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From the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University.

Ivan Iljin, in the lap  
of mother Russia

# BALTIC WORLDS

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Rescuing,  
keeping, and  
moving things

## Against the Scatter of the World

also in this issue

Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

ACTIVISTS IN ALBANIA / ARTISTS IN GDAŃSK SHIPYARD / ARCHITECTS IN LITHUANIA / SCIENTISTS IN THE COLD WAR

## editorial

### Objets out of place

Artifacts, *objets*, are shaped in a certain time and place by (and for) certain people. These precious things tend to take hold of their owners, observers, and users. Their value becomes attached to the meaning and desire they awaken to acquire them, keep them, trade them, or save them. They pass through different hands and get moved around.

In this issue of *Baltic Worlds*, we dedicate a special section investigating how *objets* have been transcended, moved, saved, traded, and even stolen from their old places and owners to new places and new owners. Why this scattering of the treasures of the world? Sheer greed, but also passion, is noted. Nostalgia and hope for an old order to reappear seem to be other drivers in this shuffling around of artifacts and *objets*. Rescuing the past is not entirely a noble act. Sometimes the artifacts in fact are falsifications or pure reconstructions. Prominent personas involve themselves in this endless shaping and moving of things. These personas make unforeseen alliances and relations, as well as their own carriers, based on the world's (and their own) eternal desire for *objets*.

It is fascinating and thought-provoking reading collected by guest editors Irina Sandomirskaja and Carl Marklund and is intended to set off a dialogue on the scattering of the world's treasures. They place their kaleidoscope on Soviet Russia, but – as the phenomenon by all means is a moving target – we also get a piece of Congo and other parts of the world in our sights.

*Baltic Worlds* also presents two peer-reviewed articles by young scholars, both concerning self-organized groups, but in rather different contexts. In Albania we are guided by Gilda Hoxha who investigates the agency and drivers, but foremost the potential and influence, that social movements such as self-organized groups can have in the young democracy in Albania. Agnieszka Kozik, for her part, studies what happened when the Artists' Colony moved into the Gdańsk Shipyard's abandoned buildings, and by this challenges the meaning of the place as a memory site for workers and the Solidarity movement in Poland.

AMONG OTHER contributions, I also would like to highlight the short piece by Magnus Ljunggren concerning Ivan Ilyn's character and ideas, which I find both illuminating and worrisome when taking into account the presence of Ilyn in the nation-building of Russia today. ✕

Ninna Mörner

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### Architecture in Lithuania

Buildings can and do evoke various feelings, serve different functions, and generate social conflict or social 'harmony'.

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### The Wende Museum, LA

The museum showcases art from the former Eastern Bloc that operates both within and far outside the tenets of Socialist Realism and juxtaposes it with contemporary art.

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## colophon

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# THE ARTISTS' COLONY IN THE FORMER GDANSK SHIPYARD

by Agnieszka Kozik

**T**his article attempts to provide an answer to the question: What was the Artists' Colony? I put this question in the broader context of research, the relations between artists and workers in the area of the former Gdańsk Shipyard, the location of historical events of the Solidarity Movement and the fall of communism in Poland, and places where various contemporary art institutions, clusters, and groups of artists have been operating since 2000.

The place – the Gdańsk Shipyard – is mythologized in the Polish narration of the process towards democracy and independence. Before the ethnographic study was conducted, the research design included assumptions about the role of the artists in the Gdańsk Shipyard, and the nature of the relationship between artists and shipyard workers. Those assumptions have gradually been subjected to verification and, to a large extent, rejection. During the research it became obvious that the incorporation of the Gdańsk Shipyard into the national myth has led to the disappearance of reality of the place and its “inhabitants”, excluding the contemporary space from the public discourse and visibility. Other research questions become more relevant: what we do not know, or hear about, or speak about, and who's voices are silence.

The reflections will be guided by the words of Pierre Bourdieu:

**One can, however, ask what exactly does this way of understanding works of art mean? Is it worth losing their charm to explain the works? [...] It seems to me that this realistic view, making the universal, collective enterprise subject to certain laws, brings comfort and is more – so to speak – human than the faith in the wonderful qualities of creative genius and devotion to pure form.<sup>1</sup>**

## abstract

This article attempts to provide an answer to the question: What was the Artists Colony in the Gdańsk Shipyard area? For over a decade, artists lived and worked within the Gdańsk Shipyard area, a partially still industrialized area. The article is based on ethnographic field studies oriented to understanding the transformation of the Gdańsk Shipyard area, as well as the transformation of Polish historical memory and the Polish contemporary art scene. A description of the situation in the post-shipyard area, with its extraordinary dynamics and symbolism, evolved into a description of the process of change and the flows of groups of “inhabitants”. Members of the Artists Colony were participants in the transformation processes, regardless of the functions they performed in such processes, the intensity of contacts with workers at the Gdańsk Shipyard, or the subject of their artistic works. Artists from the Colony identified the area of the former shipyard as a space of their own experience, memory, and history. In terms of post-colonial theory as well as the theory of revitalization, the artists can be conceived of as a “temporary community” of the post-shipyard areas.

**KEY WORDS:** Gdańsk Shipyard, contemporary art, Art Colony, gentrification, transformation, post-colonial theory, post-industrial, field of art.

Gdańsk Shipyard, view from the side of Gate no. 1 and the Stocznia Gdańska railway station/tram stop, 2012.

ALL PHOTOS: AGNIESZKA KOZIK





Interior of building 175A, during the exhibition/project "Telephone Exchange/The Former Artists' Colony" Narrations festival, 2012.



Alternativa festival "Damage and loss", interior of building 90B, 2016.

The roles that artists played in the transformation process of the Gdańsk Shipyard and the effects of their presence in the post-industrial area can be analyzed on many levels and from different perspectives – from the development of contemporary art to participation in gentrification processes.<sup>2</sup> Social sciences, referring to the words of Pierre Bourdieu, might not only help to maintain “faith in the wonderful qualities of creative genius”, and might also allow the recognition and verification of the “social power” and the function of artists.

## Artists in the area of the Gdańsk Shipyard

Although socialologists, historians, and political scientists have written a lot about the Gdańsk Shipyard, these texts rarely go beyond the subject matter related to the Solidarity movement, and researchers in the field of humanities and social sciences rarely deal with the present situation of the Gdańsk Shipyard or its former area – what happened after 1989 and what is happening there today (except for works related to the anniversary of the Solidarity movement). The dominance of the legacy of Solidarity in symbolic and political debate has been particularly noticeable in recent years – in the abundance of celebrations of the anniversary of the The Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarność”, commemorative projects (from conferences to establishing new cultural institutions), and research summarizing the past 25 years of transformation. An analysis of the public debate leads to the conclusion that in the Polish imagination the Gdańsk Shipyard is primarily a space of Solidarity’s history and political disputes (especially the tragic events of 1970, 1980, and 1981, the strikes, the “21 Demands”, and the end of the communist regime in Poland).<sup>3</sup>

The post-transformation story of the Shipyard is fixed in the past and in a history of individuals – those outstanding and irreplaceable persons at the forefront of historical change who overthrew the system – and the real post-transformation history

## Key points in the history of the transformation of the post-shipyard system

- |             |   |             |   |             |   |
|-------------|---|-------------|---|-------------|---|
| <b>1990</b> | Gdańsk Shipyard im. Lenina transformed into a joint-stock company (from 1996 Gdańsk Shipyard in "bankruptcy", and since 1998 taken over by the Gdynia Shipyard Group S.A.). |             |   |             |   |
| <b>1999</b> | Synergia 99 buys part of the Gdańsk Shipyard area.  |             |   |             |   |
| <b>2000</b> | Grzegorz Kłaman and Aneta Szyłak (as the directors of CSW Łaźnia)   | <b>2002</b> | In building 175A (the abandoned building of the telephone exchange) the Artists' Colony starts to operate (a cluster of studios, galleries and artistic spaces ,adapted and organized by artists from Gdańsk, including students of the Gdańsk Academy of Fine Arts). | <b>2002</b> | Opening of "Modelarnia". Grzegorz Kłaman and Aneta Szyłak, this time as the Wyspa Progress Foundation, start their artistic activity in subsequent post-industrial buildings. |
|             |   |             |   | <b>2004</b> | The "Wyspa" Art Institute is established in the building of the former vocational school.   |
|             |   |             |   | <b>2006</b> | Gdańsk Shipyard S.A. resumes operations with the Ukrainian capital of ISD Polska.   |
|             |   |             |   | <b>2006</b> | Development plans are adopted by the Gdańsk authorities.  |
|             |   |             |   | <b>2007</b> | The establishment of the European Center of Solidarity institutions.  |
|             |   |             |   | <b>2007</b> | Closing of the Artists' Colony in the Telephone Exchange Building and the opening of the Artists' Colony in the former  |

of the Shipyard after 1990 is absent and has lingered in obscurity.

To a certain extent (and until a certain moment) the task of telling the story of the post-transformation shipyard was assumed by the artists who lived and worked in Gdańsk Shipyard area – starting with a historical and artistic exhibition in 2000 and resided in post-shipyard areas from 2002. Thanks to the artists, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Gdańsk Shipyard began to mark its presence also in the reflections of researchers who were interested in contemporary art, theatre, and performance,<sup>4</sup> and also in the preservation of heritage and historic architecture.<sup>5</sup> My own research is of a similar origin, and at the very beginning was inspired by the Wyspa Progress Foundation (located in the area of the former Gdańsk Shipyard from 2002 to 2016).<sup>6</sup> The ethnographic field studies presented here took place from 2008 to 2017 and are mainly based on qualitative interviews, participation in events, and observations of the everyday lives of people living or working in the former Gdańsk Shipyard. The initial goal of the studies was to provide a description of the relations between the artists and the shipyard workers – both of whom were living and working within the same space that held such strong symbolic significance – but new areas soon emerged that needed to be considered, and these corresponded to the different aspects of transformation – the spatial, the social, the economic, and the symbolic. The original description of just the situation as it existed evolved into a description of the processes of change and the flow of groups of “inhabitants”, with the only permanent element being the contour of the area of the former Gdańsk Shipyard as captured on blueprints and maps.

The Artists’ Colony was one of the first “clusters” of artists in the post-shipyard area, but it was not the only one nor the most recognizable group. The key moment that initiated the period of an active presence of contemporary art and artists in the Gdańsk Shipyard was the year 2000 and the historic exhibition *Road to Freedom*, commemorating the establishment of Solidarity in 1980 and curated by Aneta Szyłak and Grzegorz Kłaman<sup>7</sup> (then

## “THE POST-TRANSFORMATION STORY OF THE SHIPYARD IS FIXED IN THE PAST AND IN A HISTORY OF INDIVIDUALS.”

the head team of the ŁAŻNIA Centre for Contemporary Art in Gdańsk). At that time, a revitalization project in the Shipyard was started by the new private owner of the post-shipyard area, under which artists were granted the use of buildings no longer used for industrial purposes. The project was called the “Young City”, and the owner was the Polish company Synergia 99,<sup>8</sup> which in 1999 acquired part of the land from the Group Gdynia Shipyard S.A.<sup>9</sup> From that moment, the history of the area of the former Gdańsk Shipyard is also the history of artists and contemporary art projects. A part of the space made available to artists also served as studios and apartments, and painters, musicians, performers, photographers, actors, directors, sculptors, and various other artists became the new users and the first the first permanent inhabitants of the new Gdańsk Shipyard.

It should also be pointed out here that the purpose of this paper does not consist in the reconstruction of facts, but rather in the attempt to (re)construct the image of the Artists’ Colony functioning within the environments that are associated with it and to present an analysis of the phenomenon of the Artists’ Colony based on anthropological and sociological methodology. All of the analyzed material comes from the three periods of Artists’ Colony “life” – part of the material was collected in 2008<sup>10</sup> at the specific moment just after the eviction of the Artists’ Colony located in the building of former Telephone Exchange”, and the other part of the material was collected later, when the Artists’ Colony was located in the next building – on the second floor of the former Shipyard’s Management Building (till 2012). Very important observations were also made in particular in 2012 during

	Shipyard’s Management Building (2008–2012).		Property Trust Optima (BPTO).	<b>2012</b>	Closing of the Artists’ Colony studios.		ish consortium Partners Group and Northern Horizon Capital.
<b>2008</b>	Demolition of the historic villa of the Director of the Imperial Shipyard (19 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup> centuries), the headquarters, and, among others, Theater “Znak/Sign”.	<b>2010</b>	The “Wyspa” Art Institute creates the international festival project “Alternativa”, connected with the B90 hall building.	<b>2014</b>	Opening of the seat and exhibition of the European Solidarity Center.	<b>2016</b>	The “Wyspa” Art Institute closes its “headquarters” in the former Vocational School building.
<b>2008</b>	Division of Synergia 99 into two companies managing the post-industrial area: Drownica Development and Baltic	<b>2010</b>	Opening of a new historical exhibition of NSZZ Solidarność in “The Health and Safety Hall”.	<b>2015</b>	Division of the post-industrial area between new owners: some of the land was purchased by Atrium Poland Real Estate Management (located in the Channel Islands). BPTO sold its sites to the Swiss-Dan-	<b>2017</b>	Division of the area owned by Partners Group, and Northern Horizon Capital resells the area to Belgian developers Re-vive and Alides.
		<b>2012</b>	Closure of the Modelarnia and demolition of the building.				

## **“EVERYONE WAS FREE TO WORK AT NIGHT, TO ORGANIZE LOUD CONCERTS, OR TO PAINT THE WALLS.”**

the exhibition/art-action “Telephone Exchange/The Former Artists’ Colony”.<sup>12</sup> In November 2012, during a two-day festival project, the artists once more adapted, settled, and filled with art the abandoned and ruined building number 175A, and they visited, got together, and watched various works and performances. The concept of re-inhabiting the building by its previous residents became an opportunity for artistic expressions of a retrospective and personal relationship with the place, the group, and one’s own creativity. For some artists, the project created an opportunity for closure, while for others it was an occasion for reminiscing or for realizing new ideas.

Throughout the text, I use the past tense to describe the Artists’ Colony because I will be reconstructing the phenomenon associated with the first project referred to as “The Artists’ Colony” in Gdańsk Shipyard. I consider such a depiction important because there exist continuations of the Colony – both within the area of the Gdańsk Shipyard<sup>13</sup> and beyond it.<sup>14</sup> In the comments of residents of the Colony made at the beginning of the year 2008, we do not find a clear and straightforward answer to the question of the “present”, “past”, or “future” of the Colony. A similar situation occurred in 2012 in relation to the former Shipyard’s Management Building – and the answer still did not seem obvious at all. Some of the artists used the past tense to speak about the Colony, while others preferred to refer to it using the present tense. However, what is characteristic is that while describing their situation in 2008, the vast majority of residents tended to avoid the name “Colony” and spoke of “leaving the Shipyard” or “remaining in the post-shipyard area”. The proper name attributed to this particular phenomenon was “suspended”, so to speak. The post-shipyard area became (perhaps only temporarily) a more adequate term than the name thus far assigned to a single building. At the turn of 2007 and 2008, the fate of the Artists’ Colony was unknown. By 2012 and 2013, many of the goals of the former residents of the Telephone Exchange building had been achieved, the emotions and passions had mostly subsided, and the self-reflection of the group led to the determination of the profits and losses resulting from the Colony’s existence. This study will therefore be an attempt to reconstruct a fragment of the reality of the post-shipyard area in the period between 2002 and 2012.

There is no canonical version of the Artists’ Colony narrative, and it is possible that such a narrative will never be written. Its story is told by many people – with varying intensity – from different periods over the last 16 years (since 2001) and from different perspectives, as the relationships with the Colony were the result of different motivations, circumstances, and interests. However, among the Artists’ Colony’s residents, there is the desire to create a story of the Colony. These efforts to tell the

Colony’s story have resulted in TV and radio reports, journalistic texts, interviews, discussions, storytelling-tours and live presentations, and various websites and blogs on the Internet.<sup>15</sup>

The residents’ responses to the questions of “What was the Artists’ Colony?” and “What was happening there?” were often contrasting and they differed in attributing to particular actors various roles and functions, as well as in the assessment of the social, economic, historical, and cultural processes taking place in the former Gdańsk Shipyard. On the other hand, at its most basic level, the image of the Colony emerging from residents’ comments was coherent: the Artists’ Colony was both a group and a place.

### **Reconstruction of the group**

The Artists’ Colony primarily consisted of a group of people working with contemporary art. Its members, the so-called residents, were mostly young people – students and graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk – but also artists from the artistic community of the Tri-City who at a given point in time were looking for a new studio. They represented and cultivated various genres of art and artistic styles. In addition to having their studios there, they opened galleries and organized art workshops, festivals, and performances; they photographed, painted, designed, played, and recorded.

The reasons for which the residents found themselves in the Artists’ Colony varied. Usually it was due to economic reasons (an opportunity to find a studio with a small rent) or individual plans (becoming independent of one’s university or parents, or acquiring a separate creative space of one’s own). Occasionally, the motivation was the desire to pursue or follow previously undertaken artistic plans at the Gdańsk Shipyard. What was common among all residents, however, was the mechanism for obtaining information on the possibility of applying for an allocation of a studio. The news regarding the establishment of the Artists’ Colony, and later the information that rooms were being made available, was disseminated in the local social circles. However, this does not mean that the Artists’ Colony was a purely comradesly structure limited exclusively to a single environment. Due to the nature of the so-called artistic lifestyle, it was rather a combination of social, professional, and sometimes even a family-like life. “To be from” the Artists’ Colony meant to have a studio there and pay rent for it, and sometimes to live in it or to stay temporarily “as between friends”. To the residents, a valuable effect of the environmental organization of the Artists’ Colony consisted of the establishment of a specific “lifestyle community” – including their openness to one another and their artistic worlds, as well as their commitment to creating and receiving art.

The place “fermented”, “bustled”, and “was a melting pot” – as we repeatedly hear in the comments made by residents of the Artists’ Colony. “Having an effect on one another”, mutual inspiration, and joint artistic experiments enjoyed increased intensity thanks to the residents’ living and working within the immediate vicinity of each other. Many projects came into being and were materialized because potential partners for artistic activities had





Interior of building 175A, during the exhibition/project "Telephone Exchange/The Former Artists' Colony" Narrations festival, 2012.

been working in the same space over a long period of time. The attractiveness of the Artists' Colony community also consisted of its interdisciplinarity. Representatives of different currents of art, confronted on a daily basis with each other's works and projects, had more opportunities to get to know one another and to become involved in different experiments. "There was always someone to talk to" about new ideas, problems in the implementation of works, or personal and everyday matters. Even if particular people did not like each other, they had mutual respect for each other's work. The agreement and understanding among members of the Artists' Colony was also concerned with the ways of functioning and organizing Colony life, often going beyond social standards. Everyone was free to work at night, to organize loud concerts, or to paint the walls. After a rehearsal or performance, one could walk down the hallway wearing a strange costume or naked, neither surprising nor disgusting anyone. It was easy to find a "team" to take part in projects, actors to create a film, or musicians for a vernissage. Residents were each other's creators, recipients, partners, and critics. All of this together meant that the Artists' Colony gave the artists freedom, a sense of familiarity, and a source of inspiration.

In the memories of the Colony, we find a strongly isolated category "we", and next to it the category of "they/others". "We" is used to refer to the residents of the Telephone Exchange building, whereas "they" are a more diversified category. The splitting off of the "they" category indicates the groups in relation to which members of the Artists' Colony built their identity. Depending on the perspective of the one who is speaking, "they" means other artistic entities operating in the area of the Gdańsk Shipyard, workers of the Gdańsk Shipyard functioning in the same area as the artists, and "outsiders" who do not play a role in the shipyard area on a daily basis.

The first level on which the "we"/"them" dichotomy was built was the relationship of the Artists' Colony with other artistic and cultural entities in the Shipyard. "They" means both the nearby "Znak/Sign" Theatre and the European Solidarity Centre as well as the most distantly located facility within the Shipyard premises – the Mock-up Room. While the majority of artistic entities were constituted by groups of highly individualized personalities, the relationships between particular people varied significantly – from affinity and smooth cooperation to open aversion or mutual ignorance. Attempts at generalizing the characteristics

## “THE SHIPYARD IS NOT A MYSTERIOUS, ENIGMATIC TERRITORY EITHER TO THE ARTISTS OR TO THE SHIPYARD WORKERS OR TO THOSE EMPLOYED IN THE SHIPYARD BARS AND SHOPS.”

of the activities of the artists at the shipyard do not appear in the residents' comments. The generalizations were replaced by comments concerning specific entities or persons and emphasizing one's "own" perspective as a resident of the Artists' Colony.

The "we" versus "they/others" formula was also used by residents to describe their relationships with shipyard workers. Although shipyard workers functioned in the same area as the artists, they were seen as a distinctly separate group, and the type of work they performed was perceived as radically different from that of the residents. While for the workers the Shipyard was a workplace, for the artists the Colony had become a place where the traditional division between "work" and "home" had become fluid or suspended. Moreover, the shipyard workers followed a different hourly schedule, i.e., to show a little hyperbole, when the shipyard workers finished the first shift, the inhabitants of the Artists' Colony would wake up and have breakfast. Thirdly, the workers and artists differed in their appearance. The former wore dirty suits and quilted jackets and wore helmets, whereas the artists did not have uniforms, and instead wore colorful clothes and had "strange hairstyles". Pierre Bourdieu describes this situation as a "double truth" of work – a situation in which groups with more cultural capital perceive work as an element of self-realization, and not just of earnings.<sup>16</sup>

The "they/others" category also referred to the inhabitants of the city who were "not from the Shipyard". This dichotomy, primarily arising from an experience of the space, partially blurs the previous social divisions. In fact, this dichotomy not only indicates the social conditions, but also the closed nature of the Shipyard area. The phrase "people from the outside" refers to the border designated by the Gdańsk Shipyard gates. The "we" category is definitely heterogeneous here and means all those who are authorized to stay on the other "non-shipyard" side of the gate. The Shipyard is not a mysterious, enigmatic territory either to the artists or to the shipyard workers or to those employed in the shipyard bars and shops. To the "outsiders", however, both the shipyard and post-shipyard spaces mean roughly the same thing because they are both inaccessible to them.

### The microcosm of art

In its fundamental meaning, the Artists' Colony was an environmental occurrence that was recognized and developed by the artistic community. The cultural activities did not involve representatives of the shipyard workers, who in terms of chronology and numbers were "first" in the Shipyard. When asked directly about their relationships with the workers, the residents responded that the contacts were minimal and essentially limited to technical issues related to "shipyard life" – repairs, favors, and passes. Occasionally, the residents mention a picnic organized by the artists to which shipyard workers and their families were invited.

[...] do you know any of the workers?

No, I know some people here who are associated with the company that owns the building, like security guards, management of the company, and the people who stand there at the gates (guards) [...].

*And did the artists ever come out with the initiative of co-operation?*

With the workers themselves? Eee, no. Rather, I integrated with artistic activities, and I used such possibilities to exhibit my works. In other words, for me this four-year stay was more connected with the possibility of opening my art to this place and to people from outside, but not with the workers.

Interview no 5, Woman, 2008

*Are the shipbuilders willing to participate in such events [...]?*

No, they do not come, [...] the advertising goes mainly to young people, partly by mailing, partly using the Modelator, which is from the blog [...] so the workers do not use it. But even if such an offer was not directly addressed to the workers, it was still an open offer addressed to anyone who simply wanted to participate in cultural events.

Interview no 14, Man, 2009

The interviewees place themselves in the context of art, but they unanimously point at several people from the Artists' Colony who were involved in projects related to the transformational reality in the Shipyard or who were interested in collaborating with the shipyard workers. These included Iwona Zajac – mainly because of the mural "Shipyard" inspired by her talks with shipyard workers,<sup>17</sup> Michał Szlaga – who had been creating photographic cycles at the Shipyard even before the founding of the Artists' Colony (his work involved portraits of shipyard workers and documenting the "disappearance" of the old Shipyard),<sup>18</sup> and a duo known under the name PGR\_ART – who organized, among other things, regular and free workshops for the children of shipyard workers and exhibitions related to the heritage of the Gdańsk Shipyard.<sup>19</sup> The figure who was most often referred to in the context of engaged art at the Shipyard was Grzegorz Kłaman from the Wyspa Institute of Art.

Questions regarding the relationships with workers caused surprise or irritation in many interviewees. The art they cultivated and the reasons for their presence in the Artists' Colony did not stem from their interest in the contemporary, economic problems of the Shipyard or the political significance of the Solidarity movement in the recent history of Poland. When trying



to understand the dissonance between the researcher's questions and the artists' reactions, it is worthwhile to refer to Claire Bishop's concept, expressed in the article "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents".<sup>20</sup> She describes the effects of a "social turn" in 20<sup>th</sup>-century art. On the one hand, there is the addition of an ethical dimension to art criticism, while on the other hand there is the domination of the ethical perspective in art interpretation directed at judging the intentions and methods of artists and their actions and the marginalization of reflection on the esthetic dimension of a work of art. From this metaperspective, the emergence of the question and answers regarding the artists' collaboration with workers at the Gdańsk Shipyard is perhaps the aftermath of the social turn in art and the ethical turn in art criticism, while at the same time it is a "disenchantment" with the theory of "regaining the phantasmal social bond" through art. Bishop emphasizes how restrictive and falsifying the analysis is in which "artists are increasingly judged by their working process – the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration – and are criticized for any hint of potential exploitation that fails to 'fully' represent their subjects (as if that was possible)."<sup>21</sup>

Without denying Claire Bishop's assertions, I will return to describing the phenomenon of the Artists' Colony. The great majority of the residents' activities were not addressed to the workers but to "people interested in contemporary art". This outline of the relations with the shipyard workers in the residents' comments suggests that the Artists' Colony was an undertaking primarily set in the "field of art", as understood by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's theory allows one to look at the Colony and the activities of the artists concentrated in it as actors embedded in the social microcosm of art (the field of art), which has its own structures, laws, and creators. In this field, as it is made evident in the comments by the residents of the Artists' Colony, other players are also present from outside the Shipyard, including the Academy of Fine Arts, perhaps with the strongest "consecrating position" (training artists and awarding the title of an artist, as well as providing an environment for the circulation of information), and CUKT (Central Office of Technical Culture), which, before the founding of the Colony, was run by one of the members of PGR-ART. Another entity that strongly marks its presence in "the field of art" is the "ŁAŻNIA" Center of Contemporary Art, which was run by Aneta Szyłak and Grzegorz Kłaman before they started the Wyspa Institute of Art and with which many residents jointly implemented their projects. Other artistic entities operating in the area of the Gdańsk Shipyard included the Znak Theatre and the Aku Club (however, both were no longer active when the Artists' Colony was established), as well as those that were less significant from the residents' perspective – The European Solidarity Centre (a municipal institution of culture) and the permanent exhibition entitled *Roads to Freedom* in two arrangements (both organized by artists currently active at the Gdańsk Shipyard – in the year 2000 the exhibition was prepared by Aneta Szyłak and Grzegorz Kłaman in collaboration with people later related with the Colony, and in 2008 the exhibition was expanded by some of the residents



Former Telephone Exchange building (175A) in 2016, Gdańsk Shipyard.



G. Kłaman sculpture "Gate I", part of the first exhibition "Roads to Freedom" (Entrance to the Gdańsk Shipyard behind the Historical Gate #2) (2014).



G. Kłaman sculpture "Gate II", part of the first exhibition "Roads to Freedom" (Entrance to the Gdańsk Shipyard behind the Historical Gate #2) (2010).



of the Artists' Colony). Another entity with a strong and well-established position in the field of art at the Shipyard was (and still is) the Wyspa Institute of Art and the related Mock-up Room. Following Bourdieu's theory, while operating in the same field all of these entities assumed certain "positions" in relation to one another, which might be described as a game of dominance, strength, power, and aspiration for a stronger "position". "The assumption of positions" is not pre-determined and depends on individual choices and creative projects, but at the same time it is limited by the place held by the entity thus far in the artistic microcosm and the scope of "possibilities" the entity has to choose from. "The strategies of artistic entities and institutions involved in those fights [...], i.e. assuming of positions (specific, for instance, stylistic, or non-specific, political, ethical) depends on the position that they hold in the field structure [...]"<sup>22</sup>. The Artists' Colony, holding a weaker position in the field of art as compared with the Wyspa Institute of Art, could choose from the pool of "possibilities", among others, the strategy of competing with the Institute in terms of methods of acting and the subject matter that is undertaken or a strategy of working out a different formula in order to build its own distinct position. The formula of the Artists' Colony – which was non-institutionalized (although formalized), was without a coherent artistic profile, was based on fragmentation, allowed for an uncontrolled mixture of styles and subject matters, and operated in the rhythm of short, frequently changing events – indicates the choice of the distinction-based strategy.

The residents built their "position" in the field of art by directing the offer of the Artists' Colony to the artistic community. The works they produced were not intended for a random, inexperienced viewer (e.g. a shipyard worker or a person living in the vicinity of the Shipyard who was uninformed in the area of contemporary art). On the other hand, the "openness" to new recipients, including those from the Shipyard, rather meant a "lack of aversion" and an expectation expressed in the attitude: "I don't mind workers being interested in art".

Invitations and notifications of events were addressed to members of a widely understood "cultural environment" who were prepared to receive the content and form of contemporary art. Posters and leaflets were distributed mainly in places related to the cultural life of Gdańsk rather than at the Shipyard. The success of events in the Artists' Colony – measured by the recognizability of the place, attendance, and interest in the projects by artists from outside the Colony – was based, among other things, on their regularity and the social form of inviting friends who in turn would bring their own acquaintances. The celebration of the Artists' Colony's anniversary or the organization of events related to the end of its operation (a New Year's Eve party or an exhibition) also constituted events related to the history of the field of art and not to the "shipyard space".

It should also be stressed that, as Bourdieu argues, a "subject once-situated must assume a position and distinguish itself, regardless of its aspiration for distinction, and by entering the game it tacitly accepts its limitations and opportunities, which it sees – similarly to all the others who understand the meaning

of the game – as *things to do*, forms to be created, and patterns to be invented – in other words, as opportunities to a greater or lesser extent for *claiming the right to existence*".<sup>23</sup> The theory contained in this sentence seems particularly important in view of the closure of the Artists' Colony in the Telephone Exchange building. Indeed, it points to the mechanisms that shaped the further professional trajectories of the former residents. Artists can be seen in 2012 during the return to the Telephone Exchange building as part of the festival "Narrations. Art thou gone, beloved ghost?". The spaces re-inhabited by artists as part of this cultural and artistic event attracted audiences interested in contemporary art and displayed works by specific artists and groups or other creators connected with the Tri-City's art scene (and the broader Polish and European art scenes). The artists themselves, often already recognized for their artistic achievements and their standing in the world of art, have slowly begun to occupy stable positions in the field of art, including in academies and in institutions operating in the area of contemporary art. As far as the shipyard workers are concerned, the events held at the Telephone Exchange building were attended by people befriended by the artists and who themselves had an artistic experience and who cooperated with the residents of the Colony or the Wyspa Institute of Art.

## Reconstruction of the place

The Artists' Colony should not be reduced to the characteristics of the community it was formed by. The physical place was also a prominent feature – both the common space of the facilities within the former Telephone Exchange building (building 175A) that housed the studios and the surrounding space, the post-shipyard area in the center of Gdańsk. This space conditioned the existence of the Artists' Colony as a community, and these were two inseparable and interdependent elements.

Without obtaining rooms for individual studios, located in one building, which were handed over to artists as a place "for living and working", the dynamics of the development of an artistic environment in the Tri-City would have been completely different. Having their own space facilitated the Colony's residents' work and the development of their "own art" and their "own style". The Telephone Exchange building that was handed over to the artists by the developer had no other "tenants". This situation enabled the convenient arrangement of the space and its adaptation to the specificity of individual's work (painting, building of models, organizing music rehearsals and sound tests, etc.), and it also gave the artists the freedom to choose the aesthetics of the interiors of the studios and other rooms in the building.

Among the facilities administered by the developer, the Telephone Exchange building was the most convenient in terms of its quick adaptation. However, in order to be able to operate and sometimes even live in a studio, or in some cases to convert it into a space adapted to events attended by several dozen people, the residents had made numerous investments in the furnishing and arrangement of rooms, as well as the adaptation of corridors and the staircases. In the stories about the Artists' Colony, a

repeated image is that of the individual, physical, and financial effort put in by each “resident”. The anthropological concepts of “domestication” and “familiarity of space” accurately describe the attitude of residents to the building housing the Artists’ Colony.<sup>24</sup> Over time, some residents also began to have a sentimental relationship with the building of the Artists’ Colony, based both on the memory of their commitment in creating the space and the quality of the space and the lives of its users.

The particular nature of the Colony was also influenced by its surroundings, i.e. the post-shipyard area. This was interesting because of its different spatial structure (different and separate from the surrounding city), but it was also “interfering” due to its functions and organizational rules (which were specific for a workplace or an industrial production plant). The Telephone Exchange building was located in an area partially excluded from industrial production. However, the use of these areas by the Gdańsk Shipyard Ltd. and private companies performing elements of the shipbuilding process lasted for many years and shaped the surroundings of the Artists’ Colony. The residents were not indifferent to the post-shipyard space, nor was it unequivocal to them. It constituted both a barrier and an advantage, an inspiration and a burden, an opportunity and a limitation to their functioning in the Colony. The hierarchy of these aspects also varied among the residents.

First, the access to the Artists’ Colony was not easy. Walking through the entrance gate to the Gdańsk Shipyard Ltd. required a pass authorizing a person to stay on the premises or to enter through the exhibition *Roads to Freedom* (during opening hours). On the other hand, the closed nature of the Shipyard space influenced its character – calm and empty – and offered a certain kind of comfort. The isolation and the entry control system increased the sense of security and demarcated an area excluded from the normal rules and pace of social living. In conversations with residents, an exciting topic regarding violation of the imposed prohibitions and restrictions appeared. Among the memories concerning life in the Colony, a significant place is occupied by stories of sneaking into the building of the Telephone Exchange and bypassing the gate, for example, through a hole in a fence, or smuggling in and drinking alcohol, which was prohibited in the employee handbook of the Gdańsk Shipyard Ltd. On the surface, such a perspective might seem trivial, even humorous; however, the fact of its recurrence in the narrative of the Artists’ Colony points to its specific role in building the image of artist life at the Shipyard.

The space in which the Artists’ Colony was located also had an aesthetic and symbolic dimension, which was sometimes reflected in the form or content of the works implemented by its residents. The fascination or inspiration found in the industrial landscape – the structure of the space and the surrounding objects, sounds, rhythms, and colors – reappear in numerous comments. Moreover, at the Shipyard the artists discovered new opportunities involving the available industrial technologies and materials. Simultaneously, they recognized the melancholy of the disintegrating post-industrial space. In the descriptions of life at the Shipyard, the ethos of an artist was also visible as

**“TO THE RESIDENTS, SIMPLE, MODEST CONDITIONS WERE ENOUGH TO LET THEM DEVELOP THEIR ARTISTIC PROJECTS.”**

a person who does not need amenities, but rather a space and freedom to act – the values and sense of art are more important than comfort. To the residents, simple, modest conditions were enough to let them develop their artistic projects. At times, opinions have even been expressed that the aesthetics of disorder, disintegration, dirt, and rejection by traditional cultural trends constituted the best nourishment for artistic imagination.

The symbolic dimension – linked to the legacy of the Solidarity movement and the process of political transformation in the economic and social sphere – only inspired the residents of the Artists’ Colony to a small extent and was only of incidental interest. In fact, the historical and political heritage was often perceived as a burden and as a disadvantage of the location of the Artists’ Colony.

*And is it that this place is historically marked in some way, what does it mean to you by working here?*

Nothing [...] There is nothing here to think about or to add to. It is simply so inspiring that you can just enjoy these attractive spaces. So most of the things that I’ve done in my case, which is video production – I’m making the clips and videos – all of the work has been done here, and it’s a bit of laziness because it’s so easy to get it done here. And the beauty of the surroundings is very inspiring. But historical aspects, I would not get involved [...] These are not things that interest us.

Interview no 3, Man, 2008

Most of the residents never took up the issues of Solidarity in their art, and only individual persons had any experience with creating historical exhibitions, including *Roads to Freedom*, exhibitions held in the Work Health and Safety Room, and projects taking part in the competition organized by the European Solidarity Centre. To some, these were important projects due to their relevance for the Shipyard, while to others they were seen only as ancillary activities.

*Have you seen the Roads to Freedom?*

Only the outside parts of the exhibition. This sphere does not appeal to me personally, so I looked at the photo exhibition, and this satisfied me and it touched my consciousness. But I did not explore this topic, especially not in my art works.

Interview no 4, Woman, 2008

The only art work I made, [...] the most direct about the Shipyard, is this sofa called “Gdańsk Shipyard” [...] It is

## “TO DEVELOPERS, THE POST-SHIPYARD AREA WAS A RUINED TERRAIN, WHERE ‘THERE IS NOTHING’, AND WHICH WAS TO BE RESTORED TO THE CITY”.

about... the transformation of the Shipyard [...] about what can happen here [...] That is, we will have luxury apartments here [...] and only a couch like that will be able to fit in, yes. And just make wallpaper from “Solidarity”, inverted in two directions, empty inside ... and that’s all it will be. Simply decor.

Interview no 9, Woman, 2008

However, some artists from the Colony created works associated with contemporary transformation processes occurring at the Shipyard and their socio-economic dimension. These were mainly the aforementioned works by Iwona Zając and Michał Szlaga and the PGR\_ART projects.

In conclusion, apart from a few exceptions, the residents valued the shipyard location for not being “just the Gdańsk Shipyard” with its associated historical baggage and libertarian rhetoric. What was of greater significance was the building handed over to artists “for their use” and the post-industrial character of the surrounding space. The undefined and functionally suspended area also ensured peace and exclusion from the surrounding urban structure and its limitations (including limitations in the social dimension).

### “It’s not all that clear”

From the residents’ comments, there is no indication of an idyllic image of the Artists’ Colony. This is due in some instances to personal conflicts occurring within the artist community, but what seems to be much more significant, it results from the ambivalence inscribed in their own presence and function in the post-shipyard area. Such an internally driven artistic community and shared creative space such as the Artists’ Colony would not have existed and operated had it not been for the marketing campaign of the company Synergia 99, which in early 2000 was the owner of the post-industrial areas within the Gdańsk Shipyard. The Artists’ Colony was a developer’s project to introduce artists into former areas of the Gdańsk Shipyard for a specific purpose – to change of the image of the post-shipyard area and to increase its market value.

To developers, the post-shipyard area was a ruined terrain, where “there is nothing”, and which was to be restored to the city. Such a rhetoric fit well with the model of an artist who incorporates avant-garde attitudes and initiates cultural and social changes. In the stories related to the appearance of residents in post-shipyard areas, the following expressions are quite common: “we were pioneers,” “we brought a change”, “it was a wild land”, “discovering of a new place,” and “an exotic dimension”. A later effect of the rhetoric of the “origins” of the Colony is a specific sensitization to the issue of “priority” – the chronology in which actors appeared in the post-shipyard area and partici-

pated in the pioneering organization of cultural life in this place – as well as to conflicts related to “legacy” and the right to use the name “Artists’ Colony”.

It is also not possible to ignore the name of the project itself – the Artists’ Colony – and the message that it carries. Although in the narratives and comments on the Artists’ Colony the prevailing perspective is that which emphasizes the advantages of the “settlement” or “basin” of art, it is the motif of “colonization” that is directly inscribed in the phenomenon of the Artists’ Colony. The process of “colonizing by art” covered the former Gdańsk Shipyard area along with its existing users and the residents of adjoining neighborhoods. According to the developer’s plan, the role of the colonists was to be assumed by artists. The seeming contradiction of this situation did not escape the residents’ attention, and it is presented in many comments as an important aspect of reflection on the phenomenon of the Colony, while at the same time this issue remained unnoticed in terms of artistic practices. Also, the use of the term “colonists” to describe themselves collides in conversations with the concurrently used metaphor of a pioneer conquering unknown territories. The problem that lies beneath these contradictions is the fact that being a “colonizer” is never innocent. An example of an extreme ambiguity and unintentional entanglement is the case of the PRG-ART duo, which was one of the few socially engaged entities in the Artists’ Colony and which tried to ensure that their actions also met the needs of the “local community of shipbuilders”. At the same time, in the symbolic sphere, PGR\_ART undertook activities that were quite dissimilar, as made visible in the gesture of acceptance of the name “art workers” and the issuance of an identity card as an “art worker of the Gdańsk Shipyard”. The name was intended to indicate the “hard work of a cultural animator” and to maintain a dialogue with the stereotype of the “light” and carefree life of the artist. However, the question about the appropriation of symbolic capital remains – symbolic. Symbolic capital contained in the workers’ ethos and strengthened with the historical and political aspects and gathered by a completely different social group than artists. The contradictions and paradoxes inscribed in the processes of changing the function and structure, as well as the symbolism, of these areas are common to many adaptation projects implemented in urban neighborhoods and spaces. These processes are not confined only to artists, and they often involve representatives of the world of science, researchers, or public authorities.

Certainly a direct and easy transfer of post-colonial categories to the description of changes occurring within a “culturally homogeneous”, western, Polish society is not warranted; however, an attempt to adapt the tools of post-colonial theory brings cognitively significant results. In the case of an analysis of the transformations in the area of the Gdańsk Shipyard, it is possible



to identify the socio-economic structure of the transformation processes and the functions fulfilled by the entities involved in these processes. In view of the deliberations on the Artists' Colony, it is worth considering the issue of the ambiguity of the participants' position in the processes of the "acquisition of new territories" by the dominant group. Indeed, the involvement of settlers and "kindly disposed travelers in the process of colonization"<sup>25</sup> cannot be ignored, and the question of said involvement should probably also be directed to the researcher who comes to observe and describe an unknown space. Perhaps the example of the Artists' Colony also shows how important the participants' awareness of these processes and their emancipatory capacity is – the capacity of a "tool to emancipate" and to adopt in the process of "colonization" the position of an equal entity and to redefine its goals and roles<sup>26</sup>. However, the nature of these transformations depends on individual experiences and motivations.

It is also worth pointing out that the phenomenon of the Artists' Colony shows yet another sociological and cultural clash, that between the western, traditional model of an artist and the contemporary concept of a creative class. The vision of the lifestyle of the residents of the Artists' Colony and the idea of the role and characteristics of art were intertwined with the context of the implementation of a marketing project and the service function of art. To the developer, artists make up a creative class that is extremely useful in investment processes because it is able to "generate" novel, innovative solutions and to move beyond the existing norms. In practice, the residents of the Artists' Colony combined these two aspects, although their stories about their art did not contain the narratives of "economic development" or "market competitiveness".

## Conclusion

The residents of the Artists' Colony constitute one of the priceless sources of knowledge on the transformation processes that have taken place at the Gdańsk Shipyard, which in the collective imagination of Poles functions primarily as a mythologized space of critical events in the Solidarity movement. Irrespective of the subject matter taken up in their artistic works, as well as the intensity of their contacts with the workers of the Gdańsk Shipyard – members the Artists' Colony were participants in the transformation processes regardless of the functions they performed in such processes. It can be said that in the theoretical assumptions of the process of "revitalization" the artists formed a temporary community within the post-shipyard areas. Some of these residents were also observers and active commentators on the social, spatial, and cultural changes taking place at the Shipyard. The portrait of the contemporary Shipyard – both its spaces and its users – conveyed through art reveals the history of economic and social processes that have occurred in the shadow of the heroic narrative of the events connected with the Solidarity movement.

The Artists' Colony was one of the constituents of the history of the Gdańsk Shipyard in democratic Poland. In turn, a different group of residents has continued the history of the Colony – both inside and outside the Shipyard area. A small group of

residents remained in a building adjacent to the Telephone Exchange until 2012, although the conditions were no longer as convenient nor did they enjoy "full" freedom as was the case before, despite the fact that "being at the Shipyard" had always required more commitment, determination, and work. Now, however, they were no longer its only users and it was no longer a space "handed over to artists", but was a shared "post-colonial" space where everyone had to make an effort to seek their place. ✖

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- 1 Pierre Bourdieu, *Teoria obiektów kulturowych*, trans. into Polish by A. Zawadzki, *Odkrywanie modernizmu. Przekłady i komentarze*, ed. R. Nycz, (Cracow: 2004) 278–280 [title of the original *Pour une science des objets* [in:] Bourdieu P. *Raisons pratiques. Sur la theorie de l'action*, Paris 1994, p.61–80].
- 2 See: David Ley, "Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification", *Urban Studies* (Sage: 2003); Stuart Cameron & Jon Coaffee, "Art, Gentrification and Regeneration – From Artist as Pioneer to Public Arts", *International Journal of Housing Policy* (2005); Japonica Brown-Saracino, *The Gentrification Debates: A Reader*, (Routledge: 2010); Martha Rosler, *The Artistic Mode of Revolution: From Gentrification to Occupation* (e-flux: 2012).
- 3 See: Jacek Wasilewski, *Opowieści o Polsce. Retoryka narracji* (Warszawa 2012) [Jacek Wasilewski, *Stories about Poland. Rhetoric of the narrative* (Warsaw: 2012)].
- 4 See for instance: Grzegorz Kłaman <http://culture.pl/en/artist/grzegorz-klaman>; <http://www.wyspa.art.pl/title,SubiektywnaLiniaAutobusowa,pi d,44,oid,38,cid,4,type,2,lang,2.html>; <http://culture.pl/en/event/grzegorz-klaman-crushing-in-tribute-to-walesa> or see Alternativa: <http://alternativa-gdansk.pl/praca-i-wypoczynek/?lang=en>, <http://alternativa-gdansk.pl/alternativa/?lang=en>.
- 5 See for instance Michał Szłaga: <https://www.karrenwall.eu/index.php/publikacje/stocznia-szlaga>, <http://culture.pl/en/gallery/shipyard-photographed-by-michal-szlaga-image-gallery>.
- 6 I emphasize this fact because it is of particular importance for the research process, which has also made an attempt to verify the dominant interpretive perspective created by the Wyspa Institute of Art. This perspective was based on a narrative about the social and political involvement of artists from the Gdańsk Shipyard, about the cooperation of the art community with the shipyard industry, and about the conscious and critical voices of artists. In light of the field observations of the artistic environment from the Gdańsk Shipyard and the perspective

of the shipyard workers (also heterogeneous), the narrative about the critical role of art and the artists' sensitivity to the social and symbolic "weight" of the Gdańsk Shipyard turned out to be misleading and often inadequate. However, the events at the Gdańsk Shipyard were among the most important (qualitatively) and led to the most comprehensive transformation of the political, social, and economic system in modern Poland. Therefore, when writing about the Artists Colony, I want to report on the fact that the practices of critical art were not and are not the only ones present on the site of the former Gdańsk Shipyard.

- 7 Read more about Grzegorz Kłaman: <http://culture.pl/en/artist/grzegorz-klaman> ; <http://culture.pl/en/place/laznia-centre-for-contemporary-art>.
- 8 Synergia 99 Sp. z o.o. started its activities in the first half of 1999 as a land developer of industrial real estate acquired from the Gdańsk Shipyard – Grupa Stocznia Gdynia S.A. The priority of Synergia 99 Sp. z o.o. in close cooperation with the City of Gdańsk and the Gdańsk University of Technology was to work on the preparation of sites in technical, legal, planning, and marketing terms for a proposed commercial and administrative center. Two projects, Young City and Nowa Wałowa, were created for implementation. The scope of the company's activity also included rental and lease of warehouses and production areas as well as wharfs and piers. The years 2006 and 2008 were a time of significant changes in the structure of Synergia 99 Sp. z o.o. In 2006, the first division of the company followed the adoption by the City of Gdańsk of two spatial development plans, "Solidarity Square Shipyard" and "North". At that time, two new companies – "Workers' Colony" and "Imperial Shipyard" – were established. In 2008, as a result of the second reorganization, Drewnica Development was separated. These companies took over ownership and management functions of the areas designated for the investments of the City of Gdańsk (accessed 14.X.2017, <http://www.synergia99.com.pl/pl/text/2-o-nas.php>).
- 9 See also the article of Roman Sebastiani, former marketing director of Synergia '99: <https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid.../download>.
- 10 The aforementioned field studies concerning the relationship between workers and artists in the area of the Gdańsk Shipyard after the year 2000 were conducted in 2008 by a research group consisting of the following: Ewa Chomicka, Agnieszka Kozik, Tadeusz Iwański, and Piotr Morawski. The studies were continued by the author of this text as part of a doctoral project in the years 2009–2011 (ISNS UW) and were continued in the years 2012–2017 within the implementation of a grant from the Polish National Centre of Science.
- 11 In 2008, the Colony was placed at the center of attention, particularly in the artistic circles connected with the area of the former Gdańsk Shipyard; however, it is important to note that the transformations occurring in the post-industrial area were also a matter of interest for many of the shipyard workers. Although by that time the decisions had already been made among the residents of the Artists Colony regarding who would stay and who would leave the Shipyard, the emotions had not yet subsided. It was one of the last opportunities to hear from members of the Artists Colony about the "life" experiences gained in the Telephone Exchange building, and at the same time was an opportunity to record the beginnings of the construction of a narrative about the Artists Colony and attempts to express subjective experiences through an objectified story.
- 12 An auteur project of curator Jolanta Woszczenko (and one of the former residents of the Artists Colony) was realised as part of the annual "Narrations" festival of Gdańsk on November 16–17, 2012. It encompassed a two-day (two-night) program of artistic activities implemented in building 175A by former residents of the Artists Colony. For a description of the project's intentions, see: <http://bangbangdesign.home.pl/narracje2012/artysta/centrala-dawna-kolonia-artystow/>.
- 13 Some of the artists remained in the post-shipyard area having been assigned studios in the neighboring building (the so-called Director's Villa). The activity of those studios ended in 2013 when the developer once more refused to extend the contracts with the residents. At present (2017), the Director's Villa still hosts the studio of a photographer, Michał Szłaga, one of the members of the "first" Artists Colony.
- 14 What I have in mind is mainly the activity of the PGR-ART collective, which for its later works also assumed the name of the "Artists Colony" and in 2010 registered the Artists Colony Foundation. Information regarding cultural and artistic undertakings, archive materials, and information on current projects are to be found in the following websites: <http://www.kolonia-artystow.pl/article/kontakt-contact/13> and <https://www.facebook.com/KoloniaArtystow/>.
- 15 Among other : Agnieszka Szydlowska's reportage *Radiowy Dom Kultury z Kolonii Artystów*, *Polish Radio Three*, 2006; television reportage by Agnieszka Adamek and Malwina Toczek *A co teraz?*, *Telewizja EIA*, 2008; press reportage by Krzysztof Miękus, photo by Michał Szłaga Stoczniovcy, *MaleMan* no. 6, 2009.; the monograph created on the initiative and under the editorship of Jolanta Woszczenko: *Kolonia Artystów w Stoczni Gdańskiej 2001–2011*, Gdańsk 2011.
- 16 Pierre Bourdieu, *Méditations pascaliennes* (1997) [in Polish: *Medytacje pascaliańskie*, transl. K. Wakar (Warsaw:2006)].
- 17 See Iwona Zajac: <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/iwona-zajac>; For documentation of the "Shipyard" mural and its closure, see: <http://www.stocznaweterze.com/ENG/>.
- 18 See Michał Szłaga: <http://culture.pl/en/artist/michal-szlaga>; <https://pl-pl.facebook.com/Micha%C5%82-Szlaga-Fotograf-438547636214411/>.
- 19 PGR\_ART, see: <http://pgrart.blogspot.com/search/label/PGR%20ART> ; <http://www.kolonia-artystow.pl/article/historia-history/84>.
- 20 Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum* (2006); "Zwrot społeczny: współpraca jako źródło cierpień" in *Stadion X. Miejsce którego nie było. Reader*, ed. J. Warsza (Warsaw-Cracow: 2009), 48–58.
- 21 Ibid, 49.
- 22 Pierre Bourdieu, "Teoria obiektów kulturowych", p. 270 [title of the original *Pour une science des objets* [in:] Bourdieu P. *Raisons pratiques. Sur la hheorie de l'action*, Paris 1994, p.61–80].
- 23 Ibid, 271.
- 24 A greater problem would be in the use of the concept of "being rooted" both due to the specificity of the process of the adaptation of the Telephone Exchange building in the former Shipyard and the dialectic of the category of a "change" in the so-called artistic lifestyle, as referred to in the residents' comments.
- 25 Mirosława Buchholtz and Grzegorz Konieczniak, "Postkolonie jako miejsca spotkań, czyli wokół postkolonialnej terminologii," in *Studia postkolonialne w literaturoznawstwie i kulturoznawstwie anglojęzycznym*, ed. M. Buchholtz (Toruń: 2009), 38.
- 26 It should also be stressed that the questions formulated on the basis of the post-colonial theory in the context of transformations of the Gdańsk Shipyard are not only relevant in the context of an analysis of the "Artists Colony" development project. An example might also be the parallel discourse on cultural and symbolic heritage analyzed from the perspective of post-imperial western history. This can be illustrated, for instance, by the critical studies conducted by Polish anthropologist Ewa Klekot. When addressing the issue of legacy and the dangers inherent in David Lowenthal's theory, the researcher poses an extreme and controversial question: "Is it then true that the rhetoric of legacy constitutes a part of the language of new colonisation?" See Ewa Klekot, "Zabytki dziedzictwa narodowego a problem stosunku do przeszłości", *Konteksty. Polska sztuka ludowa*, no. 3–4 (2004), 206.



## THE POST-SOVIET ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE IN LITHUANIA

# LONGING FOR ORDER

Vilnius Regional Prosecutor's Office. Architect Kęstutis Lupeikis

PHOTO: GLOBETROTTER\_RODRIGO/FICKR

by **Arnoldas Stramskas**

**"The longing for order is at the same time a longing for death, because life is an incessant disruption of order."**

*Milan Kundera*

**A**rchitectural discourse is as suitable for reflecting upon two and the half decades of Lithuanian independence as any other discourse. Clearly, there were profound changes. While the signs of the Soviet past are slowly being erased (firstly by the disappearance of monuments), large portions of buildings, even though crumbling, remain visibly intact. In fact, more than half of the population still lives in Soviet-era housing.<sup>2</sup> Soviet architecture in general, and mass-produced apartment blocks in particular, serve not only as a constant reminder of the historical period, but also as a certain critique of attempts to create uniform humanity devoid of individuality. Yet today's built environment, as spectacular and individualized as it might appear, is still largely unexplored. While it is not difficult to ask (and answer) what Soviet architecture did and what kinds of functions it served, it is much more difficult to ask the same question about contemporary architecture. When the oppressor is a clearly identifiable authoritarian regime, at least in retrospect, the signs of that regime are relatively simple to recognize and

criticize. When the power shifts and disperses itself into numerous locations and relations, architectural critique becomes a more difficult task, at least within its more socially oriented mode. The catchwords of today's Lithuanian architectural discourse, especially in its "critical" mode, deal with architectural debates of craft versus art, the roles of the capital and the state, national character and authenticity, globalization and democracy, and morality and responsibility. What follows is an attempt to delineate and transgress these debates by pointing out that architectural discourse is uncritical in terms of social processes and finds itself in a certain impasse (like many other spheres) and that proposed solutions to the problems are shortsighted and outmoded. Even if there are signs that architecture is somewhat distancing itself from professional specialization and isolation in some ways, and that certain positive developments<sup>3</sup> are occurring, overall the parameters of architectural discourse remain impoverished and without the ability to generate deeper reflection or theory about social processes of which architecture is a significant constitutive part. For architecture – both as practice and criticism – to go beyond the present impasse requires a firm shift in architectural aesthetics and criticism towards reconsideration and synthesizing of contemporary political economy with the reconceptualization of politics.



## Criticism and unintended consequences

Kim Dovey describes the trap of “critical” architecture in the following way:

“When someone begins a statement: ‘I don’t mean to be critical, but...’, then we are forewarned that they do, in fact, mean to be critical, and they will be. In the practice of architecture, however, the reverse is often the case.

“Architecture that is meant to be critical becomes incorporated into, and complicit with, a prevailing economic, political and social order: the ‘ever-the-same’ returns in the guise of the ‘critical.’”<sup>4</sup>

Even though there are emerging voices that aim to question the role of architecture within the present socioeconomic model in Lithuania, these voices are few and far between. Moreover, there is no self-identified “critical architecture” to speak of. Nevertheless, Dovey’s quotation above is relevant for the Lithuanian architectural discourse. One important attempt to outline the architectural situation in Lithuania after it regained its independence is the book *Laisvės Architektūra (Architecture of Freedom)*,<sup>5</sup> which will serve as the main reference point for the purposes of this essay. The book is edited by Tomas Grunskis and Julija Reklaitė, both of whom are representatives of the young generation of Lithuanian architects and critics. The strategy chosen for this collection is not only to offer scholarly and individual perspectives, but also to create space for reflection in which various actors involved in architectural processes express their opinions and insights.<sup>6</sup> In other words, it lets the world of architecture speak for itself. The discussed period spans two decades of Lithuanian independence (1990–2010), which is important in terms of regime change as well as in terms of architectural (and political, economic, social, and cultural) events and tendencies.

“Architecture, after all, reflects the society of its own time, because it encompasses many layers: investors, who come up with an idea that something has to be built; a bank, which loans the money; an architect, who draws; a society, which disagrees with everything; a municipality, which agrees with everything; builders, who build in whatever manner they know, and so on. All of it creates these layers – you slice them like a cake, and see how we have lived in those times.”<sup>7</sup>

What becomes immediately apparent is that the Hegelian understanding of architecture as one of the highest-ranking fine arts is extremely prevalent among Lithuanian architects, who want to see architecture as an art form that expresses spirit through built form. Because of such an understanding, they regret the devaluation of the role of the architect and the profession, which is seen as becoming merely one craft among many other crafts. What is peculiar is that the boundary between art and craft is not questioned. Nor are there signs that any of the avant-garde artistic movements, which questioned such a division, or more precisely the division between art and life, as meriting any basis for separation, have had any influence on today’s Lithuanian architects. If the spirit of time materializes through the aesthetics of glass and steel, maximizing the utility of space, and a lack of harmony with the environment – why do local architects, who render such an architecture with their own hands – feel such a conflict and nostalgia for the architect’s autonomy and for artistic architecture? Darius Čiuta is among the rare representatives of art in architecture. While many architects talk melancholically about the vanishing art, Čiuta not only advocates, but also tries to materialize his visions. In his view,

“Architecture does not exist as an art. Once every three or five years there emerges a building that one could discuss. All the rest are technical, engineering solutions.”<sup>8</sup>

Čiuta is also one of those who acknowledge the conflicting nature of art in architecture: “If there is no architecture, there is no conflict.”<sup>9</sup> For him, it is possible to create another kind of architecture, but this requires “moral” choices that often have financial ramifications. Yet, is it possible to assert that the problem (if it is agreed that such a problem exists) is merely an individual choice made by an architect? Even more, is “art” in itself a guarantee for another space, that is different both socially and politically? So far, architecture merely reproduces sociopolitical micro-managerial programs, i.e., it assigns bodies to their proper place, be it the home, the workplace, or a

supermarket. While for contemporary Lithuanian architects, architecture is symptomatic of societal processes that most of them describe as negative (e.g. commodification of culture, commercialization, instrumentalization of politics for capital), and they wish or hope that architecture could remain on the margins of – if not outside – these processes.

The question should be posed as follows: what critical spatial practices might be deployed so that Lithuanian architects would be able to create and materialize their projects provided there were “a proper” legislative base, a client who took into account the architect’s suggestions, and room was left for experimenta-

**“THE KEY QUESTION IS HOW ARCHITECTS UNDERSTAND THEIR OWN FUNCTION AND SOCIAL REALITY, NO MATTER HOW FRAGMENTED, UNSTABLE, AND COMPLICATED THAT REALITY MIGHT BE.”**

tion? As long as architecture remains strictly a building maximizing its function without an attempt to grasp in what ways it is a reflection of social and spatial processes and in what ways it is creating new scenarios of inclusion/exclusion and spatialization of power, it will remain a hostage and simultaneously a political and economic tool. The architect's powerlessness stems not from the contemporary situation, in which external factors bind architectural expression, but from the narrowness of architectural education and professional specialization that is deeply embedded in workings of and for capital. It is not a question of whether one could make compromises or not, similar to the popular representation of an architect vividly portrayed by Ayn Rand's protagonist in *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roark. Roark embodies unbridled individualism and creative autonomy that is maintained by any means necessary, as if countering Henri Lefebvre's claim that "architecture and the architect, threatened with disappearance, capitulate before the property developer, who spends the money."<sup>10</sup> The key question is how architects understand their own function and social reality, no matter how fragmented, unstable, and complicated that reality might be.

The Roarkian perspective is expressed by the artist-architect Kęstutis Lupeikis, who designed the Vilnius Regional Prosecutor's Office, which was received with mixed reviews. Critics, such as Vytautas Rubavičius, claimed that the building was the opposite of what the law should represent (transparency and accessibility) due to its disregard for the surrounding urban fabric, its diagonal windows, its black dominating cube form, and its lack of "any human feelings."<sup>11</sup> However, Lupeikis counters all these accusations when defending his artistic vision. Thus, it is worth quoting him at length. Concerning the windows he states:

**"The windows received varying reception from people; one remark was that the employees would walk diagonally. When answering that question, I argued that while doing his job one should probably be working instead of staring through a window. Then everything will be straight."<sup>12</sup>**

Another claim is about the surrounding environment and artistic integrity:

**"My response to such criticism is: dear ones, do we have to revert to the typical Soviet panel housing? Where would this take us? Architecturally this is a poor context, it is not valuable – my position towards this is skeptical. In post-Soviet space the context is valued too much and this demonstrates a certain creative inability. Elsewhere in the world this does not cause many problems. In the West no one thinks about the context but rather about the artistic value of an object itself – the idea. For instance, volume is not a problem in New York – you have money, you build a larger building. Therefore the overall result is effective. [...] After winning the competition, a master plan of the area had to be changed and this procedure involved consultations**

**with the local community. They came to the meeting and, as always, it started with an uproar – not because of the volume, not because of the cube, none of that. Their discontent was due to a square, where children are usually playing. Yet, when I was taking pictures there, it was not even possible to step on the grass for all the dog feces. For any construction proposal you get a few old pensioners, who reject any kind of construction, especially one that takes place near them. I can hardly imagine a scenario where the crowd gathers and starts designing. In my understanding this would be total nonsense; it would be the same as if a crowd started painting a picture together. Should an artist stop practicing if society rejects him? If you are an artist, it is in your interest not to do it in a bad way."<sup>13</sup>**

One gets a sense of a certain arrogance and irony in the proclamations made by Lupeikis. Artistic vision comes before everything. Users of the building need to perform their tasks dutifully and not try to combine leisure (and pleasure) with work. Ideas of urban planning and community engagement are perceived as bureaucratic nuisances. Clearly, there cannot be any meaningful dialogue with the inhabitants of the surrounding area because they are not worthy of discussion. Artistic autonomy needs to be preserved at all costs, which is the price of progress. It is also a polemic with city planners and urbanists who can also be quite dogmatic and bureaucratic, as expressed in the following statement: "Any deviations from (distortions of) anything that is normal, logical, systematic, objective and reasoned economically, socially, etc., is understood as deformations of urban planning."<sup>14</sup> Yet, leaving these ethical or moral issues aside, I would argue that this particular building without a clear intent at subversion is, in fact, subversive. The unintended consequence of this is that the building creates an effect on the conception of law, which is already highly compromised and mistrusted. Those who would like to see a building of law being transparent and welcoming believe that architectural content and form have to coincide with or perhaps generate trust in the institutions housed in those buildings.<sup>15</sup> What is of interest is that although Lupeikis intended to create "the experience of respectful awe",<sup>16</sup> the project passed a commission of architects and prosecutors without capturing the Kafkaesque irony of it all. K. Michael Hays, in his influential essay on the role of architectural criticism, asks the following questions:

**"What is the responsibility of architectural criticism or of critical historiography? Is it to teach and to disseminate information about the monuments of culture? Is it to deliver technical insights and opinions about the capabilities of the architect or the form of a building? Or is it [...] to concentrate on the intrinsic conditions through which architecture is made possible? In order to know all we can about architecture we must be able to understand each instance of architecture, not as a passive agent of culture in its dominant ideological,**

institutional, and historical forms, nor as a detached, disinfected object. Rather we must understand it as actively and continually occupying a cultural place – as an architectural intention with ascertainable political and intellectual consequences.”<sup>17</sup>

## Politics against consensus

Jacques Ranciere claims that art becomes political not by directly communicating political messages or being recognized as political, but by questioning, experimenting, and stepping outside its own forms.

**“Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct ‘fictions’, that is to say material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done.”<sup>18</sup>**

Architecture, in this case, has a privileged position because its output occupies space, partly composing spatial and social fabric. Buildings can and do evoke various feelings, serve different functions, and generate social conflict or social “harmony”. When architecture leads to conflict, it creates spaces of dissensus, which for Ranciere is foundational for *politics* as opposed to managerial *police*. Architects and various critics affiliated with architecture eagerly denounce symbols of architecture-gone-wrong, and the right bank of the river Neris in Vilnius might serve as an example. The area became a symbol of finally catching up with ultra-modernity via its concentration of skyscrapers. Mega-shopping and entertainment malls called “Akropolis” in major cities are also good illustrations. Skyscrapers are mostly criticized neither for their form nor for their function, but for falling outside boundaries of the urban context – for distorting the urban landscape. Mega-malls are criticized for their social impact and their inexpressive, box-like architecture, seducing the masses with vanity fairs and abandoning more noble forms of culture. While both of these arguments are valuable to a certain degree, they do not go beyond such pronouncements. It could be argued that built forms are in a sense positive to the extent that they unveil ideological foundations of a new society and provide space for reflections on the role of architecture in society and on the role of buildings not only as material objects occupying space, but also their social functions, their power effects, and the sociality of architecture in general.

Perhaps eye-soaring objects are an indirect contribution to a largely non-existent vocabulary of Lithuanian architectural critique. According to the pessimistic scenario, which currently appears to be resembling reality most closely, discussions

about the “wounds” of the city fabric merely serve the function of displacement in psychoanalytic terms. Few buildings get scapegoated, while architecture’s social/political aspects remain within the narrow confines of debates about drawing boundaries between art and craft. Architectural discourse, which merely engages in the functional, technical, and rational characteristics of a “good” building, including formal criteria for taking into account the surrounding environment, incessantly contains architecture within a professionalized field. Democracy gets re-enacted via this selective critique, proof that the debate is ongoing.

**ARCHITECTURE’S RELATION** to democracy is, in fact, one of the unfolding tensions in the architectural discourse. For example, Eugenijus Miliūnas is unafraid to proclaim, “Architecture and dictatorship are absolutely one and the same thing.”<sup>19</sup> Although this might sound like a mere provocation in times when democracy is not questioned, it does open space for discussion. According to some architects, planners, and theoreticians, architectural democracy should manifest itself via participation in planning processes and through community engagement with representatives of the various social segments that will be affected by the newly built environment. Tomas Grunskis claims: “We do not know many things yet, and in a young society it is forgiven. But community engagement, being one of the traditional European social cohabitation values, is yet unknown in our social environment.”<sup>20</sup> Typically, community engagement only appears when consensus on a certain issue must be achieved. Yet a consensus becomes fragile and apolitical when concepts of democracy, community, and participation are questioned. According to

Ranciere, there are conflicting views, or rather practices, of democracy. One is the democratic messiness of unpredictable excess. The other one, practiced most thoroughly by state structures, attempts by all means to eliminate that messiness. As a result, these clashing visions of democracy lead to the paradoxical situation where democracy in name is standing against democracy in practice.<sup>21</sup> The state serves the managerial role of

## **“ARCHITECTURE’S RELATION TO DEMOCRACY IS, IN FACT, ONE OF THE UNFOLDING TENSIONS IN THE ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE.”**

providing consensus, which voids democracy of any content in politics: “Consensus is the ‘end of politics’: in other words, not the accomplishment of the ends of politics but simply a return to the normal state of things – the non-existence of politics.”<sup>22</sup> For Ranciere, democracy is precisely that unmanageability with all its faults, mistakes, and conflicts that should be valued. Additional problems appear when democracy is perceived as a rule of the majority, which is a prevalent conception. We quickly reach a complex stalemate when the majority might either be the dominating force or be dominated itself. Reduction of the majority, which can dictate the rules for the rest, just like the minority’s domination over the majority (which is the case, at least in economic terms) cannot be viewed as a positive trend. The concepts of minority and majority are flawed themselves





Swedbank Headquarters, Vilnius. Architects: Audrius Ambrasas Architects.

PHOTO: AMBRASAS ARCHITECTS.

because they assume old-fashioned conceptions of identity and ideological allegiances that no longer characterize subjectivities that might be multiple and multiply, or even contradictorily, aligned. Participatory planning that is slowly entering the architectural vocabulary becomes an empty signifier in practice, just like “green economy” or “corporate social responsibility” that are inscribed in laws but almost never exercised in practice. It is an increasingly criticized practice for its illusionary democratic aspect,<sup>23</sup> which creates the illusion that the “people’s” voice was heard and that “choices” were made, but in reality, it is merely seen as a bureaucratic annoyance to be overcome in order to proceed with the initial plans. Community as such is devoid of content and is turned into an ideological phantom, hence its popularity within the symbolic economy (which was previously called civil society). In fact, what it often means is the management and self-interest of cultural and NGO industries. Instead of direct participation, the representational model remains, and these new players become de facto representatives of a community and civil society because by definition they do not belong to the state or to the capital, two other pillars holding up society in this model. Nonetheless, connections between capital, state,

and the so-called third sector are much closer within this new regime than they might appear.<sup>24</sup>

It is obvious that the architectural problem is political. And how do architects understand politics? Grunskis claims:

**“It might well be the case that the post-Soviet label, attached during the first decade of independence, is still valid in Lithuania today. One of its features is distrust in politicians and depoliticization of everything everywhere, including architecture. It might be that such extreme (separated from politics) architectural liberalism is equally bad in a social, as well as in a creative sense. With an archaic understanding of freedom dominating, civic freedoms in Lithuania did not grow together with the architectural reality and did not become a law. There is even less to say about the spirit of the period...”<sup>25</sup>**

The quotation above basically outlines “what is to be done” in the Lithuanian architectural context. The idea appears to be widely shared by those engaged in fields related to architecture,

and solutions have to come specifically from the state. According to the architect and public figure Audrys Karalius, architecture is left to be evaluated by architects themselves, and “society [...] remains without state-directed guidance.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Vytautas Rubavičius claims, “Although state power and the scope of direct governing have obviously decreased, sub-national territorial and urbanistic formations have not become more self-sufficient. In order to activate cities and regions, a clear state policy is necessary.”<sup>27</sup> Such a traditional political model is reminiscent of Foucault’s elaboration on the long history of the “pastoral modality of power”, which drew on various figures promising survival and redemption, and which eventually materialized itself with the state being conceived of as the shepherd and society as the flock.<sup>28</sup>

While this model is clearly no longer dominant, Lithuanian architects still perceive the state to be a sovereign agent that holds (or should hold) monopoly and autonomy over decision-making. It should have a certain transcendental ability to know and do what is best, preferably for the sake of the collective social body. However, as expressed by Lupeikis, this social body is itself the problem. Or as Ambrasas stated, it is architects’ work in the environment where “society [...] disagrees with everything”. Although this might not be the case at all because “society” is not only non-interfering, but most of the time it does not even know about projects before construction begins. Appeals to the state might simply be due to practical reasons, but what is revealed in architectural discourse is that the state should be that shepherd that not only regulates and decides, but also directs and guides. The message is that society cannot be trusted – it does not know, yet, what is best for it. As long as the political is perceived as the politicians’ arena or as a dialogue with them, real politics are not likely to emerge.

## The landscape of political economy

One does not need to talk about the economic crisis, the crisis of values (a frequent appeal in Lithuania), or more than two decades of post-Soviet transformations to realize that transformations are occurring everywhere (in the geographic sense). Society as an indivisible, local, territorial, and political unit is disintegrating. Within the architectural discourse, when attempts to grasp sociopolitical realities are made, Europe in particular and the whole Western world in general are often idealized, longed for, and desired. Although quite a few architects are expressing a certain skepticism towards processes of Europeanization, it is possible to come up with an underlying premise that Europeanization is at fault only in the forms that are materialized in Lithuania. According to this position, social maturity, political culture, effective and all-encompassing education, law, justice, and state support do in fact exist in the West. While there is no need to deny that qualitative differences do exist between the former Eastern Bloc and the West, the idealization of the West

is a symptomatic example of a lack of sociopolitical imagination and a neocolonial inferiority complex. Social, political, cultural, and economic crises that are ongoing in the West are arguably no less significant than Eastern European transformations, and there is much talk about Western values and models as not yet having achieved the ideal points of convergence. “Speaking critically, our architects do not read much and, of course, do not write.”<sup>29</sup> Trust in and a desire for the abstracted Western model, as if it were frozen in time, merely reproduces teleological notions of progress and modernity. Representatives of the Lithuanian architectural milieu are communicating their desire to jump on the train, which has already departed. What is needed instead is a vigorous analysis of what has happened in the West (as well as in the East) and why idealist models have collapsed or are collapsing. This would, perhaps, allow a more adequate response to present conditions instead of trying to go

through the same stages of “inevitable” development. Yet, Lithuanian architects’ responses are mostly appeals to art and national(ist) features in architecture, state protection, individual morality, and responsibility.

IT IS EASY TO GET the impression that Lithuanian architects live and act as post-modernists and adapt themselves to decentralized, capitalized, self-managed,

## “LITHUANIAN ARCHITECTURE OF THE PAST 25 YEARS IS A MIRROR OF SOCIAL DECOMPOSITION.”

and networked environments, yet theorize as modernist urbanists. Formal and technical qualities, which are considered as art-science, guarantee quality of architecture and its internal laws, while at the same time there is an adherence to educational, Corbusierian power and the need for architecture. It has to fulfill social and aesthetic functions by creating a new human-citizen, making him/her proud of his/her country, place, and tradition. Jonas Minkevičius might be one of the most radical representatives of such a tendency, equating Soviet and European non-freedoms of the nation, which today include importing unwanted tolerance, destroying sovereignty, and undermining the foundations of the nation. Minkevičius is openly articulating his chauvinistic position and calling for the creation of “authentic” national culture. However, such a position in more subtle forms is felt throughout the architectural discourse.

Whether they are nationalists or cosmopolitans, what these professionals share in common is the desire to plug themselves into global currents of the world of architecture through competitions, exhibitions, and architectural biennales. Architecture loses its meaning in a local sense because the local is already constructed as a result of the global. Be it authentic, local, regional, or global architecture, it participates in the same symbolic economy, annihilating space via buildings and materializing capital. Yet, it is not enough to see new buildings as merely transforming fictitious capital into something specific. Land itself, as argued by David Harvey, “is not a commodity in the ordinary sense. It is a fictitious form of capital that derives from expectations of future rents.”<sup>30</sup> Harvey locates recent eco-

conomic crises exactly here – as the accumulation of capital that was expended on real estate creating a speculative bubble that was inevitably destined to burst. For Harvey, urbanization in general “has been a key means for the absorption of capital and labor surpluses throughout capitalism’s history.”<sup>31</sup> The recent and short-lived economic boom that started after the Baltic states joined the European Union and ended with a crash in 2008–2009 was in large-part sponsored by Scandinavian banks’ credit for consumer goods and real estate construction, acquisition, and speculation. Swedbank, a Swedish bank that entered the Lithuanian market in 1999, is one of the key players in the credit and financial market. Swedbank’s headquarters, which were opened in 2010, is considered to be one of the best buildings of the two decades of Lithuanian independence. The architects’ team headed by Audrius Ambrasas designed the building that won local and international awards and recognition. It is praised for its use of material (vertical wooden panels that soften the high-rise appearance and change the surface depending on the observer’s position), the interplay between vertical and horizontal volumes, and the integration of an elevated recreational space open for the wider public. For Kastytis Rudokas it is an ultimate example of aesthetic and political democratization:

“Among the key features of this building is the integration of public space into an institutional one, which gives meaning to private property, architectural space. On the premises of the bank there is a café and an outdoor terrace, which becomes a kind of observational platform, from which the view towards the old part of Vilnius opens up. We may claim that such a model of integration, until now uncharacteristic of Lithuanian banks’ functional and architectural structure, is stemming from a global societal model, where relations between social and cultural groups are equated, and the horizontal model of integration is becoming more prominent within the economy. In general, this object, like the whole new Vilnius city center with its socio-cultural structure, reminds one of the Internet space, where members of a society with different needs and goals coexist harmoniously – from sporting youth and absent-minded shoppers to CEOs and city officials.”<sup>32</sup>

**THIS KIND OF** analysis is a perfect example of an attempt to eliminate any political content through celebratory espousal of “democratic” architecture by engaging the sociopolitical and the aesthetic. Architecture becomes a materialized part of a neoliberal utopia of a free-market and a networked society, forgetting that even the most visibly open spaces are increasingly policed and controlled, whereas free-market participation is always rigidly structured in terms of who has the means and access to it in the first place. The question to ask, then, is how one might reconcile the fact that the “best” architecture is being made possible by unsustainable infinite financialization of capital that often bears heavy social costs.<sup>33</sup> The difference between the Swedbank headquarters, which is universally applauded as an example of “good

architecture” and which thus pacifies potential discussion about its content (financial capital), and Lupeikis’s black cube is provoking and raises questions concerning operations of law and the “democratic” nature of state institutions.

Typical solutions to urban crises often evoke post-industrial intra-city competitions by stimulating tourism and cultural industries. Vilnius mayor Artūras Zuokas is credited as being among the most influential visionaries and as a crucial figure in shaping the city in its present form. Among his ideas was a Guggenheim and Hermitage museum project. The winner of the competition for its architectural implementation was Zaha Hadid, recently deceased, one of the brightest stars of neo-avant-garde (which some would call neoliberal) architecture.<sup>34</sup> Zuokas’s idea was that Vilnius could have a success story similar to that of Bilbao in Spain, adding local flavor through the heritage of Fluxus and cinematic avant-garde star émigrés Jurgis Mačiūnas and Jonas Mekas. It was supposed to generate a stream of tourists and make Vilnius a regional capital of art and culture. However, because of various voices of discontent and an ongoing economic crisis, the plan was post-poned indefinitely. The logic, however, is rather clear. Architecture needs to be either “authentically” old (Vilnius is a UNESCO heritage site due to its relatively large old town, and it markets itself as such) or globally recognized, experimental, and atypical in order to draw attention, stimulate tourism, and attract more investments.<sup>35</sup>

## Inconclusive conclusions

Audrys Karalius claims that in order for the situation to change, “time, experience, responsibility” are needed.<sup>36</sup> But what experience has been accumulated during this time? And to whom should architects feel responsible? Architects have practical skills but lack theoretical insights. Architecture will neither become a modernist tool for the creation of a New Man, nor will it become completely obsolete and meaningless. Architecture, whether intentionally or not, affects the environment and those who use it, partitioning the space and spatializing sociality. In short, it is part and parcel of social reproduction. Thus, there is a need for a “double movement” of architectural de-specialization (stepping outside its disciplinary framework)<sup>37</sup> and self-education of non-architects on the issues concerning architecture as a constitutive part of the sociopolitical field. More importantly, post-Soviet chaos might be a productive moment to experiment, engage, subvert, and play with uncertainty. It is far from being the same as open-heartedly embracing the prevailing neoliberal logic as opposed to a rigid state logic, which merely orders and stagnates. The contemporary situation does not fall neatly into such an imagined dichotomy of two differences, of two choices. Instead, it is an interplay of both of these and numerous other factors (historical, philosophical, cultural, technological, social, etc.). When buildings are built based on capitalist fantasies of infinite creativity and accumulation, they should be treated not as excesses or exceptions without context, as some critically minded architects claim, but positively, as raw material for infinite critique, situations of conflict, and ideological deconstructions of the processes that are revealed through them. Lithuanian archi-



ture of the past 25 years is a mirror of social decomposition. Thus, it should serve as a space for engagement with outcomes of this decomposition instead of glossing over it. There is a dissensus in all spheres of life already. Architecture and architects might contribute to that culture of dissensus or might cultivate fantasies about the social unity and spirituality of their art-craft. Architecture has its specificities, like all arts that have a sufficient degree of autonomy to qualify as art, but it has more commonalities with the processes that surround it. It is about time to start engaging in these processes and offering new modes of analysis and action instead of attempting to return to imaginary “models that work”. Models that do not exist, and, probably, never existed. Paraphrasing Marcel Proust, one could claim that “the only way to defend architecture is to attack it.”<sup>38</sup> x

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# ALBANIAN NOVEMBER, STUDENTS CALLING

by Gilda Hoxha

## abstract

The analysis presented here aims to establish the role of self-organized groups in the Albanian democratization process, and to understand their implications, based on the concepts of political opportunities and non-conventional forms of participation in decision-making. The relationship between the concept of “self-organized groups” and the political opportunity system will be viewed from two perspectives – the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system and how non-conventional forms of participation, such as protest, can be part of policy-making. The features of self-organized groups will be treated firstly in this paper followed by focusing on the main question: “Are the self-organized groups helped or not helped by the political opportunity system in the Albanian case?” A comparison with other young democracies of Eastern Europe will cast further light on this analysis. In the analysis of how self-organized groups work, act, and cooperate in young democracies like Albania, it is shown that different financial, human, technical, and political factors determine to what degree the self-organized groups are dependent on the political opportunity system in order to achieve their goals.

**KEY WORDS:** Self-organized groups, decision-making, democracy, protest, Albania.

In this paper we will pay interest to the role and agency for self-organized groups in Albania. The role of self-organized groups is broad. First, self-organized groups can build and develop relief networks across society by identifying social problems, defending human rights, and mobilizing against social injustices. Also, it can be said that self-organized groups can set in motion a process of gradual encroachment into the territory of the state and its eventual enclosure by the “parallel polis” of civil society.<sup>1</sup> Self-organized groups can be conceptualized as collections of motivated citizens who work toward a common goal and have the ability and authority to make decisions. Thus, self-organized groups try to influence the decision-making of government on both the local and central levels. The relationship between the state and the self-organized groups depends on the political system of governance, as the state is the main arbiter of rules.

Connections between the state and self-organized groups can take different forms, among which are participation and collaboration in the formation of public policies, building networks between state institutions and citizens, by lobbying, and in some cases even by being part of political participation and electoral

campaigns, and non-conventional forms of participating can also be used. Self-organized groups can be understood as interest groups in the sense that interest groups are defined within a relationship to government or to institutional governance.<sup>2</sup> The importance of self-organized groups goes beyond the governance system and includes institutional and other authorities, in some cases even producing social movements. In the words of Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly (1999): “Self-organized groups are generally embedded within the political arena and in most of the cases are seen as legitimate actors”.<sup>3</sup> By choosing unconventional forms of participating within the political system or by overlapping with a system of institutional governance that is quite fragile, these groups do not have the same access to opportunities for action and the same access to influence on the decision making process as political parties or other forms of interest groups that have an active and direct part in the decision making. Rather self-organized groups try to act and influence the political parties in their decision making. Interests and questions that are not caught up and voiced by political parties can, in best case in a democracy, thus be raised via self-organized groups although, as described, the outcome will depend on the degree of access to opportunities for action and influence.

This different agency between self-organized groups and other forms of interest groups such as political parties is enough to produce a diverse set of strategies and actions and thus different collective behaviors. These self-organized groups represent important interests within society and different preferences or different purposes.<sup>4</sup> In all forms of collective behavior, regardless of whether they overlap or do not overlap, they remain an essential element of mobilization, and the mobilization process can be developed in diverse ways. In an underdeveloped political system such as in Albania, specialized structures do not exist for the mobilization of self-organized groups.

**THIS ARTICLE HAS** two main objectives:

1. To evaluate new forms of participation in decision-making in relation to legal measures that guarantee non-conventional forms of participation such as protest, for example, the Constitution of Albania, the Law on Demonstrations No.8773, dated 23.4.2001, and others.
2. To examine how the concept of “mobilization” is involved during the “democratic transition” and what influence it has on building democratic governance based on case study reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and on information from reports and books detailing the implementation of non-conventional forms of participation and the mechanisms guaranteeing the rights for these new forms of participation as well as highlighting the challenges and importance of the new forms of participation during the transition.

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This paper is further organized into two main parts. The first part is based on the experience of other young democracies and focuses on the theories behind the key issues that relate government, society, and non-conventional forms of participation in decision making to build democratic governance. The second part examines self-organized groups in the Albanian case and their development during the transition from state socialism, referring to the first part of the discussion, and it draws comparisons with developments in other nations.

This research was conducted predominantly in Tirana, the capital city where protests as a non-conventional form of participation have had an important effect on decision-making.

## Opportunity for change

In this paper, Albanian self-organized groups are investigated and framed through the theoretical approach based on the idea of political opportunity. Back in November 1991, students were trying to get the regime’s attention and were criticizing the difficult living conditions in public dormitories. Getting the regime’s attention was just the first step that led to students mobilizing and adding other demands for change from the old political system. By December 1991, self-organized students forced the totalitarian regime to accept democratic pluralism for Albania. Thus, the most important approach, analyzing the political opportunity structure, serves to understand and explain why some cases are successful and some of them fail even to be mobilized.<sup>5</sup> For decades, Albania was one of the most isolated countries in Eastern Europe. As long as Enver Hoxha was in charge of the system, radical reforms were impossible. After Hoxha’s death in 1985, Ramiz Ali took power. This change in leadership opened up for

some hopes for reforms and modernization of the system. Alia’s policy was to avoid the current developments that were taking place throughout Eastern Europe. First, it seemed as though Albania was immune to the changes that during the 1970s and 1980s had opened the way for credible political alternatives to the communist regimes in other Eastern European countries.<sup>6</sup> In this paper we

will try to understand how students as a self-organized group in Albania managed to create the opportunity for political action by using non-conventional forms of participation.

## Theoretical approach

The ability of self-organized groups to sustain networks and coalitions has increased self-organized groups’ influence over public authorities. Thus, self-organized groups can be conceptualized as sustained and enduring challenges to political decision-makers in order to achieve their goals and even to achieve social change in some cases.<sup>7</sup> However, the dynamics of the changing policies in Western Europe during the 1960s brought attention to the self-organized groups as they tried to



bring about political change by challenging the political elite,<sup>8</sup> but analytical usefulness of the relationships between the “state” and “self-organized groups” was not defined properly. Thus, the process of interaction and fusion between these two groups was observed not only on the level of socio-political rules on a global scale, but also on a societal scale as the primary actors and elements in policymaking. Since the mid-1970s, a number of conservative analyses have described these actions as very dangerous cycles that can lead to the erosion of political authority or even losing the capacity to govern.

Self-organized groups have an important role in supporting the implementation period of democratic laws that have been initiated by collective action. Thus, it may be said that what we understand by self-organized groups is: “a sphere of social interaction between the household and the State, which is manifested in the norms of community cooperatives, structures of voluntary association and networks of public communication”.<sup>9</sup> Self-organized groups have been known as the “third” sector of society and are seen as an increasingly important agent for promoting features of good governance. The role of self-organized groups includes identifying unaddressed problems and bringing them to the public’s attention, protecting basic human rights, and giving a voice to a wide range of political, environmental, social, and community interests and concerns.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, self-organized groups and the wider “third” sector mostly share common goals.

In some Eastern European countries, self-organized groups were a key factor for the destruction of communist systems, but in other former communist countries self-organized groups played a minimal role. It can be asserted that self-organized groups became essential only after the transition to democratic systems. For example, self-organized groups in Poland in 1980 during the communist system worked alongside the opposition, and in the early transition period they shared common goals and similar values, which led to clear, shared objectives and collaboration with other countries that had shared interests and goals like Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia. For example,



Students at the University of Tirana in November 2015, after the protest for reform of higher education. The banderole says: “Free Public Education”.

PHOTO: IVANA DERVISHI / BIRN

the Czechoslovak students were very aware of cultural trends that were popular among youth in other Eastern and Western European countries, even if they often knew of these trends only as mediated by their Polish peers.<sup>11</sup>

Formative stages of self-organized groups and civil society in Poland were important as role models for neighboring countries. The achievements in Poland showed that citizens actively participating in collective action can ultimately create change. The people of Poland were committed to making this change, and, as stated earlier, commitment is the necessary tool to create social and civil change. This process began in Poland with the emergence of Solidarity in 1980, and in Hungary the process (re) gained momentum in the late 1980s. These two societies are now in the process of building new social, political, and economic systems as Janina Zagorska stated in her analysis.<sup>12</sup>

During the transition phase, three important processes have been occurring in almost all former communist countries.

1. Social-political pluralism has challenged the old system.
2. The democratization of the old society has been stimulated by the self-organized groups.
3. The inclusion of various actors in society has increased the participation of civil society.



Second democratic elections, 1992. Election rally from the PD, Democratic Party and Sali Berisha in Skhodra, Northern Albania.

PHOTO: CHRISTIAN JUNGEBLODT

## Non-conventional forms of participation and collective action

Self-organized groups use persuasion and sometimes even coercion, which are new, dramatic, and legally questionable methods. The formal decision-making process are challenged by different demands on participation in the decision making, both within the parliament by the opposition as well as, sometimes, also by the citizens themselves. Starting from the 1970s, groups representing broader arrays of citizens have added value to the other forms of pressure on governments or have tried to be part of the decision-making process. Since the 1970s, “a new set of political activities is joining the political repertoire of citizens”,<sup>13</sup> The political repertoire includes conventional forms of participation such as providing services to a community, developing activities for a party or a candidate, developing networks of obedience in society by directing the allocation of votes/ electoral campaigns, participating in public meetings, and contacting officials, as well as a long list of non-conventional forms of participation such as petitions, authorized participation in events, participation in boycotts, refusal to pay taxes or rents, blocking traffic, and participating in strikes. These new forms seem to be legitimate, and in advanced industrial societies the techniques of direct political action do not bring the stigma of deviance. As

Norris concludes, “Non-conventional forms of participation are anti-systemic in their direction”.<sup>14</sup> The increase in forms of political participation appears as a peculiarly elongated democratic public opinion. Powering protests is a process with indirect impact through the means of communication, and some groups come equipped with more power. As can be observed from the outside, they should not have power if they want to pass policy in their favor and to mobilize solidarity groups equipped with more power. The most well known non-conventional form of participation is protest.

Protest constituencies are made up of those who are directly interested in public policy, and such constituencies require a leadership that leads protest actions and maintains relationships with the outside political environment. Mass communication is used as a tool to spread messages that are directed, above all, to public decision-makers, who are the real target of the protest. A second important characteristic defines, besides protest in conjunction with other forms of intervention, the so-called resource for groups “without power”,<sup>15</sup> i.e. those who are free to share resources directly with those who make public decisions. Researchers might agree that protest is a symbolic and/or physical expression of dissent regarding something or somebody.<sup>16</sup> In political life, some groups exist for the very purpose of protest-



ing, or they at least use protest as a key mechanism to get their voices heard.<sup>17</sup> Yet they may also use protest only occasionally or only as a last resort. Accordingly, the kinds of groups that protest vary greatly, ranging from an informal citizen initiative to a large, hierarchical association, to a radical political party. Even a government may resort to protest, for example, by sending a written critical note to another government. In addition to the different kinds of actors, the content, aims, levels, and forms of political protest also vary greatly. Protest can refer to any political and social issue that is debated and contested, whether it is an utterance of a political leader, an administrative directive, or a political regime.

Protest is seen as the most valid form for mass participation, highlighting the network structure, the emotional motivation of participants, or the political and cultural consequences that follow when the citizens do to not feel that they can influence the decision-making through the democratic system. Non-represented interest groups, individuals, or passive citizens normally feel isolated from the social order because they are powerless to bring about social change on their own,<sup>18</sup> and collective action in mass participation leads to a feeling of empowerment because it allows them to reach a collective goal and bring about social change, while at the same time criticizing “crowd psychology” (Gustave Le Bon) for collective action.

Collective action is conventionally analyzed in two main approaches – cultural approaches and political opportunity systems. Cultural approaches argue that collective action is related to a form of strain theory. Social change imposes strains on the function of society, and collective actions are seen not just as a manifestation of those strains, but also as a viable way to arrive at a solution for relieving this kind of social pressure. However, the problem with this approach is that it fails to explain the continuities in various forms of collective action.

The political opportunity system structure approach was developed in the 1970s by Peter Eisinger, Charles Tilly, William Gramson, and others, whose main argument was that the chances for success and mobilization are strongly dependent on the opportunities created and offered by the political system. These opportunities can be institutionalized and formal, but they can also be informal. The political elite can try to facilitate or to repress collective action, which affects the chances for success of such actions. The key recognition in the political opportunity perspective is that activists’ prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and having influence are context-dependent. Analysts therefore appropriately direct much of their attention to the world outside a collective behavior on the premise that exogenous factors enhance a collective behavior’s prospects for mobilization, for advancing particular claims over others, for cultivating some al-

liances over others, for employing particular political strategies and tactics over others, and for affecting mainstream institutional politics and policy.<sup>19</sup>

## **A short historical trajectory: Eastern Europe**

The 1968 World Youth Festival held in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, with the motto “For Solidarity, Peace and Friendship” showed the ideological division between the Left in the East and the West. Signs of discord emerged during the opening ceremony when the West German delegation passed by. Tensions continued to mount when the Bulgarian secret police intervened in a demonstration against the Vietnam War that the West German SDS had called for. The situation escalated a few days later, and delegates from Belgium, Denmark, Great Britain, Italy, and the Netherlands left the scene in protest.

**IN OTHER COUNTRIES**, the 1960s have by now become part of national cultures of remembrance, with fitting “lieux de memories” like the attack on Rudi Dutche in Berlin and the occupation of the Sorbonne University in Paris. They range from national myths of rejuvenation, proclaiming the birth of a new society with a more open and democratic political culture and gender equality, to the end of a period of liberalization and the advent of domestic orthodoxy dogma.

Meanwhile, in the Czech Republic students were often subject to retrospective interpretations through the events of 1968. Students, charismatic leaders of the reforming Czechoslovak Communist Party, and many other social actors, such as writers and intellectuals, occupy the attention with respect to this year. Students, as the future socialist intelligentsia, were to be actors of a universal working class that transcended national boundaries. According to studies, the students’ grievances were orientated in three directions. First was the struggle for

the private sphere. In the 1960s, the communist leaders frequently discussed the negative attitudes toward the socialist order generally and of students particularly. The Czechoslovak communists viewed the integration of youth and students into socialist society as insufficient and sought innovative ways to increase such integration. They started to prepare new youth and student policies and decided to integrate youth activities in local government. This support

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included the establishment of three new higher education committees. The second was the struggle for equality, as the laws of historical materialism predetermined the new socialist order that inherited its legitimacy from the revolution. Furthermore, the socialist way of life was to be practiced through proletarian internationalism and founded on equal rights and transnational class solidarity. Thus, it can be understood in favor of a univer-



sal working class at the expense of identification with national communities and as solidarity with movements in Asia, Latin America, and Africa in the late 1950s. The third was the struggle for difference. The language of the students' demands for difference referred to the one-sided interpretation of achievements within the industrial organized division of labor in the social order. "Work achievements" with specific and valuable use for a socialist society were related to function, age, and class origin. Marxism-Leninism in Czechoslovakia essentially appropriated the highest group status recognition for members of the working class, which especially recognized long-term communist male functionaries. Elaboration of these three main directions led to the "Prague Spring", and for the future it might be said that these were the first steps through civil action, despite the existing political opportunity system.

## The Albanian case

Based on previous studies in Albania, it can be considered that self-organized groups had passed through three different phases. The first phase started at the beginning of the twentieth century and coincided with the end of World War II in 1945. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many groups were created before the self-organized groups, such as foundations, schools, media outlets, religious organizations, etc. Together these organizations involved political and religious leaders and cultural nationalists. Some of them were created and worked outside of Albania's official borders, especially in the US, Great Britain, and France. All of their work focused on the organization of cultural and political activities, and in some cases they would open language courses and schools as well as produce various newspaper publications. In this way, it can be suggested that the history of the Albanian state is closely related to the existence of self-organized groups that became influential in society. The reason for their survival is due to numerous political crises during the period after independence from Ottoman Empire, in 1912. There was the benefit of their financial and cultural capacity increasing through help from the Albanian diaspora, but the fact that those participating in these activities in many cases took on the role of the state and replaced it with their own institutions with their own motives could lead one to believe that the fact that these non-elected bodies were governing the progression of a newly independent Albania means that the democratization process was stunted from the beginning. Within the official Albanian borders, two "Western" areas existed, Shkodra in the north, which was under the influence of Austrians and Italians, and South Korça. These Western influences played a leading role in the development of these areas and consequently the development of some elements of the Albanian active society.<sup>20</sup> These enhanced the development of society over time, and despite authoritarian and non-demo-

cratic systems, these Western influences (representing the best examples of liberal democracies) led to the development of some of the elements within society.

The second phase took place during the period of 1945–1990, the communist period, and the third phase coincided with the change of the political system in 1991 and continues today. Elements of the self-organized groups theoretically existed, but in practice there was almost no organization of self-organized groups because they were under the strict political control of the state party, PPSH (Albanian Labor Party). During communism, the party-state was the law and the supreme regulator of the country's affairs and of the people's lives. The leadership relied on the "moral code" of the Albanian system to construct and maintain a network of loyal supporters. In such a centralized system, the collective values of *fis* (kinship) were adapted to the (new) communist priorities, where the party became the sole focus of loyalty in society. The self-organized groups and the third sector were "protected" by the state.<sup>21</sup> All members of independent and intellectual organizations that were considered liberal or in opposition were imprisoned or exiled. Social groups and organizations, both intellectual and as representations of society, were allowed to operate only under strict government control. The impact of government control created a "new man" model that meant that criticism of the Communist Party was not permitted; political decisions must be accepted unanimously. It is arguable that this suffocated all social movements and that the lack of freedom of expression prevented the Albanian people from being allowed to create any political and social change. Therefore it can be suggested that a lack of social movements allows a government to centralize their power and become undemocratic. Nevertheless, 1967 marked the peak of control of society by the party-state, meaning that religious institutions were not allowed. Under these conditions, it was difficult to organize

**"1967 MARKED THE PEAK OF CONTROL OF SOCIETY BY THE PARTY-STATE, MEANING THAT RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS WERE NOT ALLOWED."**

and act as self-organized groups. The difference between a dictatorship and a one-party system regime is essential with regards to the social contract between state and society. A one-party state allows a "kind of negotiation" contract between society and the state, whereas a dictatorship does not allow communication via social contract<sup>22</sup>. During the communist

regime, when the participation of citizens in public debate was much weaker, the regime's intention was not to allow self-organization without party-state control. After all, if people cannot come together, they cannot organize, and if they cannot organize they cannot mobilize and create any change whatsoever.

The third phase coincides with the period after the fall of communism in 1990. The collapse of the communist system in Albania, unlike in other former communist Eastern European countries, did not benefit from a swift and effective democratization process due to a lack of politically active citizens encouraging social change. Unlike other former communist countries that

embraced the notion and essence of “self-organized groups”, such notions played little to no role and had little importance in the initial stages of democracy in Albania. First, Albanian opposition engaged mostly with Euro-Atlantic integration, protection of human rights, and economic reform. Only in March 1991 were civil rights thought about and discussed. This is best illustrated by the first elections and electoral campaigns in 1991 where there was difficulty in trying to spread innovative ideas and to encourage people to participate in change. Under these circumstances, where there was no freedom or independence in thought and actions, there was a lack of public debate as previously claimed, ultimately leading to low expectations for changing and building a strong self-organized group.<sup>23</sup> However, these minimal changes combined with democratization meant that society headed in a new direction with new social objectives, norms, and values. Developments in Central and Eastern Europe resulted from constant attention and focus being placed on the countries’ leadership, which as a result created social movements against undemocratic governance that brought the governments’ undemocratic methods to an end. The most important consequences and most rapid system change was the creation of a new rapport between the state and the individual. A new era began with the fall of the communist system, and this led to the withdrawal of the state from the lives of individuals and to the public sphere becoming more transparent. Newspapers began to be published before the opposition political parties were formed, and even though they were under the function of the respective parties, the new media can be said to be characterized by unlimited freedom. This change would be a more stressful process for everyone in Albania, more than in other former communist countries, due to the lack of trust, security, and stability in addition to the economic crisis.

Only after 1992 did institutions begin to regain security due to the democratic methods. Confidence and optimism for the future of the state institutions characterized Albania’s years during this part of its democratization timeline, but a lack of knowledge of the new reforms, such as tax reforms, became noticeable and the roles and functions of self-organized groups became the voice of society.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, these self-organized groups would not be able to respond to citizens’ demands and needs. Analyzing the situation of the time, with new developments and economic policies, it can be said that the growth of the social and economic needs of citizens with disabilities created a challenge for the government, and they were arguably forgotten, and people with disabilities were considered a problem of the family not of the state. Under these conditions, the role of self-organized groups and their individual institutions would remain limited. This leads to a situation where the links between the state and self-organized groups are extremely limited and strained due to the lack of care the state gives to its citizens, which can hinder progressive social change. It is arguable that the vulnerable in society have more difficulty in gaining positive social change for their needs. The role of self-organized groups and civil engagement leads to people pursuing their own interests and ignoring the needs of others.

## The student movement, November 1990–1991

As in other Eastern European countries where communist regimes were challenged by an opposition that grew up within days into a huge mass movement of the citizens that demanded free elections and democracy,<sup>25</sup> scholars agree on explaining these developments as the emergence and influence of civil engagement over time. Opportunities open the way for political actions, but in many cases civil engagement also creates opportunities. From this point of view, students in Albania in November 1990, despite the political and economic conditions, tried to create the opportunities to change the Albanian political conditions at that time.

The political opportunity system approach is focused on four dimensions – discontent and grievances; ideas and beliefs about justice and injustice and about right and wrong; the capacity to act collectively or to mobilize; and political opportunity.<sup>26</sup> In order to understand what political opportunity means towards a regime or a state, we need to understand both the domestic and international political environment.<sup>27</sup> For Albania, the international environment was Eastern Europe, where the challenges to the system had started earlier. The experience of other former communist countries showed that the best answer against a totalitarian regime is building and strengthening civil courage and social activism. Even Albania had to face this even though the situation in Albania was not the same as in other former communist countries. The first dimension of the political opportunity structure was the most present in Albanian society during the 1990s, including student grievances as explained in the following.

**IN ALBANIA**, political changes and the beginning of democratization started in 1990 as the result of student engagement. In addition to the difficult living, economic, and social conditions, the Albanian people were still under the authoritarian regime during 1990–1991, even though changes in other former communist regimes had begun two years earlier. The students’ reservations towards the one-party state were not only understood, but also actively demonstrated at times. At the beginning of the 1990s, it was advertised that advanced student facilities had been built and that the universities were being regulated in better ways. This propaganda was followed shortly after with some inaugurations of new buildings in what was dubbed “Studenti” (Student) town, built with state funds, but even though these changes eased housing conditions somewhat, they did not affect the opinions held by the students. What was considered a problem by the state and party structures at the time did not include the students’ life problems, but in the lectures of the History of PPSH at the University of Tirana, where students and some professors started to criticize the regime and the economic conditions of society at that time, they understood the consequences of educated people teaching people what to consider the most pressing problems to be. Complete isolation and extreme poverty had extinguished the hope of most Albanians,

and this ultimately became the driving force behind the social movement. The people's dire living situations pushed the people of Albania to react, and this is how the chain of events leading to the democratization of Albania formed a cluster of actions, as stated earlier.

Complicated economic conditions, which were in direct contradiction with the so-called propaganda of a new economic mechanism, including difficult conditions in student dormitories, made the reaction of student protests possible. Repeated calls alerted the state and organizational structures of the University of Tirana (during the regime it was named Enver Hoxha University and the only existing one in Albania), and students were reminded of University regulations and warned of punitive measures for the illegal actions of a few individuals. On December 8, 1990, the prime minister decided to visit and talk to the students. The visit from the prime minister to "Student" town was rare and unexpected by the students, and for the PPSH authorities it expressed their serious concerns about the mobilizing events taking place<sup>28</sup>. The prime minister held a meeting with a group of students. Allegedly the meeting began with a fearful atmosphere; the outlook was grim and the coldness of the relations between the students and the government and party were visible, and this tense atmosphere encouraged a debate to take place, which was considered a very shocking thing to do in the company of such high-ranking officials. Here we might find the second dimension for analyzing and understanding the reason for why self-organized groups are mobilized, which in the case of Albania has to do with party-state legitimacy. Framing and interpretation are a social process for articulating a variety of private beliefs and preferences as shared meanings and values for joint action.<sup>29</sup> The communist discourse and frame had become empty rhetoric. According to some scholars, legitimacy explains why people conform to and obey the state's authority. When the state itself lacks legitimacy, however, ineffective performance will threaten the political institutions of the state itself.<sup>30</sup> At this development stage, the totalitarian Albanian regime appears to have lost its power in controlling social issues and, moreover, had lost its legitimacy. Some students, for the first time, spoke openly about the unfavorable economic situation of not only students, but also all Albanians, and they expressed their frustration with the state's use of force and the party leadership. The prime minister's mission failed to extinguish the students' dissatisfaction, and this was a warning that other uncomfortable events were yet to come. The number of protesters started to increase, and students from all faculties started to come together and work as one group, which added both determination and enthusiasm to the movement. Many protesters quickly established far-reaching goals and began to express what they wanted from their govern-

**"SOCIAL CRISIS BECAME APPARENT BECAUSE MOST OF THE INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICAL DISSIDENTS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE NEW ALBANIAN POLITICS DEMONSTRATED AN OLD POLITICAL MINDSET."**

ment. State authorities and the Communist Party believed that the protests had already gone far enough, and threats from the top were immediate. Ramiz Alia promised that he would accept their economic requirements and other requirements, which should be presented in writing, and he also promised that no police violence would be used against the students. In return for his cooperation, he asked the students to stop the protest and return to the university and to their lectures. Amidst both the approving attitude and occasional threats by Alia, a compromise was reached between the government and the students. At the request of the students, they were promised another meeting with Alia to continue further dialogue at an appropriate time in the "Student" town. The students decided to continue with the protest until the next meeting with president Alia, and students were together protesting on the streets of Tirana and now were supported by the citizens. Protesters continued to march in the streets and were separated and surrounded by the police. But this did not stop their efforts to move forward, and it has been said that the protesters were shouting slogans such as "We want Albania like Europe!", "Do not shoot the students!", "Freedom, Democracy!", "No more violence!", and "Albania is with us!". At that moment it became apparent that the students' requests were no longer only relevant to the conditions at the University, and their demands were now supported by intellectuals, students, teachers, youth workers, citizens, etc. In the largest square of the city, later renamed "Democracy Square", an extraordinary mass of people convened, before whom the petition was read first, which contained mainly political demands, including the adoption of political pluralism as a higher degree of democracy, finding ways to overcome the economic crisis, freedom of the press and of speech without censorship, publication of the UN Charter on Human Rights and the Helsinki Charter, etc. Two days later, on 11 December 1990, the people's

response at the rally was communicated with the Party, and that afternoon Alia met with students in the Palace of Brigades. Three hours later he returned from the delegations, and the students and rally supporters awaited victory – political pluralism in Albania.

**FOR THE FIRST TIME** in 45 years, a new opposition party was born – the Democratic Party<sup>31</sup>. Political commitment for civil society

was expressed for the first time in March 1991, and demands for the establishment and strengthening of civil society dominated political discourse and diplomatic meetings between the opposition and the government. There was, however, no clear platform on how this should be achieved. Social crisis became apparent because most of the intellectuals and political dissidents who were involved in the new Albanian politics demonstrated an old political mindset. Another negative effect during this time





Election rally from the PD in a village outside of Tirana, 1992.

PHOTO: CHRISTIAN JUNGEBLOTT

for Albania was personalization of political forces with the past. Personalization of political parties was a mistake, and it had a negative effect on both the opposition and political institutions. This change in the system during the early 1990s cost too much for Albania. Besides the economic crises, there was also major political loss. Moreover, during the 1990s the Albanian regime had lost even the rhetoric and the symbolic meaning of how the regime's discourse had been involved in the nation's collective identity.

In subsequent years, self-organized groups would face a difficult social and political environment. In this insecure situation, the lack of knowledge was also visible in the assessment of the role and function of self-organized groups and other non-governmental groups as essential elements of civil engagement. Uncertainty reached the point where people questioned the usefulness of the existence of self-organized groups and questioned whether they were necessary. Self-organized groups themselves, trade unions, and other organization were not able to respond to the increasing demands of the citizens and other diverse groups. The new political developments came about in the face of the urgent social and economic needs of the nation's citizens who were still faced with limited opportunity for the state to fulfill these needs. The role of self-organized groups and their institutions remained more limited. The role of self-organized groups and civil engagement was taken by the political

parties, especially by the opposition. Throughout the protests, the momentum for change grew, spread, and evolved alongside the needs and demands of the people. Eventually the people decided they needed social change, and this decision effectively created the impetus for Albania to become a democratic nation. From this point of view, the students represented a political challenge by giving voice to those who had been excluded from the political system.

**IN ADDITION, SOCIAL NORMS** from the past are strongly present even today. Thus Albanians are more likely to try to have their problems solved through personal networking relationships, which might be family relationships or direct contacts that they might have with politicians, businesspersons, or other elites rather than following other steps. Also, a strong dependence of the economy on state institutions and public administration might be considered an important element that does not help self-organized groups to mobilize, and this gives the idea that the general opinion is that it is almost impossible to influence decision-making processes. The low levels of membership and volunteerism in self-organized groups signal indifference amongst Albanian citizens towards civic engagement in general. Despite this widespread "apathy", political engagement fares slightly better compared to socially based engagement. The communication sector determines the extent of information exchange

and interaction among organizations in the country that work on similar issues. These features of Albanian society might be considered as elements emphasizing a lack of mobilization.

Moreover, these features are reflected even in the people engaged in self-organized groups.<sup>32</sup> In summary, public opinion might be shown like this: self-organized groups might be considered a complex term in Albania. It is a questionable term because other civil organizations have proven to be a tool of the political elite throughout these 27 years of democratic transition. As a young activist, I have faced the lack of trust among the people I tried to reach and convince about the University's<sup>33</sup> cause. For this reason, we have distanced ourselves from the "civil society" organizations. However, different self-organized groups are gradually shaping the third sector that has been missing in Albanian society. We find that civil society has to represent a critical point of view in Albanian society, and only by having this critical position can society put pressure on the government for more rights and greater equality. As mentioned earlier, the affiliation with parties has long characterized Albanian civil society. Thus, young activists, although open to dialogue with government representatives, have tried to stay away from closed meeting with selective audiences and have asked for more transparent confrontations with them such as in auditoriums or in televised debates. However, these have rarely taken place as the government representatives have maintained an indifferent attitude towards most public protest. The media has played a negative role in this aspect because the coverage has been very low, and public confrontation with government representatives in TV studios has often been denied to activists. To communicate their revolt, students have been using public spaces in the streets, using symbolic acts such as street graphic art. Student activists distance themselves from opposition parties because they have proven to follow pretty much the same policies when they gain power. Thus, they are not legitimate to defend the students' cause. Some of the students go even beyond this and see the political parties as organized elite structures, and from their point of view one rarely finds public institutions that are not associated with political parties.

## Conclusion

To conclude, it can be understood that self-organized groups can play a significant role in the democratization process. This is due to the notion that creating self-organized groups allows the people to participate directly with the decision-making process, and ultimately political parties that want to remain in power should listen to what their voters want. Evidence that supports this is the fall of communism in Albania, where the people were ignored and their needs and opinions were overlooked, and with time this pushed the citizens to take back their country from the minority in power. Several factors contribute to the need for self-organized groups and their ability to achieve their goals, including political, economic, and cultural conditions. Albania is one example where the lack of transparency in government institutions prevents self-organized groups from taking on their necessary role in the democratization process – the people holding their government accountable for its decisions. Coming to

this conclusion involved the analysis of Albania's progression compared to other formerly communist countries and the activity of self-organized groups throughout Europe. This is shown with the student protests in Albania, which started out as a student protest over university living conditions and led to the fall of the communist regime due to the entire Albanian society supporting the movement. Self-organized groups are set apart from other kinds of transformative processes by the combination of two forces – the need for social change and the force of citizens' power that ultimately leads to social transformation. This important process of industrialization did not happen in Albania because it was undeveloped in this sector. Based on this, social changes do not occur as a necessity from society, but through politics. This is reflected even nowadays in Albanian society, where self-organized groups in only a few cases have helped bring about social changes. Generally, Albanian citizens display high levels of indifference towards involvement in various social actions, which is a common feature of societies in transition or in the initial stages of post-transition with a relatively unsettled middle class and significant levels of inequality.

The cost and sustainability of human resources is one of the most problematic issues for predominantly project-based self-organized groups in Albania. Having built up the needed infrastructure over the past two decades of generous support from foreign donors, even Albanian NGOs must adapt their strategies to an environment that is experiencing donor withdrawal. Based on an annual progress report by the UN in 2013, in the first two decades of democratic implementation, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth was the largest recipient of technical assistance funded by UN agencies. This reflects the importance the UN is giving to social inclusion and social protection, areas where the Government of Albania has a challenging agenda. Thus, different factors contribute to the need for self-organized groups and their ability to achieve their goals. Albania is one example where the lack of transparency in government institutions prevents self-organized groups from taking on their necessary role in the democratization process – people holding their government to account for its decisions. Coming to this conclusion involved the analysis of Albania's progression. Self-organized groups have been mostly unsuccessful in achieving their goals, and institutionalized and informal opportunities have failed to facilitate the success of self-organized groups. ✖

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- 31 <https://pd.al/statuti/>, last accessed December 2015.
- 32 A few interviews were conducted for this paper via email with representative students from the movements with the following questions: 1. Do you perceive yourself as a representative of the third sector/civil society? What does it mean for you to be part of the third sector/civil society? 2. What do you see as your main role/function in society? 3. How are you interplaying with the state in Albania? 4. In what sense are you able to have a dialogue about power relations, restrictions, space to act for civil society, etc.?
- 33 Lëvizja për Universitetin (Movement for the University) was established in 2008 by a group of students and lecturers mostly from the Faculty of Social Science of the University of Tirana. The initial issue was to improve basic building infrastructure. After a few failed meetings between the Faculty representatives and state institutions, students took the decision to boycott academic life in the Faculty for more than 2 months and started to organize peaceful protests in order to get the necessary attention. A temporary solution was found for the Faculty of Social Science by establishing the students and the lecturers in other faculty buildings, and the lessons were held in the afternoons. Later on, the Albanian government took the decision to reform the higher education system and tried to adapt Western models to the Albanian system. The main reason for students and some professors disagreeing with this process is the financial issue, and it is still unclear how the University of Tirana is going to be supported by the state budget in comparison with other private higher education institutions. Each year fees for the students are increasing, and students are insisting on free public education based on their low incomes. It must be noted that the University of Tirana is the oldest and largest public university in Albania, but few investments have been made. Meanwhile, other higher education institutions are quickly adapting to government policy, and they are registered as non-profit organizations, which helps them pay less taxes and win grants from the state budget. They also have very high registration fees, which means better infrastructure, better research, and favorable conditions for competition.



# WHO WAS HE?

The now popular,  
but once taboo,  
anticommunist  
Ivan Ilyin



by **Magnus Ljunggren**

Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev, Vladislav Surkov, Patriarch Kirill—they all quote Ivan Ilyin. It seems obvious that this Russian émigré's writings serve to underpin the Kremlin's actual policies. If we want to understand where Russia is headed, we have to get a handle on Ilyin.

It all really began in 2005, when Ilyin's remains were repatriated from the West and ceremoniously reinterred in his native soil. A scholarly edition of his collected works in forty volumes was already being published then and will soon be completed. Around New Year's 2015, the Kremlin administration sent Ilyin's book *Our Mission* to the regional governors, implicitly urging them to "read and learn!" Putin quotes him freely in speeches, including both his major policy address after the annexation of the Crimea and his December addresses to the nation. Among other things, he has brought to the fore Ilyin's specifically Russian notion of "deepened freedom."

Who was he then, this man who died almost forgotten outside Zurich in 1954? How could he become the Kremlin's guiding star? What is it about him that appeals so strongly to Putin?

Let me begin with an anecdote. In March 1983 I was sitting in the manuscript archive of Moscow University reading Ilyin's 1905 diary. At that moment, exactly 100 years had passed since his birth. This was during Yuri Andropov's tenure, when everything seemed to have stagnated. The militant anticommunist Ilyin was absolutely taboo. His family grave, which I visited at the Novodevichy Cemetery, lay half-hidden among overgrown bushes.

Ilyin came from a noble family that traced its roots to medieval times. His paternal grandfather had been the commandant of the Kremlin, his father, a godson to Alexander II, had grown up in the Kremlin. Not exactly something to brag about in the socialist state.

It so happened that I was interested in the early breakthrough of psychoanalysis

in Russia. In the years around 1910, Sigmund Freud met with a unique reception in Moscow and St. Petersburg. His most famous patient from this very time was significantly enough a Russian, the Wolf Man from Odessa. In addition, shortly before the outbreak of WWI in 1914, he also treated Ivan Ilyin.

Ilyin was seriously neurotic, and Freud does not seem to have helped him very much. His personality constantly lurched from one extreme to the other. As is evident from his very antagonistic diary entries in 1905, he began as a revolutionary Menshevik but soon became a reactionary super-patriot. At one moment he would be servilely loyal to his friends, while at another he would lash out with almost unbridled hatred against everyone around him. Seemingly incapable of controlling his aggressions, he groveled meekly at the feet of the tsar.

Perhaps we can find an explanation for his problems in his own writings, where he occasionally shows exceptional empa-

thy toward abused children. Just after he returned from Vienna in the fall of 1914, he remarks that nothing can be worse than to beat a child, for it creates trauma that never heals. His text echoes Ivan Karamazov's tortured remark to Alyosha about the vulnerability of children.

**ANDREI BELY DESCRIBES** Ilyin in his memoirs as a potential mental patient who resembles the whimsically demonic Stavrogin in *The Possessed*, although he lays most stress on his similarity to Ivan Karamazov. Ilyin's aunt, his grandfather's socialist daughter Ekaterina Zhukovskaya, tells in her memoirs that the Kremlin Commandant was a sadistic tyrant. Ilyin's lawyer father, with whom he broke off all relations during the 1905 Revolution, seems to have behaved much the same. Ilyin devotes so much attention to the abuse of children that we are led to conclude that it was experiences of this sort that gave rise to his neurosis. Thus he became a rebel who, not unlike Dostoevsky, eventually masochistically submitted to the tsarist oppression.

Leading an almost hermit-like existence over the course of WWI, Ilyin completed his doctoral dissertation on Hegel as a religious philosopher. In the spring of 1918, he successfully defended it at Moscow University, acquiring the title of Ph.D. and the rank of professor of law. Based on a method he learned from his teacher Edmund Husserl in Göttingen, his voluminous opus stresses the significance to Hegel of intuition.

He was living dangerously during this period. As a newly appointed professor with an anti-Bolshevik agenda, he was arrested by the Cheka at least five times. Then and later, after he was deported in 1922 together with some 200 other prominent intellectuals on the two so-called "philosopher ships" bound for Germany, he displayed considerable courage. He was finally able to channel his seething anger, for he was no longer a philosopher but a political agitator in the struggle for the Russian Idea that Lenin had coopted. He had embarked on a new career.

Ilyin subsequently formulated a plan for a post-Bolshevik Russia. He prescribed a strictly authoritarian social order based

## "IF WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND WHERE RUSSIA IS HEADED, WE HAVE TO GET A HANDLE ON ILYIN."

on ancient tradition and spoke in stern conservative terms of the need for an austere program under the auspices of the Orthodox Church designed to mold the character of the rising generation. The individual must be made to conform to the organic whole that was Russia – a nation bonded together by the army and the cement between family, church, and state. Herein lay Russia's power to accomplish her global missions. Only Russia had the holy wellsprings, the pure and lofty morals, for which Europe yearned. Such was the message he now proclaimed in a stream of articles and lectures from his base in Berlin.

**IT WASN'T LONG**, of course, until he was driven into the arms of the Nazi movement. He began calling at the top of his voice for a Germanic Leader, the only defense against Communism. Under the pseudonym Julius Schweickert, the name of his German-born maternal grandfather, in 1932 he published together with Adolf Ehrt a book entitled *Entfesselung der Unterwelt (The Liberation of the Netherworld)*, in which he fleshed out the Leader's mission. Voltaire had poisoned the European spirit. The German "mass soul" found itself in confusion and crisis. It must be tamed by the Leader: "The masses seek control. The Leader is called and obligated to *lay out an idea*. –He looks forward, shows responsibility and lucidity; he speaks from *the sacred depths* of the people's soul; he feels the rhythm of the people's spiritual will, he touches the noblest strings of their hearts; he does not promise—he summons and orders. He does not incite – he awakens and leads. Such was Mussolini's historic feat."

For obvious reasons, on the occasion of the *Machtübernahme* in 1933, Ilyin sent a congratulatory telegram to the newly anointed Führer he had so anxiously awaited. Soon he and Ehrt had jobs in Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda. There he was exceptionally prolific, even reaching an international audience. In 1934, for example, his little pamphlet *Gift (Poison)* was issued by a Nazi publishing house in Stockholm.

There was no doubt about the source of the poison. In *Bolschewistische Machtpolitik*, a longer work that appeared in 1935 under his new pseudonym Alfred Normann, he declared that Soviet materialism was an infernal Jewish conspiracy against The Russian Spirit. Jews, he wrote, implicitly following the blueprint set forth in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, strove for destruction and cultural decay in order to ultimately to dominate Russia and thereafter the world.

In the index of the book, the names of Jews and "Negroes" were marked off in spaced letters, and in the usual Nazi manner, Jewish pseudonyms were supplied with their originals: Trotsky-Bronstein, etc. Given names as well were exchanged for those Ilyin claimed were listed in the synagogue birth registers: Karl Marx was corrected to "Mordechai Marx." "Doctor Normann" spoke at length in the text on how difficult it was to unmask all of these disguised Jews and reveal the full extent of their cunning camouflage.

**SUCH FURIOUS** anti-Semitism on Ilyin's part is rather remarkable, considering that at one time, around 1910, he relied almost exclusively on Jewish authorities such as Georg Simmel, Husserl, and Freud. One Jew – the prominent pedagogue Yakov Gurevich – had married into his own family. Gurevich's daughter Lyubov', the famous radical editor and critic, was indeed his favorite cousin. As was noted above, he moved freely from one extreme to another.

Eventually Ilyin began questioning a point or two in the Nazi view of Russia. It was not so very easy for a Great Russian to be working there in Berlin next to Joseph Goebbels. In 1938 he was interrogated by Alfred Rosenberg's right-hand man. He

was forced to emigrate once again, this time ending up in Switzerland.

After the war he declared that he was deeply disappointed in Hitler. The Führer, he said, had misused a good idea. “Fascism was correct, since it was based on sound national-patriotic sentiments without which no people can either assert their existence or create a culture of their own.” He now professed himself an adherent of democratic elections, but he viewed them as basically ritual in nature, a way to advance a Leader as the distilled expression of the popular soul. He quite naturally began idealizing Spain as a model for the future Russia: a union of church and state and a strict social hierarchy with “el Caudillo” at the summit as the incarnation of the national idea.

**IN HIS OWN WORDS.** Ilyin viewed himself as “a child in the lap of Mother Russia.” Indeed, he probably was and remained a child. He passed his entire life in exile gazing at the Russian nation, locked into his infantile imperial fantasy. Of Ukraine he finally wrote that nationalistic demands for independence must be combated with all available means, for such perversities threaten to drive Russia insane.

The grand-godson of the tsar himself, Ilyin yearned for the Kremlin and the harsh rule of his grandfather. So now he is there. This is the deeply flawed fascistoid thinker on whom Vladimir Putin has pinned his hopes. It is with his incendiary message that the Kremlin wants to fire up its subjects. Europe is stagnant, but Russia can rehabilitate our civilization. ❌

Magnus Ljungren is a professor emeritus of Russian literature at the University of Gothenburg.

This text was translated by Charles Rougle.

# ZIGZAGGING THROUGH CURRENT CHALLENGES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

**G**etting Rid of the West: Critical Social Sciences in a Post-Colonial and Post-Socialist Age, a talk given by French sociologist Jean-Louis Fabiani at New Europe College – Institute for Advanced Study in Bucharest, on 16 January 2018, questioned the manner in which social sciences can be practiced nowadays when the conditions of their founding ground – policies such as colonialism or states of geopolitical tensions like the Cold War – have changed. Namely, what should be preserved or reviewed from the paradigms that arose in a certain historical context and claimed to be timeless and universal.

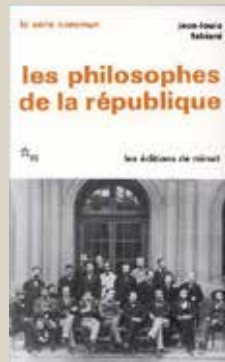
Jean-Louis Fabiani, who specializes in cultural policy, sociological theory, the sociology of culture and art and the history of sociology, is professor at ÉHESS Paris and CEU Budapest and, this year, a fellow of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study. His PhD thesis, defended in 1980 under the supervision of Pierre Bourdieu, addressed the sociological history of philosophy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century–early 20<sup>th</sup> century by pursuing not only abstract ideas (as philosophers do in their histories), but also reflecting on social contexts, schools, professors’ careers etc.

Resembling a highbrow journey in the life of concepts, Fabiani’s presentation started with a reference to physics and the disaccord that inherently resides in this amalgamate operation called *scientific research*. Contrary to our commonsensical expectations, it is this very trait that does not weaken the body, Fabiani explained by quoting Peter Galissou’s starting argument from *Trading Zone: Coordinating Action and Belief*: “(...) science is disunited and – against our first intuitions – it is precisely the *disunification* of science that underpins its strength and stability.” Thus, none of the established

practices in use or the instruments a researcher needs for his/her investigations should be seen as acting in isolation, but in a permanent process of intercalation with their neighboring traditions. This is also the case with the social sciences, by definition a field of inter-relations – from linguistics and history to economics and politics – and a space where methods are as diverse as human beings. Looking for their homogeneity or regretting their apparent fracture is not at stake here because this multitude of approaches makes science stable and cohesive in spite of an unfriendly climate, assuring it the energy for living. To sum up, Fabiani argued for two rational duties: 1. acceptance of “the irreducible plurality of our cognitive endeavors (in theory as well as in research practices)”, and 2. the plea for “cohesiveness of our goals and the necessary interconnection of our knowledge production.”

**SINCE PIERRE BOURDIEU** dissected the social sciences, no analyst has embarked on an exploration of the field without referencing him. Mentioning *Science of Science and Reflexivity* – Bourdieu’s elaborated study on the objectivity and validity of the social sciences – the French professor reminded the audience about the researcher’s fundamental ethics: discarding biases. This is essential because only this continuous effort of becoming reflexively conscious of your own partiality will prepare the laboratory for an objective approach – not forgetting that “an unconscious anthropology is always at work in our own research practice”, Fabiani concluded. However, turning the mirror inwards should not become a mere automatism, but a natural, enriched gesture – “a constitutive disposition of scientific habitus” (Bourdieu) –, and, consequently, the methodology heading towards this will reach its maturity, its full growth. Together with this penetrating





Fabiani's work includes more than 50 journal articles and books. Some of his most frequently cited pieces are *Les philosophes de la République* (1988), *Qu'est-ce qu'un philosophe français?* *La vie sociale des concepts* (2010) and *Pierre Bourdieu: un structuralisme héroïque* (2016).

and reflexive look comes the test of the environment. As many scholars put it, social sciences are bound to historicity, and the historical context is perceived as a validation tool. How does one's hypothesis work in the big narrative? Researchers do not screen past or current circumstances to simply collect data, but also to probe their theories. "In order to check that our assertions are true or false, we must index them on specific historical contexts", Fabiani further added.

Reconsidering traditions is an elementary step towards profoundly understanding a community. Once you show skepticism to certain practices, you create space for more refined perspectives and stimulate innovations in thought – as if you embrace a never-accommodating attitude that is constantly interrogating what has been researched and concluded in the dominant narrative. One of the most notable examples in the area, at least for Europe, is the French Revolution, the symbol of modernity and emancipation that has begun to be seen as misunderstood since the mid-1990s. French historian François Furet deconstructed the revolutionary myth when he published his classic *La Révolution Française* in 1965 and reflected on the roots of social change. Democratic views and egalitarian ideals existed as early as

1781 and were not necessarily based on class struggle, as Marxist historiography claimed, but on a pursuit to reduce the grandiose, concentrated power of the state. And this explanation is much more related to a "chronicle of the mentalities" than to a politics-driven historiography. The former perspective has given rise to an approach to history called *long-term social history*, which has been cultivated by the French journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* since 1960s.

Another twist in the investigation of societies happened with post-colonial studies, whose vista, to a certain extent, has also sprung from the (re)negotiations between political and social powers. Changing the emphasis from the colonizer to the colonized and giving voice to those who were constrained to undergo the experience of the Western emancipa-

**"RECONSIDERING TRADITIONS IS AN ELEMENTARY STEP TOWARDS PROFOUNDLY UNDERSTANDING A COMMUNITY."**

tion has been of major interest in the last forty years or so. Core concepts such as *universal good*, *enlightenment* and *progress* were sanctioned for misconduct and interpreted as intruders that brutally ignored the bare reality. "Something went wrong because the very idea of 'cosmopolis' involved a gross oversimplification of the notion of natural and social order", Fabiani argued. On the other hand, this zeal to catch up with the periphery of the world might become as culpable as the contested counterpart. Some theoreticians tend to reduce the colonial past to that and only that: imperialism and white men's supremacy. Arguing narrowly that the mainstream sciences did not leave room for margins to express themselves and thus failing to appropriately explain social phenomena in the area might itself evolve into a kind of dogma. Thus, as history evenly glides into ideology and vice versa, and it becomes more and more difficult to grasp the truth, we are entitled to question: who is to blame after all? At this point, Fabiani's position seems more than pertinent: "As we like to unveil our ancestors' colonial amnesia, we should ask ourselves about our own lack of concern for so many present social disasters."

**BRINGING INTO** discussion the Eurocentrism that influenced mainstream social

sciences, Fabiani pointed to Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, a seminal book on post-colonial and subaltern studies (albeit criticized for its radicalism). The author of Indian origins dismantles the 'First in Europe, then elsewhere' structure and hints almost ironically at Europe's pretense to have modernized the world, explaining that only historicism – the theory that history is determined by immutable laws and not by human agency – led to this perspective. Through this lens, the world is divided into Western and non-Western, the inhabitants of the latter being situated somewhere in the "waiting room of the history" (Dipesh Chakrabarty) on their way to overcoming the cultural distance. Moreover, what is publicly declared as *transition* from a specific system of understanding a democratic state, and life in general, has in practice altered to *translation*, a rather mechanical process in which humanity turns opaque. Thus, although hypothetically present or reminiscent in people's mentality, the European heritage is finally incompetent to explain life practices in "other parts of the world".

Michał Buchowski, the Polish author of the *Twilight Zone Anthropologies: The Case of Eastern Europe*, served as an analyst for Central-Eastern anthropology. After the collapse of communism, the East began to look at the Western style with great respect, and its economic superiority – which by comparison was overwhelming – transferred to the social sciences as well. Post-socialist countries began to feel like provinces searching for connections with the parent nation, Fabiani noticed, citing Buchowski: "For many, Western-style social and cultural anthropology was fetishized and constituted an iconic model to be followed. These politically conditioned relations within Western scholarship led, especially after 1989, to a self-imposed colonization similar to the processes that have taken place in the fields of economy and politics." To go further into Buchowski's argument, the concept of *twilight zones* is worth mentioning. Aware that extreme thinking

## "AUTONOMIZING REASON IMPLIES THAT WE KNOW ITS LIMITS AND ITS RULES."

affects the bare truth and that keeping the mind captive in either hegemonic ideas or marginalized fundamentalism is pointless, the Polish anthropologist highlighted the immense potential of *borders*. His perspective not only reconciles the never-ending discussions about the status of Central Europe – is it *affiliated* to the West or to the East? – but also brings in a fresh productive angle for the social sciences. It deserves full citation: "By referring to the example of Central Europe, I have just wanted to emphasize that (1) we should always be aware of the existence of such twilight zones that constantly emerge and re-emerge on the global anthropological map, and (2) that thinking in terms of blocks and lines is not only essentializing, but also intellectually futile." The metaphor of the twilight for border thinking is indeed valuable, as it intuitively sends us to a space of both dialogue and transverse approach within the field of social sciences.

TOWARDS THE END of the presentation, Fabiani referred to another crucial moment in the foundations of the sciences: understanding the Enlightenment. Going back to the article *What is Enlightenment?* by Michel Foucault, who himself drew on Kant's 1784 essay, the audience was invited to (re)discover the *benefits* of reasoning. Although the despotism of rationalism can never be forgotten or abandoned, Foucault rethought the intellectual and philosophical movement that animated Europe during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and detected a rather neglected thin ray of light: reason is autonomous. "As Foucault reminds us after Kant, the autonomy of reason does not imply the notion of absolute reason and nor does it imply the universalization of local principles. Autonomizing reason implies that we know

its limits and its rules," Fabiani argued. This led – after a brief look at Dona Haraway's *Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (from which it emerged that rational knowledge does not mean disengagement, but *power-sensitive conversation*) – to an all-encompassing concluding remark. Specialists should seek the all-inclusive dialogue of self-reflective stories. "The issue is now: how to construct a conversation that would involve all the members of the *Cité savante*, a notion coined by Georges Sorel with critical overtones, but re-appropriated in a more positive way by Bachelard and Bourdieu, to account for their own situation in a reflective way? This is the only condition for the creation of a new common world," were Fabiani's closing words. ❌

**Ana-Maria Sirghi**

Freelance journalist based in Romania.

Note: The conference was organized by the New Europe College in collaboration with Centre Régional Francophone de Recherches Avancées en Sciences Sociales (CEREF-REA) of the University of Bucharest.

Guest editors:  
**Carl Marklund**  
& **Irina Sandomirskaja**

## Introduction.

# Rescuing, keeping, and moving things

In Walter Benjamin's (probably too idealistic) description, the collector, driven by a "a tactile/tactic instinct", rescues things from annihilation, emancipates them from the burden of utility, keeps them in safe places, and arranges them into assemblies "...by keeping in mind their affinities." Such uprooting of things from their natural environments, as full of passion and destruction as it is, paradoxically seeks "...to collect the world from its scatter."<sup>1</sup>

As collectibles, things leave their natural soil and historical contexts to be assembled into thematically organized collections. In their travels, they change hands and thus trace out new territories, create values, and establish networks as they leap over geographic, historical, political, and social boundaries. Collecting re-arranges the world into a different order based on the rules of elective affinity. To return to Benjamin's analysis of

collectorship, "Perhaps the most deeply hidden motive of the person who collects can be described this way: he takes up

the struggle against dispersion. ... (T)he collector ... brings together what belongs together...."<sup>2</sup>

Seeking to address critical issues of collectorship as a specific kind of relationship between modern humans and material objects, the project "Transnational Art and Heritage Transfer and the Formation of Value: Objects, Agents, and Institutions", funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation, invited a group of experts in November 2017 to explore these processes from the vantage points of the stories of collecting, collectors' biographies, and the geographies across which things are scattered – to be lovingly gathered and reassembled into a complete whole of a collection, but also even further dispersed from their original context. This lived experience – of dispersal and transfer of meaning, value, and context – is evident in the fate that befell the Russian Imperial heritage as a result of war,



ILLUSTRATION: KARIN SUNVISSON



## “THE CONTRIBUTORS PRESENTED STORIES ABOUT THE LIVES OF PEOPLE AND THINGS, ABOUT THE SCATTERING AND RE-GATHERING OF THE WORLD, STORIES THAT ARE NOW MADE AVAILABLE IN THIS SPECIAL SECTION OF *BALTIC WORLDS*.”

revolution, and ideological conflict in the aftermath of the Russian revolutions a century ago. But this experience is by no means unique, and variegated forms of cultural heritage have been made into the objects of scientific inquiry or museal relocation in the process of colonial appropriation.

Hosted at the Center for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) at Södertörn University, the resulting symposium entitled “Against the Scatter of the World: Rescuing, Keeping, and Moving Things (Stories, Biographies, and Geographies of Collectorship)” drew upon diverse cases, and the contributors presented stories about the lives of people and things, about the scattering and re-gathering of the world, stories that are now made available to a wider audience in this special section of *Baltic Worlds*.

**IN HIS KEYNOTE** speech, Edward Kasinec, addresses Russian Imperial cultural heritage, specifically discussing the role of interwar Western “merchants” – art dealers, collectors, and exhibition entrepreneurs – in “ascribing value” to the objects of their dealing and their passion – Russian/Slavic/Slavonic art and rare books dispersed across the world as a result of White Russian diaspora and despair as well as Bolshevik and later Soviet business strategy and cultural diplomacy.

Irina Sandomirskaja demonstrates the institutional genius of Igor Grabar in arranging for and accommodating the emergence of a Western art market for Russian traditional and religious items – an enterprise that also served to make Grabar himself indispensable to the political needs of the Soviet Union.

Carl Marklund addresses the cultural and progressive diplomacy of Swedish banker and prominent progressive Olof Aschberg between Sweden, France, and the Soviet Union during the tumultuous interwar years.

Set in the midst of the networks identified by Kasinec, Mechella Yezernitskaya provides a multifaceted portrait of American collector, critic, and curator Christian Brinton, showing how Brinton promoted Russian and Soviet art. Her essay examines the role that a seventeenth-century Russian Orthodox icon, the inaugural object in Brinton’s collection, played in shaping the iconography of the collector’s portraits by émigré artists as well as his views on modern Russian art.

**IN HIS CONTRIBUTION**, Johan Hegardt turns from the world of art collectibles to the ethnographic collections, addressing their cementing of the universalizing gaze of Eurocentric colonialism under which human lives and bodies are subjected to the collecting fervor of the scientist observer as an exponent of the logic of colonial violence.

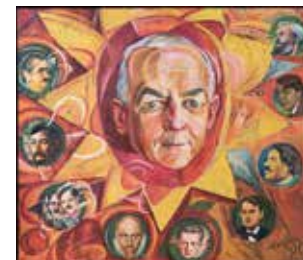
In the final contribution, Anders Björklund discusses the fate of a totem pole brought from Canada to Sweden in the early 1900s, problematizing the tension-ridden role of cultural artifacts as vehicles of meaning and value in-between Amerindian social space and the Western museological universe. ✕

### references

- 1 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [H4a, 1].
- 2 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [H4a, 1].

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### Christian Brinton: A modernist icon

“As the icon laid the foundations of the collection, Brinton continued to immerse himself in Russian art and culture even when his interests in promoting international modernism took him far afield.



PHOTO: HOOVER INSTITUTION ARCHIVES

Fig 1. Ivan Alekseevich Vladimirov (Russia, 1869–1947) *Vandalism of the Revolutionaries, a scene in the Winter Palace in December, 1918* [sic 1917].



PHOTO: HOOVER INSTITUTION ARCHIVES

Fig. 2. Great Imperial Crown (Plate III), Russia's treasure of diamonds, Aleksandr Evgenievich Fersman, 1925.



PHOTO: HOOVER INSTITUTION ARCHIVES

Fig. 3. Silver and Gold Treasure of the Moscow GOKHRAN, June 1923. M.J. Larsons Papers [Maurice Lazerson, d.Sydney, 1961].

# Imperial scatter

Some personal encounters and reflections

by **Edward Kasinec**

First encounters ...

I began my graduate studies on the Morningside Heights campus of Columbia University in New York more than fifty years ago. At that time the nearby Interchurch Center (120<sup>th</sup> Street and Riverside Drive) housed the offices of Paul B. (Frantsevich) Anderson (d. Black Mountain, North Carolina, 1985), former YMCA Russian *liaison* and secretary during the 1917 Revolution to John R. Mott (d. Orlando, Florida, 1955), who was General Secretary of the YMCA. A large gallery in the Center also displayed a portion of the legendary pre-revolutionary and “imperial” art and book collection of Paul M. Fekula (d. New York, 1982). Although he identified as Great Russian, Fekula was of immigrant Carpatho-Rusyn (Lemko) descent, a Harvard College graduate, and an oil company executive by profession. His political and religious views were conservative and stridently anti-communist. He numbered among his dealers Armand Ju. Hammer (d. Los Angeles, 1990), Israel Perlstein (d. New York, 1975), Simeon Ia. Bolan (d. Dix Hills, Long Island, New York, 1972), and Alexander Schaffer (d. New York, 1972), the principal of *A La Vieille Russie*.

By the late 1930s, Fekula was already actively exhibiting his collections of Tsarist manuscripts, old Slavonic printed books and manuscripts, sacred art and textiles, and imperial presentation volumes to the Tsars and Grand Dukes. Fekula's displays and exhibits were dedicated to the “Martyrs (*strastoterptsy*)” of the Revolution and those from whom these properties were *stolen* [Figs. 1, 2, 3]. When Mr. Fekula died suddenly and intestate, his collections went “under the hammer” in a series of well-publicized auctions and private sales lasting over the course of a decade.<sup>1</sup>

A bit further south from the Interchurch Center, on West 86<sup>th</sup> Street, stood the grand House of Free Russia (*Dom Svobodnoi Rossii*), founded after World War II by Prince Sergei S. Beloselskii-Belozerskii (d. Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1978) and supported by his second wife, heiress Florence Crane (called Svetlana Richardovna when she accepted Orthodoxy) (d. New York, 1969). Prince Sergei was an Imperial Guards officer, long-time president of the Russian Nobility Society, and heir to the pre-revolutionary “Krestovsky Island Palace” collection of portraiture, decorative arts, and militaria.<sup>2</sup> After the closing of the House of Free Russia in the late 1980s, the collections were dispersed to his descendants and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and his papers were gifted to the Bakhmeteff Archives at Columbia University. In 2017, upwards of a hundred objects from the Beloselskii-Belozerskii collections were donated by his daughter to the Georgia Museum of Art in Athens, Georgia.

These were my first early exposures to major émigré collectors and collections of the Russian imperial cultural heritage. In the course of the subsequent forty years, I have been privileged to have worked with collections in Moscow, Harvard University, Cambridge, the University of California, Berkeley, and The New York Public Library. While at Harvard, I recall with pleasure the few acquisitions I made for the Houghton Library from the 1975 Monte Carlo auction of the collection of Sergei P. Diaghilev (d. Venice, 1929) and Sergei Lifar (d. Lausanne, 1986).<sup>3</sup> I was then on a steep learning curve immersing myself in the riches of the Harvard Libraries, among them imperial association copies in the International Legal Studies Library, Bayard Kilgour's literary first editions in the Houghton Library, and icons and rare pre-revolutionary art folios in the Fogg Art Museum.<sup>4</sup> Unlike these



Fig. 4. Lascelle Meserve de Basily (1890–1989) and Nicolas de Basily (1883–1963).



Fig. 5. Feodor Stepanovich Rokotov (Russia, 1730–1808). Countess Anna Vorontsova (1722–1776) [possibly Princess Vorontsova-Dashkova (1743–1810)], circa 1774.

that were acquired in Soviet Russia during the post-revolutionary years, Diaghilev's collections of literary first editions and old Slavonic printed books and manuscripts were obtained in Western Europe between 1927 and 1929, the last two years of the maestro's life. These acquisitions and the dealers from whom they were acquired are documented in Diaghilev's notebooks at the Music Division of the Library of Congress and in correspondence housed in the Harvard Theatre collection. Sergei Pavlovich began his intensive collecting in 1927, a year which marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *vlast' Sovetskaia*, and the growing realization by some in "Russia Abroad" that return was not an option and that "museumification" of imperial Russian culture abroad might be an alternative response. Tragically, three weeks after Diaghilev's death in Venice, his brother Valentin was executed in the Solovki special camp of the Gulag.

In 1980 I moved from Cambridge to a library curator's position at the University of California, Berkeley. After adjusting to the shock of Bay Area culture, I began to avidly explore the pre-revolutionary art and book holdings at UCB and beyond. At Berkeley these included the remnants of the dacha library of historian Pavel N. Miliukov (d. Paris, 1943), illustrated nineteenth-century Russian Americana in the Bancroft Rare Books Library, and paintings in the University Museum by Vasilii Vereshchagin gifted by Phoebe A. Hearst (d. Plesanton, California, 1919), mother of the collector extraordinaire William R. Hearst (d. Beverly Hills, California, 1951). Beyond Berkeley, I ventured to San Francisco and the Russian Jesuit rare book collections co-founded by Father Andrei Prince Urusov, S.J. (d. Trail, Oregon, 2002) and The Museum of Russian Culture, and

while at the other end of the Bay explored the *kunstkammer* that is the Hoover Library and Archives at Stanford.

**THE MUSEUM OF** Russian Culture (*Muzei Russkoi Kul'tury*) founded in 1948 was then curated by Nikolai A. Slobodchikoff (d. San Francisco, California, 1991),<sup>5</sup> a grand gentleman who had immigrated to the Bay Area from the Russian Far East. In addition to curating a rich collection of archival and book material documenting the Russian post-revolutionary diaspora in South and East Asia, the museum holds paintings and artifacts depicting the personalities and historical events of Imperial Russia, includ-

ing correspondence between Alexander II and his daughter Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna (d. Zurich, 1920), paintings by Elena Luksch Makovskii (d. Hamburg, 1967), Alexander A. Gelfer (d. Paris, 1956), and Anatoly A. Sokolov (d. San Francisco, California, 1971), as well as imperial coins, medals, decorations, etc. Then, as now, the mission of the museum

remains the preservation (and representation to non-Russians) of the art, archival, and print legacy of pre-revolutionary Russia and the first two waves of the emigration. Four short years after coming to Berkeley, I relocated back to my native Manhattan, New York, and a curatorship at the New York Public Library.

I first gained an inkling of imperial rarities held by the NYPL in the late 1960s,<sup>6</sup> but it was only two decades later that I chanced on a box of catalog cards with locational information on the imperial presentation (or association) volumes found throughout the stacks of the then Slavonic Division. In the following years, my colleagues and I strove to further identify, study, and publi-

## **"THE DE BASILYS' SHARED A COMMON INTEREST IN WORLD TRAVEL, ART, AND WESTERN EUROPEAN AND RUSSIAN IMPERIAL CULTURE."**





Fig. 6. Feodor Stepanovich Rokotov (1730–1808) Emperor Peter III (r. January–July 1762; 1728–1762), circa 1762.



Fig. 7. Johann Baptist von Lampi "The Elder" (Austrian, 1751–1830) Portrait of Catherine II (r. 1762–1796; 1729–1796), circa 1790.



Fig. 8. Giovanni Domenico Bossi (Italian, 1767–1853). Grand Duke Alexander Pavlovitch (r. 1801–1825 as Emperor Alexander I; 1777–1825), circa 1804.

cize these books and photo albums from the libraries of the last three tsars and Romanov grand dukes. In addition to mining the NYPL collections, I strove to reach out to representatives of the Russian Church Abroad (Synodal jurisdiction) and solicit collections from the few remaining representatives of the Russian aristocracy and elites. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the NYPL collections were thus enhanced by the books, archival materials, and *objets* from the collections of Vera Konstantinovna Romanov (d. Valley Cottage, New York, 2003); Elizabeth Sverbeva-Byron (born Paris, 1924), great granddaughter of the Grand Duke Aleksei Alexandrovich (d. Paris, 1908); and descendants of the former military elites such as Vladimir D. Lehovich and Colonel John L. Bates (adopted name of Oleg O. Pantukhov) (d. Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, 1995). These initiatives brought to the Library several significant items that were later exhibited and publicized and continue to gain the notice of colleagues in Russia.<sup>7</sup>

So, throughout my professional life I have constantly encountered the post-revolutionary “scatter” of the Russian Imperial art and cultural heritage and the various ways in which interwar émigré collectors and dealers imbued “value and significance” to this legacy. In order to try to bring this very poorly studied subject into greater relief, I wish to share some of my most recent findings from research at the Hoover Institution in Stanford, California.

### The de Basily Collections, Hoover Institution Library and Archives

The art, books, and archives of Nicolas (d. Tampa, Florida, 1963) and Lascelle Meserve (d. Geneva, 1989) de Basily (*Bazili* in Russian) [Fig. 4] constitute the largest single gift to the Hoover Institution Library and Archives in its almost century-long history. These paintings, *objets*, books, and archives serve as a valuable prism through which to further assess the little-studied respons-

es of elite figures in “Russia Abroad” to the cultural and political aftermath and the art of the October Revolution. The recently opened Cantor Arts Center and Hoover joint exhibition “The Crown Under the Hammer” (October 15, 2017–March 9, 2018)<sup>8</sup> represents the first public display of what is only a representative selection from those collected by Nicolas and Lascelle<sup>9</sup> of a dozen paintings, miniatures, and *objets* by artists of the “high” Russian Empire (Borovikovskii, Rokotov, and Lampi the Elder, among others) and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Western European masters.

On his paternal side, Nicolas was of Phanariote Greek and Russian ancestry. Like his ancestors, de Basily was an Imperial diplomat, a political economist, a financial counselor (in emigration) at Marshall, Field & Clore, and a connoisseur and collector of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century paintings and decorative arts. While at Military Headquarters in March 1917, Basily counseled Nicholas II and drafted the “Abdication Manifesto”. Nicolas’s second wife, Lascelle Meserve, was the wealthy and widely travelled stepdaughter of Harry Fessenden Meserve (d. Sarasota, Florida, 1941), an international banker and financial consultant.

The de Basily first met in the elite social and financial circles of pre-Revolutionary St. Petersburg, subsequently re-acquainted in Paris, and married in the Rue Daru Cathedral, Paris (Western European Exarchate) in 1919. While the de Basily marriage was childless, they shared a common interest in world travel, art, and Western European and Russian imperial culture.

The de Basily maintained homes near the Bois du Boulogne and in Versailles until the Nazi occupation in 1941, and they travelled widely throughout Central (Berlin and Prague) and Western Europe and the Americas. After leaving France and a brief residence in Greenwich, Connecticut, they settled on an estate in Moldonado (near the Riviera Rio Plata), Uruguay, and an apartment in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (For much of their residency in Uruguay, General Juan Dominquez Peron and Evita



Fig. 9. Vladimir Lukich Borovikovskii (1757–1825), Count Grigori Aleksandrovich Stroganov (1770–1857), n.d.



Fig. 10. Nikolai Nikolaevich Glebov-Putilovskii (Russia, 1883–1948) Propaganda poster for the October Revolution, 1920.



Fig. 11. East wall of the Nicolas de Basily Room, Hoover Institution ("A Romanov Iconostasis").

PHOTO: STEVE GLADFELLER, STANFORD VISUAL SERVICES

Duarte dominated Argentinian political life.) The de Basily family remained in South America for almost two decades, only to relocate to a home in Coral Gables, Florida, in the late 1950s. After Nicolas's death in 1963, Madame de Basily alternated her residences between the Carlyle Hotel on Manhattan's Gold Coast and the Hotel Richemond on Lake Geneva, Switzerland. Even well into her mid-nineties (!), she continued to socialize with the few remaining Romanovs like the aforementioned Princess Vera Konstantinova and others (Prince Alexis P. Shcherbatov, Marc Sevastopoulo) in the "white" Russian community.

THE DE BASILYS may well have first heard of the Hoover War Library (founded in 1919) in Paris, possibly from one of their long-time acquaintances, former Imperial Ambassador to France Vasilii A. Maklakov (d. Baden, Switzerland, 1957) or from others in their circle like artist Aleksander N. Benois (d. Paris, 1960) or the collector and philanthropist Boris A. Bakhmetev (d. New York, 1951).<sup>10</sup> Whatever the facts of the initial contact, Madame de Basily's first visit to the Hoover came only in the late 1960s, several years after Nicolas's death. During these years, the Hoover had assembled a small Russian expatriate community that included Prince Vasilii A. Romanov (d. Woodside, California, 1989), Professor Elizabeth "Countess" Stenbock-Fermor (nee Sevastopoulo, d. Palo Alto, 2001), Dmitrii von Mohrenschildt (d. Pondicherry, India, 2002), editor of the journal *Russian Review*, and the Canadian Russophile historian and collector Marvin M. Lyons (d. Burnaby, Canada, 2014).

Even after fifty years and the publication of a brochure in 1972 on the de Basily Room,<sup>11</sup> we still know little of the provenance trails, movements, and sources of the art collected by the de Basily family. The work of stabilizing, conserving, and authenticating many of the paintings and other *objets* has just begun. Despite these caveats and limits in our sources, several interesting details have emerged from careful first-time physical examination of some of the paintings and objects on display, documents in the Hoover business (internal) records, and the few hints in her published memoirs and a recently uncovered recorded interview with Madame de Basily.

For example, Francesco Guardi's (d. Venice, 1793) important

## “ART AND THE 'SCATTER' OF EMPIRE WAS FOR THE DE BASILYS AND OTHERS OF LIKE MIND A REMONSTRANCE AND RETORT TO THE REVOLUTION WHOSE CENTENNIAL WE HAVE JUST MARKED.”

"Piazza San Marco" was purchased from Pavla (d. Buenos Aires, 1976) and Nicolas (d. Sao Paulo, 1952) de Koenigsberg. Nicolas began as an antiquarian in Soviet Russia in mid-1920s. By the late 1920s the de Koenigsbergs' "Galerie Le Passe" in Paris (later in Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Mexico, and New York) became one of de Basily's principal and long-time dealers. Fedor S. Rokotov's (d. Moscow, 1808) "Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich" was first exhibited by Prince Vladimir E. Golitsyn (Galitzine) (d. London, 1954) at

the grand 1935 London Belgravia exhibition of Russian art. This significant exhibition of art of the Imperial period was organized by former Russian governmental official and émigré art dealer Aleksandr A. Polovtsov (d. Paris, 1944) and his wife Sofia (nee Kunitsyn, d. Paris, 1970).

Like his colleague Benois, Polovtsov served as an art advisor to the de Basily family and as well as as the broker for this sale.<sup>12</sup> Still oth-

er paintings were obtained through private sales from Parisian émigré collectors and connoisseurs – from attorney and philanthropist Alexander Iu. Rozenberg (fl. Paris, 1920s) (also known as Rozembergh) came Rokotov's (d. Moscow, 1828) "Countess Vorontsova," [Fig. 5] and Stepan S. Shchukin's (d. Moscow, 1828) "Emperor Paul I"; from memorist and collector A. A. Trubnikov (d. Paris, 1966) came Rokotov's "Peter 3" [Fig. 4]; from Countess Elizaveta (Betsy) V. Shuvalova (nee Bariatinskaia, d. Paris, 1938) came "Empress Catherine II" [Fig. 7] by Johann Baptist von Lampi the Elder (d. Vienna, 1830); and from Ivan (Jean) P. Isaevich (d. 1971) came Georg Christof Groot's (d. 1749) "Elizaveta Petrovna".

In places, Lascelle also notes the provenance and exhibition history of individual paintings. So, for example, both the Guardi and Shchukin were reportedly deaccessioned from The Hermitage collection and auctioned on behalf of the Soviet Government in the well-publicized Rudolph Lepke Berlin sales of the late 1920s. The Shchukin was then acquired by the wealthy entrepreneur Leonid F. Davydov (Davidoff) (d. Nice, 1941). Davydov subsequently exhibited the painting in the 1928 Brussels exhibition of Imperial era art organized by Vera S. Naryshkina-Vitte (d. Paris, 1963) and the art historian Ivan (Jan) I. Zharnovskii (d. Paris, 1956).<sup>13</sup>

The miniatures of "Grand Duke Aleksander Pavlovich" by Domenico (Johann Dominik) Bossi (d. Munich, 1853) [Fig. 8] and "Count Stroganov" by Vladimir L. Borovikovskii (d. St Petersburg, 1825) [Fig. 9] were purchased from the Italian diplomat Valentin Andreolette Andreoletti (fl. 1940s) and Vladimir A. Artzimovich (fl. 1930s), respectively.

According to Madame de Basily's manuscript notes, purchases from these collections were on occasion negotiated by art brokers such as Pavel A. Mikhailov (d. Paris, 1962) and Georgii (Georges) M. Destrem (d. Paris, 1959), a shadowy figure who may have been associated with the Wildenstein Gallery in Paris.

Three years after the October (Bolshevik) Revolution, Lascelle privately published in Paris her collected poetry titled *Echoes from Russia*, one poem of which reflects her mature (then at age 31) world-view:<sup>14</sup>

#### "The Cry of Holy Russia"

Where is the Father worshipped of yore,  
When the world had scarce begun?  
Where is the Power we knelt before,  
When God and the Czar were one?  
... Ye [EK: the Bolsheviks] who are weaving Free Russia's fate  
With hordes obeying each nod,  
Without the White Czar, thro' God is great,  
He seems to be only half God  
Ye say we are comrades, equals, free?  
Come to the end of our search?  
Ah! Give back the days that used to be  
When our Czar was part of the Church

The Basily's had of course both the means and opportunities to collect and exhibit Imperial elite art and books. In doing so, I argue that they wished to present an alternative narrative of Russia's past to the Soviet political, economic, and modernist artistic

program that they witnessed unfolding in Soviet Russia [Fig. 10]. Along with their contemporary collectors, dealers, art historians, and connoisseurs – Count Sergei P. Zubov (d. Buenos Aires, 1964), Georgii K. Lukomskii (d. Nice, 1952), and Baron Vasilii de Lemmerman (d. Rome, 1975) among others we have mentioned – the de Basily's strove to collect, preserve, and later exhibit the artistic and cultural legacy of the Imperial period. Art and the "scatter" of Empire was for the de Basily's and others of like mind a remonstrance and retort to the Revolution whose centennial we have just marked [Fig. 11]. ✕

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- 8 Bertrand M. Patenaude and Jodi Roberts, *The Crown under the Hammer: Russia, Romanovs, Revolution* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Library & Archives and Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2017). The catalog contains a preface by Edward Kasinec.
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- 10 Most of Ambassador Bakhmetev's collection of paintings, icons, and engravings were gifted to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
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- 13 *Bruxelles. Exposition D'Art Russe. Ancien et Moderne...Mai–Juin 1928* (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1928).
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# Scattering, collecting, and scattering again

The invention and management of national heritage in the USSR

by **Irina Sandomirskaja**

**A**mong the dramatis personae of European modernity, the collector strikes an eccentric figure representing, at one and the same time, both modernity and anti-modernity in their most characteristic aspects. As anti-modern, by gathering objects into his collection, he saves them from destruction (from industrialization, war, or revolution) or exploitation (in functions that are alien to the nature of the objects). Such was Balzac's Cousin Pons – an insignificant human being, a miser, and a poor relative in a rich and insensitive family, who struggled all his life and gathered a considerable amount of masterpieces, affording them a pure, disinterested love without ever considering their commercial value.

However, after Cousin Pons' death, his heirs immediately capitalized on his property. The objects once saved from scatter by the naïve eccentric were thus scattered again – this time, as advised by the sane and reasonable bourgeois common sense, and against considerably higher prices. And indeed, things do not have value as such but only acquire it in repeated acts of exchange: 'Cousin Pons' cherished objects dispersed, again, all over the wide realm of the unrestricted circulation of commodities. With an increase in their market value, things themselves become irrelevant – what is significant is their value and the purpose they serve, or the idea they represent when gathered again. This is why the museum with its priceless treasures displayed so as to represent a certain principle or a national ideal is such an important invention of modernity. In Konstantin Vaginov's parodic novel *Garpagoniana* from 1933 (not published until 50 years later), a bunch of anti-social, if not criminal, collectors secretly operate in the shade of the socialist economy organizing their own little black market, collecting and exchanging absurdly useless, ephemeral items such as paired nails, cigarette butts, graveyard epitaphs, or dreams of virgin

maidens. Completely devoid of even a shadow of utility or meaning, these collectibles, passionately hunted and hidden from the world, represent, in effect, fully idealized and ideal objects of modern connoisseurship and collectorship; they change hands and thus gain in value – even though solely in the eyes of the mad collector who dreams of making a systematic collection of his favored non-things as complete as possible.<sup>2</sup>

**IN THE CASE** I am presenting here, it is practically impossible to determine whether the collector and connoisseur in question was, indeed, saving his objects from scattering and destruction – or contributing to their further enslavement by exploiting them in a capacity that was radically alien, if not inimical, to their nature. I am speaking about Igor Immanuelovich Grabar (1879–1960), an outstanding functionary in the Russian art and art history establishment; the founding father of Russian medieval art history; the discoverer and curator of Russian icon painting; a collector; a museum organizer; an internationally acknowledged expert in the attribution, restoration, and conservation of art; and a specialist in cultural diplomacy under Stalin. The Russian Orthodox icon was the chief object of his collectorial desires and connoisseurial interventions.

**“ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY, HE ACHIEVED THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN ANCIENT HOLY OBJECT INTO A MODERN AESTHETIC PHENOMENON.”**

Almost single-handedly, he achieved the transformation of an ancient holy object into a modern aesthetic phenomenon, of a historical religious symbol into a representation of the Soviet aesthetics and proclaimed religious tolerance, of divine relics – into objects of useful value for the Bolsheviks, to be utilized as means of propaganda, instruments of cultural diplomacy, and marketable commodities. The contradiction between the conservative affects in collectorship and its quite revolutionary institutional practices is obvious in this case, and so is the conservative Grabar's quite futurist approach to manipulating



Expropriation of valuable objects from the church, probably 1922.

the past to produce a new collective memory for the new Soviet community of people.

The personal myth of Grabar as the founder of the Soviet art museum and a world authority in Russian art history was coined and promoted by Grabar himself in his prolific autobiographic, professional, and essayistic writing.<sup>3</sup> In 1960, in his obituary, a colleague mentioned an “amazing and felicitous feature in Grabar’s creative personality [...] his personal interests invariably coinciding with the interests of the state.”<sup>4</sup> His Soviet biographers praise him for his “true interest in the destinies of Russian art that found its genuine expression during the Soviet epoch” and “Grabar’s civic sentiments, his passionate love for Russia, for Russian art, his efforts to preserve for the sake of the people the greatest cultural achievements of its ancestors.”<sup>5</sup> As an art-

ist, he was, and still is, valued for the solid quality of his post-impressionist manner of painting in his ideologically neutral production – still-lives and landscapes extolling the pleasures of Russian private life and the beauty of nature. In his autobiography, Grabar himself explained: “Indeed, I was destined to give exceptionally much time of my life to public activity, but this has also been my service (*sluzhenie*) for the sake of art, art, and art.”<sup>6</sup>

With his characteristically keen understanding of the “interests of the state”, he had been the first to offer his services to the Bolshevik regime in 1917 while the absolute majority of his colleagues refused to support it. As a result of the Sovnarkom decree on the registration and protection of monuments of culture and antiquity (October 1918), and amongst the rioting and pillaging that it had unleashed,<sup>7</sup> Grabar was issuing passionate appeals



The church of the Savior on the Neredita, Novgorod; in the 1910s, after WWII, and today.

to collect, save, and protect “cultural values” – i.e., property from churches, monasteries, estates, and private collections alienated by the new regime.

**ASSISTING THE BOLSHEVIKS’** destruction of private collections and old museums and the subsequent establishment of new museums, both of which were under his personal control, Grabar was appealing to the new regime’s ignorance and greed. The Bolsheviks were evaluating the looted valuables as scrap by weight, but Grabar convinced them to preserve and then to realize them as objects of “world cultural significance”. Assessing the results of the expropriations (by means of violence and intimidation), Grabar was satisfied with the fact that “during 1922–1923, museums were enriched with objects of applied and decorative art to an extent they had never been enriched during the decades before.”<sup>8</sup>

His strategies under the Bolshevik rule were a continuation of his projects from before the Great war, when he had served as a trustee of the Tretiakov gallery. After the publication of the six volumes of the *History of Russian Art* by 1915, which Grabar had edited and co-authored, after his widely advertised expeditions to the Russian North during the 1900s and 1910s, and after the first exhibition of Russian icons organized to celebrate the 300 years of the Romanov dynasty in 1913, no one could question his authority as a connoisseur and a historian. But they did question his ethics. In his memoir *Mezhdru dvukh revoliutsii* (first published in Leningrad in 1935), Andrei Bely, who had met Grabar in the early 1900s, described him as “a bureaucrat of culture” who had “allowed his ironic sceptis to putrefy an internal flight in himself, “a *miriskusnik* from head to heels”, “skeptical and condescending”, and “a learned satyr.”<sup>9</sup> But equally important – and this is what relates this cynical game player to Balzac’s innocent Cousin Pons – Bely acknowledged that Grabar was passionately devoted

to the collection of antiquities: “He was collecting materials for his history of monuments, spending all his money for this deed of culture, rushing around from one godforsaken hole to another; he would emerge out of there and boast of his materials...”<sup>10</sup>

The aestheticized icons and churches were inherited and appropriated by the Soviet art history from the Silver Age already as desacralized images and as arbitrary symbols. When Grabar was saving icons from vandalization by claiming their museum value, he was certainly protecting them from physical demise. But in doing so, he also prepared them for further exploitation in Soviet atheist propaganda and cultural politics. Grabar’s reputation as a connoisseur of European art, which he had gained during

his several years of studies in Munich at the turn of the century, came in handy when later on the Bolsheviks conceived a plan for a cultural offensive against the West and attempted to trade Western art masterpieces and Russian icons in exchange for military materials, technology, and diplomatic recognition.<sup>11</sup>

The 1921 Riga Treaty between Soviet Russia, Ukraine, and Poland opened up another major episode in the Soviet appropriation of Russian heritage and its symbols. As in the time of revolutionary expropriations, Grabar again appears

both as expert and as institutional designer, this time in various projects of marketing culture – but also as a greedy collector fighting to protect his (or national) treasures against the encroachments of “the Poles,” while the Bolshevik negotiators were seeking to appease the former enemy by satisfying their art claims and rejecting territorial and financial claims. With that characteristic collectorial fixation on completeness, Grabar fought for the USSR to keep major collections untouched as treasures of international cultural significance. This, however, did not prevent the Bolsheviks from selling the pearls of the Hermitage, the Diamond Fund, and many other unique collections to

**“AS IN THE TIME  
OF REVOLUTIONARY  
EXPROPRIATIONS,  
GRABAR AGAIN  
APPEARS BOTH  
AS EXPERT AND  
AS INSTITUTIONAL  
DESIGNER.”**





Igor Grabar painting his "Self Portrait in a Fur Coat", from: Igor Emmanuilovich Grabar, *Pis'ma*. 1941–1960, Nauka, Moscow, 1983.

the West in exchange for industrial equipment in the late 1920s through the mid-1930s.

The travelling *Exhibition of Russian Art in America* in 1924 was curated by Grabar "offering a generous perspective on Russian aesthetic activity,"<sup>12</sup> mostly academic realist and Modernist art, partly brought from Russia and partly exporting from Malmö what remained of the Russian art exposition (also curated by Grabar) at the 1914 Baltic exhibition in that city. It opened in New York and then toured the major museums in the US and Canada until the end of 1925. The leading artists who still remained back in Russia, quite impoverished in the new economic reality, were promised a market full of rich American clients. As a diplomatic and commercial enterprise, the show failed completely. But as an early attempt of trading art for international acknowledgment, it was a pioneering enterprise. The art critic and collector Christian Brinton helped to set up the show in New York using his museum connections. He already had some experience arranging Russian events before and would continue collaborating with the Soviets in curating Socialist realist art shows until the middle of the 1930s.<sup>13</sup>

**WHEN IN 1928** the Bolsheviks conceived a commercial initiative to sell Russian icons in the West, Grabar suggested a more sophisticated plan of first appealing to Western collectors and connoisseurs to promote this entirely new art object among museum directors, art history specialists, gallery experts, cultural celebrities, and politicians by way of taking "a number of measures to create the demand and a certain 'fashion'." This is how the famous international icon show, *Monuments of Ancient Russian Painting. Russian Icons of the Twelfth to Seventeenth Centuries* was conceived, organized by Narkomtorg and Gosantikvariat<sup>14</sup> and assisted by the German Society for the Study of Eastern Europe. It started with an international tour in Berlin in 1929, went on to the Victoria and Albert Museum, and then to the Metropolitan Museum in New York. There was indeed an interest in icons in the West, and Grabar's pre-revolutionary *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva* was the most authoritative source, as advertised by



Religious icons displayed as artworks, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1930.

Grabar himself in his numerous public lectures. During the months of preparation he spent in Germany, Grabar met with eminent museum experts as well as numerous gallerists, politicians, and academics. In the meantime, he gave well-attended public lectures and wrote for art magazines, inspected established museum collections to identify fakes (which he found in abundance), and offered fascinatingly bold attributions, not necessarily probable.

It was largely due to this effort, supported by complicated political games behind the scenes, that the Russian icon emerged internationally as a desirable collectible, an expensive market commodity, and a coveted possession among the world's highest-ranking museums. Without this work of advertising, it would have had little legitimacy, coming as it did without provenance (apart from a stamp by the Tretyakov gallery), nor responding to generally accepted criteria of authenticity. At that time, a special secret committee for "desidentification" (*obezlichivanie*) was operating at the state treasury, Gokhran, a department of the People's Commissariat for Finance, seeing to it that art objects would be cleansed of any signs of previous ownership. The exhibition was touring the world during the time of the Bolsheviks' massive repressions against the church, of which the potential clients were quite aware. The show thus advertised the Soviet way of "protecting traditional values" in which the Soviet regime sought to appear as a much better custodian of the property of the church – and showing a greater concern for the spiritual and religious life of the Russian people – than the church itself.

Due to these connoisseurial efforts in propaganda, the Russian icon appeared in the West as a Soviet cultural trademark, the brainchild of the new Soviet approach to the past, a material outcome of positivist knowledge within the framework of communist ideology, and owing its international success to the care of Russian heritage by the Bolshevik state. Grabar's exhibition showcased the Russian icon as a new face of Soviet Russia, a generous gift from the Soviet government to the art student and the connoisseur alike.

During and after the Second World War, when the Soviet

government started the assessment of the material losses caused by the war, the collectorial affect of “saving and protecting” now concerned old churches and palaces in occupied regions, destroyed in war, being reconstructed. In practice this meant that some needed to be rebuilt almost from scratch. This was not only a tribute of respect for lost treasures. It was also a retribution in the name of the Russian people who had been robbed of their heritage by the enemy and were now receiving it back from the hands of the generous victor. Categories like historical truth, originality, and authenticity had by that time already become quite arbitrary. What was at issue, however, was the USSR being compensated for the damage incurred. As early as 1942, Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov’s Narkomindel was already issuing diplomatic notes demanding the Nazis to be held responsible by international law for the destruction of the Soviet people’s property. A special emphasis was made on monuments and churches due to their unique character as world heritage.<sup>15</sup> Books were being published and documentary films produced that demonstrated the staggering levels of destruction, with old buildings aflame and the Piranesian ruins of Leningrad, Kiev, Novgorod, Klin, and Yasnaya Polyana.<sup>16</sup> They were used both as propaganda inside the country, fanning patriotic anger in Russian citizens, as well as abroad, incurring sympathy in cultural diplomacy and providing evidence for Soviet negotiation positions with regard to compensation. Additionally, the horrific pictures of destruction also served to justify the looting of German museums and collections by the Red Army.

As could be expected, now an old man, Grabar – the connoisseur and the collector – played a central role in these events. He was summoned as an expert to work on a committee to evaluate the destruction of cultural monuments in 1942. It was he who promoted the idea of avenging German destruction of cultural values in the Soviet Union by expropriating the property of German museums and art collectors, for instance, the Pergamon Altar. This is how the massive looting of German art by the Soviet military authorities began, with the relocation of innumerable monuments to secret storage sites in the USSR, mostly under the same pretext of “saving and protecting”, just as in the expropriation of Russia’s own patrimony some 25 years before. Grabar’s intimate knowledge of Western collections was useful in locating, mapping, and evaluating art objects to be treated by the so-called trophy brigades, i.e., groups of art experts and NKVD officers that were formed and instructed by Grabar himself or were under his guidance.<sup>17</sup>

**EVEN THOUGH** the issues of post-war reparations were officially and finally settled in 1990 (which made possible the reunification of Germany), the dramatic circumstances of the post-war relocation of art from Europe to Soviet secret storage, supported by cultural authorities like Igor Grabar, are still disputed and will probably remain highly sensitive ideologically, politically, and legally for a long time to come.<sup>18</sup> The concept of Russian patrimony as it was invented by Grabar would play a role in the post-war division of Europe and then, long after his death, throughout the Cold War and after it up to the present moment in international

relations as the Putin administration uses the same language of patrimony for the justification of its territorial claims. But all of this, however, is already a different story. ✕

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# The Icons of “the Red Banker”

Olof Aschberg and the transactions of social capital

by **Carl Marklund**

One of the more important collections of icons outside of Russia is to be found in Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. It totals 323 icons, the mainstay of which, 245 icons, were donated in 1933. This first donation was followed by another of 32 icons in 1952, both by the same donor. Most of the icons are Russian, but the collection also contains excellent examples of Byzantine and Greek icon painting.<sup>1</sup>

The primary donor of this collection was Swedish banker, businessman, and patron of the arts Olof Aschberg (1877–1960). Aschberg’s lifelong interest in Russian religious art began when he was perusing the flea market at Moscow’s Smolenskaya Rynok while employed as the director of one of the first Soviet commercial banks, Ruskombank, in 1922–1924.

Aschberg’s road to Moscow can be traced in two different strands in his *vita* – first, his early engagement with the labor movement, and second his experience with financial transactions during the First World War. In 1912, Aschberg started Nya

Banken [The New Bank], which was intended to become a workers’ bank with the aim of providing capital for workers’ housing. At the time, Stockholm was characterized by sub-standard, yet expensive, housing with adverse effects on the health and child care of the working class. Recognizing the potential of workers’ power through their market share and by using the capitalist system for social improvement, Aschberg established close contacts with both left and right wing social democrats – including the Swedish Social Democratic Party’s leader Hjalmar Branting and his wife, Anna, as well as Stockholm’s radical burgomeister Carl Lindhagen.

Gradually, Aschberg became deeply involved in the labor movement. In 1917, for example, Aschberg collaborated with several groups of social democrats and left socialists in various attempts at launching a peace conference to be held in Stockholm during that year.<sup>2</sup>

THESE ACTIVITIES earned Aschberg the sobriquet “the red banker” and provided him with a first-rate opportunity to get to know some of the leading figures of European as well as Russian socialism. By the early 1920s, Aschberg had established a banking network between Moscow, Stockholm, and Berlin,



Fig. 1. Olof Aschberg depicted by his friend, Albert Engström, in Moscow in 1923.



eventually relocating to Paris in the late 1920s. After the Nazi takeover in Germany, the French capital replaced Berlin as the hub of “international solidarity” work of the international labor movement. Aschberg soon engaged himself in several anti-fascist and anti-racist networks operating out of Paris.<sup>3</sup> Besides his financial and solidarity work, Aschberg also found time for cultivating his cultural interests, supporting avant-garde arts, and often entertaining Swedish as well as international artists in his Paris home.

When Paris was occupied by the Germans in 1940, Aschberg was arrested. His property, including all of his artworks, was confiscated by the Vichy government, and Aschberg himself was interned in southern France.

Eventually, Aschberg managed to move via Lisbon to New York, where he engaged in anti-fascist publicity work before he fell ill. At this point, he retreated to Florida where he began penning his first autobiography during his convalescence.<sup>4</sup>

As the Second World War came to an end, Aschberg returned to Sweden. In 1946, not forsaking his second adopted homeland, Aschberg acquired a new estate in France. Eventually, Aschberg donated this property to the Swedish labor movement in the early 1950s. Throughout his life, he was an outspoken proponent of closer ties between Sweden and other countries, primarily France and Russia/Soviet Union, engaging in what could be called “citizen cultural diplomacy.”

**TODAY, THE SIGNIFICANCE** of Aschberg’s rich biography is difficult to assess. In fact, his 1933 and 1952 donations of icons to Nationalmuseum are what Aschberg is mostly known for today, at least in Sweden. Even though Aschberg was a very well known person in his own lifetime, also internationally, his activities are not well understood.

There appear to be two main reasons for this. First, Aschberg wrote no less than four autobiographical works or memoirs, which provide exciting insights into his rich, variegated life, his business activities, his cultural interests, and his myriad of social contacts.<sup>5</sup> While these memoirs confirm his role as a progressively oriented businessman, with far-ranging visions with regard to both enterprise and diplomacy, they are often imprecise regarding dates and context, making the information therein difficult to verify. Partly due to this vagueness, Aschberg has, secondly, become a household name in some of the literature on the nebulous contacts between Germany, Western finance, and the Bolsheviks/Soviets in the tumultuous final stages of the First World War and the first phase of the Russian Civil War.<sup>6</sup>

The Bolsheviks and later the Soviets were eager to acquire hard currency as well as technology not only for rebuilding the infrastructure and industry of war-torn Russia, which was suf-

fering from widespread famine, but also to equip the Red Army fighting the White Russians as well as numerous liminal countries. Confiscated Tsarist gold as well as both religious and secular art, not the least icons of the Russian Orthodox Church, were just some of the assets the Bolsheviks would rely upon in these attempts. Weimar Germany soon became the central site for the auctioning of Russian antiquities. This was primarily because Weimar Germany’s recognition of the Bolsheviks/Soviets as the legitimate rulers of Russia – de facto in the Brest-Litovsk treaty (1918) and de jure in the Rapallo Treaty (1922) – would make it difficult for the White Russian émigré community to protest the sale of seized assets. Several scholars have described the world-

wide tour of icons that preceded large-scale sales of Russian-origin arts, furniture, prints, etcetera, in particular in Germany and later the US, from the early 1920s to the early 1930s.<sup>7</sup> These transfers were not merely intended to generate monetary gain, however. They were also instrumental in early Soviet cultural diplomacy. We know of the role of Armand and Victor Hammer in boosting the market value of icons as the cultural heritage of a fallen empire and the genius of Igor Grabar in improving the cultural respectability of the Soviet Union in saving it and making it available to Western markets.<sup>8</sup>

Aschberg does not appear to have been engaged in the selling of Russian artworks and icons on Western art markets, even if he was based in Berlin and Paris at the time of these sales. According to Ulf Abel, who has researched Aschberg’s donations to Nationalmuseum, no relevant documents remain. What we know, we know mostly from Aschberg’s own accounts.<sup>9</sup> There, Aschberg does not mention Grabar, Glavmuzei, or Gokhran. Instead, he describes the plundering of Russian Orthodox churches by the Bolsheviks as resulting in icons flooding the flea markets, where he himself discovered them in the Smolenskaya Rynok. Another reason for the icons to enter the market, Aschberg found, was that abject poverty led many private Russians to sell whatever artworks and valuables they might have in order to survive. Aschberg was awestruck when he saw icons for sale for the first time, noting their dual artistic and spiritual value. He describes how he began acquiring them privately, adorning his Moscow flat with icons.<sup>10</sup>

**IN HIS OWN ACCOUNT,** Aschberg does not appear to have had much of a collector’s interest at all before his Moscow stay, perhaps at least in part due to his demanding work and mobile lifestyle. However, in another episode already in 1907, Aschberg describes how he and his friend Martin Aronowitsch – who would later become the owner of the main Swedish auction house Bukowskis (until 1974) – travelled on a gambling tour to Ostende and Brus-

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sels, where they bought antiquities in such amounts that they had to hire a whole railway wagon to transport their acquisitions back to Stockholm.<sup>11</sup>

While Aschberg conducted his bank business in a triangle between Berlin, Moscow, and Stockholm in the early 1920s, he also realized the need to establish the respectability of the Soviet regime to Swedish business interests as well as his own reputation as an international businessman. Among Aschberg's many Stockholm friends was Albert Engström, a highly popular and esteemed Swedish artist and author of conservative inclination. Since 1922 a member of the Swedish Academy, Engström however suffered from personal problems with finances and substance abuse. His books were not selling very well any longer, and his publisher, Bonniers, refused him an advance. At this point, Aschberg claims that he came up with the idea that Engström could follow him to Moscow in 1923. As the turmoil in Russia had prevented ordinary travel and contacts, it could be assumed that Engström's impressions of the Soviet capital in images as well as words would be attractive on the Swedish book market.

In Moscow, Engström received unprecedented access to the most prominent Bolsheviks, except for Lenin, who was ill at the time, drawing the portraits of the world-famous revolutionaries, the leaders of the world's first workers' state. Both shocked and intrigued by the desperate poverty of war-torn Russia, Engström describes himself as enjoying less meeting with the Bolsheviks than walking the streets of Moscow, socializing with tramps and street urchins.<sup>12</sup>

**HERE IT IS INTERESTING** to compare memoirs. Aschberg explains that Engström became impressed with Aschberg's already then sizeable collection of icons and how he then initiated his own icon hunting at Aschberg's market of choice, the flea market at Smolensky Rynok. Engström, for his part, barely mentions Aschberg, but writes at length about the marvellous icons at the Moscow Historical Museum, confirming that he bought a few, but unclear from whom. Alongside the icons, Engström also acquired Soviet propaganda posters. Just as Aschberg, Engström also received offers to acquire fine arts, including a Murillo, but complained that he could not afford it. Like Aschberg, Engström considered his acquisitions in Russia to be his personal belongings and quite naturally wanted to bring them to Sweden when returning home. However, by 1923, bringing icons out of Russia was no simple matter. Engström finally managed to meet with Nataliia Trotskaia (née Sadova, Leon Trotsky's second wife). Trotskaia chaired a commission tasked with preserving Russian cultural "memory" – Glavmuzei – which in Engström's understanding primarily worked to prevent it from destruction and export.<sup>13</sup> Together with Anatoly Lunacharsky, Trotskaia agreed to Engström bringing an undisclosed number of icons out of the country, as the Swedish writer was an "artist."<sup>14</sup>

In 1925, Aschberg encountered the same problems as Engström had. Aschberg also wanted to bring his far more numerous collection of icons to Sweden, when he found that he had to ask for special permission from Leonid Krasin. As a result, "four gentlemen" from the "museum board" (*museinämnden*,



Fig. 2. The March 1930 issue of the Paris émigré newspaper *Vozrozhdenie* commented upon the sales of Russian sacral art in this satirical drawing. The caption reads "First of all, we protest against the looting of churches and second, how much do you want for these things?" Source: Reprinted in Anne Odom and Wendy R. Salmond (eds.), *Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia's Cultural Heritage, 1918-1938*, ed. (Washington: Hillwood Estate, Museum, & Gardens, 2009).



Fig. 3. Albert Engström.



Fig 4. Natalia Trotskaia. Albert Engström, Moskoviter (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1924), 121.

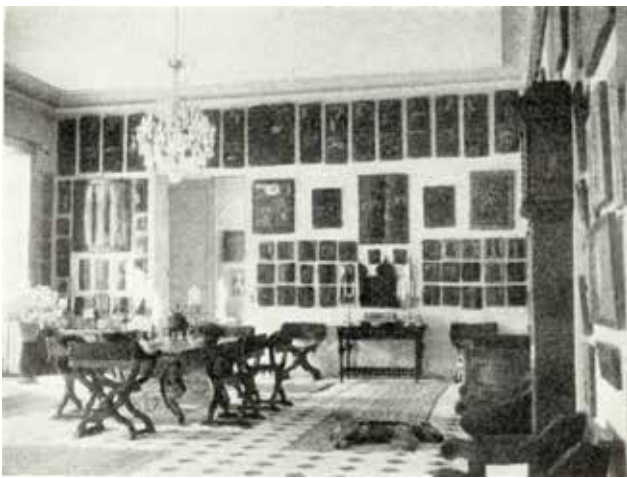


Fig. 5. Aschberg's icons in his home outside of Paris in 1928. Olof Aschberg, *En vandrande jude från Glasbruksgatan* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1946), 269.



Fig. 6. Saint George in Adoration of Christ "Not Made by Human Hands" from the first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Central Russia. Originally belonging to the Rumiantsev Museum in Moscow, it was sold by Antiquariat to Aschberg in 1935 and donated to Nationalmuseum in 1952. Ulf Abel and Vera Moore, *Icons* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 2002).

## **"ASCHBERG SKILFULLY USED ART AND ARTISTRY AS WELL AS COLLECTING AND COLLECTORSHIP TO FACILITATE TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT FORMS OF CAPITAL AND MEDIATIONS OF VALUE – CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL."**

probably indicating Glavmuzei) came to inspect his collection. According to Aschberg, the museum men expressed surprise at how Aschberg had managed to bring together such a fine selection of icons and promptly prohibited their export. Aschberg then offered them to select whichever icons they wanted to be donated to four unnamed Soviet museums in return for permission to transport the rest.<sup>15</sup> As early as the next year, in 1926, Aschberg left Sweden for Paris with his family, taking many of his icons with him.<sup>16</sup>

In Paris, Aschberg contemplated for a while setting up a museum devoted to icons. In the end, however, he arranged for a donation to be made to Nationalmuseum in Stockholm in 1933. The timing was well chosen, as it followed upon an international arts conference held in Stockholm where Aschberg had showcased his icon collection. The donation letter states an interest in cultural contacts through research and artistic inspiration in general, but also alluding to possible links between Swedish and Russian-Byzantine early Church art. At the same time, it is also clear that the Soviet selling tour organized in cooperation with the Hammer brothers as well as the Great Depression had caused a drop in the global market value for icons by this time.<sup>17</sup>

It is likely that the 1933 donation served to maintain Aschberg's contact with the Swedish cultural sector despite his relocation to Paris. Similarly, the 1933 donation was followed by another in 1952. Again, in the donation letter Aschberg cited the interest in Swedish-Russian cultural contacts and in providing access for the public as well as researchers in seeing this "cultural heritage."<sup>18</sup> Among the 1952 donations, we find Saint George in Adoration of Christ "Not Made by Human Hands," acquired directly from Antiquariat in 1935. Some of the highest quality items of the Nationalmuseum collection originate from this acquisition. We do not know how these icons were selected, but it is not impossible that some of these icons had already been in Aschberg's possession before 1928, when his collection was first screened by the four museum men.

Coming to a close of this brief essay, it stands clear that Aschberg skilfully used art and artistry as well as collecting and collectorship to facilitate transactions between different forms of capital and mediations of value – cultural, economic, politi-



cal, and social. Gifts and donations were his primary instrument for managing these transactions, alongside more unorthodox means of supporting and providing valuable contacts for artists and authors in need. Distinctions between collectorship, patronship, philanthropy, and financial investment might appear clear-cut in theory. But in the multifaceted biography of Aschberg, we see how these activities seamlessly followed from one another. Just as the Soviets could trade “Rembrandts for tractors,” Aschberg could trade icons for social capital, while his donations also served the purpose of establishing links between himself in Paris and his business, cultural, and political contacts in Stockholm and ensuring the longevity of Swedish contacts with its great neighbor to the east, Russia.

**TODAY, CLAIMS ARE** sometimes voiced that the Nationalmuseum icon collection – although unclear if all of it, or only the Aschberg donations – should be given back to Russia, either because the *objets* are holy or because they are somehow ill-gotten.<sup>19</sup> However, the circumstance that these icons are today located in Stockholm is in itself evidence of the cultural heritage of the contacts that proliferated between the workers’ state of the Soviet Union and the Western world of capitalism throughout the short 20<sup>th</sup> century – as well as the special role played by the Baltic Sea Rim, Sweden and Stockholm in serving as a conduit for such contacts. ✕

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- 13 Aschberg does not mention this episode.
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# Christian Brinton: A modernist icon

A portrait and a study of the collector

by **Mechella Yezernitskaya**

Christian Brinton (1870–1942) liked to have his portrait painted. The portraits of the collector, critic, and curator by émigré artists in the Philadelphia Museum of Art reveal that the collector did not merely “discover[], acquire[], and salvage[] objects,” as historian James Clifford has described the practice of collecting.<sup>1</sup> Instead, Brinton collected objects through a network of cultural exchange, diplomacy, and gift giving by forging bonds with expatriate artists living in the diaspora in the United States. Brinton’s staunch and steadfast promotion of the careers of émigré artists earned him the epithet “St. Brinton.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, the colorful portraits of Brinton portray the collector as a society man, saint, and priest dressed in elegant suits with accessories such as a top hat, gloves, and a cane. Two portraits in particular capture the range of perspectives on the man – Brinton’s portrait surrounded by his cohort of émigré artists from the Russian Empire in David Burliuk’s 1924 *A Critic and His Artist Friends* (Portrait of Christian Brinton and Nine Artists) (Fig. 1) and a full-length portrait of the collector displaying piety at the crossroads of imperial and Soviet Russia in Nikol Schattenstein’s 1932 *Adoration of Moscow* (Portrait of Christian Brinton) (Fig. 2). In fact, these two portraits consolidated Brinton’s reputation not only as a critic, curator, and collector, but also as a benefactor and promoter of Russian and Soviet art. While the portraits pay “tribute” to the collector’s patronage, as art historian Andrew J. Walker notes, they also pay tribute to the inaugural object that Brinton did “discover[], acquire[], and salvage[]” for the collection, namely, a seventeenth-century Russian Orthodox icon.<sup>3</sup> In the essay that follows, I examine how the seventeenth-century icon drove not only the unusual iconography of these two portraits of Christian Brinton, but also the collector’s valuation and views of modern Russian art.

Born in West Chester, a suburb outside of Philadelphia, Brinton descended from one of the earliest Quaker families to flee from religious persecution in England and to settle in the colony of Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup> Brinton was trained as an actor and received his B.A. from Haverford College in 1882. Due to the family’s suc-

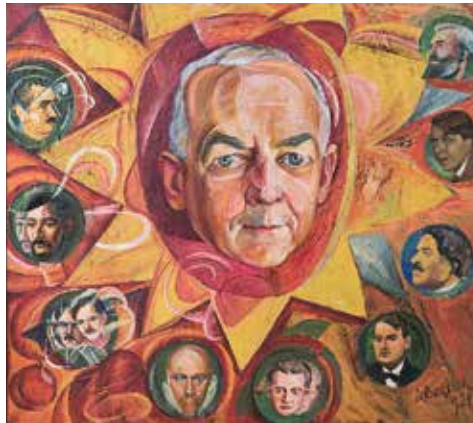


Fig. 1. David Burliuk, *A Critic and his Artist Friends* (Portrait of Christian Brinton and Nine Artists), 1924. Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 71.1 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Christian Brinton, 1941.

cessful serpentine stone quarry in West Chester, Brinton was able to travel extensively and study throughout Europe. Brinton studied philosophy, aesthetics, and art history at Heidelberg University and Sorbonne University while also pursuing a short-lived career as a theater actor. He continued his studies at Haverford College and received his M.A. in Art History in 1906 and an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters (Litt.D.) in 1914. In the United States, Brinton lived in The Players Club, a private social club for thespians in Gramercy Park in New York City, and he vacationed at what he named the “Quarry House” in West Chester, where he eventually retreated towards the end of his life.<sup>5</sup> Brinton took up a

post as an editor of the literary criticism magazine *The Critic* and penned hundreds of articles in popular magazines including *The Century*, *Harper’s*, *Scribner’s*, *Vanity Fair*, *L’Art et les Artistes*, and *The International Studio*, as well as numerous essays for exhibition catalogues and monographs.

**THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE**, Brinton gathered a range of objects including paintings, works on paper, and sculptures as well as stage and costume designs, textiles, toys, and folk crafts predominately from Eastern Europe with a selection of works from Central Europe, Scandinavia, and the United States.<sup>6</sup> The collection brings together objects as varied as a seventeenth-century icon, multicolored peasant crafts, a porcelain figure from the Lomonosov Porcelain Factory, Cubo-futurist paintings, traditional Russian textiles, and sketches of set designs and costumes for the Ballet Russes, all of which came from what the collector emblematically termed the “Slavic Crescent.” According to Brinton, this region encompassed the Baltic States, Yugoslavia, Eastern Europe, and, in particular, Russia “from which varied and complex cultural currents mainly flow.”<sup>7</sup>

According to legend, Brinton first journeyed to the Slavic Crescent sometime in the 1890s and returned to the United States with a small seventeenth-century icon.<sup>8</sup> Purportedly the first object to form his collection, the *Episodes from the Life of Saint Anne* narrates the life events of Saint Anne and Saint



Fig. 2. Nikol Schattenstein, *Adoration of Moscow (Portrait of Christian Brinton)*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 126.8 x 101.9 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Christian Brinton, 1941.



Joachim, specifically the miraculous birth of the Virgin Mary as indicated in the Cyrillic Church Slavonic inscription that reads, “Birth of Mary” (*Rozhdestvo Presviatoi Bogoroditsy*) on the upper register of the panel (Fig. 3). The veneration, popularity, and cult of Saint Anne, based on the Apocryphal Gospel called the *Protoevangelium of James*, flourished in Russian culture at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It is noteworthy that an icon depicting the story of a saint whose life events were constructed would not only commence but also serve to concretize Brinton’s collection of modern Russian art.<sup>9</sup> How are we to understand the appeal of a centuries-old Russian Orthodox icon and the *vita* of Saint Anne to a modern viewer and collector of modern art? What is the significance and value of the icon in Russian art and culture?

**AMONG THE SYMBOLS** she represented and the roles she performed such as mother, grandmother, and the founding matriarch of the sacred family, Saint Anne completed the extended family of Christ, embodying the notion of what scholars describe as the “continuity of generations.”<sup>10</sup> Together, these symbolic attributes established Saint Anne as an authority figure for medieval and early modern worshippers, but above all she was inextricably associated with the “idea of genealogy.”<sup>11</sup> To a modern viewer and collector such as Brinton, however, the icon itself came to symbolize the genealogical origins of Russian visual and material culture. Brinton’s assessment of the icon’s value did not center upon its religious, ritualistic, or apotropaic qualities but instead upon its aesthetic, historical, and temporal qualities. In other words, the icon’s artistic, historical, and age value, in the art historian and theorist Alois Riegl’s sense of such terms, gave weight to the object’s place in the collection.<sup>12</sup> The icon’s dating to the seventeenth century projected a particular sense of authority and authenticity. As James Clifford observes, “Old objects are endowed with a sense of ‘depth’ by their historically minded collectors. Temporality is reified and salvaged as origin, beauty, and knowledge.”<sup>13</sup> Such values allowed the object to serve as an artistic, historical, and, eventually, national symbol of Russia.<sup>14</sup> Like the story of Saint Anne, which was constructed by apocryphal scriptures in order to fill the gaps in the biblical narrative of the life story of Christ, Brinton’s deployment of the seventeenth-century icon serves to construct a pseudo-lineage of Russian art and cultural heritage in his collection of modern Russian art.

Saint Anne’s role as a respected authority figure gave further weight to Brinton’s view that art developed along an “evolutionary” rather than “revolutionary” course.<sup>15</sup> Brinton observes, “The development of artistic effort advances normally along definite lines. The various movements overlap one another, and in each will be found that vital potency which proves the formative spirit of the next.”<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere in his text, Brinton writes, “Painting and sculpture are living organisms, which must reflect the aims and aspirations of the time or become sterile and soulless formulae.”<sup>17</sup> Brinton understood modernism as a continu-

ation rather than a rupture of artistic traditions in which styles and movements move forward along a linear and continuous trajectory. This notion of genealogy would become the germ of Brinton’s evolutionary view on modern art, which he espoused throughout numerous articles and exhibition catalogues.

**AS THE ICON** laid the foundations of the collection, Brinton continued to immerse himself in Russian art and culture even when his interests in promoting international modernism took him far afield. In the summer of 1912, Brinton traveled to Sweden, Denmark, and Norway in preparation for his work on the *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art* under the auspices of the American-Scandinavian Society.<sup>18</sup> Brinton visited various institutions such as Sweden’s open-air museum known as Skansen and the Nordic Museum, which presented historical, ethnic, and national ideas of “Scandinavianism” or “Swedishness” from the Viking era to the present.<sup>19</sup> Brinton’s pan-Scandinavian survey

focused on the aesthetic, ethnic, and what Brinton often termed the “racial” similarities among the three nations while at the same time asserting the distinct aesthetic and national characteristics of each country.

The preservation of Scandinavian artistic and cultural patrimony that Brinton saw in modern-day Sweden was not lost on the collector in his growing appreciation and assessment of Russian art. In the introduction to the catalogue of the *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art*, Brinton writes,

**It is in fact only the redoubtable Russians who can today compete with the sturdy Scandinavians in the possession of a spontaneous, unspoiled esthetic patrimony. The reasons for such a situation have in many respects been similar, if not, indeed, identical. As in the case of Russia, the relative geographical remoteness of the Peninsula, the barrier of an unfamiliar speech, and the fact that the pallid fervour of Christianity and the pagan richness of the Renaissance were comparatively late in making appearance on the scene, all tended toward preserving that integrity of expression alike in art, letters, and music which is their most distinctive possession.**<sup>20</sup>

Brinton sings the praises of Scandinavia’s and, by extension, Russia’s unadulterated preservation of their artistic and cultural heritage by virtue of their distance and isolation from the Western world, their foreign languages, their delayed embrace of Christianity via the Byzantine Empire, and their bypassing of the Western Renaissance. This preservation of a so-called “unspoiled esthetic patrimony” was not lost on Brinton when he turned his sights again to Russia in the late 1910s and early 1920s. In the preface to the 1916 book *The Russian School of Painting* by Russian artist and critic Alexandre Benois, Brinton underscores a “typically Slavonic note” that he found to be inherent

## “TEMPORALITY IS REIFIED AND SALVAGED AS ORIGIN, BEAUTY, AND KNOWLEDGE.”

in Russian art throughout the ages.<sup>21</sup> The legacy of the icon, an archetypal “Slavonic” object and the symbol of Russia’s artistic and cultural heritage, would reappear and serve as a vehicle for promulgating the collector’s essentialist views on Russian art in his collection.

Brinton’s subsequent trips to imperial and later Soviet Russia – at least half a dozen between the 1890s and 1932 – reinforced the significance of the icon in artistic traditions beyond the early modern period to the early twentieth century. At the turn of the century, both academic and avant-garde artists, or what Brinton describes as the “ultramodernists”, began to turn to the icon for material and metaphoric inspiration.<sup>22</sup> In Brinton’s collection, paintings such as David Burliuk’s *Icon after the Revolution* (c. 1920), Nicolas Vasilieff’s *Modern Icon* (c. 1925), and John Graham’s (né Ivan Dombrowsky) *Study for Icon of the Modern Age* (1930) form a suite of objects that respond to the icon’s materiality, iconography, and formal qualities such as the use of flattened planes, factured surfaces, and reverse perspective (Figs. 4–6). This renewed interest in the icon beyond its religious value came about when academic and popular consciousness of the icon spurred discussions about the value of objects of cultural heritage in late imperial and early Soviet Russia.<sup>23</sup> The icon, moreover, was channeled in the iconography of several unusual portraits of Christian Brinton by émigré artists from the Russian Empire.

David Burliuk (1882–1967), a Ukrainian artist who emigrated to the United States in 1922, was celebrated as the “militant father of Russian Modernism.”<sup>24</sup> Two years later, Burliuk painted *A Critic and His Artist Friends (Portrait of Christian Brinton and Nine Artists)* in 1924 (Fig. 1). Brinton engages the viewer with a direct gaze from the center of a halo from which yellow rays extend to the edges of the canvas. Orbiting around the so-called “patron saint of all the Russians” are nine circular portraits of émigré artists from the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. Arranged like scenes from the life of a saint, the nine portraits in frontal, profile, and three-quarter views speak to the diaspora community of émigré artists living and working in New York City.<sup>25</sup> Moving clockwise, the portraits represent artists Sergei Kononov, Boris Grigoriev, Abraham Manievich, Sergei Sudeikin, Nicolai Cikovsky, Nicolas Roerich, Alexander Archipenko, Boris Anisfeld, and, finally, Nicholas Vasilieff. The halos, sunburst, and diaphanous swirling motifs encircle Brinton and the artists within a non-descript setting operating in a similar way to that of religious portrait icons, which typically depict an identifiable holy figure set against a background of luminous gold leaf. Unlike the sequential composition that unfolds the linear narrative of the *Episodes of the Life of Saint Anne*, Burliuk’s circular composition with abstracted background displaces the figures from any recognizable time or place. By doing so, the portrait draws the focus to Brinton and his nine artist friends.

In 1925, the apologist of the Slavic Crescent mused, “While America is the lighthouse of my body, Russia is the lighthouse of my soul.”<sup>26</sup> During the 1920s, Brinton organized a slate of solo and group exhibitions featuring recent émigré artists in museums and galleries including the Brooklyn Museum, the Grand Central Palace, and Kingore Galleries among other venues.



Fig. 3. *Episodes from the Life of Saint Anne*, 17<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on panel, 32.1 x 27.3 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Christian Brinton, 1941.



Fig. 4. Nicholas Vasilieff, *Modern Icon*, circa 1925. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 75.9 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Christian Brinton, 1941.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART



PHOTO COURTESY OF PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Fig. 5. John Graham (Ivan Dombrowsky), *Study for "Icon of the Modern Age,"* 1930. Oil on canvas, 61.3 x 38.1 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Christian Brinton, 1941.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Fig. 6. David Burliuk, *Icon after the Revolution,* circa 1920. Oil on cardboard, 50.8 x 40.6 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Christian Brinton, 1941.

## “BRINTON UNDERSCORES A ‘TYPICALLY SLAVONIC NOTE’ THAT HE FOUND TO BE INHERENT IN RUSSIAN ART THROUGHOUT THE AGES.”

Brinton further promoted the work of artists beyond the émigré community in New York City to include the ultramodernists such as Kazimir Malevich, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Alexandra Exter, and El Lissitzky, among others, through his work with the Société Anonyme, an organization that sponsored exhibitions, publications, and lectures on modern art founded by Katherine Dreier.<sup>27</sup> Brinton continued to travel to Russia and was affiliated with a number of Soviet cultural organizations such as the Russian-American Institute and the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (known as VOKS), for which he was involved in negotiating, albeit unsuccessfully, an exhibition on icons in the United States.<sup>28</sup>

UPON BRINTON'S RETURN from his final trip to the Soviet Union in 1932, the Lithuanian-born artist Nikol Schattenstein (1877–1954), who built a reputation for his portraits of society men and women, painted the collector in the same year in New York City. Unlike Burliuk's portrait of Brinton's disembodied head floating in a sunburst, Schattenstein situates a full-length portrait of the collector in clearly articulated time and space in *Adoration of Moscow (Portrait of Christian Brinton)* (Fig. 2). The portrait once hung in Brinton's bedroom as photographs of the collection's installation in the Quarry House in West Chester reveal (Fig. 7).<sup>29</sup> Brinton wears a three-piece suit with a red decoration pinned to his left breast pocket along with a black top hat and a pair of white gloves resting beside a plush red pillow.<sup>30</sup> The collector kneels in piety at the metaphorical crossroads of Tsarist and Soviet Russia as represented by the polychromatic sixteenth-century Saint Basil's Cathedral on the left and Vladimir Lenin's tomb on the right, all within Red Square. The imperial coat of arms in the form of a double-headed eagle topped off with two imperial crowns and the communist symbol of the hammer and sickle create a notion of historical continuity. In the upper register of the painting, a fanciful Cyrillic inscription encircled in stylized clouds recalls the inscription in the *Episodes from the Life of Saint Anne* (Fig. 3). While the spelling and style of the inscription imitates the letters of the Old Church Slavonic alphabet, the text does not form coherent words in the liturgical language but instead carries semantic value in Russian. The pseudo-Church Slavonic text reads, “Little Priest” (*Mialen'kiy Pop*), which alludes to Brinton's short stature, but also his notorious persona as a patron saint or priest, a colloquialism—at times derogatory—used to refer to a priest.<sup>31</sup> The stylistic pseudo-Church Slavonic script together with Brinton's pious pose invokes a modern-day secular, if not sacrilegious, devotional scene in which Moscow's spiritual significance is the subject and object of worship.



In the same vein as Burliuk's appropriation of the iconography of portrait icons, Schattenstein's portrayal of Brinton appropriates devotional images, most notably the theme of the Adoration of the Magi, a scene from the Epiphany in which richly adorned envoys or kings known as the "three wise men" pay homage to the incarnation of the Christ Child. While the specificity of this religious narrative is absent from *Adoration of Moscow*, the secular devotion scene fortifies Brinton's international reputation as a promoter of Russian and Soviet art. In the guise of a holy yet modern figure, Brinton's upturned gaze, praying hands, and kneeling posture perform devotion before Moscow and its legendary status as a potential Third Rome, a concept that gained popularity throughout medieval Muscovy and modern Moscow.<sup>32</sup> While Brinton is portrayed in a canonical pose of devotion, Moscow, by extension, reciprocates adoration towards Brinton and, perhaps, bestows the medal that is pinned to the collector's suit jacket in recognition of Brinton's promotion of the capital's artistic and cultural riches.

Like the lives of the saints, Brinton consciously crafted his own *vita*, iconography, and legend by inserting himself within the genealogy of his collection. From the portrait icon to the pious patron, the portraits of Christian Brinton tell us something of not only the actor, but also the narrative of Russian art that the collector constructed. As historian Robert Williams observes, "Christian Brinton acted out his most notable role as promoter of Russian and Soviet art in America."<sup>33</sup> These portraits commemorate the relationships Brinton forged with émigré artists, but above all they commemorate Brinton's role as an actor and as an apologist of the Slavic Crescent. ✕

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- 3 See Andrew Walker, "World War II and Modern Russian Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Christian Brinton Collection, 1941–1945," *Archives of American Art Journal* 41, no. 1/4 (2001): 34–42, at 36; See also Walker, "Critic, Curator, Collector: Christian Brinton and the Exhibition of National Modernism in America, 1910–1945" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1999), 1.
- 4 The Brinton family kept meticulous genealogical records, which tell us that they emigrated from Staffordshire County, England, and settled in West Chester, Pennsylvania, in the spring of 1684. See Janet Wright Schoonover, ed., *The Brinton Genealogy: A History of William Brinton*,



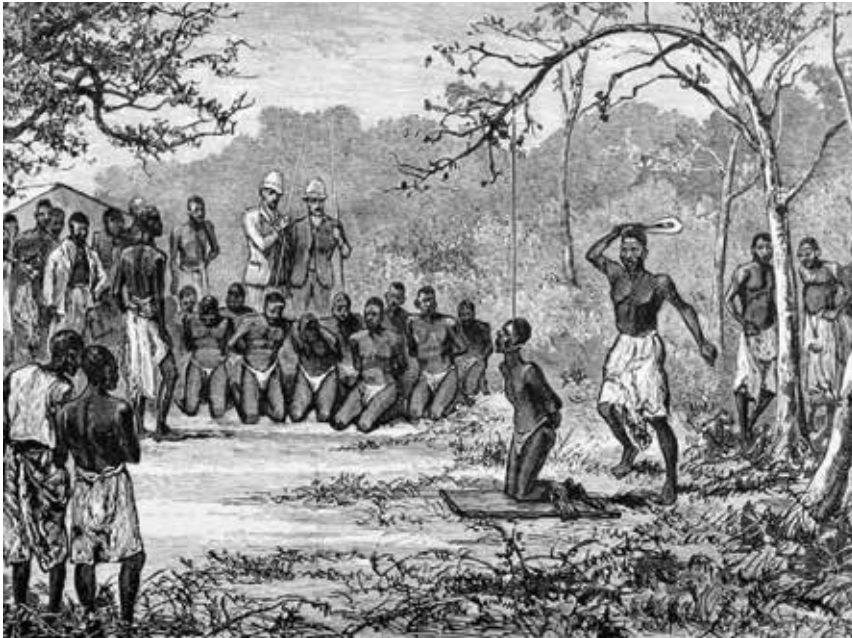
PHOTO © CHESTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, WEST CHESTER, PA

Fig. 7. Christian Brinton standing beside a portrait of himself titled *Adoration of Moscow (Portrait of Christian Brinton)* by Nikol Schattenstein, photographed by the Philadelphia Record in 1937.

*Who Came From England to Chester County, Pennsylvania in 1684, And of His Descendants with Some Records of the English Brintons* (Trenton, N.J.: MacCrellish and Quigley, 1924).

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- 6 For the Philadelphia Museum of Art's acquisition, display, and care of the Christian Brinton Collection, see Walker, "World War II and Modern Russian Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art," 34–42.
- 7 The "Slavic Crescent" appears in Brinton's 1932 application for a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship to travel to the "Slavic countries" in order to publish a "first-hand" survey of contemporary Slavic painting, sculpture, and graphic and decorative arts: "What I term the 'Slavic Crescent' virtually encloses the Eastern confines of Europe, and has had a more deep-rooted and profound influence upon West European culture than has thus far been recognized, either by scholars or the general public. The Southern tip of this crescent is Yugoslavia, facing the Adriatic and the hell [sic] of 'Italy's boot.' The Northern tip of this crescent curves through the Baltic States and ends, say, at Danzig, though one-time under points, its width at the center is as wide as Russia itself, from which its varied and complex cultural currents mainly flow." Grant Application, 1932, Series 1, Personal Papers, Box 1, The Christian Brinton Collection, Chester County Historical Society.
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  - 13 Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” 99.
  - 14 For a discussion on the significance of the icon and its revaluation throughout Russian history, see Jefferson J. A. Gatrall, “Introduction,” in *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity*, 1–25.
  - 15 In the same essay outlining the value of monuments, Riegel argues for a continuous evolution of art: “It is important to realize that every work of art is at once and without exception a historical monument because it represents a specific stage in the development of the visual arts.” Riegel, “The Modern Cult of Monuments,” 22.
  - 16 Christian Brinton, “Evolution Not Revolution in Art,” *The International Studio* 69, no. 194 (April 1913): xxvii–xxxv, at xxviii.
  - 17 Brinton, “Evolution not Revolution in Art,” xxxiii.
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Slave nation: engraving from an 1885 book on the founding of the so-called "Congo Free State".

# Letters from the heart of darkness

Dr. Ludvig Moberg, ethnographic collections, and the logic of colonial violence

by **Johan Hegardt**

A year or so ago I came across 26 letters sent from the Congo Free State by Ludvig Moberg (1866–1935) to his mother Sara (1843–1927) and his brother Axel (1872–1956). Sixteen of the letters are to Sara and the rest to Axel and were written between 1893 and 1896. The majority is from 1894 and 1895. The addressees being his younger brother and his mother, the letters differ in tone and content. I have not yet been able to read them all in more detail, but I believe that they are special because they were written by a highly educated person. As far as I understand it, the majority of those that served in Congo, be they Swedes or others, lacked higher education.<sup>1</sup>

In the mid-1890s, Ludvig's brother Axel was a student at Lund University. He would later become a professor in Semitic languages and a translator of Arabic literature. Between 1926 and 1936, he was head of Lund University. In a letter to Ludvig, Axel asks for some Arabic objects. Ludvig replies:

You write that you would like some Arabic objects.  
It is difficult to get hold of such objects here, because

contacts with the Arabs are far away and only due to "warfare," but those taking part in the campaigns might find some objects for you. The caravans that come down here have changed people many times and negroes from the parts where contacts with the Arabs are intense do not come down here. I might find something for you among the workers from Senegal who have been in contact with Arabs and have their education from them, but I have so far not seen much except some smaller amulets. I have however spotted some workers that skillfully write Arabic and I will try to find something for you among them.<sup>2</sup>

What Ludvig probably mentions here is the brutal Arabic slave trade, organized by the notorious Zanzibar-based Arabic slave-raider Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, known as Tippu Tip, a man who King Leopold at first negotiated with. At the time, white state officials launched campaigns against the slave traders, and it might be such campaigns that Ludvig refers to when he talks about "warfare". Adam Hochschild has shown that these





Dr. Ludvig Moberg with three of his five children in his home in Djursholm in 1923. Courtesy of the Moberg family.



Matadi. From Dr. Moberg's photo album. Courtesy of the Moberg family.

anti-slavery campaigns were in fact not as glorious as one might think.<sup>3</sup>

Axel had two daughters and three sons. All three sons would become professors in different disciplines. I have not been able to trace his daughters. One of Ludvig and Axel's sisters, Ellen Chatarina Moberg (1874–1955), became a politician and a pioneer in developing nursery schools and co-founded with her sister Maria Elisabeth (1877–1948) the Fröbelinstitutet in Norrköping, an institute educating kindergarten teachers.

In the letters to his brother, Ludvig mentions names such as Émile Zola and Ernest Renan among others. Ludvig mastered French, German, and English and had some knowledge in Portuguese and Spanish. He and his wife Maria (born Svård) had five children, all of them living their lives in the upper socio-economic strata of Swedish society, but none of them made a career at the universities like Axel's children. These examples show that the family had a long tradition of education and academic scholarship. As such, the letters might be rather unique, also reflecting the fact that Ludvig was not a missionary, but a physician.

## The Congo Free State

In this capacity, Ludvig Moberg served as a functionary for the Belgian company *Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo* in the Congo Free State in 1894–1895. The Belgian company constructed a railway between the port city of Matadi and the inland city of Leopoldville named after the Belgian king Leopold II, who was the owner of the colony. Leopoldville is today called Kinshasa and is the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The reason behind the railway construction was that Livingstone Falls, stretching approximately 300 kilometers between the port cities of Matadi and Boma and the inland city of Leopoldville, hindered transportation with steamers between the inland and the Atlantic Ocean. Transportation had to be taken care of by carriers – or caravan men – forced by the colonial authorities to do the work. We will meet them later in this essay.

In 1890, Joseph Conrad traveled to Matadi to work for a Bel-

gian shipping company that transported commodities up and down the Congo River from Leopoldville and further east into the interior. As is well known, his book *Heart of Darkness* is based on his experiences from the six months that he spent in the Congo Free State working for the company. Conrad writes:

**I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders, and also for an undersized railway-truck laying there on its back with its wheels in the air [...] I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty rails...A horn tooted to the right, and I saw black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all [...] They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on.**<sup>4</sup>

I am not sure that Conrad did witness this because the construction work had hardly begun when he was in Matadi, and he worked on the river from Leopoldville and eastward, not west of the city where the railway construction was taking form. He could have read about the construction later during his work with the novel or seen parts of it when returning from Leopoldville to Matadi on his way back to England after ending his contract. In fact, when Moberg left Congo in 1896, the construction of the railway had not even reached half way between Matadi and Leopoldville, as far as I understand it.

The Congo Free State was the consequence of the 1884–1885 Berlin Conference, when the world powers, including Sweden, agreed that King Leopold could have access to the colony. It is no surprise that Sweden took part in the conference. Even though Sweden lacked colonies, the country was integrated into the world economy that was based on the structures of colonialism. The deal was that every one else could have a bite too, including Sweden. King Leopold argued that the objective was for the

**“EVEN THOUGH SWEDEN  
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COLONIALISM. THE DEAL  
WAS THAT EVERY ONE  
ELSE COULD HAVE A BITE  
TOO, INCLUDING SWEDEN.”**

colony to bring civilization to the area, something that Conrad also believed in before he left for Congo.<sup>5</sup> This was of course a lie. Instead, they were burning villages and killing local people on a massive scale.<sup>6</sup> Moberg writes: “They are burning villages in ‘the name of civilization.’” He places “in the name of civilization” in between quotation marks, which implies that he does not agree. But in the same letter he also writes that he hopes to make good money.<sup>7</sup>

The railway was finished in 1898, and Conrad published his novel in 1899 as a three-part series in *Blackwood's Magazine*. The book was first published in 1902. Conrad's novel sparked an organized international opposition against King Leopold's genocidal activities. Eventually, the Parliament of Belgium annexed the Congo Free State and took over its administration on November 15, 1908, as the Colony of the Belgian Congo. Tim Stanley writes: “Estimates for the number of people killed range between 2 and 15 million, easily putting Leopold in the top ten of history's mass murderers.”<sup>8</sup> It is the most terrifying example in the history of colonialism, as discussed in detail by Adam Hochschild in his book *King Leopold's Ghost*.

**CONRAD EXPLAINS:** “They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others.” And he continues: “They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it in blind – as is very proper for those who tackle the darkness.”<sup>9</sup>

What Conrad's protagonist Marlow expresses in the novel is very close to the truth. But Conrad can also be criticized for words such as “They were no colonists” because he here neglects that colonialism always is a question of oppression, but he does have a clear point when he argues that “They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got.”



The railway under construction. From Dr. Moberg's photo album. The text reads: “Les travaux du chemin de fer du Congo. Une tranchée vers Bembesi. 72 kilom. de Matadi. Congo 1894.” Courtesy of the Moberg family.

Conrad can also be criticized for viewing Africa and Africans from a Western perspective, for example, that the people are backwards, something he expresses when he writes, “The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell?”<sup>10</sup> Hochschild notes, however, that “European and American readers, not comfortable acknowledging the genocidal scale of the killing in Africa at the turn of the century, have cast *Heart of Darkness* loose from its historical moorings. We read it as a parable for all times and places, not as a book about one time and place [...] Conrad himself wrote, ‘*Heart of Darkness* is experience [...] pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case.’”<sup>11</sup>

There will always be questionable sentences in a book written over a century ago, and we shall of course not neglect that, but if we read the novel as an experience we will be able to catch and understand the deep horror that Conrad witnessed, and I think that a close, but not uncritical, reading of Dr. Moberg's letters will also render us deep insights into the horrible goings-on in the Congo Free State.

Indeed, 1,932 persons died during the building of the railway,

**“HELL IS ALWAYS HELL, BUT AS WE KNOW THERE ARE DIFFERENT LEVELS IN HELL AND CONGO WAS THE LOWEST OF THEM ALL, HELL ON EARTH, AS SVÄRD PUTS IT. THIS MAKES PEOPLE EXTREMELY BRUTAL, WHICH WAS THE CASE IN THE COLONY.”**

1,800 black and 132 white.<sup>12</sup> This indicates that on average 16 white people and 225 black people died every year during the construction between 1890 and 1898. Moberg worked for two years, and he thus could have witnessed the death of 500 black people and 32 white people during his time in Congo. In his letters, he describes the death of many people, most of them white. Moberg writes:

In Matadi some strong and healthy men have died and people are a little scared. Among the 39 persons that the company have sent home, most of them have been sent back due to diseases before they had ended their time here. Most of the illness is dangerous forms of fever. Among those that left were a French engineer, a very nice man, maybe the best man that I have met here. He should have left earlier, but had only two months left on his contract of two years. Yesterday I was told that he did not come further than Boma before he died. He had a family in France with two children and talked a lot about his family.<sup>13</sup>

Various sources give different numbers, but some 600 Swedes are believed to have been contracted to work in Congo. The picture is that the majority were seamen or military men, and many of them, but not all, were poorly educated. For the time being, I do not know how many of them died in Congo. Moberg did encounter some Swedes, for example, Anders Sjöcrona who worked as an engineer for the *Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo*. Moberg writes: “There is not as much life here as it is in Kengé of course; we have been 4 to 5 whites here, Sjöcrona (sic), ‘a cosseptable,’ (sic) a technician, myself and a supervisor.” He continues: “Once when we got hold of some Danish aquavit, Sjöcrona (sic) and I thought that it was like music from home and for some evenings we took a drink from the bottle together with some sandwiches and sardines in a very motherlandish way – but the bottle was soon empty.”<sup>14</sup>

**IN HIS BOOK** *Vit man i svart land* [White man in black land], the Swedish missionary Arvid Svärd divides the white people in Congo, including the Swedes, into three categories:

**The first: An international scum, flocked from all directions, failed beings, dysfunctional wretches, those that must disappear into the fringes of life, adventurers, with a ravenous appetite on life, those that could not afford a conscience. They found a place free of any restrictions out there.**

The second: honest bookkeepers, craftsmen, NCOs, that very innocently dreamt of adventure and money in the newly found black wonderland under the equator, men, that in an unfortunate ignorance of reality jumped straight into something, that came very close to hell on Earth. It happened that some after some time in service came half insane to a missionary and begged for help. But – what could he do? They could not stand it any more! A bullet in the forehead ended often a life, which in Europe would have become a respectable and impeccable life. They had not understood that they would be thrown into a “whirling maelstrom of unrighteousnesses, cruelty and undisguised human passion.”

The third: men with character, conscience and decency. They protested and had to face the consequences. Some disappeared. It was easy to state that a rhino had killed X. Others were thrown out. And others emphasized, after returning: “We will never go back.”

It was namely the men behind the system: its creators, the coupon cutting [*kupongklippande*] shareholders and the governors, that carried the responsibility.<sup>15</sup>

That missionaries “helped” both black and white people in Congo and that they protested was of course heroic. But Svärd was himself a missionary, and his book is about a missionary. We must not forget that missionaries have had their part in the systematic social and religious oppression of people in the colonies.

Nevertheless, Svärd is probably very close to the truth, and the majority of non-black people from around the world working in Congo had lost something in their home country – money, work, a wife or a family, or something else. This means that they probably also had lost their trust in themselves and in society and therefore also had lost their moral compass. But this is not only true for Congo, but a rather common description of people in other colonies too.

**HELL IS ALWAYS HELL**, but as we know there are different levels in hell and Congo was the lowest of them all, hell on Earth, as Svärd puts it. This makes people extremely brutal, which was the case in the colony.

If the British and the French had some idea of how a colony should be governed, there were no such ideas behind Congo, but, as Conrad describes it, the whole point was to grab what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. Moberg, for his part, writes:





"Two Congo veterans that took part in the building of the Congo Free State. Sea captain Tage Jönsson from Brunflo and engineer Anders Sjöcrona from Helsingborg." Published in Svenska Dagbladet 1937.

**You think that the Negroes here are savages, but most of them come from British colonies where they have received education and some are very advanced and speak fluently both English and French, for example, my male nurse from Sierra Leone. The black [he uses the word "black" here] boiler men working on the railway engines do their job as good as the white.<sup>16</sup>**

What he points to here is that there is a difference between colonial administrations, which also underlines Conrad's distinction when he writes, "they were no colonists." But even though there are distinctions among colonies, colonies are of course always troubled by the logic of colonialism and its violence.

### Who was Dr. Ludvig Moberg?

Congo was not unknown in Sweden. The Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* mentioned Congo almost every year from 1870 and onwards. The whole process, from Stanley's famous expeditions up to the collapse of the Congo Free State in 1908, is covered, and Congo is mentioned in 27 articles in 1883 and in 96 articles in 1885. There are advertisements in the paper for tea from Congo, the political situation is covered, and Swedes who died there are mentioned. Those who left Sweden for Congo are also mentioned, and we find a short notice that Ludvig Moberg is on his way to Congo in *Dagens Nyheter* on December 14, 1893. The note reads: "To Congo. Medical student Ludvig Moberg born 1866 and son of the deceased hospital doctor in Norrköping Vilhelm Moberg has entered his services in the Congo Free State. He has travelled from Antwerp to Congo."<sup>17</sup>

As we read from the note, Ludvig Moberg was himself the son of a physician who had held a high position within the hospital in Norrköping. With the background he had, he had no reason to travel to Congo, but as with most others who left for Congo



Dr. Moberg's villa – "Larsbo" – in Djursholm, 1906. Courtesy of the Moberg family.

Moberg had his sorrows. He was in love with his cousin Maria Roth, but she did not love him, and off he went.<sup>18</sup> Two years and 26 letters later he returned, and with him he had a collection of objects. Moberg writes:

**The authentic Congo Negroes, that live for themselves, are of course real "bêtes sauvages," [wild animals] even though they too have come in contact with Europeans – missionaries, traders and aquavit – which has had some impact on them. In general the Congo people are intelligent, which many examples show, for example, the objects that they make. I hope that I before I leave will be able to collect some of their handicraft, weapons and household objects, because it would be interesting to bring them home as a memory from here.<sup>19</sup>**

In her book *On Longing*, Susan Stewart writes:

**We might say that this capacity of objects to serve as traces of authentic experience is, in fact, exemplified by the souvenir. The souvenir distinguishes experiences. We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable [...] It represents not the lived of its maker but the "secondhand" experience of its owner. Like the collection, it always displays the romance of contraband, for its scandal is its removal from its 'natural' location.<sup>20</sup>**

But objects were not the only things that he brought back with him to Sweden. In one of his letters, Moberg writes: "In one aspect I may be pleased with myself and the situation. I have not had one death during the latest 2 months among the 500 workers that I care for. The other department with 800 workers has had one or two deaths every day." After that he places in brackets

## “I AM COOKING A SKULL FROM A POOR CARAVAN MAN THAT WAS FOUND DEAD BESIDE THE ROAD. IT IS THE FIFTH SKULL THAT I HAVE COLLECTED. I HOPE TO BE ABLE TO COLLECT MORE SKULLS BEFORE I RETURN TO EUROPE.”

the following: “(I stop writing because I need to attend the fire in my ‘kitchen.’ I am cooking a skull from a poor caravan man that was found dead beside the road. It is the fifth skull that I have collected. I hope to be able to collect more skulls before I return to Europe.)”<sup>21</sup> In another letter he writes about the caravan men: “The only people that I see from where I live are the by force and threat of violence and for the state contracted caravan men that pass by my small house, mostly in the hundreds and with their stuff on their heads and their long sticks in their hands.”<sup>22</sup>

Both Conrad and Svärd mention the caravan men. Conrad when on his way from Matadi to Leopoldville: “Next day I left the station at last, with a caravan of sixty men for a two-hundred-mile tramp.”<sup>23</sup> Svärd underlines: “The caravan trail between Kasongo and Tanganyika is strewn with bodies of dead caravan men, almost as under the days of the Arabic slave trade. Mistreated, malnourished carriers die in the hundreds. The smell of rotten bodies cover the clime, we call it the Manyema’s perfume.”<sup>24</sup>

It was very common to force people to work for the Congo Free State, and the point of building the railway was to make transportations easier and to get rid of the time-consuming caravans. It is probably one of these men, forced to work until he died, that Moberg collected the skull from. There is no explanation for why he collected skulls in the first place, but he studied medicine for his exam when returning to Sweden.

**FREDRIK SVANBERG WRITES** in *Människosamlarna* [Human collectors] that Moberg returned with four skulls that he donated to Uppsala University in 1896. They are described in the University’s catalog as: “4 Skulls. Negros from Congo. Fiott-spraks tribe. From the West Coast, the area Cataract, a-c South, d North of Cataract.”<sup>25</sup>

Cataract means waterfall, and skulls a-c were collected south of the waterfall and d was collected north of the waterfall. Svanberg mentions that Moberg might have collected the skulls close to Kinshasa, but Moberg never reached Leopoldville. In fact, his last letter home is from Kimpese, not even half way between Matadi and Leopoldville. When writing the letter about the skulls, Moberg was in Kenge, a place not far from Matadi. This means that all four skulls must have been collected far west of Kinshasa.

There is no answer in the letters as to why he collected the skulls. The relation between studying medicine and cooking skulls is also rather far-fetched. The only answer to the question why is found in Svanberg’s book. Collecting body parts was a part of a culture of collecting and believed to be positive for scientific research.

Sweden was of course not alone, and it has a difficult history

when it comes to this very precise form of anatomic research dating back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in the establishment of a racial-biological institute and the introduction of eugenic policies in the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, it did not end until the 1970s – a deep and tragic history discussed in numerous books, articles, and television programs over the past decade.<sup>26</sup>

**AFTER RETURNING** to Sweden in 1896, Moberg made a decent career in medicine. He became a docent (associate professor) at Karolinska institutet in 1905. His specialization was dermatology, the branch of medicine concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of skin disorders. He lived in Djursholm, a fashionable and at the time liberal suburb north of Stockholm, where he died in 1935.

In the Museum of Ethnography’s yearbook for 1939, we read – under the headline “Gifts” – that *Doktorinnan* Maria Moberg, Stockholm, has donated 31 objects from the Belgian Congo to the museum. The objects are from Upper and Lower Congo, and among the objects there is a large shield, probably from the Ubangi area, spears, arrow heads, a knife with a broad wooden case with copper ornaments, probably from Bateke or Bamfumo, one ivory trumpet, one beautiful clay pot with ornaments, and a head stool with an ornamented face. The text ends with the conclusion that many of the objects are not manufactured anymore in the Congo area.<sup>27</sup> An educated guess is that this has to do with the fact that Congo in 1937 had been completely robbed leaving millions dead, because, in Conrad’s words, “It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale.”

Many ethnographic collections around the world are based on what Stewart has called “contraband.” They were unlawfully collected, although Ludvig Moberg probably did not do anything wrong. He did not steal things. Instead, it was the context and the logic of colonial violence that made it possible for him to collect not only objects, but also human skulls. Important here is also the logic of civilization and modernization, and as Moberg himself writes, “they are burning villages in ‘the name of civilization’.” Modernization and civilization are words highly approved of by those who “grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got,” as Conrad put it.

The website at the Museum of Ethnography lists 31 objects from Ludvig Moberg. Each object has an identification number followed by a short description and the names Ludvig Moberg and Maria Moberg. Only 3 out of the 31 objects have a photograph connected to the description. The objects have been cleansed of any former meaning and context.<sup>28</sup> The information on Ludvig Moberg on the museum’s website is from the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*’s yearbook from 1936.<sup>29</sup>

*Svenska Dagbladet* used to publish yearbooks where important events during the past year are mentioned. They obviously thought that the death of Ludvig Moberg in 1935 was important enough to publish. Ludvig Moberg is also mentioned in many other biographic encyclopedias. What is interesting is that his years in Africa are not seen as very important and are only mentioned briefly. It appears that he himself maybe not regretted, but at least had a complicated relationship to his experiences from his years in the “Heart of Darkness”. In letters home at the end of his contract, he is critical of the *Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo*, of black people, and of the whole situation in Congo, but at the same time he has ambivalent feelings for his return and asks himself in the letters if he will be able to tackle the hectic life at home, accustomed as he is to the slowness of time in Congo.

**MOBERG DID RETURN**, and the objects that he collected are today stored at the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm. In the last letter to his brother Axel sent from the steamer *Ambara* off Lisbon on February 8, 1896, Ludvig asks where Maria Roth might be. Two years in the “Heart of Darkness” had obviously not weakened his feelings for her. Eventually, it would be another Maria – Maria Svärd – whom he married and who would donate his “souvenirs” to the Museum of Ethnography two years after his death.

I have in this essay tried to show how complicated such collections are. It is well known that ethnographic museums today are contested and face problems of what to do with their collections. Repatriation is sometimes a solution, but not always. At present, the only way forward is to do in-depth research on the histories of the museums, the histories of the different collections in each museum, and of course on the collectors themselves. ✕

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# The case of Chief G'psgolox's totem pole

"Rescuing", keeping, and returning

by **Anders Björklund**

## "Rescuing"

In the year 1872, Chief G'psgolox from the Kitlope Eagle clan of the Xenaaksiala/Haisla people (in Kitlope Valley, British Columbia, Canada) decided to have a totem pole carved and erected. In 1928 the pole was cut down on behalf of a Swedish consul to be shipped to Stockholm the following year.<sup>1</sup>

This was far from a single incident, as is well known. It has been estimated that some 125,000 objects from indigenous people in British Columbia were captured in a frantic collecting of "Indian curiosities". The operations were run by dealers of all kinds and orchestrated by both private collectors and museums around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Totem poles represented "big game" and were acquired by the great museums of Canada and the US. A few were even brought to important European museums like the British Museum in London and Museum für Volkskunde in Berlin. Here, the poles were transformed into impressive pagan icons that evoked both surprise and fear (which was exploited in European popular culture at the time).

The acquisition of Chief G'psgolox's pole placed the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm on par with these far more famous institutions, and the museum hereby became an institution of national pride, as emphasized by the high-ranking dignitaries who visited the totem pole inauguration ceremony in 1929.

Recently, new research has broadened the understanding of what was actually going on when the pole left the "Indian reserve" in 1928. The Swedish General Consul in Montréal had in contacts with the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences discussed the possibilities of acquiring a totem pole for Sweden. A query was sent to the Swedish Consul in British Columbia at the time, Olof Hanson (1882–1952), asking if it would be possible to find a suitable totem pole. Hanson had become a successful businessman in Canada after his emigration from the small mountain village of Tännäs in the county of Härjedalen where conflicts between nomadic Sami people and farmers were frequent.<sup>3</sup> From his early years he had therefore met problems connected to ethnic groups and their cultural heritage, and he may have been influenced by the idea of "the vanishing race" – the belief that indigenous people were destined to die out following contact with western culture. At the same time – within this evolutionary paradigm – it was considered important by ethnographic expertise to "rescue" some of the material culture in order to be able to visualize "early stages" of human civilization.

It was the Norwegian emigrant Iver Fougner (1870–1947) who (with unnamed helpers) actually chopped down the pole. Fougner was employed as an Indian agent and was thus a contact person between the authorities and indigenous peoples in the vast district. In the 1920s, the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa had started to take action to prevent the export of Indian objects – among them the expressive totem poles, which were thought to stimulate a small but emerging tourist industry. This may explain why the Scandinavians decided to go for the G'psgolox totem pole – it stood in the isolated Kitlope Valley, seldom visited by strangers. So, when Fougner sent a photo of this totem pole to the Canadian authorities to seek export permission, he wrote: "The reserve is uninhabited and very isolated. The chances are that the pole if not removed, after some time will fall down and be destroyed."<sup>4</sup> And he got his permission.



Chief G'psgolox's totem pole standing in Kitlope Valley. Indian agent Iver Fougner came across the pole, took a snapshot, and filed a report to The Department of Indian Affairs in 1927 together with the photo.

PHOTO: IVER FOUGNER/MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY



## Keeping

It is not surprising that the director of the ethnographic collections in Stockholm was proud when he presented the pole for interested and impressed museum visitors. Based on the accompanying documentation, the object was declared to be a “Ceremonial pole,” a monument that celebrated Chief G’psgolox’s encounter with a spiritual being. However, the museum building was old and had to be shut down and the pole was also in bad shape. It was soon taken down and put in storage.

After resting for fifty years in an old stable, the pole was sent to wood conservators at the Vasa Museum where it was investigated by specialists, cleaned, x-rayed, and sprayed with chemicals to prevent rot, mold, and insects. Finally, a substance was applied as a foundation on the rugged old wooden surface of the pole, which gave it a smooth and antique brownish color. After this thorough makeover (and makeup), it was transported to the brand new National Museum of Ethnography that opened to the public in 1980. Here, the roof of the second floor had – with considerable expense – been made ten meters high in order to accommodate the tall pole. Once again, the totem pole was visited by ministers and ambassadors and celebrated as an object of great value for museum visitors of all ages as well as for museum professionals and researchers.

The new museum was deeply involved in the ongoing work on professional guidelines, presented through the International Council of Museums (ICOM).<sup>5</sup> Here, discussions in favor or against repatriation were often on the agenda. The then-director at the Museum of Ethnography Karl-Erik Larsson was an eloquent advocate for a liberal view of this subject already in the 1970s. This was mirrored also among the museum staff. For example, a senior museum teacher wrote in 1992: “It would by no means be a pedagogical loss if the old pole would be replaced by a new one. On the contrary, it should be an advantage for us to be able to stress that the art and traditions of the Northwest Indians have survived and developed. And on top of that we will get a possibility to tell about a repatriation case.”<sup>6</sup>

The G’psgolox totem pole was chopped down and shipped to Stockholm, where it was erected outdoors in the museum yard immediately after its arrival in the spring of 1929. The media was enthusiastic, and museum visitors stood in line for weeks to get a glimpse of the exotic object.

PHOTO: MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY



PHOTO: TONY SANDIN, MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY

A new building for the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm opened to the public in 1980. The roof of the second floor was built ten meters high to house the tall pole, which – after half a century of storage – was presented to Swedish museums visitors.



PHOTO: TONY SANDIN, MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY

In March 2006 the replica of Chief G'psgolox's totem pole was erected outside the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm. The Swedish Minister of Culture Leif Pagrotsky, Haisla chiefs, and the former NHL captain Börje Salming attended the ceremony together with hundreds of museum visitors.



PHOTO: TONY SANDIN, MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY

After the decision to make a replica totem pole for the Swedish museum, four carvers arrived in Stockholm in 2000: Henry Robertson (center), his nephews Barry Wilson (left) and Derek Wilson (right), and his granddaughter Patricia Robertson. They all belonged to the Raven clan (as did the old pole's original carvers in the 1870s, hired by Chief G'psgolox of the Eagle clan).

## Returning

The process of restitution of the pole started when the museum received enquiries from Canadian museums, beginning already in 1989. Two years later, a delegation from the Haisla and Kitlope people visited the museum and demanded that the “stolen” pole be returned to them. In 1994 and after an intense debate, this was agreed to by the Swedish Government. No receipt could be found proving that the pole had once been bought. Moreover, the value of the totem pole as heritage was judged decisively greater for the Haislas compared to average Swedes. But even though two replica poles were carved (financed by Swedish and Canadian funds and a local sawmill who donated the cedar logs) by the Haisla – one raised in the location where the old pole once stood, and the other one presented to the Swedish museum – the actual restitution of the old pole was postponed because the Swedish Government wanted to be assured that once in Canada it would be preserved for the future. At last, in 2006, the G'psgolox totem pole began its journey back on board a ship, sponsored by a Swedish transport company.

According to mutual agreements that led to the decision to the repatriation of the pole, it should be preserved by the Haisla people as a unique item of cultural heritage. And that seemed to work well when the pole – as no suitable museum facilities were available – was placed on display indoors at a shopping mall close to the Haisla's village. Here, it was surrounded by school children who listened to the elders telling the history of the pole, the Eagle clan, and the Haisla and Kitlope people.

In 2012, however, the highest-ranking chief in the still existing Kitlope Eagle clan – all descendants from Chief G'psgolox of the 1870s – decided that it was time to let the old pole rest. It was transported to an old graveyard up in the Kitlope Valley, where it was left to disintegrate.

## Epilogue

It should, of course, always be important to undertake thorough research before taking action in acquiring or restoring objects for or from museum collections. Many agents with different agendas can be found in these different discourses. With some luck, historical documentation might uncover facts that shed new light even on acquisitions made a long time ago – as in the case of the G'psgolox totem pole.

After a second look into the archives (some ten years after the repatriation), it became evident that the Indian agent Iver Fougner had in fact been a dealer with artifacts and that he visited deserted villages and graves in search of antiquities. Based on newly found photographic documentation, one can also question if Fougner really told the whole truth when he described the reserve as uninhabited and the pole as deserted. Fougner reported in 1927 that he had been at the spot “some years ago.” The land surveyor Frank Cyril Swannell – traveling in the area in June 1921 – took a series of photos (now at the Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria) with captions that instead tell us about a camp with a mortuary pole.<sup>7</sup> Tents and sheds surrounded the pole, and there were boats on the shore. Evidently, if visited at the right time, this was not a deserted place but



PHOTO: TONY SANDIN, MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY



PHOTO: TONY SANDIN, MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY



(Left) In 2012 the G'psgolox totem pole was left to lie at an old graveyard in Kitlope Valley. The wood is quickly decomposing despite earlier conservation efforts, and a bear has gnawed on one of the carved figures (according to archival notes from 1928 representing "a grizzly bear in the water").

(Right) The copy of Chief G'psgolox's totem pole in front of the Museum of Ethnography. The fascinating story of the repatriation is presented at the stand nearby.

rather a campground where the nomadic Kitlope people used to stay during the fishing and hunting seasons.

A closer look at the Indian agent's own photo of the G'psgolox totem pole also calls for new interpretations. There are remains of a fence on both sides of the pole, which – according to contemporary and later voices – was standing guard in front of an old grave yard. The pole was facing the Kitlope River, and it was visible to everyone who approached the river bend, safeguarding the area. The G'psgolox totem pole was hardly a "Ceremonial pole" as the Swedes were led to believe in 1929, but rather a "Mortuary pole" or a "Sentinel pole."

**NOWADAYS, AS THE OLD** pole is gradually decomposing in the woods, there are certainly questions raised among both museum visitors and professionals about the rationality of this case of repatriation. But the archival findings and the new interpretation make it easier to justify the process. If the pole was equivalent to a grave monument for a clan that is still in existence, should it not be up to them to decide if the pole should be saved for the future ("the white man's way"<sup>8</sup>) or be given back to Mother Nature (the Haisla and Kitlope people's way)?

The Swedish museum was at the time unaware of the documents (and conclusions) mentioned above, and it reached the decision to work for a repatriation of the pole based on values that had become shared by many museums with ethnographic collections and in dialogue with indigenous people.<sup>9</sup> The museum tried every option to preserve all objects in its possession, but at the same time wanted to have safe collections without connections to old wrongdoings. Moreover, this was a meeting between a totem pole soaked with holiness and a secular museum system not able to fully comprehend its spiritual

load.<sup>10</sup> And, consequently, no one could foresee that the pole would be carried out to the woods to rot.

When the Swedish government in 1994 had decided to return the totem pole, it was given "as a gift" to underline that this was a unique and one-time occasion and would not act as a precedent. As mentioned above, it was also stated as a condition that the pole should be safeguarded for the future. Among the Haisla – where potlatch traditions were still in good memory<sup>11</sup> – this was considered extremely impudent. One spokesman said, "They wanted to 'gift it' back to us, and that almost tipped (things) /.../ I mean, how do you make a gift of something that was stolen?" And another: "We continued to negotiate and let the museum know that when we give a gift there is no attachment."<sup>12</sup> With such statements as background, an overview of the exchange of

**"THIS WAS A MEETING  
BETWEEN A TOTEM  
POLE SOAKED WITH  
HOLINESS AND A  
SECULAR MUSEUM  
SYSTEM NOT ABLE TO  
FULLY COMPREHEND  
ITS SPIRITUAL LOAD."**

gifts that took place certainly proves that the Haisla – in spite of their anger – were mostly successful. The repatriation from Sweden of what they considered to be a stolen pole could hardly be classified as a real gift, while the replica pole sent to Sweden certainly was a gift of high value. In this perspective, sending the old pole back to Mother Nature (and thereby finally bringing it out of circulation, but with its spiritual power intact) might be described as the final blow.

Nonetheless, the repatriation of the totem pole became a sort of win-win situation from which there is a lot to learn. By allowing the destruction of the original pole following its return to the Kitlope Valley, the focus upon material culture among Western museums was certainly challenged and made visible by the Haislas, who rather emphasize intangible heritage such as dances, rituals, and oral traditions. It is even questionable if a totem pole with its sculptured spirits can be "owned" at all by any human being as it mediates between

man and nature: “Our culture is, when it falls, let it go. Mother Earth will cover it. And when that thing is no longer there, a new one will come.” “For we do not own the land, so much as the land owns us.”<sup>13</sup>

The final outcome of the totem pole exchange also added new fuel to the old museological debate on authenticity. What is the value of the old pole compared to the copy? One answer is that the old pole certainly was authentic for the Haisla and Kitlope people, impregnated as it was with meaning and historical references. But the replica pole that was gifted by the Haisla and today stands in front of the Museum of Ethnography is authentic for the Swedes, telling a comprehensive story loaded with connotations for cultural historians, researchers in museology, and the visiting public.

Finally, can this case of close to a hundred years of “rescuing, keeping, and returning” in any way be described as successful? My answer is yes, with a reservation. The long-lasting negotiations between the Haisla and the museum resulted in new friends, contacts, and exchanges of ideas. Sometimes misunderstandings based on cultural values colored the discussions, but it was ultimately a valuable educational process. Also, if counting totem poles the outcome is acceptable, with old and new totem poles – in varying conditions, to be sure – on both continents. Therefore, looking into the acquisition project as well as the restitution process, we will come to one and the same conclusion – there are absolutely some positive results from this long, costly, and complex story, but really, Chief G’psglox’s old totem pole should never have left the Kitlope Valley in the first place. ✖

Anders Björklund is a former professor of ethnology and director of the Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm.

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- 9 A critical discussion on these subjects is found, for example, in Tiffany Jenkins, *Keeping their Marbles. How the Treasures of the Past Ended Up in Museums... and Why They Should Stay There* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- 10 I want to thank professor Irina Sandomirskaja at Södertörn University for this line of thought. Discussing the logic of religious cults, she draws attention to a possible parallel – the sacred meanings and history of icons in the Orthodox Church compared to a secular market with other scales of measuring value. Thanks also to assistant professor Carl Marklund for important remarks in finalizing this paper.
- 11 Potlatches were ceremonial feasts practiced by indigenous people of the Northwest Coast of Canada. Property as well as social status were distributed in these ceremonial feasts, sometimes including property being destroyed by its owner in a show of wealth. A classic ethnographic study of the potlatch tradition is Franz Boas, *The Social Organisation and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians* (Washington 1895).
- 12 Both quotations are from Anders Björklund, *Hövdingens totempåle – om konsten att utbyta gåvor* (Stockholm 2016), 129.
- 13 First quotation from Haisla Chief Cecil Paul 2014, in Anders Björklund, *Hövdingens totempåle – om konsten att utbyta gåvor* (Stockholm 2016), 176, second quotation from “The Haislanuyum – a Haisla protocol” (Kitlope-declaration, [www.fngorvernance.org](http://www.fngorvernance.org)). There are several examples where museums restituted objects knowing that they would be destroyed upon arrival. The Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm repatriated a cranium from the collections to be burnt at the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre in Hobart. The Denver Museum of Nature and Science returned “viangos” (memory poles) to Kenya to be decomposed outdoors. First Nations in Calgary demanded in 1998 archival material to be destroyed because it should never have been materialized or made available for everyone. For a discussion, see for example Miriam Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued: Analysis of Museum Conservation and First Nations Perspectives* (Leicester: University of Leicester, 1997).



# CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE FORMER EASTERN BLOC

by **Maria Brock**

The Wende Museum of the Cold War in Los Angeles

**C**an a museum located thousands of kilometers away from East Germany or the former Eastern Bloc provide a nuanced representation of life under socialism? This was at the forefront of my mind as I paid a visit to the Wende Museum of the Cold War in Culver City, Los Angeles, in April 2018. Having visited and written about a number of museums of GDR “everyday history” or Alltagsgeschichte, all of which are based in East Germany, I was curious to learn more about how this museum seeks to contribute to an understanding of the GDR- and the Cold War history.

The Wende Museum was officially inaugurated in 2002, but its history dates back to the 1990s, when founder Justin Jampol, a US academic working towards a PhD in modern European history, lived in Germany and became concerned with “the wholesale neglect and rampant destruction of Cold War material culture in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989” (from the Museum’s website). The Museum’s collection originated with items acquired by Jampol in the mid-1990s, expanding in 2000 with a significant donation by activist Al-

win Nachtweh and his partner Ulrike Wolf. In 2004, the Wende received a grant of \$1.4 million from the Arcadia Fund, established by Peter Baldwin and Lisbet Rausing, which has since contributed more than \$10 million and become the Museum’s largest funder. Additional funding for the museum comes from individual, corporate, and foundation gifts, plus government grants and other sources. In 2006, the Museum expanded its collecting mission to include documenting personal histories from the era. The “orphaned objects” in the collection, as Jampol refers to them, include Eastern Bloc art and artifacts, such as textiles, photographs and home movies, furniture, restaurant menus, mixed tapes, paintings, and sculptures. In terms of the collection’s composition, around 50% of the objects are from the former GDR, 25% from former countries of the Soviet

**“CURRENTLY, ONLY A SMALL PART OF THE OVER 100,000 ARTIFACTS IS ON DISPLAY.”**

Union, and 25% originate from other East Bloc countries, predominantly Hungary and Romania. Currently, only a small part of the over 100,000 artifacts is on display. However, the full collection is accessible to scholars and other interested parties by appointment.

The Museum’s site has recently undergone a major change. In 2017, it moved to the Armory building in Culver City, a former atomic bomb shelter built in 1949 in anticipation of a World War III Soviet air strike and formerly occupied by the National Guard before standing empty for many years. It was in this hangar-like structure with its surrounding garden, which will house a piece of the Berlin Wall once completed, that I met up with the Wende Museum’s chief curator Joes Segal, who took me on a tour of the current exhibition, introduced me to the Museum’s founder, and answered my questions patiently. As alluded to earlier, I was struck by the Museum’s implicit as well as explicit idea that there is value in looking at historical processes not only from a temporal, but also a geographical distance. I was therefore particularly interested in how the Museum differs in both scope and ambition from the many museums of





Exhibition on 'Cold War Spaces'. Interior showing the aesthetics of the period.



Surveillance equipment from East Germany and the Soviet Union.

GDR history with large collections of GDR artifacts located in present parts of former East Germany. Additionally, I wondered whether its focus on Cold War history – an angle not eschewed to the same degree by East Germany-based museums – would lend itself to certain, perhaps simplified readings of life under socialism, especially in the current geopolitical climate.

**HOWEVER, DURING** our tour of the exhibition I understood that my reservations were mostly unfounded. The current exposition on “Cold War Spaces” (to close at the end of April) takes a spatial perspective of the Eastern Bloc, dividing it not only into expected sections such as the separation between private and public space, but also “alternative” spaces, “shared” and “changing” spaces. Everyday and consumer objects – the focus of so many of the GDR museums located in East Germany – do appear in the exhibition, but the domestic here becomes merely one among many overlapping spheres. And while political repressions and persecutions are acknowledged and referred to, this is not done in order to showcase the triumph of the ‘democratic’ West over the East. Indeed, the highlighting of multiple facets of life under socialism is in many ways representative of the museum’s eclectic approach. Usually, two exhibitions run concurrently. The second exhibition – called ‘The Russians’ – shows photographs of ‘ordinary’ Soviet citizens, many of them humorous, taken by American photographer Nathan Farb

on a cultural exchange trip to Novosibirsk in 1977. Joes Segal explains that “the Cold War is the starting point, not the angle. The angle is whatever presents itself. I am actually more interested in how it is used, and how it is made operational, both in social and political terms, than in what it is in and of itself.” He appears to relish the challenge of confounding expectations and of disrupting dominant narratives. As he put it “There are many people who come here with a certain expectation and get confused, which I very much like.”

Joes Segal is a former Professor of Cultural History at Utrecht University with a special research focus on German art history. He met Justin Jampol while guest teaching a UCLA, and after a stint as guest curator, he accepted the invitation to become the Wende Museum’s chief curator in September 2014. His background and interests mean that a focus on visibility and artistic representation are core elements of current and future exhibitions. The museum showcases art from the for-

**“THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO COME HERE WITH A CERTAIN EXPECTATION AND GET CONFUSED, WHICH I VERY MUCH LIKE.”**

mer Eastern Bloc that operates both within and far outside the tenets of Socialist Realism and juxtaposes it with contemporary art. It actively invites conversations and collaborations with contemporary artists, and it commissions pieces on occasion. Currently, the museum features such a commissioned piece: a video installation, “Vessel of Change”, by artist Bill Ferehawk and multimedia designer David Hartwell, which addresses the end of the Cold War in a comedic reinterpretation of the 1989 Malta Summit with surreal computer-generated renderings of George H.W. Bush and M. Gorbachev.

While saving artifacts from destruction was one of its original missions, the museum is trying to be future-oriented as much as it looks to the past – its official motto is “Preserving the Past – Informing the Present”. The aim, according to Segal, is not to insist on the parallels between the Cold War and current politics, but to utilize any apparent similarities in order to question “how history gets interpreted, what stories are based on the materials we have, and [...] to show them in a way that makes them relevant for now. So they should inspire discussions.” This openness is in fact manifest in the museum’s space and structure, which is light-filled and accessible, offering additional room for performances and concerts. An emphasis on transparency means that visitors can see how and where some of the permanent collection is stored. The museum is also kept open during exhibition changes, giving insight into how curato-



PHOTO: WENDE MUSEUM

Pieces of the Berlin Wall and boarder guard training materials in the background.



PHOTO: MARIA BROCK

Video installation 'Vessel of Change', with chief curator Joes Segal and author in central panels.

rial decisions are made, presenting history as a construct and allowing museum guests to witness its construction. In Segal's words: "I want to be a bit experimental and adventurous in connecting past and present, but also very transparent."

Another theme that emerged in both our conversation and the way the exhibition is framed is that of ambiguity. Information plaques next to exhibits are kept relatively laconic – an intentional move, as Segal explained, because "things have their own power". The ambiguity of meanings that is inherent in the objects and by extension also present in museums of material culture mandates leaving room to interpretation, to let the visitor engage with the artifacts on multiple levels. "This is one of the fascinating aspects of Material Culture: it seems so objective, but as soon as people start to remember and interpret it, it gets very messy sometimes". This complexity is meant to keep guests engaged, rather than overwhelm them. Of course, artifacts on display are embedded not only in the context of the exhibition, but also the larger context of the museum's location and prevalent historical discourses. The Museum's website informs visitors that its "location in Los Angeles provides independence and critical distance from current political debates in Europe, and also facilitates the questioning of preconceived ideas about our past and present", seemingly implying that preconceived notions about the past do not circulate in the United States. Joes Segal explains that "as a curator, I try

to create something that does not allow for any of those simplistic approaches" – whether coming from those who see themselves as winners of the Cold War, or those who approach 'real existing socialism' with nostalgic projections. The Museum's new location already performs a kind of reinscription by showcasing Eastern Bloc objects and art in a space that was meant to serve as protection from a potential attack by the Soviet Union.

**IN GERMANY,** GDR museums have a tendency to fit into existing discourses of its history, and thus reiterate notions of the GDR as either an *Unrechtsstaat* or a state with a systematic absence of the rule of law, or as a lost home that inspires nostalgia or "Ostalgie". The former type tends to be seen as explicitly political and with a clear educational mandate, while the latter is more object-centric, aiming to reproduce emotion over reflection. While the reality of museum culture in Germany is of course more complicated, the Wende Museum to a degree escapes such categorizations merely by being at a large geographical distance. This distance has also benefited the Museum in perhaps unexpected ways. Some donations, such as a collection of border guard materials from Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, or the personal archives of Erich Honecker, were specifically given to the Museum because donors did not want the objects to end up in a German institution, expecting the museum in Los Angeles to be more relaxed and at the same time objective in its

handling and display of the artifacts.

When asked about future plans for the Museum, Joes Segal listed a whole series of exhibitions and collaborations. To mention just a few, upcoming exhibitions will focus on art and culture in Socialist Hungary, the role of ballet in the cultural Cold War, and Soviet hippie culture. These, like events such as future exhibitions on "The War of Nerves: Psychological Landscape of the Cold War" and "The Television Revolution beyond the Iron Curtain" are co-curated with academics and researchers, utilizing items from the existing collection along with specially purchased or borrowed artifacts. Finally, thanks to a special grant for its "Historical Witness Project", museum visitors along with select individuals will be interviewed about their formative Cold War experiences, further developing the Museum's interest in subjectivity and subjective experience. Clearly, a key aim for the Museum is to showcase the diversity and complexity of cultures and lives in the former Eastern Bloc because, in the words of Joes Segal: "The way to energize people is not by telling them a story and saying 'this is how it was' but by asking questions and showing the complexity of those questions." ❌

Maria Brock is a postdoctoral researcher at CBEES, Södertörn University.

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- 1 "Wende" is the German word for "transformation" and pertains to the changes leading up to, and following, the end of the German Democratic Republic.



XXIII conference "Art Nouveau in Russia: Before Changes", The Catherine Palace, Tsarskoe Selo.



M. N. Gavrilova, from the State Hermitage.



The Pavilion Hall of the Small Hermitage.

# WHAT IF THE BOLSHEVIK COUP HAD NEVER INTERRUPTED...

Nostalgia and stories of loss

by **Anna Kharkina**

**N**ovember 2017 in St. Petersburg was a month of intensive museum conference life, bringing together not only local specialists, but also those from outside the major cities in Russia. According to one of my Russian colleagues, events such as the regular state-supported *St. Petersburg International Cultural Forum* are highly valued by cultural workers from smaller cities. They give them a chance to become updated and establish networks with St. Petersburg and Moscow cultural institutions and independent actors, which often results in different types of collaborations. For example, artists and curators from St. Petersburg and Moscow are being invited to make presentations in Ekaterinburg, Tumen, Perm, Vladivostok, and other Russian cities with cultural ambitions.

Due to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, the cultural events in 2017 were either directly related to the theme of revolution (like the conference "Museum and Revolution", organized by the State Hermitage in the framework of the *St. Petersburg International Cultural Forum*), or touched upon it, with the conscious choice not to talk about revolution

as such but to concentrate on life in Russia before it, aiming to reflect upon what the country could have been if the revolution had never happened.

The question "what if...?" was often addressed by the conference presenters. What if the Bolshevik coup had never interrupted the country's evolutionary development? What if Russia had never entered World War I? How would Russian economics, everyday life, politics, and culture have developed between 1917 and 2017? What kind of society would Russia be nowadays? There was an obvious temptation to think about other opportunities rather than what became a reality. Paradoxically, the analysis of the meaning of the revolution and its consequences for Russian society was not often in focus during the cultural events dedicated to the revolution. The general mood of those events was rather nostalgic. The name of Nicholas II was pronounced much more often than Lenin's name. The presence of the images of the tsar's family was stronger than that of the revolutionary leaders and inspired the visuality of several major exhibitions such as "Tsarskoe Selo. On the Eve of 1917" in the Tsarskoe Selo State

**Conference "Museum and Revolution"**, The Hermitage, November 15–16, 2017 (in the framework of VI St. Petersburg International Cultural Forum)

**XXIII conference "Art Nouveau in Russia: Before Changes"** at the Tsarskoe Selo State Museum and Heritage Site, Pushkin, November 27–29, 2017.

Museum and Heritage Site or "Winter Palace and the Hermitage. 1917. History was created here" in the Hermitage.

**THE HERMITAGE CONFERENCE "Museum and Revolution"** focused on collectors and collections. The question of private property and the contribution of independent actors to the origin of state cultural institutions attracts many researchers nowadays. After 100 years of oblivion, there is a will and interest in contemporary Russian society to make known the names of those cultural enthusiasts who stood behind the established cultural institutions. Just to give some examples of presentations from the conference



that underlined the role of the private collector: N.V. Buianova from The State Tretyakov Gallery talked about the donation of the Tretyakov collection to the city of Moscow; L. V. Liakhova from the State Hermitage mentioned the Meissen porcelain collection in the Hermitage, which belonged to Prince Dolgorukov; and N. V. Il'ina highlighted the role of the merchant P. M. Dogadin's private collection for the establishment of one of the most significant art museums in the Volga region – The Astrakhan State Art Gallery.

The conference told the stories of loss – for example, the loss of the interiors of the Marble Palace (N.V. Kazanina, The State Russian Museum). There were stories of return, such as the history of the Museum of Don Cossacks in Novochoerkassk – where part of the collection that was taken out of Russia in 1920 was preserved in the National Museum in Prague and returned to Novochoerkassk in 1946 (S. P. Chibisova, Museum of Don Cossacks). There were also stories of resurrection, such as the reconstruction of the Menshikov Palace, which started in 1966 and led to the opening of the palace as a museum (O.S. Andreeva, the State Hermitage).

Some private museums, opened before the revolution by enthusiasts, were closed, like the Museum of Old Petersburg, the precious child of The Society of Architects-Artists. Its collection was partly absorbed into the State Museum of Leningrad History while the rest was dissolved. Nevertheless, the new government continued to express creativity in the process of opening new museums such as The State Museum of Palekh Art (opened in 1935), the Kusokovo manor house (which received the status of a museum in 1918), the Ekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts (the former Sverdlov Art Gallery, opened in 1936), and the Russian Museum of Ethnography (which was planned before the revolution, but was opened only in 1923). Some older museums like the Military Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineers and Signal Corps (St. Petersburg) were re-conceptualized and continued functioning.

It is interesting to notice that there was an intention to give a voice not only to collectors, whose role was downplayed in the Soviet era, but also to ordinary people

who had a connection to museums. For example, N. I. Tarasova from the State Hermitage spoke about the destiny of court servants from the Winter Palace (the museum possesses the collection of their uniforms).

Another museum conference, “Art Nouveau in Russia: Before the Changes” at the Tsarskoe Selo State Museum and Heritage Site united design and architecture historians mostly from St. Petersburg and Moscow as well as included international guests (Agrita Tipane from the Riga Art Nouveau Center and Silvija Ozola from Riga Technical University).

**THE GENERAL THEME** of this conference was, as its title says, Russian Art Nouveau, the style fashionable during the last decade of the Russian Empire. The conference was divided into two parts – on architecture and applied arts. The presentation that attracted the most attention and led to the subsequent discussion was by B. M. Kirikov: “The Content and Borders of St. Petersburg Art Nouveau. The Identification of the Architectural Heritage of the New Style”. Kirikov represents the Research Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture and City Planning, St. Petersburg. He introduced his ideas on how to identify Art Nouveau building and presented a list of those buildings in St. Petersburg which can be considered as built in the Art Nouveau style. The problem with identification lies in the eclecticism of the architectural style of that time, as was demonstrated using the example of Buddhist Datsan Gunzechoinei (presentation by V.A. Chernenko) and Suvorov Museum (presented by V. G. Gronskaia). In the logic of eclecticism, purity of style was not con-

sidered to be an obvious asset, and architects who generally worked in other styles could use elements of Art Nouveau to give their buildings a contemporary look.

Neither of the conferences in The Hermitage and the Tsarskoe Selo State Museum and Heritage Site tried to produce generalized conclusions. On the contrary, there was an expressed tendency to focus on details, or to bring new material into light, material that was previously considered uninteresting and lay neglected in the shadows of research. One example was the presentation by A.A. Shakhmatova from the Scientific-Research Museum of the Russian Academy of Arts, St. Petersburg, in which she spoke about architectural courses for women, organized by E.F. Bagaeva (opened in 1906), which made it possible for women to enter the architectural profession in Russia.

The conference in Pushkin also paid special attention to the history of “forgotten” buildings as well as stories of people related to those buildings, for example, the premises of the Community of Red Cross Sisters in Tsarskoe Selo. Its story is closely linked to the charity activity of high society women, the Empress of Russia Alexandra Feodorovna, her daughters Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna and Tatiana Nikolaevna, Princess S.S. Putiatina, and Baronessa E.A. Wrangel (E.S. Epurina, the Tsarskoe Selo State Museum and Heritage Site). This revealed that although *gender* was not a concept utilized during the conferences, the gender perspective was used anyway to analyze the material that was presented.

These conferences demonstrated that currently in the Russian research community there is a profound interest in the social and cultural history of Russia as well as a desire to search for information that was previously neglected by researchers. The work of different researchers has helped to assemble bits and pieces of material and create a multidimensional picture of the time around the revolution. After almost a century of studies controlled by the Soviet ideological narrative, there is still a lot of work to be done. ✕

Anna Kharkina holds a PhD in history and philosophy at Södertörn University.

**“THE PRESENCE  
OF THE IMAGES OF  
THE TSAR’S FAMILY  
WAS STRONGER  
THAN THAT OF THE  
REVOLUTIONARY  
LEADERS.”**

## IIASA. How to model capitalist and communist futures?

**Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of the Systems. How Policy Sciences Opened Up the Cold War World***

Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2016, 292 pages, illustrations, index.

**E**glė Rindzevičiūtė's book *The Power of the Systems. How Policy Sciences Opened Up the Cold War World* (Cornell University Press, 2016) is a study of historical sociology about the International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and its work as an East-West bridge builder during the Cold War era. IIASA, the international think tank located in Vienna, was established in 1972 after long international negotiations' (Chapter 2) but is better known as a joint endeavor of two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The main aim of IIASA was to advance scientific collaboration in the field of systems analysis and to solve global problems.

IIASA is an interesting research topic because it was truly an international endeavor. In Laxenburg Castle near Vienna, scientists from both sides of the Iron Curtain were able to work together. Eglė Rindzevičiūtė approaches IIASA as a zone of freedom that was a permanent platform for policy scientists to work together and solve problems on a global scale. The author focuses especially on the Soviet story that has so far been very little studied. She draws on an extremely wide range of sources consisting of archival material, literature, memoirs, and interviews from both East and West. Based on these materials, the author shows that Soviet scientists working in IIASA were able to develop and try out their innovative ideas and to gain access to the Western literature. The Soviet specialists were able to create networks with their western counterparts that were beneficial not only from the science and policy development point of view, but also for their personal development. They were part of the "IIASA family", gaining several benefits (Chapter 4).

Taking into account what an interesting entity IIASA was during the Cold War, it is surprisingly little studied. The author shows that IIASA was a good example of the meso/intermediate and micro-level activity that took place below the macro structure of the Cold War division. The establishment and the actual work on "the East-West institute" was based on the work and ambition of individual actors. The major Soviet actor in the IIASA context was Zhernenkov Gvishiani,<sup>2</sup> vice chairman of the State Committee for Science and Technology in the Soviet Union. His activity and interest in collaborating with



PHOTO: GRAYFINDOR/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The IIASA castle in Laxenburg, Austria.

the West was fruitful not only for the Soviet partners, but also for the IIASA community. As the author brings to the fore, at IIASA the Cold War conflict was toned down as much as possible, but the division was still there. The fear of high technology transfers to the Soviet bloc through IIASA was minimized by using old computer technology and monitoring specialists' interactions. However, at the same time secret Eastern data was used in IIASA projects alongside Western data.

**EGLĖ RINDZEVIČIŪTĖ** highlights the role of the IIASA in the transformation and opening of Soviet governance to East-West cooperation. The main forums for the processes were the computer-based global modeling projects conducted at IIASA during the 1980s. One of IIASA's main aims was to prove its relevance to its member states and to influence policy making. IIASA was established just after the publication of the report *The Limits of Growth* commissioned by the Club of Rome. This controversial analysis of the global future set IIASA in the middle of debate over the problems of global modeling. The researchers at IIASA took up the challenge and started to construct their own approach to the modeling. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was believed that global modeling and systems analysis would help to understand and control the complex and fast-changing world. The author gives as an example two projects, both modeling global environmental change. The report of "nuclear winter" "in 1982 proved to be a "perfect global disaster" (p. 151). It was important for the global defense discourse but proved to be less important for direct policy making. The Acid Rain model (RAINS) created by IIASA in 1984 proved to be influential for global policy making, but also in Soviet environmental thinking.

*The Power of the Systems* focuses on the work of IIASA as an East-West think tank and East-West builder of horizontal alli-

ances beyond the systemic divide. It is an important contribution to the complex and multilayered process of *real* East-West interaction during the Cold War. The author challenges the traditional view of Cold War transfers as the unidirectional traffic of knowledge from the West to the East. In the IIASA it was a question of East-West coproduction, where both East and West were equally active and important actors. This, however, is only one conclusion to emerge from the book. In addition, *The Power of the Systems* studies system-cybernetic governmentality through the case study of IIASA. The author outlines “the transnational career of systems analysis as a science of governance as it was coproduced by liberal democratic and authoritarian regimes” (p. 204). The East-West collaboration in the field of computer modeling, cybernetics, and systems approach challenged the Soviet control-based governance. The Soviet Union had to create the objects and techniques of government. Through computer modeling, the Soviet Union (and the Soviet bloc) was able to create future scenarios. An interesting example of this is the subchapter “Modeling Soviet decline” and the example of non-growth communism which actually proved to be a very realistic scenario.

Eglė Rindzevičiūtė’s book *The Power of the Systems* is an important contribution to the theme of science and power and the a/politics of science. As a thoroughly reasoned scholarly contribution, the book has so many references to different themes that for the reader it is challenging to follow all the layers of argumentation. The good point is that the book is so well-written that this is rather a positive aspect. ✖

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Research associate at the Harriman Institute of Columbia University. Visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University. Has published more than 200 refereed articles and books.

### Anna Kharkina



PhD in history and philosophy. Research project “Transnational Art and Heritage Transfer and the Formation of Value: Objects, Agents, and Institutions” at Södertörn University.

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### Magnus Ljunggren



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### Irina Sandomirskaja



Professor of cultural studies at CBEES specializing in Russian and Soviet cultural history. Head of the research project “Transnational Art and Heritage Transfer and the Formation of Value: Objects, Agents, and Institutions” funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation.

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Journalist and former reporter at the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Company and at various socio-cultural magazines in Romania.

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PhD candidate at the Department of Philosophy and Social Critique, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania. Focus on contemporary political philosophy with an emphasis on micropolitics and minor spaces.

### Mechella Yezernitskaya



PhD candidate in history of art at Bryn Mawr College, US. Studies early 20<sup>th</sup>-century European modernism with a focus on the Russian and Soviet avant-gardes.



## Baltic Sea Region. Life in the archipelago

**B**altic Worlds will publish in 2019 a Special Section on the economic conditions for the inhabitants of the Baltic Sea Region, edited by Associated professor Paulina Rytönen (Södertörn University) and PhD Nadir Kinossian (Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography).

Over the last decades, concerns about the special challenges faced by inhabitants and business owners in the Baltic Sea Region have accelerated as reports about depopulation, ageing population, increasing socio-economic gap between coastal rural areas and urban areas, and not the least, pollution of the marine environment in the Baltic Sea continue to raise the interest of the public and authorities at the regional, national, and European level.

In previous studies contextual, spatial, geographic, institutional, political, technological, environmental, and social pre-conditions for social cohesion, economic development, and solutions to environmental challenges in rural and less favored areas have been highlighted. However, our understanding about the special conditions of coastal areas, archipelagos, and islands, especially in the Baltic Sea Region, is still scarce. We therefore openly invite articles from scholars, addressing social, technological, spatial, geographic, economic, and environmental challenges and opportunities for living, working, and conducting business in coastal

### call for papers

**Baltic Worlds' Special Section on Economic conditions for inhabitants in the Baltic Sea Region: Challenges and opportunities for livelihoods and businesses in coastal areas, archipelagos, and islands in the Baltic Sea Region.**

#### Deadlines:

Submission of abstracts: June 15, 2018

Note of acceptance of abstract: June 21, 2018

Submission of full manuscripts: October 1, 2018

Final revised manuscripts: February 1, 2019

Special issue release: April 2019.

You are welcome to submit abstracts by June 15, 2018 as an attachment to paulina.rytkonen@sh.se and N\_Kinossian@ifl-leipzig.de.



PHOTO: ARILD/FLICKR

areas, archipelago, and islands in the Baltic Sea Region. We like to encourage papers with empirical evidence and theoretical insights through original research and review articles addressing the following issues in the Baltic Sea Region:

- Contextual/institutional challenges, opportunities, and arrangements that are specific for living, working, and conducting business.
- Risk, uncertainty and ambiguity concerning living, working, and conducting business.
- Strategies (from below) to meet challenges and opportunities concerning living, working, and conducting business.
- Case studies, comparative studies and theoretical contributions about living, working, and conducting business.
- Spatial dimensions of living, working, and conducting business.
- Institutional controversies and the role of policy.
- Population issues and debates.
- Challenges and opportunities surrounding the use of local natural resources.
- The construction of local identities.
- Stakeholder analysis connected to living, working, and conducting business.
- The interplay between environmental challenges and living, working, and conducting business.
- Cases of, or grounded concepts for socio-technical systems that serve societal or environmental improvements.
- Historical aspects connected to living, working, and conducting business.
- Epistemological, methodological, and ethical aspects of studying livelihoods and businesses.

**THE VOLUME WILL** comprise five to seven selected peer-reviewed articles not exceeding 8,000 words each, including abstract and keywords. Please familiarize yourself with *Baltic Worlds*, all issues of which are freely available at the *Baltic Worlds*' website.

A prerequisite for publishing scientific articles in *Baltic Worlds* is that the article has not already been published in English elsewhere. If an article is simultaneously being considered by another publication, this should be indicated. *Baltic Worlds* practices double blind peer-review by two anonymous, independent reviewers, at least at the post-doc level, following the reviewers' guidelines. ✖