, politicians and armies, nomads and crusaders, working-class activists and aristocrats, communists and fascists, refugees and economic migrants, scholars and artists, diplomats and spies. Any literary protagonist, author, motif or stylistic device that can be argued to reflect such modes of movement is of relevance for the discussion.

More than a year ago, we addressed literary scholars with a call for papers including the above lines. It was an act of curiosity: we wanted to gather pieces of literary criticism that make the linguistic and historical diversity of the Baltic Sea region palpable; that either reflect movements across the borders within and around the region, or offer destabilizing approaches to literary texts that have so far been seen in a more rigid national or regional context. In this issue of Baltic Worlds, we present the results: a selection of seven articles from, depending on how one counts, around ten different nations – as it turned out, most of the contributors live and work in more than one country and more than one language. While five of the articles represent different styles of literary scholarship, the other two offer alternative vantage points on literature: philosophy and historiography.

There are good reasons why the Baltic Sea region is usually not understood as a unit of analysis in literary studies. When scholars from the Nordic countries, the Baltic states, Russia, Poland, and Germany come together, they bring different linguistic, national and institutional traditions with them, traditions that have existed in geographic proximity but have often had astonishingly little to do with one another. Apart from the linguistic boundaries, there are long-term effects of political divisions as well as specific traditions regarding who is expected to know which cluster of languages. Furthermore, there is a tendency of smaller literary fields to seek to connect with a more dominating aesthetic core rather than with each other.

Yet places, languages, and stories tend to connect in ways one would never expect. We decided neither to define a clear subject nor a specific school of thought, but to enter our own region as something unknown and amorphous, to welcome multiple perspectives and paratactic relations and try to handle whatever came our way. Although we were happy not knowing what to expect, we were not merely rubbing our hands together in excitement anticipating chaos. The editors come from Finland and Sweden, each of us grew up within different linguistic communities: we all have a close relation to both Finnish and Swedish, yet in three very different ways.

Having studied German and comparative literature partly or entirely abroad – all three of us in Germany, two of us in the United States – we wanted to get in touch with scholars who have crossed our own paths from other points of origin and in other directions. We began to discuss whether the American and Western European debates on comparative literature can be related to the lives and writings in the smaller countries surrounding this large body of brackish water known as the Baltic Sea.

But why comparative literature – what is comparative literature? While this field of scholarship is practiced in many countries, with decisive local differences, it has its strongest institutional tradition in the United States, where the work of exiled scholars has been formative: the early comparative literature departments were mostly staffed by European expatriates. Since the late 19th century, the history of the discipline includes very different approaches to comparison – from attempts at systematizing the literary output of the world in exhaustive evolutionary models to the so-called "theory years" in the 20th century, when comparatists tended to rely on a very small canon, working mostly on Western European literatures. Over the last decades, the traditionally small canon has been expanded towards the inclusion of non-Western literatures. One of the most influential developments has come from postcolonial theory – along with a corresponding sensitivity towards hierarchies and more complicated orders and disorders. As a discipline, comparative literature is now often understood quite broadly, as a study of intercultural relations and interactions between literature and other forms of human activities, such as historiography, the arts, philosophy, and politics. Along with this development, comparative literature has all but ceased to be seen as a supplement to national philologies, which would only confirm the existence of clearly defined entities to be compared.

Applied to our endeavor, a comparative approach in the above sense would mean avoiding the temptation to construct an entity and call it "The Literature of the Region", and instead bearing with the differences and complications one comes across as soon as one sets out to think comparatively. Accordingly, rather than comparing for instance a Swedish novel with an Estonian one, the task would be to historicize or destabilize the notion of what is Swedish and what is Estonian. Far from being explicitly thematized in the following contributions, all these questions form a subtext of the current issue; we have been discussing them while choosing the contributions and while analyzing them. By presenting selected samples of scholarly writing, we want to put up for discussion the question of which specific criteria might be meaningful for a comparative approach. Furthermore, in posing questions of the location of literature, we are not only talking about literary texts but also about the literary scholars who set out to read and perhaps compare them. In this way – as readers of literature and of scholarly contributions – we face a dual task: On the one hand, we seek to reconfigure and "dislocate" conceptualizations of literary texts and literary relations in the Baltic Sea region. But perhaps we are also re-locating ourselves while looking into questions that pose themselves particularly strongly here.

Bringing together literary scholars with such diverse backgrounds inevitably involves dealing with language barriers. For now, the English language serves as a mediator: it is foreign to the Baltic Sea region and yet in a way may be our strongest point of comparison since it is the only language we have in common. We use English, and yet we hope to allow some space for the different points of enunciation, different approaches to language, and different scholarly traditions and styles, as well as their possible resonances. While translation can be seen as a way to level out differences, it has also been argued that certain meanings can only be made visible through the process of translation.

The main focus of this issue is literature in relation to the history of the 20th century. After the first essay, which deals with literature and the Holocaust, we move on to a series of articles about the Soviet era: the Cold War division and its aftermath from several different perspectives. At the end of the issue we have two articles that offer reflections on philosophical and aesthetic questions such as the relation between the written and the spoken word, and between solidifying and liquefying concepts of thought.

We are not striving towards an exhaustive representation of scholarly approaches, much less literatures, in the region, but hope that the multitude of approaches presented in the following articles will form a new point of departure for unexpected and fruitful readings. A number of themes, literatures, and languages are left unmentioned in our current selection, such as literature written by migrants from other parts of the world, to name but one example. Acknowledging the impossibility of accounting for every important aspect of our topic, our aim has been to highlight the particularities that do not easily lend themselves to generalization. In accordance with this vantage point, we have left the relations between the individual articles open for discussion, regarding the gaps between the texts as productive. ⚡

In the shadow of Rumkowski

essay by **Olaf Haagensen**

The period of September 5–12, 1942, will leave indelible memories among the portion of the ghetto's population on whom fate smiles and who survive the war.

One week, eight days that seem an eternity!

Even now it is difficult to grasp what has occurred. An elemental force has passed through the ghetto and swept away some 15,000 people (no one knows the exact number yet) and life appears to have resumed its former course.[1]

In the literature on the Łódź Ghetto, these eight days in early September 1942 are referred to only as "the Sperre", derived from the general curfew ("Allgemeine Gehsperre") ordered by the Germans while they rounded up children, the elderly, the infirm, and the unemployed for deportation to Chełmno (German: Kulmhof), a death camp about 55 kilometers away. *The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto*, from which the quotation was taken, was a sort of collective diary written in secret by a group of ten or fifteen people in the Jewish Administration. It describes life in the ghetto, major events – such as the Sperre – and minor occurrences. (For instance, in a short entry from June of the same year, one reads that a recital had been held, "das einem klassischen Repertoire gewidmet war, im Programm u.a. Bach".[2]) With its 3,500 pages, *The Chronicle* has been called "a source unparalleled among writings on the destruction of [the] European Jews".[3] Without it, Swedish writer Steve Sem-Sandberg could not have written his novel *De fattiga i Łódź* (2009; English translation, *The Emperor of Lies*, 2011). The two texts are so closely interwoven that it would not be unreasonable to argue that the novel is a rewriting of *The Chronicle*.

In retrospect, one man has become inextricably linked to the Sperre, and he was not among the 15,000 forced to leave the ghetto. The day before the deportations started, the Chairman of the ghetto, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski (perhaps the most important character in Sem-Sandberg's novel), delivered a speech known in the Anglo-American reception only as "Rumkowski's 'give me your children' speech". In front of the fire station in the ghetto, he informed the inhabitants – or the 1,500 of them who had assembled to hear him – that all children under ten and adults over sixty-five must leave Łódź.[4] In the English translation of Sem-Sandberg's

book, the speech is reproduced over the space of four pages. Rumkowski explains that he has no choice. Either they take care of the matter themselves or the German soldiers will. He tells the crowd that he has negotiated the number who must leave the ghetto down from 24,000. And he defends his decision: by sacrificing some, he can save the ghetto. In Sem-Sandberg's version, the speech ends as follows:

So what is best? What do you want? For us to let eight or nine thousand people live, or look on mutely as all perish [. . . .] Decide for yourselves. It is my duty to try to help as many survive as possible. I am not appealing to the hotheads among you. I am appealing to people who can still listen to reason. I have done, and will continue to do, everything in my power to keep weapons off our streets and avoid bloodshed . . . . The ruling could not be overturned, only tempered.

It takes the heart of a thief to demand what I demand of you now. But put yourselves in my shoes. Think logically, and draw your conclusions. I cannot act in any way other than I do, since the number of people I can save this way far exceeds the number I have to let go . . . .[5]

The deportation of children, the elderly, and the sick transformed Łódź from a traditional ghetto to an industrial slave city and established the motto for which Rumkowski would become known: work is our only way out.

Rumkowski's position in the ghetto and his role in the deportations have – naturally enough – attracted a great deal of attention in the literature on the Łódź Ghetto. Primo Levi brings up Rumkowski in his reflections on "the grey zone" and interprets him as an example of what absolute power does to a man.[6] Rumkowski ran the ghetto like a dictator – with the help of an extensive police force – and talked about "his city" and "his Jews". He printed his own ghetto currency with his image on it and got his own "court poets" to compose poems and songs about his accomplishments. In her critique of the *Judenräte*, Hannah Arendt places Rumkowski at one end of the scale and Adam Czerniakow, leader of the Warsaw ghetto, at the other. When Czerniakow was given the same order as Rumkowski, he took his own life.[7] Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer devotes a few pages to Rumkowski in *Rethinking the Holocaust* from the early 2000s and asks: What

if the war had played out differently? What if the Red Army had stopped the advance only three or four days later than it did in July 1944? If it had, Soviet forces would probably have reached Łódź while there were still about 70,000 Jews in the ghetto instead of the fewer than 1,000 they found in January 1945. Would we then have erected a statue in Rumkowski's memory or executed him for having sent thousands of Jewish people to their deaths? Bauer's answer is, "Frankly, I would vote for the gallows, not the statue."[8]

Sem-Sandberg has talked about Rumkowski in interviews as the "black hole" in his novel, that towards which everything is inexorably drawn, and has said among other things, "Immer heißt es in den Erinnerungen an Łódź: Rumkowski entschied dies oder das. Als ob keine Deutschen dagewesen wären"[9]. The observation is important, not as an absolution of Rumkowski but more as a reminder that a historical event must be interpreted against the horizon of its time. Ruth Klüger writes about the distorted image of the Holocaust that survivor stories are always in danger of producing. At one place in her memoir *Landscapes of Memory*, she stops and reflects:

Now comes the problem of this survivor story, as of all such stories: we start writing because we want to tell about the great catastrophe. But since by definition the survivor is alive, the reader inevitably tends to separate, or deduct, this one life, which she has come to know, from the millions who remain anonymous. You feel, even if you don't think it: well, there is a happy ending after all.[10]

In the encounter with the history of the Łódź Ghetto, posterity faces a similar problem: how should we regard all of those who stood in Rumkowski's shadow, all of those who did not step onto the stage of history, but went to their ruin in the wings? Or, taken to the extreme: how can we avoid reducing Łódź to an example of Levi's grey zone or the role of the *Judenräte* in the Final Solution? How can we look past the arguments in Rumkowski's speech outside the fire station on the 4th of September, 1942, and catch sight of his audience?

In his essay "Even Nameless Horrors Must Be Named", published in autumn 2011,[11] Sem-Sandberg argues that it is time to lift the "aesthetic state of emergency" that has surrounded witness literature and made it a forbidden area for anyone who has not personally and physically experienced a Nazi

concentration camp. He discusses the Russian writer Varlam Shalamov's suite of short stories, *Kolyma Tales* (published in Russian in 1954), which describes life in a Russian labor camp, and suggests Shalamov as a possible role model. When Sem-Sandberg describes the world of the camp in Shalamov's work, it is tempting to read it as an indirect interpretation of the ghetto he himself has created in *The Emperor of Lies*:

The world of the labor camp with its gigantic superstructure and the barren landscape all around does not merely serve as a backdrop, but develops by degrees into a hellish space with clearly delineated boundaries, governed by its own laws. Here are the mines to which a constant supply of new work brigades are sent, to be used up like so much dross; but also the camp hospitals, a clinical world within a world, to which those with the right contacts might have the good fortune to be temporarily or permanently transferred. And last but not least: the world of professional criminals that constitutes the foremost circle of the camp, those with the true power, its aristocracy.[12]

As one reads the book, the map provided at the back of *The Emperor of Lies* changes from a collection of street names to precisely that which Sem-Sandberg finds in Shalamov: a world apart, one with its own inner context and logic. Roughly in the middle of the ghetto lies Bałuty Square, a neutral barbed-wire enclave where raw materials are brought in and finished products taken out, the only place where there is any interaction between Germans and Jews. Rumkowski's office and the Central Office of Labor, which coordinates all production in the ghetto, are here. "You could call this square the stomach of the ghetto."[13] Just a few streets away, we find the ghetto's Department of Statistics, often called simply The Archive. This is where the ID cards all Jews must carry at all times are made, and where various pieces of informational material supposed to document the work done in ghetto factories and workshops are published. But it is also where a small group of people secretly compile *The Chronicle* and describe everything that does not fit the official image of Łódź: the food shortages and diseases, the deportations and violence. A historical narrative for the future is written in the archives, "the heart of the ghetto".[14] Marysin, in the northeastern part of the ghetto, is an area of wooden houses, garden plots, and greenhouses where the upper echelons of the ghetto go to escape the summer heat and dust trapped between the tenements in the center of the ghetto. The cemetery is located at the edge of Marysin where the ghetto borders on the rest of the city. It is hidden behind high walls. While the more affluent residents of the ghetto take a vacation, the gravediggers work seven days a week. They have to in order to keep up: thousands of new graves are needed every year. The Green House, one of the orphanages Rumkowski has set up in the ghetto, is just a stone's throw from the western wall of the cemetery. In addition, there are places like the hospital and police station (also known as the Red House), the homes of the various families we come to know – and, lest we forget, the private apartments of the Rumkowski clan, where an utterly disastrous family life plays out in the midst of the surrounding catastrophe.

Sem-Sandberg has built a world around Rumkowski and populated it with persons from all levels of the ghetto hierarchy – the list of characters at the back of the book contains more than 80 names. Łódź is seen through the lives of people who are often far from the center of history, regardless of
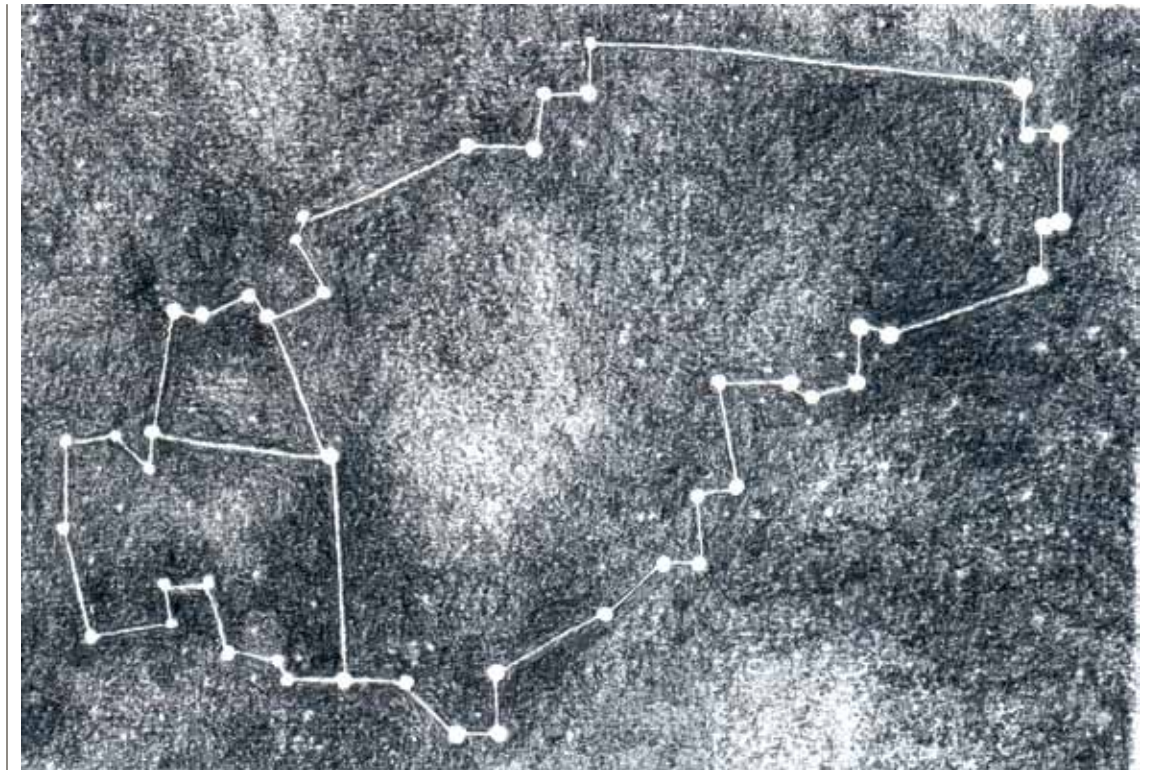

Illustration: Moa Thelander

whether placed in the German ghetto administration offices or in Rumkowski's office.

This is an unfamiliar (yet recognizable) world for most of us, and the few who can claim first-hand knowledge of it – the survivors, the witnesses – are dying out. Sem-Sandberg and *The Emperor of Lies* have – in the otherwise largely positive reception – met with the same objections made against all works of fiction by writers who have not personally *been there*: Why fiction? By what right?[15] Sem-Sandberg has little to say in answer to the second question. He is a non-Jewish-Swedish citizen born to Norwegian parents, and he has no biographical or familial ties to the destruction of the Jews. And, one might well add, not only is he a product of neutral and innocent Sweden, but he made his first literary forays in the most unrealistic of all genres: science fiction.[16]

Let us linger a bit on this last point. Let us try, for a moment, to amalgamate two types of texts that seldom or never intersect, the survivor testimony and the science fiction story, and ask whether there are any parallels between the two that might be productive of further reflection. One striking characteristic of the testimonies is in fact how often arrival at the camps is described as being like landing on another planet, a place outside and disconnected from the world as we know it. In his essay "Orfeus i spegelstaden" [Orpheus in the city of mirrors], published in 2003, Sem-Sandberg argues that the defining characteristic of science fiction is the creation of worlds: the science fiction author cannot rely on our shared, presupposed reality (as a traditional realistic novel can), but must build a new world from the ground up for the reader, a world that may encompass everything from linguistic peculiarities (neologisms) to metaphysical superstructures.[17] In one interesting passage, Sem-Sandberg discusses the work of Polish writer and journalist Ryszard Kapuściński and argues that Kapuściński's position on the borderline between journalism and literature is comparable to the science fiction author's attempts to conjure up an unknown world:

The genre in which Kapuściński works, literary reporting, is found between two other genres/ languages, news journalism and fiction, and it is precisely because it is there, *in the middle*, marginal in a way to both, that it must constantly rediscover and repopulate the world. Simply referring to an existing reality, as the journalistic text does, is not enough. Relying on conventional literary forms and means of expression is not enough either. It is precisely the position of literary reporting *on the margin* that helps release a slew of literary energies that would otherwise have remained latent. In this case, it resembles science fiction.[18]

Can we imagine a similar position *on the margin* for the literature that attempts to describe twentieth-century camps? A literature that does not attempt to meet Medusa's gaze (Primo Levi), but instead attempts to recreate in literature – with all forms and means available – the world, the strange planet where Medusa might roam? Elie Wiesel's repudiation of any form of fiction in the encounter with the Holocaust ("A novel about Treblinka is either not a novel or not about Treblinka"[19]) is well known. Imre Kertész's utterly opposed contention has received less attention. A concentration camp, he argues, is imaginable only and exclusively as literature, never as reality. "Auch nicht – und sogar dann am wenigsten –, wenn wir es selbst erleben."[20]

In one place in her previously mentioned memoir, Ruth Klüger writes about Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* and ponders over Lanzmann's obsession with the specific places where the exterminations took place. He wants to know what they looked like then, down to the last detail. "Lanzmann's greatness", she writes, "depends on his belief that place captures time and can display its victims like flies caught in amber."[21] One might well make a similar argument about Sem-Sandberg and *The Emperor of Lies*. The world of his liter-

ary creation in the novel would not have been much more than a "simple backdrop", to use his own words, if it had not also captured the peculiar temporality of ghetto life. From the privileged viewpoint of posterity, it is obvious that the Sperre was a watershed in the history of the ghetto. This interpretation is confirmed by *The Chronicle*, in which the historic significance of the deportations is immediately established. The articulative stance and perspective of the author behind the diary entry of September 14, 1942, is, however, quite interesting. Seen in the light of the institutionalized memorial culture surrounding the extermination of the Jews that has emerged over the last 15 or 20 years and the insistence upon the unique and incomprehensible nature of the Holocaust, the following sentence is noteworthy: "Noch heute fällt es schwer, sich bewusst zu machen, was es eigentlich war." *The Chronicle* diarist writes this entry only two days after the deportations, and in the very next sentence, he or she adds that life is moving on "im alten Flussbett", despite the typhoon that has struck the ghetto. In the next entries in *The Chronicle*, the deportations are briefly mentioned on a few occasions, but by October, there is scarcely a trace of them anymore. The difference – and it is a world of difference – between our own recognition of the historical significance of the deportations and that of the ghetto inhabitants (as portrayed in *The Chronicle*) is that the inhabitants did not have the opportunity to rest upon this recognition. If those who remain are to have any chance, they must find their way back to the rhythm of ghetto life. The remembrance work – which we are so inclined to talk about today – had to wait until after the war, and for those who were lucky enough to survive.

The conflict between the ghetto's horizon and that of posterity is already clearly discernible in the first section of the prologue to *The Emperor of Lies*. We are in the first days of September 1942, the beginning of the Sperre, and we find ourselves in Rumkowski's office on Bałuty Square. Rumkowski has just received the order that children and the elderly are to be deported:

That was the day, engraved for ever in the memory of the ghetto, when the Chairman announced in front of everyone that he had no choice but to let the children and old people of the ghetto go. Once he had made his proclamation that afternoon, he went to his office on Bałuty Square and sat waiting for higher powers to intervene to save him. He had already been forced to part with the sick people of the ghetto. That only left the old and the young. Mr. Neftalin, who a few hours earlier had called the Commission together again, had impressed on him that all the lists must be completed and handed over to the Gestapo by midnight at the latest. How then could he make it clear to them what an appalling loss this represented for him? *For sixty-six years I have lived and not yet been granted the happiness of being called Father, and now the authorities demand of me that I sacrifice all my children.*[22]

The temporal space that opens here is vast and complex. The first sentence puts us in a place in the future, looking back: The day that has passed is already part of collective memory ("engraved for ever in the memory of the ghetto"). But the perspective changes over the next two sentences, and by the fourth sentence, we are in a *now* ("That only left the old and the young"), that is, before the inscription in the collective memory of the ghetto, at an unspecified time on this particular day. The lists have to be ready by midnight, but it is impossible to know whether that time is two hours or ten hours away. In the two final sentences, historical time utterly dissolves and we move – in a two-part movement from direct discourse to free indirect discourse – into Rumkowski's mind ("*For sixty-six years I have lived*").

What is going on in this very first paragraph of the novel? Isn't it that the temporal structure of *The Chronicle* is being written into the novel and, one might add, that the first building blocks of what will be the novel's depiction of the ghetto world are being laid out: Bałuty Square, Mr. Neftalin, etc.? We move from the retrospective position of the historian to the immediate perceptions of those involved, from the history of the ghetto to the uncertain horizon of events as they unfold. The observation that Rumkowski has been sitting in his office "waiting for higher powers to intervene to save him" underlines this transition. Rumkowski longs for a glimpse into God's book in which all the events and days ordained for him are written (Psalms 139:16). He wants to know whether Divine Will is controlling what is happening around him, a confirmation that he is making the right decisions. Or, in more secular terms, he wants to see himself from the retrospective viewpoint of posterity.

It is here that Sem-Sandberg's novel unfolds: in the intersection between the knowledge history has given us and the perspective from inside the ghetto, between the documentary reconstruction and the creative power of fiction, between that which is now a city district in Łódź and that which once was, for 140,000 people in July 1941, the entire world. ◼

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9 "Bist du es, der bestimmt wer sterben soll?", interview in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2011-09-17.
10 Ruth Klüger, *Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, London 2004, p. 164.
11 I have quoted the essay "Even nameless horrors must be named" as it was published on Eurozine.com on 2011-09-23 and accessed 2011-10-05: http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2011-09-23-semsandberg-en.html. The essay is a revised version of two texts, "Även de onämnbara fasorna måste namnges" [Even nameless horrors must be named] and "Snart är vi alla vittnen" [Soon we will all be witnesses], published in *Dagens Nyheter* on 2011-01-27 and 2011-04-26, respectively.
12 Steve Sem-Sandberg, "Even nameless horrors must be named", at eurozine.com.
13 Steve Sem-Sandberg, *The Emperor of Lies*, p. 42.
14 Ibid., p. 390.
15 Historian and art historian Simon Schama, for instance, ends his review of the English translation with the following blistering reproof: "It makes you wonder what Sem-Sandberg thought he was doing when he perpetrated this lumbering monster of a novel. Also it makes one meditate on the relationship between personal experience and moral power needed to take on this kind of subject. I am not of the school that believes a writer must have survived the camps in order to have written decent fiction about them. But one can't help reflecting that when works such as Solzhenitzyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*, and HG Adler's astonishing *Panorama* draw the strength of their narrative from direct memory, and their own non-fiction accounts, there may be something to the connection. Besides their raw witness to an evil so unspeakable as to be all but unwriteable, Sem-Sandberg's misbegotten effort is just a 672-page cautionary footnote." (*Financial Times*, 2011-07-15)
16 Sem-Sandberg wrote a series of science fiction books in the late 1970s, although he considers *De ansiktslösa* [The faceless] from 1987 his actual debut.
17 Steve Sem-Sandberg, "Orfeus i spegelstaden", in Lars Jakobson, Ola Larsmo & Steve Sem-Sandberg, *Stjärnfall: Om SF* [Falling star: On Sci-Fi], Stockholm 2003, p. 124.
18 Ibid, p. 135.
19 Elie Wiesel, "The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration", in Elliot Lefkovitz (ed.), *Dimensions of the Holocaust: Lectures at the Northwestern University*, Evanston, IL 1977, p. 7.
20 Imre Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch* [English translation: *Galley Diary*], Reinbek 1999, p. 253.
21 Ruth Klüger, *Landscapes of Memory*, p. 73.
22 Steve Sem-Sandberg, *The Emperor of Lies*, p. 11.

Illustration: Moa Thelander

Songs from Siberia
The folklore of deported Lithuanians

essay by **Vsevolod Bashkuev**

The deportation of populations in the Soviet Union during Stalin's rule was a devious form of political reprisal, combining retribution (punishment for being disloyal to the regime), elements of social engineering (estrangement from the native cultural environment and indoctrination in Soviet ideology), and geopolitical imperatives (relocation of disloyal populations away from vulnerable borders). The deportation operations were accompanied by the "special settlement" of sparsely populated regions in the hinterland. At least six million people of different nationalities were relocated by force in the USSR from the 1930s to the 1950s.[1]

This article focuses on the texts of songs, poems, prayers, and jokes created by Lithuanians deported to Eastern Siberia in large-scale relocations from the Lithuanian Soviet Republic in 1948 and 1949. They suffered repression at the hands of Stalin's regime for alleged active aid to the nationalist Lithuanian resistance known to historians as the "forest brothers". *Vesna* [Spring] is the name given to the most massive deportation operation in Lithuanian history, conducted on May 22–23, 1948, resulting in the exile of 11,233 families, 39,482 men, women, and children, to Krasnoyarsk Krai, Irkutsk oblast, and the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. A year later, in March, April, and May 1949, in the wake of Operation Priboi, another 9,633 families, 32,735 people, were deported from their homeland to remote parts of the Soviet Union.[2]

The deported Lithuanians were settled in remote regions of the USSR that were suffering from serious labor shortages. Typically, applications to hire "new human resources" for their production facilities were received by different ministries a few months before a major deportation.[3] In the area of exile, the bulk of those deported were settled in separate communities supervised by the MVD (Ministry of the Interior) district command post. The displaced were provided with employment without any consideration for their occupation before exile. For example, in Buryat-Mongolia, most of the Lithuanian peasants were employed in the forestry sector, felling trees and handling lumber, while in the Irkutsk region, some of the exiles worked at collective farms and "sovkhoz".[4]

Special settlements were quite close to local population centers and did not differ from them externally. The displaced were commonly accommodated in the dwellings of local residents, or even lodged with them as part of the forced accommodation-sharing program. Whatever the housing arrangements, the exiles were in permanent contact with the local population, working side by side with them at the factories and collective farms and engaging in barter; the children of both exiled and local residents went to the same schools and attended the same clubs and cultural events. Sometimes mixed marriages were contracted between the exiles and the local population.

A special status that existed only in Stalin's USSR was assigned to the displaced Lithuanians as well as to other ethnic groups. The term "special settler" used in the Soviet legal reprisal lexicon meant "administratively exiled for an indefinite term without deprivation of rights". Translated into normal language, it meant that people were exiled without a proper court ruling, without announcing the exile term, with only limited freedom of movement, but with some of the elementary civil rights and duties enjoyed by the Soviet people. Hence, special settlers were not allowed to leave special settlements without the express permission of the command post leader and were obliged to work at the jobs assigned

them, but they enjoyed the right to vote and the right to education, medical assistance, and social security. Naturally, in real life, the special settlers were second-class citizens, stigmatized as ideologically unreliable.

Most of the Lithuanian special settlers had been self-supporting farmers, including many peasants of average means and sometimes even members of the working poor.[5] Therein lies the tragic peculiarity of the internecine "war after the war" that broke out in Lithuania in the course of sovietization and collectivization (1945–1953). What was described by the Soviet government as a class struggle was, in fact, a civil war provoked by Stalin's regime, in which those who suffered most were common people, who simply longed above all else for a peaceful life.

The bulk of exiled Lithuanians were included in the lists of people to be relocated because of denunciations. Exile orders were approved on the basis of only four signatures – often those of close friends, neighbors, or fellow villagers. A few liters of homebrewed vodka, a sack of flour, or a piece of smoked fat given to another person could provide sufficient reason to suspect a farmer of links with the nationalists.[6] Without taking the trouble to look for proof, the Soviet authorities launched the punitive mechanism, and in the course of the next special operation, the whole family would be exiled, together with thousands of other unfortunate companions.

The only supporting document given to the local supervising authorities in the place of settlement was a deportation certificate. Flimsy though it may have been compared to today's multi-volume files, this single sheet of paper was a sentence and determined the subsequent destiny of the exiled families. This sterility characterized all of Stalin's deportations: their mass scale, extrajudicial nature, machine-like detail, and soulless indifference to human fates.

Inside the mechanism of repression, the situation changed dramatically. Total control and all-permeating surveillance were at the heart of the forced labor system. Once there, the person was immediately surrounded by numerous invisible files who scrupulously took notes to report anything that could be perceived as a threat to the Soviet regime. Selection of informants from among the special settlers began in the early stages of their transportation to the place of exile. In addition to the lists of deportees, the train officers would hand over to the receiving MVD officers supplementary lists of enrolled informers, who, from the first days of exile, began to provide information regarding those among the contingent of special settlers who showed signs of wanting to escape.[7]

The ordeal of exile brought out both the best and the most ignoble in people. The vast majority of secret agents who reported on the moods of special settlers were Lithuanian. In return for their services, they were given money, work exemptions, and other minor forms of preferential treatment that acquired significant value in the exile environment. But denunciation was risky, and, if unmasked, such informants were at best subjected to unspoken ostracism from the entire Lithuanian community, such that the MVD agencies often had to transfer them to other places of special settlement.[8]

Great importance was attached to the formation of the informer network and scrutiny of the attitudes of the special settlers until the Lithuanians were released from exile in 1958. Multiple factors were taken into account when selecting informants: age, willingness to cooperate, agility,

awareness, and a command of Russian. The latter ability is particularly important given the context of this article. The poems and lyrics quoted below were translated into Russian by Lithuanian informants, apparently in advance, as they are attached to the documents in verse. But the Lithuanian originals are missing.

The reports on special settlers' attitudes received from informants were gathered at the lowest level of the MVD system, at village and district special command posts where they were first evaluated, interpreted, and systematized. "Surveillance files" formed at the district command posts, using memos and reports received from village command post leaders, were then sent to the MVD's regional department or head office. Once received, the information was analyzed and, based on the analysis, decisions were taken to investigate particularly unreliable special settlers. An abridged summary of the surveillance file materials was used to prepare reports for the Soviet Ministry of the Interior.[9]

One result of all this activity is the vast collection of documents that form the basis of this study, containing the most diverse data from surveillance of people who had been forcibly relocated. This study used only a small portion of the collection kept in the "special files" of the Information Center of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Buryatia. Various segments of the most extensive archival records made it possible to reproduce every detail of life in a special settlement in Buryat-Mongolia. This provided a strong empirical foundation for correlation with the real features of special settlement life in other parts of Eastern Siberia and for further generalizations. Most importantly, thanks to accurate records of carelessly dropped phrases and utterances, songs, prayers, poems, and jokes overheard, it was possible to recreate the thoughts, attitudes, and even emotions of the people who found themselves in the extreme environment of distant exile.

Naturally, the secret informers only recorded manifesta-

tions of negative emotions against the Soviet system and the gray reality around the special settlers. MVD officers also focused on manifestations of hostility, disobedience, slander, and freethinking, since that was what their key supervisory and repressive responsibilities implied. However, behind the flow of choleric, accusatory, and disparaging words, one can discover, like particles of gold in river sand, the overtones and images, hopes and aspirations, ideas and views of the people who had fallen under the wheels of repression.

Art reflected the negative features of their existence, personified in caricature and sometimes even demonic imagery. The songs of exiled Lithuanians often combined images of their Mother Lithuania and disparaging epithets aimed at Russia and Russians as aggressors. On formal occasions such as elections, Lithuanian youth would sing songs with "nationalist content" to spite the Soviet system. Thus, on December 16, 1951, on their way back from voting, young Lithuanians were singing the song below (the original document is a Russian translation):

> A linden tree is bowed down by the roadside;
> My old mother bursts into tears:
> Ah, my son, your Motherland is calling you;
> Once again my Lithuania will be free.
> And if I am to die
> At the Russian butchers' hands,
> Ah, lassie, adorn my tomb
> With white locust blossoms.[10]

The old mother and the Motherland are identical in the song's context, while the array of images is made vivid by the symbol of the bending linden. The linden tree, typical of Lithuania, is long-lived, and in this instance forms the heart of an extended metaphor: a mother calling to her exiled son and the Motherland bent under the aggressor's heel. The victim's

fate, possibly awaiting the song's protagonist, is reinforced by the image of a girl adorning the tomb with white blossoms, a symbol of youth, innocence, and eternity.

Jhukas Kazis, who was under surveillance as the son of a kulak and ex-member of a gang, was seen singing a similar song:

> Your old mother is crying;
> Your Motherland awaits you,
> A merry spring will blossom,
> The happy day of freedom will come to Lithuania.[11]

The array of images used in the above songs is identical. Quite likely, it was the same song translated differently into Russian by informers among the exiled Lithuanians. Or the exiles who sang it may have added appropriate words here and there, modifying the form but leaving the meaning unchanged.

While the images of the Motherland, the mother, and the blossoms and trees symbolizing them formed a sacralized context, their antagonists, Russia, Russians, Soviet reality, and Soviet power, were portrayed with caricatures or demonic images.

One of the informants reported that on July 16, 1949, Kirsha Alexas gathered a group of Lithuanians at his place, and joined them in singing songs with "counterrevolutionary, nationalist, anti-Soviet, and slanderous" content, one of which is quoted below:

> The sun has set, the evening has come,
> Our land has been robbed by the pauper Russia;
> It seized our land
> And does not let our sisters sow rue grass.
> [...] Asians came up to the mother's window
> And asked: Where is your son?
> But she kept silence and did not betray her son;
> So she was exiled to Siberia forever.
> Spring will come; the cuckoo will start cuckooing;

> We'll cover all the roads with the bodies of Soviet partisans;
> A time of blood will come, and our sufferings will end;
> We'll oust the pauper Russians from the Lithuanian land.[12]

In the above context Russia is presented as an enslaver. The rue grass normally sown in the spring by Lithuanian children is associated with the national traditions being oppressed, and possibly even with children yet unborn whose potential mothers were exiled to Siberia. Two distinctive features that parody Russia are the epithet "pauper" and the direct reference to "Asians", personifying wildness and poverty in the eyes of the exiled Lithuanians.

Once again, in the image of a mother who did not betray her son, one can recognize thousands of Lithuanian women exiled in punishment for their sons, husbands, and brothers, members of the nationalist resistance, and Lithuania itself raided by "Asians".

Interestingly, the image of Siberia is more neutral in the exiles' songs and poems. It is undoubtedly a harsh place, ill-suited for human life, but descriptions of it contain less hatred and rejection. For instance, another song, recorded by a Lithuanian woman named Pranya, goes as follows:

> Don't ask me why my face is sad;
> Between the high mountains of Siberia
> I cannot see the sun setting;
> I cannot hear the lark's song,
> It may be that I will not see my brothers
> mowing hay in a green meadow;
> It may be that I will not hear my sister
> Singing a song of freedom.
> You living over there in our homeland
> Have neither nests nor sentinels,

> Only the rustling of young birch trees
> And the echo of a boring song.
> Cold blizzards are raging in Siberia;
> Our brothers have long been suffering there.[13]

Like the lines quoted earlier, the above song was based on contrasting images: Siberia is severe, a place of fierce suffering; Lithuania is a quiet homeland, with birds warbling and trees rustling in the wind. But no derogatory attitude towards the land of exile is present here. This song rather conveys sadness and alienation, representing Siberia as a cruel but monumental natural purgatory where the firmness of the exiled Lithuanians is tested.

Other verses of the song contain an interesting image of Lithuanian partisans that becomes clear in the context of the "war after the war":

> Don't ask me, dear sister
> Why I was exiled to Siberia;
> [For] loving my native fields
> And serving food to my brothers.[14]

The girl was exiled to Siberia for aiding members of the nationalist movement, as described in the last verse of the song. The "brothers" to whom she was "serving food" are definitely her relatives or friends who fought in the "forest brothers" detachments. For exiled Lithuanians, their memories were precious because some of their "forest relatives" remained at large; moreover, resistance meant the survival of deeply rooted traditions and the will for freedom, and instilled hope during conditions of exile.

It was vigorous and aggressive march-like songs that helped to mobilize the exiles' will and physical strength to survive and resist the system. Thus in July 1949 an informer reported that three young Lithuanians returning from work formed a column and sang:

> Get up, lad, get up,
> Get up, good man,
> It's time to go to the war;
> Defend enslaved Lithuania![15]

That same summer, during a drinking party, Lithuanian youths sang an even more rebellious song:

> Down with damned communism,
> Down with heartless liars
> Burglars of others' property,
> Those who ousted us, the young,
> From our sweet homeland [...]
> As soon as the sun sets
> You can see through the small windows
> Our yellow faces and tearful eyes.
> You won't come back, old people;
> You won't come back, little children;
> You won't come back, brothers and sisters;
> You won't walk Lithuanian paths;
> You won't join the soldiers' ranks.[16]

In the above song, the call to overthrow communism and the denunciation of the Soviet leadership are linked with sorrow about the fate of exiled Lithuanians, with fatalistic motifs making the song sound like a lament, made more poignant by multiple repetitions of the negation. This song, both a cry and

Special settlement of Barun, Khorinskii region, Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Socialist Republic, 1956. Photo from the private archive of N. D. Grebenshchikov.

Dedication of a monument to deceased Lithuanian deportees. Village of Chelan, Buryat-Mongolia, 1957. Photo from the private archive of K. Mikulskene.

Work brigade of Lithuanian women deportees clearing a path in the forest. Buryat-Mongolia, 1950s.

Easter, 1950s. Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Socialist Republic. Both photos above from the private archive of A.V. Arefyeva.

a lament, conveys the feelings Lithuanians had during the first years of their Siberian exile.

Religion played an important role in the life of the exiles. Given the extreme conditions of exile, prayer helped to mobilize their strength to survive. Thus, even in the rush to pack all that was most essential during the single hour granted for gathering up their belongings, Lithuanian women would take prayer books, crucifixes, rosaries, holy pictures, and other devotional articles. These and the appeals to God composed in exile not only served to restore their spiritual equilibrium, but also helped them to preserve their Catholic faith in the Soviet environment of bellicose atheism. The religious poem below was written by a Lithuanian girl, Aldona Artishauskaite, in 1951:

> The earth was in blossom, the olives were praying;
> You were accompanied by Christ's sad glance
> And the free wind of your native fields.
> Do not cry, even if your heart is torn by storms;
> Love your Motherland; grace will descend to your feet.
>
> Hard as it is to remember your Lithuanian name,
> Do not ever exchange your cup of happiness.[17]

The poem contains a clear call to submission and spiritual strength, expressing confidence that all the hardships inflicted on the exiles will finally end. The lines urge the listener to maintain love for the Motherland and never to lose the traditional values and ideals.

Clearly, singing songs and composing poems seen as "anti-Soviet" and "harmful" were risky undertakings. The exiles were deeply concerned about their destiny. Thus, in July 1951, a Lithuanian girl who lived in Buryat-Mongolia told her countrywoman – who proved to be an informant – "How soon will the ones in the blue caps take me?" When asked "What for?" she replied: "I believe they must seize me for going to the cemetery with Kazya Rimkutya last summer. When we were there, we sang songs against the Soviet rule."[18]

Indeed, just a few lines of poetry, song, or letters were enough to earn the exiles several years in a camp, charged with anti-Soviet protest. However, there were people who dared to mock even the top Soviet leaders. Such jokes were often recorded in the MVD's surveillance files at the time of the state bond issues, hated by the special settlers. For instance, during a bond offering, a Lithuanian woman named Zinaida Blagozhevichute said on June 26, 1953: "I hate this deputy director for political affairs because he makes me subscribe for amounts I don't want. Last year I did not subscribe for the full amount of my salary and Stalin died because of that; and if I don't subscribe this year Malenkov will die."[19]

Such on-the-edge statements most tellingly reveal the level of antagonism towards Soviet practices and rituals. Despite the risk of being sent to a camp, the exiles expressed resentment towards the aggressive ideological campaigns, which aggravated their already strained financial situation.

CONCLUSION

The examples of the oral folk art of exiled Lithuanians cited in this paper allow us to address the fundamental problems of how the trauma of deportation relates to the archival findings and how it transformed the creators of the folk art. The bulk of research material is still preserved in the memory of those who suffered exile, or in restricted-access archives. Nevertheless, this analysis has made it possible to arrive at a number of generalizations.

It is folklore that most vividly reflects the situation of exile: homesickness, expressed through immediately recognizable images, grudges against Soviet power, and rejection of an alien reality reflected in the contrast of expressive means and a conflict of images. At the same time, folklore may have served to neutralize the trauma, thus removing psychological stress and assuaging spiritual anguish.

Songs, poems, and prayers were reliable tools of passive resistance to Soviet propaganda. Unlike other types of expression of dissent, they were created for existential purposes, to last a long time and to be open to modification. Quite possibly, the same songs and poems, like court ballads, were passed from one contingent of Lithuanian special settlers to another, with new verses added.

The system of total surveillance established by the government to punish and reeducate the exiles has been preserved in its records and has brought to the present age examples of folk art that were created under extreme stress and documented for the purpose of surveillance. Given the ability of the human memory to quickly erase that which is most painful, the above examples might, under different circumstances, have been forgotten and have disappeared forever. The fact that most of them are presented in Russian translation and are accompanied by the interpretations of supervising officers gives us a vivid impression of the peculiarities of the perception and reasoning of the exiled Lithuanians': the MVD officers. This adds particular value to the examples of folklore as primary historical sources. ❌

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4 "Sovkhoz" is an abbreviation of the Russian *sovetskoe khoziaistvo* [soviet farm] and refers to the large mechanized farms owned by the state.

5 Viktor Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy: Politicheskaia ssylka narodov Sovetskoi Rossii* [The deported: the political exile of Russian ethnic minorities], Moscow 2005, p. 525.

6 From an interview with B. S. Razgus dated April 28, 2010 (the audio tape of the interview is kept in the author's records). According to B. S. Razgus, chairman of the regional organization National-Cultural Society of Lithuanians in Buryatia, the resolution concerning the expulsion of his family contained only four signatures of alleged "witnesses" to the fact that his father, S. V. Razgus, had given a sack of flour and a certain quantity of home-brewed vodka to his neighbor. The Razgus family owned 20 hectares of land and a small farmstead.

7 Vsevolod Bashkuev, *Litovskie spetsposelentsy v Buriat-Mongolii (1948–1960)* [Lithuanian special settlers in Buryat-Mongolia (1948–1960)], Ulan-Ude 2009, p. 149.

8 Ibid., pp. 160-161.

9 Ibid., pp. 52-53.

10 Archival abbreviations are henceforth used as follows: F for "archival fund"; O for "inventory"; D for "archival file"; T for "volume"; L for "info on Lithuanians" or "sheet". Gruppa spetsfondov Informatsionnogo tsentra MVD Respubliki Buriatiia [Special Deposit of the Information Center of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Buriatia], F. 58L. O. 1. D. 91. T. 1. L. 66: "Sognulas' lipa pri doroge, / Zaplakala mat' moia starushka, / Akh syn moi, otchizna tebia zovet, / I opiat' budet svobodna moia Litva. / A esli suzhdeno mne pogibnut' / Ot russkikh palachei ruki, / Akh devushka, ukras' moiu mogilu / Beloi akatsii tsvetami".

11 Ibid., L. 119: "Mat' starushka tvoia plachet, / Otchizna mat' tvoia zhdet tebia, / Zatsvetet vesna veselaia, / Budet schastlivyi den' svobody dlia Litvy."

12 Ibid., D. 10. T. 1. L. 124: "Solntse zashlo, nastal vecher, / Zagrablena nasha zemlia nishchei Rossiei, / Ona zavladela nashei zemlei / I ne daet nashim sestram seiat' travu-rutu. / [...] Prishli aziaty k oknu materi / I sprosili mat', gde ee syn, / A mat' molchala i ne vydala syna, / Za eto ona vyslana navek v Sibir'. / Pridet vesna, kukushka zakukuet, /Trupami sovetskikh partizan zastelem vse dorogi, /Pridet vremia krovavoe i nashi stradaniia konchatsia, / Nishchikh russkikh vygonim so svoei zemli litovskoi."

13 Ibid., L. 125: "Ne sprashivai, pochemu skuchnoe litso, / Mezhdu vysokimi gorami Sibiri / Ia ne vizhu, kogda saditsia solntse / i ne slyshu pesni zhavoronka. / Mozhet ne uvizhu, kak na zelenom lugu / Brat'ia stanut seno kosit', /Mozhet byt' ne uslyshu, / Kak sestrenka pesniu svobody zapoet. / U vas tam na nashei rodine / Net ni postov, ni chasovykh, / Tol'ko shurshanie molodykh berez / I ekho skuchnoi pesni. / V Sibiri svirepstvuiut kholodnye v'iugi, / Tam stradaiut brat'ia izdavna."

14 Ibid., L. 125: "Ne sprashivai menia, dorogaia sestra, / Za chto popala ia v Sibir', / [za to], chto liubila rodnye kraia / i brat'iam kushat' podavala."

15 Ibid., L. 124: "Vstavai, vstavai parenek, / Vstavai molodets, / Pora ekhat' na voinu, / Zashchishchat' poraboshchennuiu Litvu!"

16 "Doloi kommunizm prokliatyi, / Doloi besserdechnykh obmanshchikov, / grabitelei chuzhogo imushchestva, / kotorye nas, molodezh', / vyselili iz nashei miloi strany [...] / [...] Kak tol'ko solntse zakatitsia, / Vy vidite skvoz' malen'kie okna / Nashi zheltye litsa i slezlivye glaza, / Ne vernetes' vy, stariki, / Ne vernetes' vy, malye deti, / Ne vernetes', brat'ia i sestry, / Ne budete khodit' po litovskim tropam, / Ne vstanete v soldatskie riady."

17 Ibid., D. 91. T. 1. L. 257: "Tsvela zemlia, molilis' olivy, / Tebia soprovozhdal pechal'nyi vzgliad Christa / i svobodnyi veter rodnykh polei. / Ne plach', khot' tvoe serdtse i budut razryvat' buri, / Liubi otechestvo, blagodat' spustitsia k tvoim nogam. / Khot' i tiazhelo vspominat' imia litovki, / chashu schast'ia nikogda ne promeniai."

18 Ibid., T. 2. L. 140: "Mne kazhetsia, menia dolzhny zabrat' za to, chto ia proshlym letom s Rimkutei Kazei khodila na kladbishche, gde pela pesni, napravlennye protiv sovetskogo gosudarstva."

19 Ibid., D. 130. T. 1. L. 251: "[...] ia nenavizhu etogo zamdirektora po politicheskoi chasti, tak kak on zastavliaet menia podpisyvat' na zaem stol'ko, skol'ko ia ne khochu. V proshlom godu ia ne podpisala na polnyi oklad, i iz-za etogo umer Stalin, a v etom godu, esli ne podpishu, umret Malenkov."

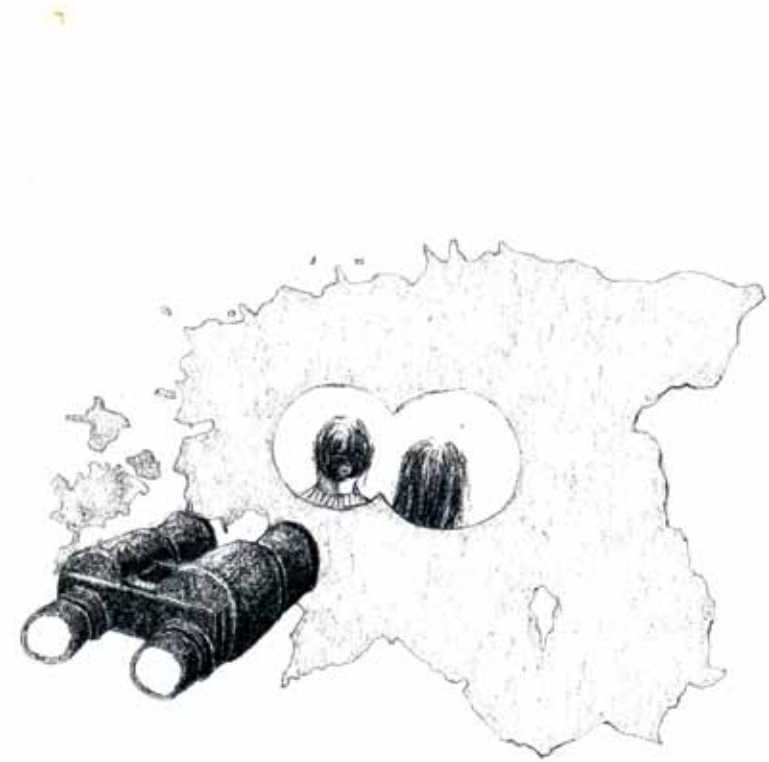Illustration: Moa Thelander

Sofi Oksanen's "Purge" in Estonia

essay by **Eneken Laanes**

In an article revisiting Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities, and in particular the relationship between the modern novel and the nation, Jonathan Culler advances the idea that the novel functions in the contemporary world as a transnational form primarily directed at the international cosmopolitan reader.[1] It is therefore possible that the national community of readers closest to the novel's origin might not be its best audience.[2] He provides the example of the critical Peruvian reception accorded Mario Vargas Llosa's *Storyteller*, which reproached the author for quietism and evasiveness. Culler argues that Peruvian readers read the novel as a political statement against the backdrop of Vargas Llosa's political activity and writing. He suggests that a "geographic remove" from the novel's national context is needed in order to read the novel as a novel.

An interesting test case for Culler's idea is presented by the reception of Sofi Oksanen's internationally successful Finnish novel *Purge* (*Puhdistus*, 2008) in Estonia, the national setting of the book. Although Culler's discussion of the cosmopolitan novel refers to postcolonial literature, another transnational phenomenon in contemporary literature that is similar to the postcolonial type discussed by Culler[3] is literature on memory. Both address international readership in discussing widespread phenomena such as the postcolonial experience or working through historical traumas, but represent them in the historically specific (national) context. Because it addresses the traumatic legacies of World War II and Soviet rule in Estonia, *Purge* can be tentatively, albeit somewhat problematically, read as literature on memory and trauma. In my analysis of the Estonian reception of *Purge*, I examine how a transnational perspective affects the reading of the novel in the national context and vice versa. As one who participated in the debates on *Purge* in Estonia, I am presenting this article as an attempt at self-reflection.

The novel Purge, based on a play with the same title,[4] was translated into Estonian in April 2009. It was received as a quasi-Estonian novel partly because of Oksanen's Estonian background, and partly because it recounts, through its two protagonists Aliide and Zara, the intertwining stories of Stalinist terror in Estonia and of trafficking in women in

post-Soviet Eastern Europe. Zara, a young woman from Vladi-vostok on the run from sex slavery, arrives in Estonia at the farm of her great-aunt Aliide to learn more about the suffering and acts of crime and complicity in her family during World War II.

The growing success of the novel in Finland and elsewhere was repeatedly reported and celebrated in the Estonian press even before the novel was available in Estonian. After transla-tion, it was powerfully embraced by official publicity, but not reviewed as a literary work.[5] The cultural critic Kaarel Tarand suggests that the reasons for the lack of literary reviews, and for *Purge*'s prominence in the public space in promotional articles and interviews that represented Oksanen as a na-tional hero, are to be found in the international recognition accorded the novel before its arrival in Estonia.[6]

In the autumn of 2010, more than a year after its publica-tion in Estonia, *Purge* became the object of unprecedented public debate that centered on the question of presenting Es-tonian history in fictional form.[7] The debate was remarkable in its intensity, and exceeded the public space usually allotted to a literary debate. The discussion was opened by a column in the daily newspaper *Eesti Päevaleht* by journalist Piret Tali, for whom *Purge* molded Estonian history "into a modern thriller in short sentences *à la* Dan Brown and covered with a disgusting trendy sauce of violence against women, anguish, and depression".[8] Her critical approach instantly provoked pain and fury in subsequent defenders of *Purge*. The critical dissent seems to be, more than a reaction to the novel itself, a response to its acclaim as a document about Estonian his-tory that would enlighten the international reader about the historic suffering of Estonians. The specific points of criti-cism, all of which revolve around questions of history, can be divided between two broader arguments: one concerns the representational choices made in the novel, and the other deals with problems with the novel's depiction of history, caused in part by those choices.

The critical approaches to *Purge* view it as a novel that is part of the culture industry, which aims at accessibility, sen-sationalism, and entertainment. In telling a horrific story of crimes and suffering inflicted on people, it employs elements of the thriller and melodrama that make it a gripping read, but turn Estonian history into a theme park. The novel exoti-cizes elements of local color and borrows from Hollywood film in its sensational representation of the violence against women in sex slavery.[9]

Another aspect of the argument refers to ethnic stereotyp-ing in characterization. On this point *Purge* is compared to the Stalinist novels of the 1940s–1950s, which "had a certain appeal; they fitted into some of our deep psychological needs, to our needs for fairy tales, for tales of heroes and vil-lains".[10] Whereas in Stalinist literature heroic Soviet citizens were contrasted to sadistic Nazis, the patriotic Estonians in *Purge* are noble in body and mind, while Soviets are filthy and evil. In other words, *Purge*'s element of mass culture, its ea-gerness to entertain the reader, and its popular success seem to make it suspect as a novel about historic suffering because the representational mode distorts history.

If we examine the allegations of distortion more closely, we find that some critics maintain that this schematic mode de-monizes and presents an overly negative picture of the Soviet period.[11] Attempts to rehabilitate the Soviet period have led to accusations of Soviet nostalgia and insensitivity towards the suffering of co-nationals, as well as an inability to differenti-ate between the periods of Stalinist terror and the socialism

of the 1970s and 1980s.[12] Ethnologist Ene Kõresaar, who has analyzed the *Purge* debate with regard to how memory is discussed in the public arena, argues that the conflicting argu-ments reflect the typical scenario of post-Soviet memory cul-ture, in which the discourse of totalitarianism and suffering referring to the Stalinist period clashes with milder memories of everyday life under late socialism.[13]

Another, more serious charge of distortion refers to the sensitive issue of sexual violence against women in the Stalinist period. Tali, who raises the point, argues that in the representational mode used in *Purge* the theme seems to be borrowed from international experience in Kosovo or Congo rather than Estonian history.[14] There is almost no historical research on violence against women in the 1940s in Estonia, and it is not a topos of Estonian memory culture.[15] That is not to say that such a phenomenon might not have occurred in the Stalinist period. Tali's argument indicates some resistance to accepting the possibility of such violence against women in the Estonian context.

Many works of fiction have drawn attention to past crimes that were not being addressed in the present. Nonetheless, it is problematic, I think, to claim something as sensitive as sexual violence against women in a specific historical context, especially if it is presented not as a personal experience of the protagonist, but as a widespread phenomenon. Rein Raud's summary of the argument about the culture industry – "by linking historical narrative with the clichés familiar enough [...] to the western reader, she [Oksanen] touches precisely those keys and chords that megasuccess presupposes" – is presumably applicable to the issue of sexual violence. Tali's observation draws attention to the fact that violence against women is a topos in the transnational memory culture to which the international reader can relate.

It is possible, however, that the critics' problem with the generalization of sexual violence against women is primarily the novel's perceived relationship to the post-Soviet politics of memory – the last set of questions debated with regard to *Purge*. Many critics have opined that the novel is celebrated in Estonia because its interpretation of Estonian history is in harmony with the post-Soviet politics of memory. Those whose uneasiness with the representation of history led them to search for errors of historical detail were vulnerable to the objection that they had read *Purge* as a realist text. It may be argued that, as *Purge* works with clear-cut dichotomies and stereotypes, it must be read differently. However, as Linda Kaljundi shows in her analysis of the interesting use of olfac-tory motifs and the theme of purity and filth in *Purge*, the im-age of Estonian history that results from such a reading is still susceptible to political and ethical criticism.[16]

The post-Soviet Estonian politics of memory have centered on the themes of national suffering and heroism, which function as a "dominant narrative and state-supported memory regime".[17] The fixation on victimhood has served as a screen memory[18] for avoiding questions about the Holocaust in Estonian territory and the collaboration of Estonians in So-viet rule. At the same time, it has an ethnopolitical dimension in the multi-ethnic Estonian state in that it ignores and ex-cludes the diverse memories of different ethnic groups.[19] For Linda Kaljundi, *Purge* constitutes a powerful reiteration of the regime of memory established in the early 1990s because it represents the interwar Estonian Republic as a pastoral paradise, the farm as a symbol of the nation, and the Soviet

occupation as a rupture. Kaljundi demonstrates that the at-tribution of past and present sexual violence and political terror to Russians equates the two, transfers the victimization of women to the whole nation,[20] and assigns the blame to an ethnic group that is a part of post-Soviet Estonia.

My own contribution to the debate drew attention to the melodramatic elements of the text which, in aspiring towards an unequivocal moral interpretation of the world, construct a world of perpetrators and victims. This permits a nationalistic reading of the novel, because the roles are distributed along ethnic lines.[21] The melodramatic element is most evident in the redemptive finale of the novel, in which the only mor-ally ambivalent character, the protagonist Aliide, reveals her moral value by saving her niece Zara in the nick of time.[22] Her act of (self)sacrificial violence is meant not only to save the girl, but also to purge the social order that is presented in the novel in ethnopolitical terms.[23]

The reaction to Purge in Estonia brings to mind the reception of Steven Spielberg's Holocaust film *Schindler's List* (1993) in the US, as analyzed by Miriam Bratu Hansen.[24] Like Spielberg's film, *Purge* addresses collectively relevant histori-cal traumas – the mass deportation of Estonians in 1949 and the annihilation of the Forest Brethren guerilla resistance movement by the Soviet regime in the 1940s and 1950s. In both cases, the reception is characterized by suspicions about the popular success of the works and perceptions of a clash between the representational modes employed and the subject matter. Whereas the polemic against *Schindler's List* was based on a comparison with Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985) as an exemplary attempt to represent the genocide, *Purge* was negatively compared to the novels of the Estonian writer Ene Mihkelson, which portray Stalinist terror in a highly experimental form and, instead of reworking the historical trauma in the name of national identity, present the conflict between individual remembering and the post-Soviet politics of memory.[25]

In her illuminating analysis of the reception of *Schindler's List*, Miriam Bratu Hansen argues that the film is important for its "diagnostic significance" in relation to the public re-membrance of the Holocaust in American culture, but also *vis à vis* the functioning of public memory in general.[26] She shows how the straightforward rejection of the film overshadows its diagnostic value as well as diverts the discussion from the textual workings of the film.

In the light of Hansen's analysis, *Purge* can be seen to have a diagnostic value on multiple levels. First, the debate on *Purge* brought to the fore the differences in the interpretation of World War II and its aftermath in post-Soviet Estonia not only between the ethnic communities in the country, but within the Estonian community itself, in particular with regard to whether or not the memories of ethnic minorities deserve a place in the Estonian collective memory.

The second diagnostic point concerns the nature of collec-tive remembrance and the role of literature as its medium. Michael Rothberg has argued that collective memory is not a "zero-sum struggle for preeminence", but multidirectional, creating new forms of solidarity through intercultural cross-referencing of different memories.[27] Consequently, *Purge*'s critics' concerns that the novel may achieve a political impact by establishing a hegemonic image of the past may prove to be exaggerated for two reasons. First, as Rothberg maintains, one memory does not necessarily preclude others. Second, and this brings us back to Culler's point discussed at the be-ginning of this article, novels are not read merely as political

statements. The critics of *Purge* fell into the same trap as the novel's publicists in that they read and discussed the novel as a representation of history. What gets eclipsed is the fact that *Purge* may not be, or at least does not function transnation-ally, as a novel about historic national suffering, but rather a masterfully executed, uncanny story about women's fear.[28] Instead of rejecting the novel on ideological grounds that are relevant only in the national context, we ought to analyze its textual workings and its attempt to represent sexual violence and other politically relevant issues in literature more close-ly.[29] As Culler shows, a geographic remove or a transnational perspective may allow readers to find more in a work of art rather than less.

Finally, Purge confirms that literature as a medium of collective remembrance is a phenomenon of reception[30] and that popular success is a prerequisite for attracting transna-tional attention to issues of historic injustice, especially in marginal historical contexts. The national perspective on *Purge* reinforces the realization that historical specificity may be compromised in the process. How we deal with specificity in remembering historical injustice and suffering in the public arena and in literature is a question still open for discus-sion. ✕

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references

1   Research for this article was supported by ESF research grant no. 8530.
2   Jonathan Culler, "Anderson and the Novel", in *Diacritics* 29, (1999), p. 33.
3   Culler discusses the kind of postcolonial literature in which, in Timothy Brennan's words, "the contradictory topoi of exile and nation are fused in a lament for the necessary and regrettable insistence of nation-forming, in which the writer proclaims his identity with a country whose artificiality and exclusiveness have driven him into a kind of exile – a simulta-neous recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it". See Culler, p. 33; Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form", in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, London 1990, p. 63.
4   *Purge* premiered in the Finnish National Theatre in 2007.
5   Oksanen was named Person of the Year 2009 by the leading Estonian daily newspaper *Postimees*. The novel topped Esto-nian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip's Christmas wish list. See "Ansip tahab jõuluvanalt Oksaneni raamatut" [Ansip wants Oksanen's book from Santa Claus], in *Postimees*, 2009-12-22, accessed 2011-11-15, http://www.postimees.ee/204103/ansip-tahab-jouluvanalt-oksaneni-raamatut/. In 2010 Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves awarded Oksanen the Order of the Cross of Terra Mariana for special services to the Esto-nian Republic. The first review of *Purge*, by Kaarel Tarand, was published six months after its publication in Estonia. Kaarel Tarand, "Tuumapommiks kujutletud meelelahutus" [Entertainment imagined into a nuclear bomb], in *Sirp*, 2009-12-18, p. 8.
6   Ibid. *Purge* received the Finlandia Award in 2008, the Rune-berg Award in 2009, the Nordic Council Literary Award, and in France, the Prix Femina Étranger and the FNAC prize in 2010.
7   The debate was provoked partly by the opening of the play *Purge* in Estonian theatre Vanemuine in September 2010.
8   The first critiques were actually expressed by the renowned Estonian writer Jaan Kaplinski in his blog entry "Sofi Oksanen and the Stalinist Award", but the negative responses to his post attracted wider attention. See Piret Tali, "Kogu tõde Sofi O-st" [All about Sofi O.], in *Eesti Päevaleht*, 2010-10-04, p. 3; Jaan Kaplinski, "Sofi Oksanen and the Stalinist Award", in *Ummamuudu*, 2010-08-24, accessed 2011-11-15.
9   On entertainment and crime, see Tarand, p. 8; on melodrama see Eneken Laanes, "Trauma ja popkultuur: Sofi Oksaneni *Puhastus*" [Trauma and mass culture: Sofi Oksanen's *Purge*], in *Vikerkaar*, no. 12 (2010), pp. 52–65; on exoticism, see Linda Kaljundi, "'Puhastus' ja rahvusliku ajalookirjutuse come-back" [*Purge* and the revival of national history writing], in *Vikekaar*, no. 12 (2010), pp. 36–51; on the representation of sexual violence, see Tali, p. 3, and Laanes, pp. 62–64.
10   Kaplinski. For related arguments, see Rein Raud, "Teised meist: stampide keeles ajalugu" [Others about us: history in the language of clichés], in *Eesti Päevaleht*, 2010-11-05, p. 3; Rein Veidemann, "Oksaneni kuvand eestlastest on vastuolu-line" [Oksanen's image of Estonians is contradictory], in *Eesti Päevaleht*, 2010-11-01, p. 3.
11   Kaplinski; Tali, p. 3.
12   Mihhail Lotman, "Sofi Oksanen ja nõukanostalgia" [Sofi Ok-sanen and nostalgia for the Soviet Union], in *Eesti Päevaleht*, 2010-10-18, p. 3.
13   Ene Kõresaar, "Ajakirjanduse "mälutöö" ja mis on Sofil selle-ga pistmist" [The role of the press in memory work and what Sofi has to do with it], in *Postimees*, 2010-11-06, p. 6–7.
14   Tali, p. 3.
15   The first writer to address the topic, albeit indirectly, was Imbi Paju in her documentary film *Memories Denied* (2005) and in her book with the same title (2009).
16   Kaljundi, p. 46.
17   Eva-Clarita Onken, "The Baltic States and Moscow's 9 May Commemoration: Analysing Memory Politics in Europe", in *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, (2007), p. 31.
18   For a discussion of the concept of screen memory, see Mi-chael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the*

Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, Palo Alto 2009, pp. 12–16.
19   Onken, p. 37.
20   Kaljundi, p. 46. For a reading of the way in which "the story of a era, of a state, of a family and of a woman [...] are braided into a rope", see Mari Klein, "'Puhastus' on väga mit-metasandiline lugu" [*Purge* is a multilayered story], in *Eesti Päevaleht*, 2009-01-16, p. 12.
21   Laanes, pp. 59–62. My understanding of melodrama is indebted to Linda Williams and Peter Brooks. See Linda Wil-liams, "Melodrama Revised", in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring Film Genres: History and Theory*, Berkeley 1998, pp. 42–88; Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, New Haven 1995.
22   For a different reading of the ending of Purge, see Markku Lehtimäki, "Sofistikoitunut kertomus ja lukemisen etiikka" [Sophisticated writing and the ethics of reading], in *Avain*, 2010:2, pp. 40–49. For Lehtimäki as well, the finale redeems Aliide, but rather than being melodramatic, it turns *Purge* into a novel of moral ambivalence. He compares Aliide's dilemma in saving Zara by killing Russian pimps to Sethe's di-lemma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in killing her child in order to save her from slavery. I do not find this an apt comparison, because Sethe kills her child in order to save her from slavery, whereas Aliide kills a third party in order to save Zara *and* redeem her own past deeds, as Lehtimäki suggests.
23   Zara comes to Aliide as a Russian girl, but Aliide decides to save her because she has her Estonian grandfather's Hans's chin. As she kills herself, Aliide thinks, "If the girl made it home, she would tell Ingel that the land she lost long ago was waiting for her. Ingel and Linda could get Estonian citizen-ship. [...] Since she was a descendent of Ingel and Linda, she could get an Estonian passport, too. She wouldn't ever have to go back to Russia" (Sofi Oksanen, *Purge*, New York, 2010, p. 335; 355–356). The initial social order is restored by expelling the scapegoats – the Russian pimps – and by bringing Zara, who was unjustly removed from her community, back within its periphery. I am indebted to René Girard for my under-standing of sacrificial violence: see René Girard, "Violence and Representation in the Mythical Text", in *To Double Busi-ness Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, Baltimore 1978, p. 185.
24   Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah. Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory", in Yosefa Loshitzky (ed.), *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Per-spectives on Schindler's List*, Bloomington 1997, pp. 77–103.
25   Ene Mihkelson's novels describing Stalinist terror are *Ahas-veeruse uni* [The dream of Ahasuerus] (2001) and *Katkuhaud* [Plague grave] (2007). For a non-antagonistic comparison of Oksanen and Mihkelson, see Sirje Olesk, "Two Ways to Write About Estonian History", in *Estonian Literary Magazine* 2011:1, pp. 4–11.
26   Hansen, p. 94.
27   Michael Rothberg, pp. 3, 5. It is important to note that Roth-berg's approach addresses the relationship of the different histories of victimization, whereas in the *Purge* debate a single ethnic group's different ways of remembering the past compete.
28   The last point was made by Tiina Kirss. See Tiina Kirss, "Sofi O. ja tema raamat" [Sofi O. and her book], in *Eesti Päevaleht*, 2010-10-20, p. 3.
29   Hansen analyzes the role of sound in the visual production of *Schindler's List*. See Hansen, pp. 85–94.
30   Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, Basingstoke 2011, p. 160. In reference to *Schindler's List*, Hansen also argues that the predominant media of public memory are media of mass consumption. See Hansen, p. 98.

The truncated road movie: Thomas Brasch and the Berlin Wall

essay by **Jakob Norberg**

In an interview from 1977, author Thomas Brasch, who had recently moved from the GDR to West Germany, said that people in East Germany experienced the same problems as in any other contemporary industrial society. There were struggles with bureaucracy everywhere, and a declining faith in economic and technological progress. East Germany was no different from Finland or Japan. The Berlin Wall, he added, was really the only "GDR-specific problem".[1] But the Wall was hardly a minor issue. Later in the same interview, he laconically characterized his formative conditions as a writer in a way that suggested the dominating presence of the *Mauer*: "I started writing when the GDR was a functioning state, which was surrounded by a wall."[2]

It is no surprise, then, that the Wall figures in Brasch's first collection of stories, *Vor den Vätern sterben die Söhne*, from the same year, 1977. Brasch had written the stories in the GDR but taken the manuscript with him to West Berlin and published it with Rotbuch, a left-wing publisher there. The longest story of the collection tracks the travels of a group of young people, two men and one woman. In this story, the Wall appears several times: the text alludes to it tacitly, then refers to it explicitly, and finally the characters visit it. Towards the end of the story, the three friends are in Berlin for a blues concert and make their way to the Wall, an episode Brasch renders with absolute terseness: "After the concert we went to the Wall. I thought it was higher than that, Sophie said."[3] Unlike Brasch, the characters never cross over to the West.

Thomas Brasch was obviously neither the first nor the best-known author to write about the Wall.[4] One of the most famous novels on the division of Germany is Christa Wolf's 1963 bestseller *Der geteilte Himmel*. Between Wolf's novel and Brasch's story, however, the heavens have darkened and hardened. For Brasch, the sky is no longer partitioned, but has become a part of the enclosure; it is a lid, a cover. The title

of the story mentioned above reads, "Und über uns schließt sich ein Himmel aus Stahl". About fifteen years after the division of the sky referred to in Wolf's novel, the area to the East has turned into a vault; it is a border above people's heads, a boundary that contains and confines them.

But is there a way in which the Wall is not simply mentioned in the title of Brasch's story or gestured to in a brief scene, but somehow inscribed into the text, into its very literary form? I think there is. Let me summarize the story.

Three young East Germans meet, spend some time together, maybe a couple of weeks, and then disperse again. The male narrator meets Robert, a student, at a rare screening of a controversial, prohibited film. After getting into a fight with what are probably undercover secret police agents sent to intimidate the audience, the two escape and leave the city on a motorbike. They travel to the East German coast and stay on the beach for a while. While there, Robert persuades Sophie, a young female nursing student working in a pub, to join them. The three of them share intimate stories, bicker, go bathing, have sex, mockingly participate in a cheesy seaside resort singing competition, go on trips with the motor bike, and attend the American Folk Blues Festival in the capital. After a few days, the group breaks up. Sophie must return to her child and start her hospital work. The narrator works in a factory and cannot extend his sick leave. And Robert tries illegally to cross the German-German border and dies. In their final heated discussion about what to do next – get back to work routines or somehow continue their marginal existence – Robert accidentally smashes the motorbike: there will be no more traveling.

Summarized in this way, the story pattern may seem vaguely familiar. The plot has an unstructured feel to it. It jumps from encounter to encounter, moves through a seemingly random series of events in a journey without a clear destination. It is about a few young people who want to live more freely and wildly, to disregard duties and conventions, until their obligations close in on them again and the resulting

tensions strain their relationships. The group seeks a "mobile refuge from social circumstances felt to be lacking or oppressive".[5] They hop on a bike and embrace, however briefly, "the road as a way of life".[6] In other words, Brasch's story belongs to the genre of the road movie, the emblematic countercultural narrative form in which the improvised nomadism of nonconformists with motorized vehicles represents a challenge to the normative-administrative order of the hegemonic majority. The story of their trip more or less begins with Robert sitting behind the narrator on the motorbike and shouting out: "Let's get out of the city, just go wherever, someplace where we can get more air."[7] And then they travel to the shoreline, where they can feel the damp sea breeze on their faces.

It may seem odd to invoke a very American genre to discuss a text about the GDR, but Brasch's story is already well-stocked with similar references to popular culture from the West. The narrator and his friend sing the songs of the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, and Simon and Garfunkel as they work themselves up into excitement about the folk concert in Berlin. "Every day I have the blues", Robert exclaims on the beach, and the prison legends of American blues artists seem to resonate with their own helplessness.[8] They see their own boxed-in lives reflected in the songs of men on death row in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. The story couldn't possibly contain more interregional encounters, moments of cultural cross-pollination, and transmogrified German-English (or "*denglisch*") phrases, given the boundaries that were imposed to filter or completely arrest the flow of people, ideas, and goods between East and West. The blues artists who perform have been invited to the GDR, and so are presumably considered non-threatening by the regime, but the three protagonists listening to them associate the music with their own entrapment. It is not an exaggeration to say that the characters in this East German story are animated by cultural energies coming from the Cold War enemy.

Yet the story embodies the pattern of the road movie genre only imperfectly. It is here that we must return to the Wall. Perhaps we can say that the Berlin Wall is not simply mentioned or indicated as a cruel physical barrier in the text, but also shows up in the text as a limit imposed on full participation in a genre, a closing that shows up too early in the unfolding of the generic pattern. "And Over Us a Sky of Steel Is Closing" is an abbreviated, even truncated road movie. The protagonists set out on an impromptu journey away from everything that burdens them: the tedium of factory work, the narrowness of dogmatic Marxist university teaching, the unspoken norms on how to conduct one's social and sexual life, and, most immediately, the censorship and thuggish political oppression. And they have barely started out when they run up against the limit. It takes them little time to travel to the coast, a day's ride interrupted only by a fuel stop, and geographically, that is as far as they ever get. There is no path across the water. Instead, they soon return from the seaside, and even claim that the sea gets irritating after a while, only to find themselves standing finally at the Wall. They travel, but not further and further away from a starting point. Instead, they get to the sea and back again, closer and closer to the impenetrable barrier that seals off their life trajectories. Any road movie might portray claustrophobia and people eager to escape enclosure, but in Brasch's case, the period of relief is really very short. If the text activates the road movie pattern as a possible frame of interpretation, this association serves only to highlight how its heroes can do nothing but move in circles within an enclosed space.

Judging by Brasch's text, there is not enough room for a road movie in the GDR. It is not the fact that the story ends in such a melancholy, desperate way that prevents full membership in the genre, but the fact that it must end so quickly. The road epic has shrunk to a road novella. Yet paradoxically, this curtailed variant may be the ultimate road movie, because it actualizes the idea that traveling is inherently subversive. The heroes are either outlaws escaping from the forces of control, or non-conformists breaking out of their designated place in society.[9] In a party state that oversees and molds every aspect of citizens' behavior, one could argue, the unplanned and aimless road trip can once again become genuinely subversive. While people who crisscross the country, crash local talent shows, steal alcohol, explore their sexuality, and listen to blues music may not be engaging in unequivocal political protest, they are clearly not helping to build the socialist state.

But here we must avoid a tired and facetious account of how intolerant societies keep the idea of rebellion interesting, or how demarcations and discipline help restore the liberating impulse of the road movie. If a repressive party state narrows down the space of permissible behavior, more and more seemingly trivial actions will be classified as implicit protest.[10] And if that same state installs a system of nearly total surveillance and nearly perfect border control, these forms of protest will become completely neutralized, contained, and ineffectual.[11] The result, in Brasch's story, is that the characters go mad out of total helplessness. They are not outlaws on the run from the law because everything they do, no matter how trivial, is potentially suspicious; nor are they wild and free individuals who defy the borders of their world because there really is no road, just a day-long trip to a dead end. The protagonists are stuck in the static condition of inescapable and ineffective rebellion.

In Brasch's story, East Germany is a functioning state sur-

rounded by a wall, a circumscribed, homogeneous space with no exit or threshold, a single cell.[12] The GDR citizen is confined to one area, but, according to Brasch, also trapped in a single phase of life, or kept in an extended childhood. The non-journey corresponds to personal non-development. In another interview from 1977, Brasch explained that there was no way for East German citizens to keep out of politics, since all actions were judged by their ideological potential, but that there was also no way of formulating political alternatives in cooperation with others. As a result, people were reduced to a state of "childish obstinacy".[13] These observations bring home the harrowing meaning of the collection's title, "The Sons Die Before the Fathers". The "sons", the heirs of socialism, never leave adolescence, or never cross the threshold from one space or one age to another. The road trip and the life journey are both contained and sealed off by barriers.

To read Brasch's texts is to witness people scurrying about and never growing up under a sky of steel. This can be a discomforting experience. *Vor den Vätern sterben die Söhne* was published in West Germany but not in the East, for obvious reasons. The truncated road movie was bound to one of the two German states, the GDR, and never describes a place outside it, although the author and the first generation of readers were located outside. Today, the reader, critic, or scholar inherits this position outside East Germany, and slips into the role of someone watching as people suffocate inside the "*Riesenknast*", or gigantic prison, next door.[14]

Brasch himself said that he paid no attention to the geopolitical map when writing, and he clearly wanted to avoid ranking the two Germanys or celebrating either of them. When interviewers in the West invited him to facilitate self-congratulatory West German attitudes by speaking of his first-hand experience of GDR horrors, he declined. But because the 1977 collection of stories could only be published in the West, there was never a time when it could avoid placing the reader in the position of an external witness to stunted development under conditions of confinement. In the text written in and about the East, but made available in the West, the border lies between the reader and the events represented. Brasch's *Vor den Vätern sterben die Söhne* is a case of "dislocated lit-

erature"[15]: the collection crossed the demarcation line of the Cold War, and was immediately approached as a document of life behind the Wall.

Modern literature often guides its readers behind the scenes. In a complex world, authors can take us into spaces and minds that would otherwise be inaccessible and unknown to us. Brasch does so, but so do countless other authors; this is nothing remarkable. In the case of Brasch's story about a leaden sky, however, the author and the initial and primary book market were just on the other side of the Berlin Wall, and the story does not make its readers invisible spectators of scenes in distant, inaccessible places. Rather, I would suggest, it pulls the reader quite close to the neighboring, country-wide prison, and even shows the reader models of privileged spectatorship. For instance, one West German in the truncated road movie is a tourist chatting to the desperate Robert at a train station. It is clear that this traveler represents the opportunity to move freely and even visit inside the prison, a role shared by West German readers. "I'm sorry", the young visitor from the West says glibly, "every time I'm here I forget that you people can't get out".[16]

Brasch lets us peek over the Wall. And what we then see is how this wall destroys the people on the other side of it. Given the collection's publication history, the topic of Brasch's novella could not be simply life in East Germany, but rather life in East Germany as observed from somewhere else, or as seen by witnesses who are more mobile. Today, the text should perhaps not be read as a document of East German conditions, but rather as a document of East German conditions that was inevitably offered up for the voyeuristic consumption of a West German audience.

"The socialist experiment" is a common phrase that is obviously attractive to socialism's critics: to call socialism an experiment is to imply that a particular hypothesis – the proposition that socialism constitutes a viable and desirable political and economic system – was conclusively refuted when put to an empirical test, namely the attempt to construct a socialist society in the Eastern part of Germany and

Illustration: Moa Thelander

other places. No laws of history brought socialism about; it was a man-made endeavor that failed. But Brasch's cut-off road movie highlights another meaning of the "socialist experiment". When reading his story, we approach the text as a window onto a clearly delimited space in which a dreary human action is being played out. The protagonists are cast in the role of lab rats to be studied. What happens to human relationships under conditions of internment? How does detention affect well-being? These are questions that force themselves upon us when we are reading across the border. Brasch's novella does two things: it presents lives smothered by incarceration, and it also places the reader on the other side of the barrier, as a witness to the road movie that crashes into the Wall. ⊠

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3   "Nach dem Konzert gingen wir an die Mauer. Ich habe sie mir höher vorgestellt, sagte Sophie." Thomas Brasch, *Vor den Vätern sterben die Söhne*, Frankfurt am Main 2002, p. 56.

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6   Daniel Lopez, *Films by genre*, Jefferson, NC 1993, pp. 256-57.

7   "Weiter […] raus aus der Stadt, irgendwohin, wo man mehr Luft kriegt." Thomas Brasch, *Vor den Vätern sterben die Söhne*, p. 35.

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9   See Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, "Introduction", in *The Road Movie Book*, ed. Cohan and Hark, New York 1997, pp. 1–14.

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13 Thomas Hoernigk, Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, and Lienhard Awrzyn, "Interview with Thomas Brasch", trans. Eric Rentschler and Edward Weintraut, in *New German Critique* 12 (1977), pp. 141–168.

14 Thomas Brasch, *Vor den Vätern sterben die Söhne*, p. 129.

15 I borrow this phrase from Markus Huss, Kaisa Kaakinen, and Jenny Willner, the organizers of the Baltic "Dislocating Literature" network.

16 "Entschuldigen Sie […] jedesmal, wenn ich hier bin, vergesse ich, daß Sie ja nicht rauskommen." Thomas Brasch, *Vor den Vätern sterben die Söhne*, p. 61.

Baltic-Russian literature: writing from nowhere?

Illustration: Moa Thelander

commentary by **Taisija Laukkonen**

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a new "Russian minority"[1] began to take shape on the territory of the independent Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). It was new in a number of ways. Historically, whether large or small, a Russian community had always been present in these territories. However, the independent cultural status of this minority within a separate state was not a foregone conclusion, even though there were precedents, as, for example, in Lithuania between the First and Second World Wars.

The post-Soviet Russian diaspora in the Baltic countries was novel not only in and of itself, but in comparison with other communities in the post-colonial world. First, the transformation of a group from the status of linguistic and cultural dominance to one of a minority occurred without a change of residence. This is most unusual in traditional diasporas. Second, certain cultural pretensions remained with regard to differences in the prestige of literary traditions.[2] The enthusiasm for the "preservation of Russian culture" that was characteristic of the Russian diaspora beyond the borders of the Soviet Union throughout the 20th century was no longer appealing, given the disappearance of the obvious obstacles to repatriation and participation in the life of modern Russia.

This has caused the new Russian diaspora to look for a different basis for its identity, and one of the steps that seemed necessary was the identification of cultural boundaries. Historical precedents of this kind of cultural mission include both assimilation of the achievements of Western cultures, and eastern, northern, or southern exoticism. In classical Russian literature, the images of the representatives were often developed through exotic dismissal. During the Soviet era, the Baltic socialist republics were considered the Westernized outskirts of the Soviet Union and, as such, the bearers of the prestige of Western culture. However, in the post-Soviet "world without borders", the newly emerged Baltic nations are neither one nor the other: too familiar to be considered exotic and, at the same time, not Western enough as far as the *real* West is concerned. Writers of Russian-German, Russian-French, and Russian-English cross-border cultural exchange appear to play the role of intermediaries in a culturally prestigious dialogue of equals, whereas Russian authors in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, having to develop their identity through their position in a cultural "beyond", find themselves struggling for legitimacy, uniqueness, and value their cultural dialogue.

Relations between the new Baltic national states and their Russian minorities are somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, the states were not interested in supporting or culturally advertising anything *Russian*, which, in the minds of some of the population, was synonymous with *Soviet*. On the other hand, attention to minorities is one of the most important characteristics of a contemporary democratic country, all the more so for members of the European Union. However, this does not imply that the dialogue with Russian culture is imposed from above. The cultural prestige of the Russian literary tradition is sufficiently high, compared to those of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, that those authors who are interested in accessing a wider international market cannot help but see a whole range of new opportunities in such a dialogue.

Despite the similarity of the general situation in the three Baltic States, the status of local Russian literature is different in each one. This is only partially due to the percentage of each state that is ethnically Russians.

In Lithuania, there is just one professional literary periodical in Russian, *Vilnius* magazine, which is published twice a year, sometimes even less frequently. It carries mainly Russian translations of Lithuanian authors and reviews by Lithuanian literary critics. A smaller portion of the magazine is devoted to work by local Russian-language writers. Although the Lithuanian Union of Writers can boast more than a dozen who are Russian-speaking, their activity goes almost unnoticed. In Latvia, in contrast, literary life is noticeably active, with numerous literary clubs and several periodicals. In Estonia, there is, in addition to periodicals, an electronic magazine called *Novye Oblaka* [New Clouds] that unites young Russian-language writers in Estonia. In addition, the *Eesti Kulturkapital* fund grants awards to local Russian-language writers annually.

Since Russian-language literary activity is more evident in Latvia and Estonia than it is in Lithuania, the latter is represented by only three authors on the New Literary Map of Russia[3] – which claims to represent the entire Russian-language "literary world" – whereas Estonia is represented by eleven authors and Latvia by sixteen. For comparison, Finland is represented by as many as four authors, even though its Russian-speaking community is noticeably smaller than that of Lithuania. Moreover, Russian authors from Latvia (Sergei Moreyno and Sergei Timofeyev) and from Estonia (Yelena Skulskaya and Andrei Ivanov) have been among the nominees for the Russian Award[4] twice during the six years of its existence, whereas there has not been a single recipient from Lithuania.

In my opinion, the defining factor here is the absence (or presence, for that matter) of an established literary tradition. This, in turn, is connected to the unofficial, uncensored literature that came to light at the end of 1980s. It undermined the existing literary hierarchy and demanded a re-examination of the history of Russian literature of the second half of the 20th century. From this point of view, Latvia and Estonia find themselves at an advantage as compared to Lithuania. Authors from Riga (the capital of Latvia), united by the *Rodnik* [Brook] magazine, were involved with the samizdat[5] in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and, therefore, influenced the development of contemporary Russian literature.[6] The importance of Estonia for unorthodox Soviet culture is un-deniable, first because of the Tartu School of Semiotics led by Yuri Lotman, and second because of the literary works of the unofficial novelist Sergei Dovlatov. As a result, the new generations of Latvian and Estonian authors rightfully consider themselves heirs to a prestigious tradition of unofficial Russian art in its local form. It is commonly thought that, in Lithuania, it was mainly Soviet Russian literature that developed – the symbolic value of which is now called into question.

Whereas national literary institutions are mainly interested in the participation of local Russian literature in the dialogue between two cultures – and as a rule, it is local authors who translate contemporary Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian literature into Russian – Russian critics and prize juries prefer authors whose creative writing fits into a wider intercultural context.

Recently, two Baltic novelists, Lena Eltang of Lithuania and Andrei Ivanov of Estonia, have become unexpected discoveries for Russian critics. The literary trajectories of these authors are different, and they vividly demonstrate the difference in the status of Russian literature in the two countries. The first novel by Lena Eltang was published in 2006 in St. Petersburg and appeared on the shortlists of two prestigious Russian awards, the National Bestseller and an Andrei Biely[7] Award. Her next novel, *Kamennye Klyony* [Stone maples], became the first recipient of the *Nos* [Nose] award,[8] which is aimed at "identifying and supporting new trends" in contemporary Russian literature. Only then did Lithuanian society at large become interested in this Russian writer, who had resided in Lithuania since 1989.

The story of Andrei Ivanov is entirely different. His novel *Hanuman's Travel to Lolland* was first published in 2009 with the support of the Eesti Kulturkapital Fund and received the Fund's award. In 2011, the novel was republished in Moscow and was included on the shortlist of the "Russian Booker" prize. Thus, it was the Estonian cultural industry that facilitated the publication debut of the book.

Although Ivanov, as a writer, is often compared with Eltang, their literary trajectories are different, as are the texture and the subject matter of their novels. The main characters of Ivanov's mischievous novel are Hanuman, an Indian, and the narrator Eudge, a Russian-Estonian. The two reside illegally in a Danish refugee camp. Their dream is to visit Lolland, a Danish island. Russian critics see the refugee camp – with its mixed lot of representatives from "third world" countries, contrasted with well-off Danish citizens – as a parody of contemporary Europe. According to the author, the first version of the novel was written in phonetic English, but the final one was done in Russian. The very name of the novel mislead the reader, sounding as it does like a travelogue whereas the main characters never travel to Lolland.

Critics often compare Lena Eltang's works to the intellectual crypto-detective novels of Umberto Eco, and to the refined language of Fowles and Borges. Her novels are narrated in the first person, but are always refracted through the specifics of various "personal" genres. For example, her first novel, *Pobeg Kumaniki* [Blueberry shoot], appeared in LiveJournal (a web site and a web journal) as notes of a fictitious character, who many readers believed really existed. The book was also published in the same way, as the notes of either a student, or a madman named Moses-Morass, and e-mails and diaries of characters (members of an archaeological expedition to Malta or their correspondents) that probably exist only in the imagination of the main character.

Eltang's novels are far from unambiguous. To the best of my knowledge, the first attempt to translate *Pobeg Kumaniki* into English was a fiasco, due mainly to the tight texture of the language and its close resemblance to poetry. The main character of the second novel, Sasha Sonly, a woman with Russian roots, lives in Wales, owns a boarding house called "Kamennye Klyony", keeps a diary and communicates with her surroundings by writing notes. This novel also consists mainly of letters, diaries and notes in guest books; here, too, the author creates a polyphonically complex, multi-layered "reality" rather than the pretense of an objective narrative.

In their attempts to determine the cultural-geographic coordinates and language characteristics of Eltang's and Ivanov's novels, Russian literary critics may well begin from different points, but they converge on one and the same key

word: "nowhere". Here, for example, is what Tatyana Grigorieva writes about Ivanov's novel:

> The first paradox that holds up the narrative is reality itself, described vividly, in detail and even somewhat naturalistically, and transformed into a fantastic "nowhere" populated by wild characters speaking a wild language.[9]

In his review of *Kamennye Klyony*, Andrey Uritsky connects the language characteristics of the novel with the author's place of residence, with the help of the "nowhere" category:

> The parabola of Eltang's biography is reflected in her novels: a Russian-speaking writer who lives in a city once located on the Western outskirts of the Soviet Empire, but now situated on the Eastern outskirts of the European Union, apparently has to use an airy, semi-transparent language almost devoid of any "meatiness"; an almost "distilled" language in which profane words or colloquialisms would be impossible. And, evidently, she has to place her characters in the historical and geographical space farthest from Russia, as well as from the location of her current residence. The simplest way to determine such a location would be to use the word "nowhere". As a matter of fact, the author herself lives in the same "nowhere". The "nowhere" of Eltang's second novel is Wales.[10]

The fact that the word "nowhere" is the most apt to describe the intercultural situation of Russian-Baltic novelists and their characters is evidence of their attempts to culturally assimilate distant territories, despite the authors' geographical proximity to the Russian border. The multicultural backgrounds and language properties on which their novels turn – and in a certain way depend – immediately confer on their creators the title of innovators in the Russian medium, and when translated into European languages, guarantee the recognizability of their themes.

As far as poetry is concerned, Orbit (www.orbita.lv), a publishing and multi-media project founded in 1999 by Russian poets in Latvia (Sergei Timofeyev, Arthur Punté, Semyon Khanin, George Wallick, and Vladimir Svetlov), enjoys the widest recognition. Orbit experiments with different ways of representing poetic texts and emphasizes the inter-cultural context. In this case, however, the context is more pointedly European, rather than an abstract "nowhere". For example, in his review of Orbit's fifth collection of works, Stanislav Lvovsky puts forward as a key metaphor a fragment of Alexei Levenko's poem that cites the lyrics of a song called "Europe Is Our Playground" by the group Suede. Andrei Levkin, for his part, makes the notion of "TransEurope" a heading for his preface to Sergei Timofeyev's book *Sdelano* [Done]. There is also a musical allusion to it: a famous album by the group Kraftwerk is named "Trans-Europe Express" (1977). However, Europe is understood as a field for cultural games rather than a specific cultural-linguistic space, as a transitional territory rather than a place of residence.

In summary, it is important to note that Russian literature is as multi-layered in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia as it is in the contemporary Russian literary space as a whole. One can find virtually anything here: from naive poetry and popular literature to language and innovative intermediation. Therefore, strategies aimed at assimilating the Russian-European borderline are evident and successful. This allows us to talk about the primary task of Baltic Russian literature from the point of view of a literary metropolis, to comprehend the intercultural European "nowhere" from the perspective of its own cultural experience.

Many Baltic writers, in one way or another, do touch upon the issue of the Russian minority. The topic is of keen interest not only to the local Russian-speaking population, but also to those in government institutions. As a rule, local writers receive awards for strengthening literary and cultural ties. That being said, authors who confine themselves to simply developing the minority problem without focusing on their own intercultural situation run the risk of never attracting a wider market of Russian and foreign readers. For example, the novel by P. I. Filimonov entitled *The Zone of Non-Euclidian Geometry* – which received an Eesti Kulturkapital award in 2007 and was translated into Estonian in 2010 – has not yet aroused the interest of Russian readers. Some novelists and poets who are recognized as authors of the European borderline often find themselves in the spotlight of social attention and, as a result, successfully address more local topics; for example, the action of Ivanov's second novel, *Gorst' Prakha* [A handful of dust] – nominated for the Russian Award – is set in Tallinn and describes the recent situation developing around "The Bronze Soldier".[11] The main character of Lena Eltang's new novel, *Drugiye Barabany* [Other drums], is a Lithuanian. Orbit's bilingual projects sustain the mutual interest of Russian and Latvian writers, and so on.

Thus, the Baltic Russian author is in double demand, from both the metropolis and the local public, but each one makes his or her individual choice. We must simply acknowledge that the authors who achieve the greatest success and recognition are those who combine their European identity with an interest in a specific cultural borderline situation in their literary work and their strategies of self-representation. Their novels are more frequently translated into other European languages. ▪

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2 As Pascale Casanova shows, ethnic literary territories are not equal; many of them relate to one another in terms of dominating or dominated. These relations are not necessarily political in nature; sometimes we must recognize that the domination of a specific literary tradition stems from the prestige of that literary tradition; in other words, its importance is derived from how ancient, developed, and recognized it is. See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, Cambridge, MA 2007.
3 New Literary Map of Russia, accessed 2011-11-15 at: www.lit-karta.ru.
4 The "Russian Award", established in 2005, is given to foreign Russian-language authors.
5 "Samizdat" (self-publishing): The term refers to literary works that could not be officially published in the former communist-ruled Soviet Union, since they were deemed incompatible with official government propaganda. Such works were often printed illegally using personal typewriters and then distributed among trusted friends.
6 For more details see Ilya Kukulin, "A Photo of the Inside of a Coffee Cup", in *Novoye Literaturnoye Obozrenie* [New Literary Review] 54 (2002), pp. 262–282. The name of the article cites the beginning of a poem by Sergei Timofeyev, a Russian-Latvian poet, who wrote: "All I know about Paris is a photo of the inside of a coffee cup."
7 Andrey Biely is the pseudonym of Boris Bugayev, Russian poet and novelist of the first half of the 20th century, the Silver Age of Russian Literature.
8 The Nose award alludes to the well-known novel by Nikolai Gogol, a famous Russian-Ukrainian writer of the first half of the 19th century. The award and a bronze statuette in the shape of a human nose are displayed in St. Petersburg. The name of the award is also an acronym derived from the first three letters of the words "NOvaya Slovesnost'" [New Literature] or "NOvaya Sotsial'nost'" [New social order].
9 Tatyana Grigorieva "Andrey Ivanov: Hanuman's Travel to Lolland." See OpenSpace.ru, 2011-01-20, accessed 2011-11-15 at: http:www.openspace.ru/literature/events/details/19940/.
10 Andrey Uritsky, "Decals or Battle with Non-Existence", in *Novoye Literaturnoye Obozrenie* [New Literary Review] 104 (2010), p. 281.
11 The monument to Russian soldiers who fought in Estonia during the Second World War was erected in the central park of Tallinn. Not long ago, Estonian authorities decided to move it to another location. Ethnically Russian residents of Estonia opposed the decision. It created considerable unrest in Tallinn, including confrontations between Russians and Estonians.

Listening for other languages
Cia Rinne and the soundpoetic event

essay by **Hannah Lutz**

EXCERPTS FROM NOTES FOR SOLOISTS, CIA RINNE 2009

1
one
ohne
oh no
ono
on
o.
(oh no)[1]
[...]

1 no
no.no
no)
no9
no.9
no.nine
no.nein
no.no.[2]
[...]

sur scène:
sur scen
sen, sur
censur.[3]

What is the relevance of these lines to the sounds of Cia Rinne, the Finnish multilingual poet I wish to introduce in the following pages? How can the soundpoetic event be approached in the form of an article in a journal? For many of its practitioners, creating sound poetry means vigorously demonstrating the here and now of the poem, which has no counterpart in text; encouraging the people in the audience to place trust in their own listening rather than look to a text for answers; and by extension challenging the idea of an object which lends itself to ownership, or can be saved to experience later. Do we listen differently when bereft of a text version? As performance art has taught us, we can question representationalism by creating works of art that demonstrate their inseparability from the hour and the space in which they take place, and therefore cannot be copied, sold for profit, or archived.

However, when Rinne performs, she carries a book in her hand, in a sense bringing us back to the text. Moreover, her text poems – particularly in *notes for soloists* – suggest an immanent relationship to sound, as illustrated by the lines quoted above. In a sense, this reinforces the idea of representation, as the poem appears to be either imitating sound, or anticipating its own becoming sound. Why is engaging with Rinne's sounds a difficult yet worthwhile challenge? Why choose Rinne over the many sound poets who do not rely on text versions of their poems? Why even call Rinne a sound poet?

I hope to demonstrate that it is precisely in the odd relationship between text and sound in Rinne's performances that we may find openings into her poetry and its powerful potential. Rinne seems to suggest the possibility of a soundpoetic event in which spaces, bodies, texts, and times can assemble in surprising ways, and generate new and radical modes of negotiating language and meaning.

CIA RINNE ON STAGE

After my first live experience of Rinne's poetry, I was left contemplating the presence of sound in her texts and the presence of text in her performance.[4] Sensing that the tension between the two raises intriguing questions, and interested in further exploring this tension, I brought a copy of *notes for soloists* to her next performance.[5] Attempting to follow the poems in the book during the course of the performance, I found that the words in the book remained firmly glued to the page. Rather than bringing the lines of the book to life, Rinne articulated long sequences of words like foreign sounds she was toying around with, uncertain of how to use them as tools of communication. She transformed into a machine, or perhaps a playful child, bridging gaps between languages by linking them through their similarities in sound, rather than through literal meaning. She is speaking Spanish, I decided as she repeated a sequence of sounds, only to find myself seconds later constructing a sentence in Swedish out of the same sequence of sounds, and wondering when she had changed linguistic codes.

Occasionally, she would plunge into repeated, rhythmic hissings and clickings, per-

haps intelligible as German, perhaps only as the sound of a tongue moving around in a mouth. A copy of the book was in her hand as well as in mine, but I could not go back and verify what she actually said. Gradually the separate languages I was listening for seemed to dissolve, and all I could hear was air traveling between lips, tongue hitting teeth, vocal cords vibrating.

Thus, the sound and the text worked against each other when I attempted to organize them in a relation of representation. This relation can be reconfigured as a deleuzoguattarian "becoming". Deleuze and Guattari draw on Nietzsche in asserting that there is no being, no intrinsic ontological unity, only becoming through blocks that connect different phenomena: humans, animals, texts, sounds, machines, bacteria, etc. The movement of becoming is non-teleological and "produces nothing other than itself".[6] Moreover, becoming moves rhizomatically: unlike trees with their hierarchical branching, it spreads in all directions; any point can connect to any other. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "The tree and root inspire a sad image of thought that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centered or segmented higher unity".[7] The rhizome, however, is a non-centralized system, and therefore undermines the idea of representation.

Illustration: Moa Thelander

CIA RINNE, POET AND ARTIST

I meet Cia Rinne at Collegium Hungaricum Berlin, where she just attended a panel discussion on the current problems of Roma filmmakers in Europe. Rinne knows well the situation of the Roma in Europe, having spent extended periods of time with Roma communities in seven different countries. Together with photographer Joakim Eskildsen, she translated parts of this experience into a book of essays and photographs, *The Roma Journeys*.[1]

Cia Rinne thinks of her poetry as less directly political than her work on the Roma. Nevertheless, she is intrigued to hear that her poems have sparked a reading that connects them with new forms of community beyond the nation. Born in Sweden and raised in Germany and Finland, Rinne never experienced national identities as central. Her extensive linguistic facility with at least ten languages makes it possible for her to study and play with language beyond specific linguistic contexts. She illustrates her approach to language with the words of an Argentinean friend, who says that language is like a revolving door. There is not one, but several possible directions to go in.

Some weeks before our meeting, Rinne performed her multilingual poetry at Ausland, a project space in Berlin focusing on experimental performance art. On stage, Rinne's poems from her second poetry collection, *notes for soloists*, become a sound event, as Hannah Lutz observes in her article. Rinne's first book of conceptual poetry, *zaroum*, beautifully designed by the poet herself, focuses on the visual rather than aural aspects of language. However, this book also ended up producing a medial transformation of sorts, as it became an interactive Internet piece with moving images, *archives zaroum*. The contexts for Rinne's transmedial art are thus manifold, to say the least, and include art museums and exhibitions as well. ⊠

kaisa kaakinen

Cia Rinne's installations *indices* and *h/ombres* and sound installations *sounds for soloists* and *7/ [seven solidus]* are being shown at Grimmuseum in Berlin from June 23 to July 19, 2012. Rinne will also read in three performances at the exhibition (June 23: Cia Rinne, July 5: Anders Lauge Meldgaard and Cia Rinne, July 19: Tomomi Adachi and Cia Rinne).

Cia Rinne's works on the internet:
Interactive piece *archives zaroum*:
http://www.afsnitp.dk/galleri/archiveszaroum/
Sound installation *sounds for soloists*:
http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Rinne/Rinne-Cia_Complete-Reading_Sounds-For-Soloists_2011.mp3

reference

1   Joakim Eskildsen and Cia Rinne, *The Roma Journeys/Die Romarcises*, Göttingen: Steidl 2007/2009.

Rather than resonating back to the tree, the root, the Father, or the Nation, meaning is created by flattening out the relationship between text and sound, placing them on a single horizontal plane where they can infect each other, dislocate each other, and co-construct each other, but never represent each other.

By this token, despite the book in Rinne's hand, a sound poem was never on the page. The book may function as part of the event of the sound poem and a physical component of the performance, but it does not constitute the past of the poem. Similarly, despite Rinne's text poems' pronounced relationship to sound, they will never become sound. Here I find an interesting deterritorialization of both text and sound: the text moves forward through its desiring sound, and sound is reconfigured as the driving force of the text, as the desire that brings the poem into existence.

How can "becoming", in this context, be understood as a possible political engagement with the world? Equipped with Karen Barad's idea of "entangled agencies"[8] and Rasmus Fleischer's concept of "the postdigital", I hope to demonstrate that Rinne's poetry undermines arborescent systems of generating meaning, and creates openings for a politics built on other premises.

BARAD: ENTANGLED AGENCIES

"Climate, wind, season, hour are not of another nature than the things, animals, or people that populate them, follow them, sleep and awaken within them", Deleuze and Guattari suggest.[9] While Deleuze and Guattari illustrate the entanglement of all the components of an event, the feminist and quantum physicist Karen Barad shows agency – and thus responsibility – to be intrinsic to processes of becoming: "[R]elations are not secondarily derived from independently existing 'relata', but rather the mutual ontological dependence of 'relata' – the relation – is the ontological primitive."[10] This opens up a place for agency, which "does not take place in space and time but in the making of space-time itself".[11]

In light of this, it seems to me that the poem comes into being as a part of the body and the space; when bodies inhabit space and affect each other they create time, and none of the parts of the event are exchangeable, all are constituted by their relations of becoming. Agencies, then, emerge from this mutual entanglement and from intra-acting and do not exist as "separate individual agencies that precede their interaction".[12] According to Barad, it is here, in understanding our entangled agencies, that we can develop new forms of political engagement. For Barad, epistemology, ontology, and ethics are inseparable; you are responsible for the becomings in which you engage and through which you exist. Possibilities for acting and intervening are immanent in every situation, but practicing politics based on attentiveness to the specificities of the circumstances is no simple task.

FLEISCHER: THE POSTDIGITAL AND THE COLLECTIVE

In his 2009 book *Det postdigitala manifestet* [The postdigital manifesto], Fleischer focuses mainly on how digitalization affects our relationship to music.[13] Nevertheless, many of his thoughts may be advantageously applied to sound poetry, particularly as collective experience. Struggling to challenge the idea of saving and owning with the idea of listening as becoming, we enter Fleischerian territory. In discussing music

experiences increasingly shaped by abundance and access, in which we stare at our screens paralyzed by the task of choosing between all the songs we "have", Fleischer finds the concept of the postdigital useful. This does not signify "a new stage in cultural history, but rather a maturing of the digital experience which causes us to attach renewed importance to presence".[14] Hence he suggests a postdigital understanding of music influenced by new materialism. By this definition, the files on your computer are merely *potential* music: music is that which takes place, that which is materialized in time and space, that which affects bodies.[15]

Fleischer imagines a future in which collective experiences become increasingly important as our access to digital files becomes increasingly unrestricted. In contrast to the private, practically unlimited accumulation of music files, a collective event imposes limits through its physical and temporal manifestation, through bodies restricting and affecting other bodies. This heightens sensation and makes certain kinds of becomings possible: "Since [collective experiences] cannot be copied, deleted or calculated, they set strong desires in motion. Desires can spread contagiously in the postdigital, from one temporary community to the next, provided that some of the participants return."[16]

This contagion in the postdigital, which sets bodies in motion, challenges the idea of saving, owning, and reproducing with rhizomatic movements of becoming. It suggests an ontology built on sharing and desire, and communities built horizontally, in all directions, and not resonating with a central system of control.

A POLITICS OF LISTENING

This brings me back to the sound-text relation in Rinne's poetry and the ontological implications of reconceptualizing this relation. In her performances, Rinne appears to be actively engaging with the text poem and freeing herself from it simultaneously. This movement, I suggest, illustrates the poet's affirmative approach to borders as passages, reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's imperative: "Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight. [...] It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight."[17]

Moving "unfaithfully" among languages, Rinne deterritorializes these loci of Western thought and philosophy by creating meaning not within them, but straight across them. By undermining the ways in which they control discourse and thought, Rinne is not negating meaning. Rather, she initiates other meaning-making processes which work "against the Father", as Deleuze would put it, "without passing through the [Platonic] Idea".[18] Rinne's claims to language are, in the manner of the seductive simulacrum condemned by Plato, "made from below, by means of an aggression, an insinuation, a subversion".[19] Sounds from one language can physically transform into the sounds of another language without passing through an arborescent structure. Thus her poems do not resonate with anyone's national project. If I allow meaning to emerge at those points where I lose track of the codes, I discover how the body itself, the grain of the voice, the language in its materialization, has the capacity to undermine systems of control, making matter mean.

This makes possible a politics of listening: if the poem is inseparable from the time of my listening, and the event is inseparable from the bodies in the room, meaning is always a collective, physical, and temporal process. Consequently,

politics means taking time to listen for ways of responsibly intervening in the world's becoming. A postdigital desire for embodied yet open-ended collectivities, rather than political programs or national flags, can trigger a contagious feeling of responsibility, and this excess of energy and desire could perhaps be directed towards creating and sustaining communities by horizontal movements. Famously, Derrida once made a "plea for slow reading, even at a time of political urgency"[20] – perhaps the soundpoetic event may serve as a space for slow listening, a space in which the Nation and the language of the Nation may be challenged by other, as yet unformed languages and meanings. ⊠

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5   Cia Rinne, poetry performance, Copenhagen, 2010-11-8.
6   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis 1987, p. 238.
7   Ibid, p. 16.
8   Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, NC 2007.
9   Deleuze and Guattari, op. cit. p. 263.
10   Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", in *Material feminisms*, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2008, p. 150 note 20.
11   Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity", p. 135.
12   Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 33.
13   Rasmus Fleischer, *Det postdigitala manifestet*, Stockholm 2009.
14   Fleischer, p. 45. "[This does not] betecknar [...] ett nytt kulturhistoriskt stadium, snarare en mognad av den digitala erfarenheten som får oss att åter lägga vikt vid närvaro."
15   Fleischer, op. cit. p. 69.
16   Ibid, p. 63. "Eftersom [kollektiva upplevelser] inte kan kopieras, inte raderas och inte kalkyleras sätter de starka begär i rörelse. Begär kan spridas vidare som smittor i det postdigitala, från en tillfällig gemenskap till nästa, förutsatt att vissa av deltagarna återkommer."
17   Deleuze and Guattari, op. cit. p. 161.
18   Gilles Deleuze and Rosalind Krauss, "Plato and the Simulacrum", in *The MIT Press* 27 (1983), p. 48.
19   Deleuze and Krauss, op.cit. p. 48.
20   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Note on the New International", in *Parallax* 3 (2001), p. 15.

The land, the sea and the water in between

On the liquefaction of culture

lecture by **Sven Rücker**

On September 2 in the year 1967, Paddy Roy Bates, a former major in the British Army, landed in the middle of the water. He occupied a marine fortress called Fort Roughs, which has roughly the size and the appearance of an oil platform, 10 kilometers away from the British coast on the open water. After landing, Bates immediately founded the state of Sealand and proclaimed it to be sovereign – a constitutional monarchy with, of course, himself as the king. Since then, the Royal Navy has tried several times to reconquer the platform; one of the citizens of the "Principality of Sealand", the German Alexander Achenbach, even started a revolution. Bates, however, has successfully defended his state by both judiciary and military means until today. Currently, ten people live on the platform, and so Sealand lives on too, with its own currency, its own passports and its own flag.

Even though the sea is characterized by its transgression of all borders, the founding of Sealand has shown that one can transform the sea into some sort of land, into Sea-Land. Because the sea is dislocated, one can set up a location. Because it is not the realm of defined territories, one can declare part of it as a territory and thereby align it with the land and the terrestrial idea of a state. But if one does, it is no longer "sea" in the strong sense of the word,[1] but rather a symbolic aggradation of the sea – just sealand.

While the sea commonly stands for homogeneity, the classic symbol of culture is the house. The house sets up the basic opposition of inside and outside, just as classic culture defines itself by the separation from other cultures or from non-culture: in other words, by its frontier. It is the frontier that permits localization and creates a closed territory.

Culture begins with the installation of a border. But not only culture, the world itself begins with a border. The Book of Genesis starts with the spirit of God, hovering above the indifferent water: "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. [...] And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas."

On the first day, God created Sealand. But what God does is actually not creating, but dividing. He divides (as Moses will do later) the water from the water, then he divides the water from the sky, and in the end of the beginning, he divides the water from the land. Creation means division: it means setting boundaries and, by doing so, defining territories. As long as there is only water, there is no world in the sense of the Greek kosmos, an organized and well-regulated totality – only the chaos of transgression.

The work of God is also the work of his legitimate successors on earth, or on dry land: the philosophers. Thinking also means creating order by dividing one from the other, by setting boundaries. In spite of a heretical tradition beginning with Heraclitus's sentence, "Everything flows", the exponents of mainstream – or rather, mainland – philosophy use architectural terms to describe their work. Thinking is building in a concrete sense. It uses repetitive elements and connects them with the help of the laws of logic to build a system in which one element supports another. That is what Spinoza and Descartes called "geometrical method" and what, from another point of view, Heidegger analyzed in his text
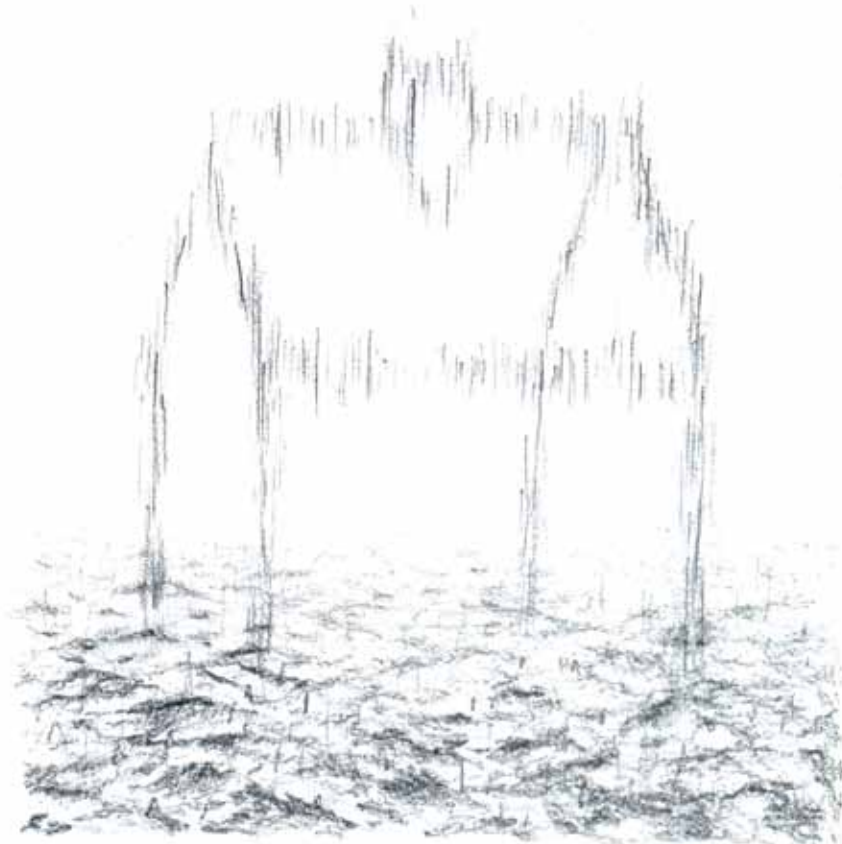
Illustration: Moa Thelander

"Building, Dwelling, Thinking". And even before them, the great *Summae* of Thomas Aquinas showed such an obvious architectural structure that they were often compared to the great cathedrals of his time. Kant calls his system the "architecture of pure reason". But he also criticizes the architecture of classical metaphysics by saying, "We have found, indeed, that although we had contemplated building a tower which should reach to the heavens, the supply of materials suffices only for a dwelling-house… [A]nd inasmuch as we have been warned not to venture at random upon a blind project which may be altogether beyond our capacities, and yet cannot well abstain from building a secure home for ourselves, we must plan our building in conformity with the material which is given to us, and which is also at the same time appropriate to our needs."[2]

One might say that Kant replaces the old cathedral of thinking − the towers that reach to the sky − with a middle-class family house. He wants to build on solid ground, on a foundation that can support the house instead of collapsing under its own weight or ending up a monstrous ruin because it can never be finished. But, of course, this is just a change of the building plan, and does not touch the central identity of thinking and building. Perhaps words pour out of the soul, but when they are printed, they are fixed. In a late text, "The Conflict of the Faculties", Kant mentions a crisis of the petrified words caused by their liquefaction. First he admires the type, the printed words, because they look like an army of stone soldiers or a Greek temple − like something that can carry the weight of his thoughts. Kant insists on the original meaning of the German word for "type", *Buchstaben*: staffs of beechwood to hold onto for support: "mit Breitkopfschen Lettern, die ihrem Namen Buchstaben (gleichsam bücherner Stäbe zum Feststehen) … entsprechen".[3] Philosophy needs such a solid ground because Kant defines thinking itself as the

"fixation of a term" (*Festhalten eines Begriffs*[4]). But when he read at university, something strange happened: suddenly, the words began to shift and disintegrate before his eyes.[5] They became fluid, and so did Kant. The architecture of pure reason tumbled down and Kant panicked. But he found a solution: Kant ended the crisis by closing his eyes for a few seconds.[6] By petrifying himself − with eyes closed, like a dead man − he managed to petrify the words on the paper again. The liquefaction was stopped, the text was rebuilt, and the equation of thinking and building was reestablished.

This changed in the 19th century. The main protagonist promoting this change was Friedrich Nietzsche. With him, philosophy, indeed culture in general, leaves the house and sets sail. Thinking is no longer creating a static system, a system in which everything remains in its assigned place. It has to be mobile and encompass multiple perspectives. The world is not a totality of territories that can be closed off, but a fluid mass. It is not ruled by identity, but by alternation; not by borders, but by transgression. If everything is floating, the thinker must float too. He is no longer an architect, but a drifter.

"On to the ships, philosophers", Nietzsche pathetically exhorts. But he also says: "There is another world to discover" − and another world means a new land. Thinking leaves the land, not to go to sea, but to cross the sea. Thinking moves, but it moves like an occupation army that relocates when dislocated, that deterritorializes itself only to establish new territories by setting new boundaries. The movement on the sea is liable to become aggradation.

Is it possible to reverse this process, to initiate a liquefaction? Another text by Nietzsche "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" continually alternates between the fluid and the fixed, between liquefaction and petrification. "What

is truth?" asks Nietzsche, and he answers, "A mobile army of metaphors […] illusions that we have forgotten are illusions."[7] Again, here is an army, or to be more exact, here are two forces fighting each other: a mobile army − or navy − and an army of stone soldiers. One is the result of liquefaction, the other of petrifaction. As long as the metaphors are known for what they are, they stay fluid and flexible. But as soon as we forget about their nature and take them for some sort of "truth", they become immobile and petrified: "Only by fossilization of an original mass of pictures that once − as a hot liquid − gushed forth from the primeval imagination"[8], man builds truth as a "system of classes, laws and boundaries […] and the great building of terms shows the fixed regularity of a Roman temple"[9]. In other words, the great philosophical tradition of an architectural self-description is just a monstrous aggradation of metaphors that were once fluid, and their transformation into terms that are now fixed. Finally, the thinker himself becomes petrified, like Kant when he closes his eyes to prevent the words from liquefying: "He does not show a twitching, moving face, but rather a mask of symmetry. He does not scream, he does not even change his voice. If it starts raining, he hides under his cloak and slowly slips away."[10] The architect of truth obviously does not like water.

To fight those stone soldiers of the mind, one must mobilize the other army, the army of metaphors, which is buried under the building of terms. To uncover it, one must destroy the temple of truth and build a ship or raft out of its ruins. One must put the house to sea; in other words, one must dislocate it. Nietzsche describes this new fluid model of thinking: "Now we can admire man as an architectural genius who succeeds in building a complex cathedral of metaphors on mobile foundations and on fluid water. But to stand on

such foundations, it must be a building of cobwebs, so airy that it is carried away by each wave, and so strong that it is not destroyed by the wind."[11] The fluid is not just the opposite of the house. It is rather a new way of building − a building of cobwebs, airy and strong at the same time, conjunctive and flexible: a world-wide web.

In Nietzsche's text, land and sea, the fluid and the fixed are not separated and therefore not identified as they are in the biblical myth. Instead, his text describes the permanent transformation of the fluid into the solid and vice versa. The difference between land and sea itself is not solid, but fluid.

Nietzsche was not the first to liquefy the idea of culture. In 1845, Ernst Kapp wrote his book *Vergleichende allgemeine Erdkunde*. Kapp analyses the history of world culture, not in terms of the shifting of political frontiers and territories, as most other cultural theorists did, but in terms of the rising of water in relation to land. Kapp distinguishes between three phases of world culture. The first phase, called the "potamic phase", starts with Mesopotamia and the Egyptian Nile culture. It is characterized by rivers and streams. The potamic phase is followed by the "thalassic phase", the cultures of the inland seas, represented by Greco-Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages, and including, in my view, the Baltic Sea. The third and last phase starts with the modern era and the conquering of the oceans. According to Kapp, the progression of world culture expresses itself in the liquefaction of mankind. The history of Man does not start with the resettlement after the Flood; rather, Man is the Flood. In Kapp's model, high water and high culture become similar. The rise of culture is directly connected to the rise of water.

Kapp's fluid Hegelianism floats into the 20th century and is collected again by Carl Schmitt. His book *Land and Sea* constructs the progression of culture as a struggle between land cultures and sea cultures. For Schmitt, the progression of culture is the sum of spatial revolutions. The beginning of each spatial revolution is marked by a new "nomos of the earth", the conquering of new land, and with it a new definition of space itself. Therefore, the triumph of the sea cultures does not mean the triumph of water over land − because even victorious sea cultures like England are characterized not by a transgression of the land, but by a transgression or crossing of water and a definition of new territories. Ruling the waves means finding a safe way to reach new land. The deterritorialized sea is surrounded and delimited by territories. And to the same extent that the theory of culture is liquefied, it transforms the sea into a different kind of land, into an area of transportation rather than transgression.

This becomes clear when we look at the most famous conqueror of the modern era, whom we know as Columbus, but who gave himself the Spanish name "Cristóbal Colón". "Colón" means "colonist", "conqueror"; and "Cristóbal" is St. Christopher, who carried Christ over the river. And this is exactly what Columbus did, carrying Jesus, the Christian ideology, from coast to coast over the ocean, not transgressing but transporting it. In sum, the difference between land and sea is an aggradation because it localizes the dislocated, it creates a territory for the deterritorialized.

But this creation is only a human construction. As mentioned earlier, the difference between the fluid and the solid is itself not solid, but fluid. One can only regard the sea as another kind of land − as something to be crossed, as a medium of transportation − as long as one stays on its surface. But the real water begins underwater. "The idea of depth is a general idea", Roland Barthes writes. And of course, this gen-

eral idea is derived from the idea of the sea, and specifically from its third dimension. One of the most erroneous interpretations of the so-called postmodern theories claims that there are no depths, but only surfaces. To experience what water really is, you cannot hover over it like the spirit of God and his armed missionaries, the European Conquistadores. You have to dive into it. This would add a fourth phase to Kapp's three-phase model of world culture. After the potamic, the thalassic and the oceanic phases, all defined by the surface of water, something new would begin, something that one might call the abyssal phase or, from the old name of the Deep Sea, the hadal phase. In this fourth phase, to think means to sink. Thinking would no longer be defined by the distance to its object, but − as Deleuze and Guattari say about the rhizomatic rooting in the underground − by interlinking; not − as Kant said − by the fixation of terms, but by drifting.

But if we choose this close connection between thinking and sinking, we must be aware of the fact that mankind may have had good reasons to form an aggradation instead of a liquefaction. Depth is always near to death. The classical European concept of identity itself is based on the idea of a territory or a terra firma; beginning with Plato, we are accustomed to describing our inner life in architectural terms. Under the fragile building of the soul, under the surface of identity, there is only the chaos of drives and unadjusted powers. This is why the same man who claimed the idea of depth was a general idea wrote an article about the death of the author. To undermine the building of the self can be a dangerous undertaking − as Nietzsche's fate illustrates. It is no coincidence that Nietzsche's deconstruction of the self used maritime metaphors. The ocean always was connected with the loss of identity, as in the Romantic paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, such as the famous "Monk by the Sea". But the liquefaction of the self is not necessarily a loss of identity − just as getting near to the fluid underground of the self does not necessarily mean the aggradation of the "inner ocean" by making it conscious, as in Freud's famous phrase. The hadal phase stands neither for the loss of identity nor for the aggradation of its fluid parts: it is a transformation of our concepts of self-identity. In relation to this change, we are still standing on the shore, looking into the great wide open. ❎

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references

1   This is why I will not discuss the Baltic Sea in particular: it is something like an inland sea, and therefore not a good example of water as a transgression of all borders. A sea that can even freeze and so transform itself into a kind of land cannot be "sea" in the strong sense mentioned above.
2   Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 735.
3   Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, (GA, vol. 11), A 203.
4   Ibid., A 199.
5   "Unter den krankhaften Zufällen der Augen . . . habe ich die Erfahrung gemacht, wo das Phänomen darin besteht: daß auf einem Blatt, welches ich lese, auf einmal alle Buchstaben verwirrt und durch eine gewisse, darüber verbreitete Helligkeit vermischt und ganz unleserlich werden." Ibid., A 205.
6   "Zufälligerweise kam ich darauf, wenn sich jenes Phänomen ereignete, meine Augen zu schließen […] meine Hand darüber zu legen, und dann sah ich eine hellweiße wie mit Phosphor im Finstern auf einem Blatt verzeichnete Figur […] mit einem auf der konvexen Seite ausgezackten Rande, welche allmählich an Helligkeit verlor." Ibid., A 205. What Kant sees with eyes closed, this strange figure "as if painted with phosphor in the dark on paper", is the ghost of the text, the type in its liquefied form.
7   Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne", in *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, Stuttgart 1964, p. 611. Translation by the author.
8   Ibid., p. 614.
9   Ibid., p. 612.
10   Ibid., p 622.
11   Ibid., p. 613.