

# BALTIC WORLDS

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**Special Section:**  
Cultural heritage  
and the property of  
missing persons

The function of books  
in the siege of Leningrad

The value of art  
in revolutionary  
Petrograd

## Artifacts and their phantom owners



Painting: Boris Kustodiev, 1920

also in this issue

CONCERNED HISTORIANS / PRIBALTIFICATION / SOVIET FOOD / THE CHURCH IN POLAND / CHERNOBYL

## editorial

### The echo of the absent

**B**altic Worlds introduces an essay on the responses by the Catholic Church in Poland to clerical sexual abuse, as more victims come forwards. Real change is absent, argues the author Brendon Humphrey. We follow with another alarming topic, namely, the rising cases of the persecution and obstruction of researchers in history. David Gaunt discusses some worrisome trends indicating that more historians in more countries are facing restrictions and being silenced. And several might feel obliged to censor themselves to be able to continue research at all.

“One must do one’s best to undermine the system” is the title and a quote from the Lithuanian writer and poet Tomas Venclova, who is interviewed here about his life and thoughts on growing up in a communist system. He has written about his memories and his hometown of Klapeida, which was severely damaged in WWII. Ashes and dust become beautiful new literary formations for Venclova, as for example in his here published poem: *A Poem about Memory*.

IN THIS ISSUES’ THEME SECTION, “Cultural heritage and the property of missing persons”, Irina Sandomirskaja and Anna Kharkina offer a broad and thrilling series of articles all connected to the idea that when persons leave, especially in haste, there will be things left behind that lose their meaning and value in one sense but, in another sense, are filled with new, as they are passed on and move around. The concept of Missing is discussed and viewed from different angles and the presence of the absence, as Irina Sandomirskaja describes it in the introduction, becomes a glue. Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback also suggests that the missing is a space (Lancuna), a lack of presence.

Polina Barskova describes the siege of Lenin-grad and the places that were empty – some of them gain new meaning, as the library, which

became a place to keep warm and stay human and alive by consuming books, even literally, when there was no food. Iulia Demidenko discusses the consequences on the art market of the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik nationalization of mansions, homes and property. The people who left, were forced into exile or just disappeared left valuable objects that made the art market explode. Ove Bring provides us with guidance on the legal aspects of the concept of missing persons. Jean-Luc Nancy is interviewed and proposes that there is no cultural heritage. In a lecture, Iampolski argues that we are now facing a shrinking of the present as things tends to grow old faster. In contrast the past is expanding and coming closer upon us. Finally, in an essay on archaeology and the findings from the past, Hegardt asks questions about the long-departed missing owners and how their absence may be recognized by their ancestors’ claims.

THIS RICH ISSUE of *Baltic Worlds* also contains other articles, as for example an introduction to the concept of “Pribaltification”, and an analysis of the link between Soviet food and gender. ✖

Ninna Mörner

## in this issue



### Pribaltification on Russian TV

“ The image of ‘Pribalts’ in Russia has been reinforced by stereotypes and myths gradually accumulated through literature, cinema, the media, personal cultural contacts and popular jokes.

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### On the cover

Portrait of Isaak Brodsky, 1920 by Boris Kustodiev. The painter Brodsky was also an avid art collector. After his death Brodsky’s apartment on Arts Square in St. Petersburg was declared a national museum.





## colophon

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# CROSS OR CROSSROADS?

WILL THERE BE A  
'QUIET REVOLUTION'  
IN POLAND?

by **Brendan Humphreys**

First there was a fictional film, *Clergy* (Kler, 2018) and now a documentary film, *Tell No One* (*Tylko nie mów nikomu*, 2019) that directly confront a core and very sensitive relationship in Poland, that of the Catholic Church and the people.

The former film was a satirical comedy; the latter is a profoundly unsettling viewer experience, a clinical exposé that includes scenes of the abused confronting their abusers. It makes difficult, upsetting viewing. It was released directly on YouTube in May 2019 and had over 20 million views within weeks.

With the recent screenings depicting corruption and sexual abuse by priests in Poland, issues that were previously taboo are now being aired in public. What effect, if any, will these events have on the powerful position of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland?

IN CANADA, the “quiet revolution” took place over the course of the 1960s, a gradual process of secularization among Catholics in Quebec. A very powerful Catholic Church, which had a strong presence throughout all branches of society, little by little, lost its authority. Genevieve Zubrzycki has drawn comparisons between the French Canadian and Polish situations.<sup>1</sup>

Local realities and political circumstances make each individual case different, but it might be possible to detect some commonalities between countries.

In Ireland, a similar process is still ongoing, but the authority of the Church has certainly taken much punishment over the past three decades. It is worth examining this situation to see if there might be some points of comparison with post-socialist Poland.

## A dark, hidden history

The process in Ireland could be likened to an archaeological dig, with each layer revealing darker and darker experiences, long hidden from public view. Unearthing secrets and even – literally – actual corpses, became part of this downward journey.

Previously, there had been what seemed like isolated incidents, which showed that the conservative Catholic ethos of the country had a dark side. One such incident was the tragic story of Anne Lovett, a 15-year-old girl who died, having given birth to a stillborn son. But unlike later revelations, nothing eventuated; there was no individual to target and blame, no father was identified, and the victims were gone and silent. Silence surrounded the entire incident. The first real scandals broke in the

### abstract

With the recent screening of a feature film and a documentary depicting corruption and sexual abuse by priests in Poland, issues that were previously taboo are now being aired in public. What effect, if any, will they have on the powerful position of the Church in Poland? This article looks first at how scandals have challenged the massive authority of the Church in another conservative and Catholic country, Ireland. It asks whether there are sufficient points of similarity between the two countries and their political predicaments for the Irish experience to act as a guide for the Polish situation.

**KEY WORDS:** Catholic Church, Poland, sexual abuse

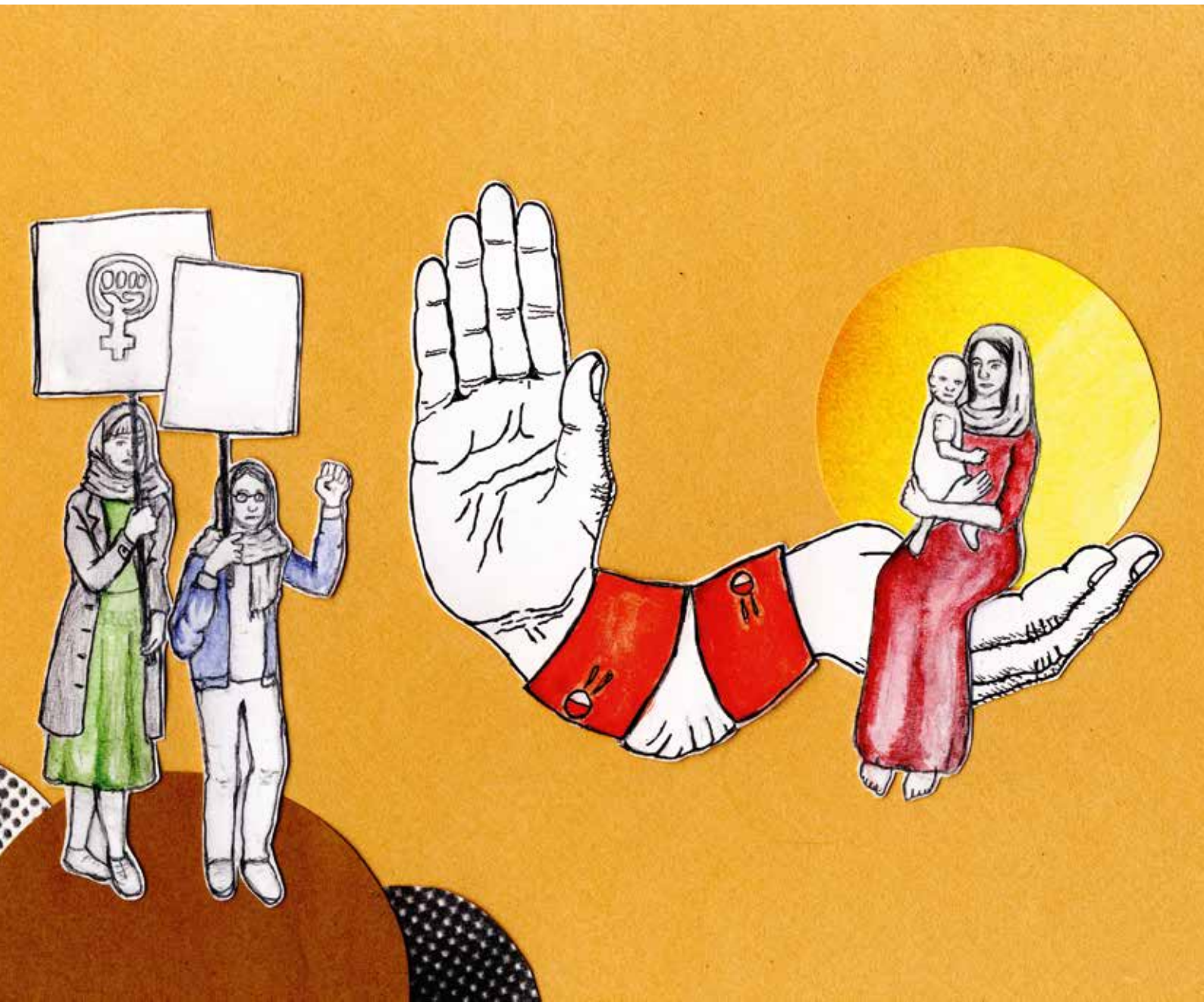
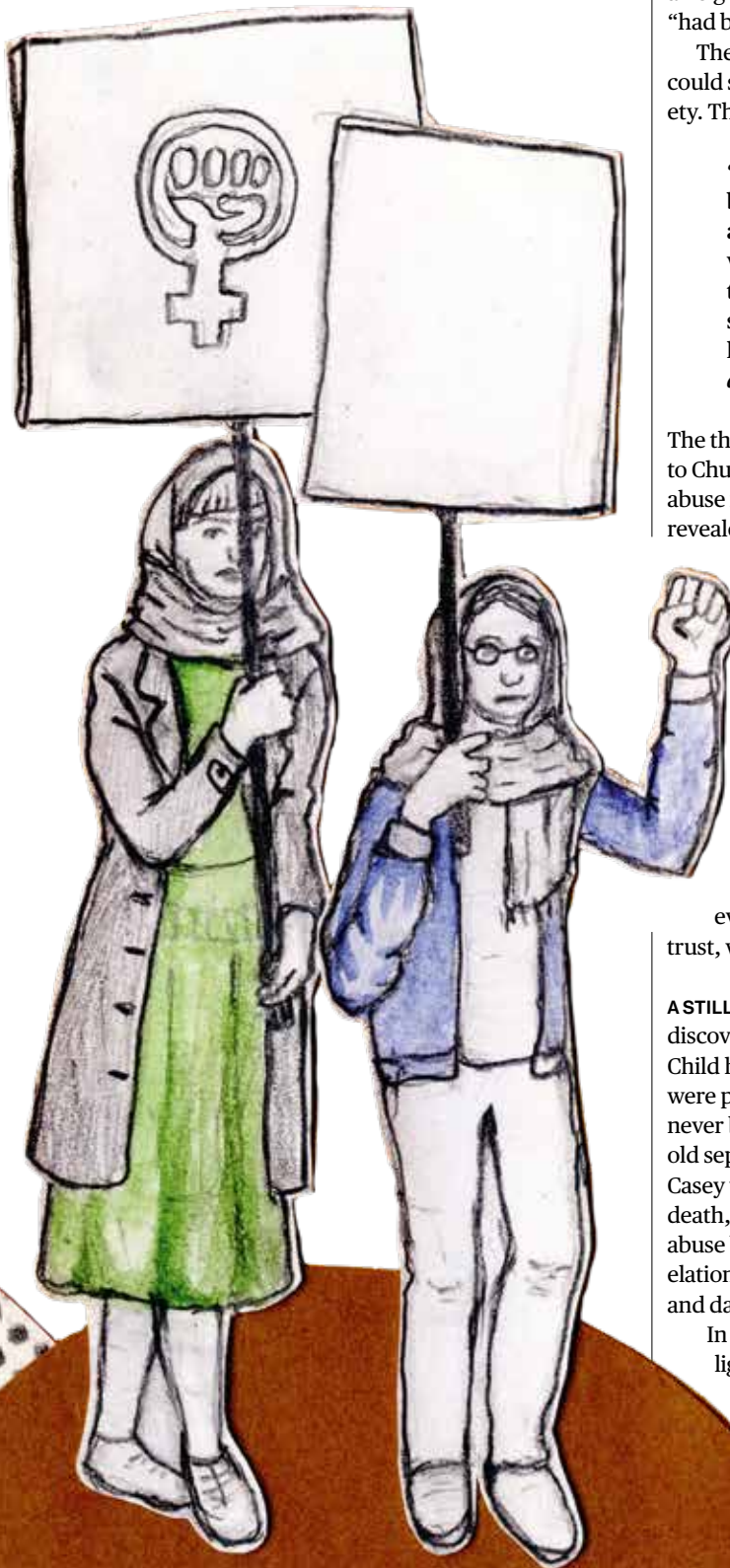


ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON

early 1990s. These were cases of high-profile clerics – in one instance a Bishop, Eamon Casey – being exposed as having broken his vows of celibacy and fathering children. Given the Church's severe policing of sexual morality – uncompromising opposition to divorce, contraception or abortion – the hypocrisy was too much for many people to endure. A secondary set of revelations was much darker, involving exposure of the Magdalene Laundries. These laundries were typically run by orders of Catholic nuns, in which young women were confined, often for decades.

The laundries had been in existence since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, places where “fallen” women – the euphemism for women in prostitution – could be put to work in a spirit of Victorian morality, even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, not all women confined in these institutes had been involved in prostitution; some were sent for having become pregnant outside marriage (their children would be taken from them and given up for adoption), some merely for being exposed themselves to sexual abuses. One woman, Mary-Jo McDonagh, was sent by her family





to be confined in a laundry for having been sexually abused by a neighbor. Because of this, a priest assured her, she, *the victim*, “had brought shame on her family”.<sup>2</sup>

The ‘sinful’ women – they were referred to as ‘penitents’ – could somehow repent by washing the actual dirty linen of society. The overlap of the real and the symbolic is clear:

“One of Western femininity’s most enduring traits has been women’s responsibility for coordinating and managing dirt and disintegration, the association of women with polluting aspects of birth and death... In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women who had servants were perceived as purer, more feminine, more ladylike. The servant (and the servant class as a whole) *absorbed dirt and lowliness into their own bodies.*”<sup>3</sup>

The third layer of scandal did commensurably more damage to Church prestige. This was the increasing revelation of child abuse in Church-run institutions. Reports since commissioned revealed decades of abuse: beatings, hunger, humiliation and exploitation. Most damning, however, was the systematic and repeated sexual abuse of pupils. Furthermore, this was found to have been carried out by parish priests around the country; sometimes the behavior became known to Church superiors, whose (non)response was to move the offending priests to another parish, or sometimes another country, where, unsurprisingly, they typically re-offended.

Not only were children *not* being protected from individual predators, the Church was actually exposing more and more children to risk. The sense of betrayal was overwhelming: The most vulnerable children, some even orphans, were being abused by adults in a position of trust, with a duty of care.

**A STILL-ONGOING CONTROVERSY** in Ireland revolves around the discovery of children’s remains in the grounds of a Mother and Child home in Tuam, Galway. Investigations found that there were perhaps hundreds of infants in the grounds, who had never been given a proper burial – some were even placed in an old septic tank. Before his death in 2017, the disgraced Bishop Casey was facing allegations of child sexual offences.<sup>4</sup> After his death, his own niece alleged she had suffered years of sexual abuse by him, which began when she was five years old. The revelations of abuse by members of the Church continue, deeper and darker.

In sum, the Church’s authority was hugely diminished; religious attendance declined dramatically, from 90% in the late 1970s to 35% now, but with some urban parishes reporting attendance of less than 2%.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, young men can no longer be attracted to join the clergy, and many priests are now of non-Irish origin. The most notable of these countries of origin is

Poland (Poles make up the largest foreign group in Ireland).

Theoreticians of institutional change speak about 'exogenous shocks' that may prompt internal change or reform of an institution.<sup>6</sup> Will the process of revelation of abuse, which has recently begun in Poland, have a comparable effect in that country?

### 'An autocracy of clergy, not a democracy of believers'

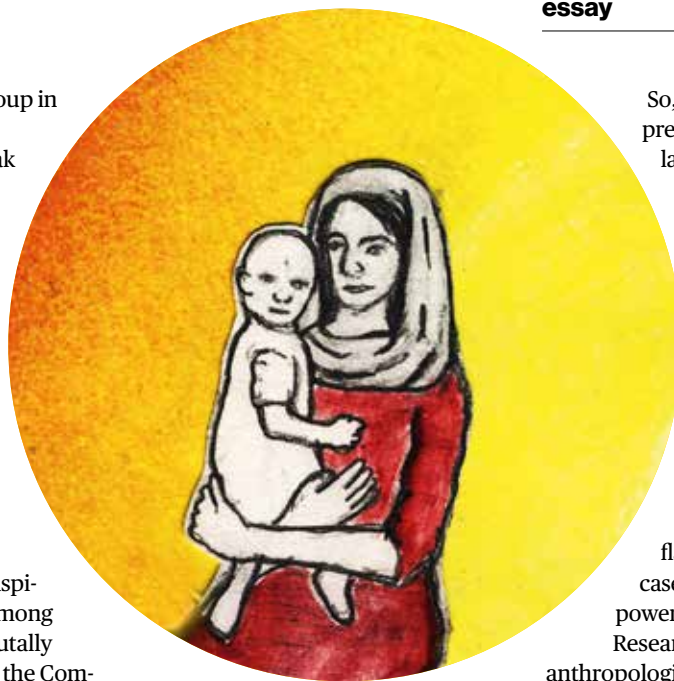
It must be said, however, that few institutions are more resistant to reform than the Roman Catholic Church. And perhaps even more so, the *Polish* branch of the Church. Although the Roman Church is universal in aspiration, it is experienced as deeply *national* among Polish believers.<sup>7</sup> The Church was treated brutally by the Nazis and severely constrained under the Communists. It was seen to be on the side of the people, something not easily forgotten. Modern Polish national heroes had a strong Catholic ethos – Witold Pilecki and Lech Wałęsa, as well as clerical figures like Father Jerzy Popiełuszko and John Paul II.

Nothing perhaps demonstrates this identification of Church with nation more clearly than the movement to have Jesus officially crowned King of Poland (as the Virgin Mary was crowned Queen of Poland in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century). This finally took place in Krakow in November 2016. The official status of the ceremony – and the claim it makes – are uncertain and confusing, but the *emotional* status, if we can call it that, is clear. President Andrzej Duda attended the ceremony.

**WHAT WAS THIS** if not an implicit state blessing? So not only is there an alignment of people with Church, but also of *state* with Church. Disentangling religion and politics, if they have been allowed to tangle, is very difficult. As Anna Grzymala-Busse memorably puts it:

"...religion influences politics whether or not mass publics want it to. There is no relationship between the *demand* for the influence of religion on politics and its *supply*."<sup>8</sup> She goes on to make a further point: "Politicians, meanwhile, are uncertain of electoral preferences, and worry about offending a powerful societal actor. As a result, once the churches frame issues as moral imperatives, politicians tend to comply. Second, fusion between religion and national identity increases the likelihood of direct church access to policy making."<sup>9</sup>

**"PEOPLE  
FEEL THAT  
THE CLERGY  
ALWAYS BENEFIT  
FINANCIALLY."**



So, at least under the present regime in Poland, led by the Law and Justice Party, there is a holy alliance of nation, Church and government. This leaves the Church in a very powerful position. But does that mean equally that the *clergy*, now being exposed as flawed, even in some cases criminal, are in as powerful a position?

Researchers such as anthropologist Juraj Buzalka

have pointed out that many people in

Poland traditionally had real doubts about the behavior of *individual* priests, but they still remain attached to the Church as an *institution*. He speaks of the *ambiguity* of believers, of which anti-clericalism is the most notable aspect: in particular, people feel that the clergy always benefit financially.<sup>10</sup> Yet this stops short of any challenge to the Church as an institution, a very hierarchical one. As one of Buzalka's respondents put it memorably, it is "an autocracy of clergy, not a democracy of believers."<sup>11</sup>

**OTHER OBSERVERS** point out that the Church in Poland does show internal division, on *open* versus *closed* church. The more conservative wing is associated with Radio Maryja and its founder Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. Speaking very generally, this wing is suspicious of outside influence, even Western European influence, which is seen as too secular. Zubrzycki speaks of the "folk piety" aspect of belief, and Buzalka of "post-peasant populism" and both these phrases are worth bearing in mind.

However, the Church remains a very powerful institution by any measure. With the post-1989 change of system, a lot of previously nationalized Church property in Poland was returned to the Church, which is now the largest landowner in the country. And there is indeed a complementary economic factor; as observers such as David Ost have pointed out, workers (and farmers) have lost out badly in that transition to a market economy. The fallout should be measured in *human*, not economic, terms:

"...by the late 1990s the typical Polish suicide victim was not a teenager in an existential crisis but a married man in his early forties living in one of the myriad small towns and villages where state firms and farm bankruptcies combined with the collapse of the old welfare state to produce a particularly searing kind of despair..."<sup>12</sup>



One might argue that it is these left-behind people who are most likely to cling to the Church. Additionally, when identity is at stake, people often take up defensive positions; Polish conservatives seemingly understand this well, and prominent conservatives have stated quite explicitly that to criticize the Church is to insult Poland.

**WILL THE CHURCH** scandals be enough to bring about social change? Helsinki-based media and communications researcher Kinga Polynczuk-Alenius is doubtful, given the powerful position of the Church across Polish society: “because we have something called the ‘Concordat of 1993’, which invests the Catholic Church in Poland with enormous privilege, as well as political and social influence. As long as the symbiotic relationship between political power and religious institutions continues, we will not witness any major change.”<sup>13</sup> She continues:

“That being said, I really want to believe that a social change is slowly simmering as certain segments of the population become sick and tired of the Church’s grip on all non-religious matters. All in all, I think that only a true separation of religion from the state can cause any real damage to the Catholic Church in Poland. Everything else will be managed as a PR crisis and used/re-appropriated to reinforce the Church’s (self-)image as an innocent victim of vitriolic leftist propaganda.”<sup>14</sup>

But given the huge impact of *Tell No One*, one wonders whether this can be managed as just a PR crisis. For Alicja Curjanovic, a Warsaw-based researcher, there might be major change:

“After these films it’s impossible to claim that paedophilia is a problem confined to Western countries. For the first time, the Church had to really confront the issue. The effect would have been even bigger if there had been a different government. The present government has obviously made an effort to redirect people’s attention and promote the narrative that it is a political attack, and not a deep pathology within the Polish Church.”<sup>15</sup>

The role of film, both fictional and documentary, can be crucial because of its capacity to effect the public view. The film as a media still retains extraordinary power to engage and enlighten people. In this, it far surpasses “reality” television and many aspects of social media.

A 1996 documentary, *Dear Daughter*, brought to general public awareness the cruelty of Irish industrial schools. Other documentaries that were influential in changing attitudes included the BBC’s *Suing the Pope* (2002) and Channel 4’s *Sex in a Cold Climate* (1997). The latter influenced the feature film *The Magdalene*

*Sisters* (2002), which helped to bring Ireland’s Church scandals to an international audience.

The effect of these documentaries was to raise awareness of the culture of abuse and, through this, put public pressure on the government to create commissions to investigate the issue. This has happened, leading to the landmark Ferns Report (2005) and Ryan Report (2009).

**THERE ARE MOVEMENTS** in this direction in Poland, initiated by the *Fundacja ‘Nie Lękajcie Się’* (*Have no Fear Foundation*), a support group for victims of clerical sexual abuse that was established in Warsaw in 2013. The effect of the screening of *Tell No One* was huge. Anna Frankowska, a lawyer and board member of *Have no Fear* states that, “Following the documentary, the foundation was literally flooded with calls. The documentary, which had more than twenty million views in just a few weeks, has had a big impact on survivors, who felt compelled to call us and share their stories.”<sup>16</sup>

Frankowska is very aware of processes in other jurisdictions, including Ireland. Her foundation is willing to learn from the legal shortcomings of that country. “We understand that in Ireland, the Irish taxpayer had to pay the Commission’s costs and any compensation, but without knowing who exactly was to blame, and without prosecutions for what were clearly criminal acts or omissions.” The aim of *Have no Fear* is to establish a ‘truth and compensation commission’ to “investigate cases of sexual abuse of minors...ensure that paedophiles are prosecuted...ensure that there is no “indemnity deal” that would provide symbolic compensation in return for a waiver of further claims against the Church.”<sup>17</sup> A report they drafted seemed grimly similar to the Irish situation: multiple cases of sexual abuse by priests, which were known about but ignored or covered up by their bishops. A letter addressing the abuses had previously been delivered by *Have no Fear* to the Primate of Poland, Archbishop Wojciech Polak, but no response was forthcoming. The report has since been delivered to the Vatican, addressed to Pope Francis in person.

## Conclusions

In making any comparison between Ireland and Poland, one must look at other social, political, and economic factors that have been part of Ireland’s move towards secularization. Ireland obviously did not have a post-communist legacy to deal with. Poland, likewise, did not have institutions such as industrial schools or Magdalene Laundries.

One such factor was the conflict in Northern Ireland, which began exactly 50 years ago, but was resolved in the late 1990s. (Even that resolution was draped in religious language, i.e., the Good Friday Agreement.) The other factors included systemic economic problems, which were considerably helped by EU (then EC) membership, plus very favorable terms for foreign investment. The economic boom of the 1990s, the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’ years, turned a sharp corner on decades of unemployment and underdevelopment.

**“PROMINENT  
CONSERVATIVES  
HAVE STATED  
QUITE EXPLICITLY  
THAT TO CRITICIZE  
THE CHURCH IS  
TO INSULT  
POLAND.”**



It may be precisely the economic boom that was decisive in the value shift away from the Church. The country has now experienced levels of wealth and comfort without precedent (despite the property crash and an EU-level bailout process). I would argue that wealth, somewhat disappointingly, appears to feed cultural confidence like nothing else. Aspects of the Catholic *emotional landscape*, if one can call it that, those that centre on penitence, self-sacrifice, even martyrdom, have more immediate appeal to people in situations of political oppression and economic hardship. When external

factors change for the better, the landscape can alter as people's aspirations, life choices and values change. I believe that this was an important factor in Ireland's secularization and that it reinforced the split between people and Church that was caused by the various scandals.

Poland has been an EU success story, and its economy has steadily recovered from decades of communist underdevelopment and mismanagement. Some commentators even

suggest it is currently undergoing a fiscal 'golden age', based on growth rates and other economic indicators.<sup>18</sup> As the seventh largest economy and – after Brexit – the fifth largest population in the EU, Poland will have an increasingly influential future within the EU. One hopes that this will offer a broader sense to identity than the narrow *Polak katolik* one, and a corresponding cultural confidence. But a painful aspect of its recent past must be addressed. Thanks to the courage of those willing to speak out about their abuse by the clergy, this process has started. The absurdity of ecclesiastical celibacy seems to be revealed by the repeated pattern of sexual abuse in the Church – which had also caused scandal in Canada, the US, Australia, and elsewhere. But will this lead to a change?

Pope Francis is a humane figure, and – by Papal standards at least – liberal. If one reads the signs correctly, he does seem willing to consider allowing married men to be ordained (in some regions of his native Latin America). So there might be grounds for (very cautious) optimism on this issue in the future.

Meanwhile, however, the Polish Church must account for itself; if it fails to do so, it may risk losing its faithful. ✖

Brendan Humphreys is a researcher at Aleksanteri Institute, Finnish Centre for Russian and Eastern European Studies at the University of Helsinki

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- 2 Fiachra Gibbons, "In God's Name" (accessed 18 August, 2019) available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/feb/07/artsfeatures>.
- 3 Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between, Historical Perspectives of Gender and Class*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995), 5 (*emphasis added*).
- 4 No formal charges were brought, but compensation was paid to two victims. This legal grey zone has been a notable feature of the process – the Ryan Report was blocked by the Christian Brothers, the order accused of the most offences, from publishing the names of individual offenders.
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- 7 An actual Polish Catholic Church (*Kościół Polskokatolicki w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*) does exist, but it is a breakaway institution with few members.
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Professor Antoon de Baets founded the Network of Concerned Historians in 1995.

PHOTO: HISTORICNL



The historian and anthropologist Ayşe Gül Altınay was sentenced to 25 months imprisonment for signing the "Academics for Peace" petition.

PHOTO: BIANET.ORG



Ayşe Zarakolu was sent to prison for having translated books on the Armenian genocide.

PHOTO: BIANET.ORG

## THE CONCERNS OF HISTORIANS

In 1995 Antoon de Baets, professor of History, Ethics and Human Rights at the University of Groningen, published the first report of the Network of Concerned Historians, which he had just founded. The mission of the network is to create general awareness of the issues caused by the friction between historical research and human rights issues. The twenty-fifth annual report was published online this year. Over time, the emphasis in the reports has shifted markedly from abstract human rights issues to cases of the imprisonment of professional academics. The annual reports also reflect the loss of the international optimism of the 1990s that has turned into the gloom of the populist/nationalistic 2010s. Up until the year 2000 there were usually less than 50 countries chastised by the network, but since 2009 the annual number of countries where violations of historians' human rights were recorded has been about 100. The network registers bans on books, official denial of historical atrocities, trials against individual historians for researching about the conditions of minorities, falsifications in school books and manifold other abuses of history and memory.

Taken as a whole, the annual reports become dismal registers of the tribula-

tions of historians culled from the accounts of organizations like Human Rights Watch, Pen International, Scholars at Risk, and other sources around the world. The 2019 report alone gives the impression that professional historians are harassed by governments almost to the same extent and manner as journalists.

**BUT THIS WAS** not always the case. The first reports from the 1990s dealt mostly with the need to document crimes against humanity committed by the many dictatorial and military regimes that plagued the 1980s, particularly in South America, Africa and South-Eastern Europe. The basic concern was that the criminals would never come to trial due to laws granting immunity or the lack of interest in prosecuting the war criminals, not just in Argentina, Chile and former Yugoslavia, but even for older crimes committed against Jews by collaborators during World War II in France and in the Dutch colonial war in Indonesia. Treatment of concerns in Western countries mostly focused on confronting denial of the Holocaust, with the trial of David Irving and the antics of other anti-Semitic denialists. In German speaking countries, an exhibition about "The Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941-1944" which revealed the deep involve-

ment of the regular German army in the killing of Jews created great controversy years after it opened in 1997.

**OFFICIAL GOVERNMENTAL** denialism of atrocities was rare in Europe at that time. But Japan was and still is struggling with the reality of the women seized from Korea and other Japanese occupied territories to slave in military brothels. Turkey, always hysterical about minority claims, featured from the very beginning for its heavy-handed repression of historical works on Armenians, Kurds, Greeks and Assyrians. The 1995 report already included an account of Ayşe Zarakolu who had been imprisoned simply for having translated books on the Armenian genocide by Vahakn Dadrian and Yves Ternon. Her crime was said to be "separatist propaganda". For many years her various trials connected to publishing books the government found uncomfortable – they numbered 34 – filled the pages of the annual reports. Disturbingly, she died in prison. Her husband, Ragıp Zarakolu, continued publishing and translating books on minority subjects and had to endure the same judicial harassment. He now lives in exile in Sweden.

The 2005 report takes up the case of Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk who was



Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk was put on trial when he stated in an interview that hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Kurds had suffered genocide.

PHOTO: ALEXEY BALAKIN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

put on trial for “anti-Turkish” sentiments when he stated in a newspaper interview that hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Kurds had suffered genocide, but no one was talking about it. A conference of Turkish historians that intended to discuss the Armenian genocide was attacked by government ministers as a “stab in the back” and had difficulty in finding a venue.

IF WE JUMP TO THE MOST recent annual reports, the reader can see a new phenomenon, namely arrests and imprisonment of historians for researching breaches of human rights and history of minorities or making public statements in defense of minority claims. This is particularly the case in China where there is a crack-down on historians dealing with Tibetan or Uigur peoples. Turkey is no longer alone in its harassment of historians, although it remains the most extreme among the countries considered democracies. The sentencing in May 2019 of internationally respected historian/anthropologist Ayşe Gül Altınay (Sabancı University, Istanbul) to 25 months imprisonment for signing the “Academics for Peace” petition is arguably the most despicable instance of state abuse. All signatories of that declaration risk being accused of “propaganda

for a terrorist organization”. However, Altınay is devoted to non-violence and her research studies the link between everyday domestic violence as a long-term consequence of war and anti-guerrilla campaigns on society, particularly in South-eastern Turkey. She trained as an anthropologist, but her book *The Myth of the Military State* is historical and deals with the Turkish republic’s persistent and debilitating glorification of its armed forces. Candan Badem, who has written the most comprehensive bibliography of Armenian-Turkish research, has been fired from Munzur University and his passport has been revoked so he cannot accept offers from foreign universities. Although an outspoken Marxist, he is accused of being a follower of the Gülenist religious movement, and thus stamped as a terrorist. His latest book is *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853–1856)* which gives unique insights into that conflict.

A very sad development in the Baltic region is the official Holocaust denial-

ism taking root in Poland. That country has been in a conflict with Israel about the extent of involvement of Poles in the killing of Jews during World War II, for which there is ample evidence, but which the Polish government considers a defamation of the nation. A recent attempt to strike an accord between the Polish and Israeli governments was considered by historian Yehuda Bauer as “a betrayal of the memory of the Holocaust and the interest of the Jewish people”. In the same vein, Jan Grabowski had to sue the Polish League Against Defamation for that organization’s attacks on book he wrote dealing with Poles who killed Jews fleeing from ghettos. In a different context, Polish “patriots” disrupted a conference in Paris dealing with the Polish history of the Holocaust and a Polish TV station labeled the conference a “festival

of anti-Polish lies”. Accused of slandering the nation, Dariusz Stola was not reappointed director of the Museum of Polish Jews in Warsaw which he had led since 2014. Although the situation in Germany is not so dire, there is an increasing politicization of Holocaust denial by the right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland whose members have interrupted guides at concentration-camp memorials. In response, the Association of German Historians has taken a resolution on “current threats to democracy” through persistent politically inspired misuse of history.

ANOTHER PROBLEMATIC development in the Baltic region that causes concern among historians is the Belarusian government’s refusal to allow a memorial at a killing field outside Minsk known as Kurapaty. Here an estimated 30,000 to 100,000 persons were shot by the Soviet secret police during the Stalinist terror and excavations in the late 1980s proved that bodies buried there belonged to

the period before World War II. In Hungary the statue of the hero of the anti-Soviet uprising of 1956, Imre Nagy, has been removed from its place in front of the parliament building. It has been replaced by a monument to the victims of the short-lived communist regime of Bela Kun in 1919.

De Baets and

his Network of Concerned Historians do an admirable job of raising awareness of the risks that professional historians face, and the political misuse of history. As the annual reports reveal, these dangers to academics are increasing and spreading in lockstep with the growth of authoritarian and populist politics. ✕

**David Gaunt**

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**“TURKEY IS NO LONGER ALONE IN ITS HARASSMENT OF HISTORIANS, ALTHOUGH IT REMAINS THE MOST EXTREME AMONG THE COUNTRIES CONSIDERED DEMOCRACIES.”**



# THE IDEAL COSMOPOLITAN CLASSROOM IS THE STAGE

On applied theatre interventions  
for perpetuating peace in Kosovo

by **Emily Russell**

**T**hroughout the past two decades, independent identities in the Balkans have been continuously shaped and reshaped. Among the events leading to these identity-forming shifts is the Kosovo War, which dragged on in the small mountainous territory in the late 1990s until the US and NATO-led interventions in 1999. The conflict preceded and contributed to Yugoslavia's dissolution in 2003 and the subsequent emergence of Serbia and Montenegro. The decades which followed were marked by processes of development among the young nations; Kosovo became the newest member of the Balkans when it declared itself sovereign in 2008, a sovereignty which remains contested by neighboring Serbia. The end of conflict did not constitute the solidification of peace. To call any post-conflict country one at peace would be a misnomer.

## Paragons of peace

Staging creative interventions in the post-war period of nascent nations, therefore, is not for naught; on the contrary, it is a way peace may be made perpetual. In the summer of 2019, just over a decade after the state declared independence, the project "Playwriting for Peace" was launched in Pristina, Kosovo. "Playwriting for Peace" operates under the notion that the theatre is a place to

develop empathy and explore one's own humanity, suggesting creative expression is instrumental in establishing a common understanding from which sustainable peace can be created and enacted. The summer-long project utilized multiple forms of verbal and nonverbal techniques as well as varied artistic mediums, including visual arts, text, music, and movement to empower participants in developing their artistic voices while engaging with theories of peacebuilding. Activities like these constitute the active learning strategies behind applied theatre – an umbrella term which encompasses theatrical education staged in non-traditional spaces or involving participation of marginalized groups.<sup>1</sup> In particular, this intervention encompassed a multitude of goals centered on the primary aim of inspiring a generation of young people to resist repeated violence and become, themselves, paragons of peace.

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**KOSOVO WAS A STRATEGIC** choice for the project's genesis. The country's population comprises a youth bulge, with nearly half of the current population below the age of 29<sup>2</sup> and almost 18% between the ages of 15 and 24.<sup>3</sup> It is this generation that inherited

the scars of war and must decide to heal them. Further, many routes of violence still loom: the proposed development of a large-scale Kosovar army in December 2018 threatened to incite



Workshop in the cosmopolitan classroom.

state-sanctioned violence and arm the nation's youth, while the unhealed tension and trauma from the war creates a risk of return to communal or border conflicts. Particularly salient are the mixed ethnic identities in the country, with an Albanian majority living alongside Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Roma groups. The preservation of peace here, as anywhere, relies on these apparently different groups being able to envision themselves as part of a shared human community.

## Cosmopolitan education on stage

Guiding the development of such a community is the theoretical "cosmopolitanism," which, when applied in micro-settings of education, has the power to change narratives of identity and belonging, and bring about an enduring peace. Cosmopolitan education lays the groundwork for cooperation and peace beyond all identity boundaries, and importantly, beyond the boundary of nationality.<sup>4</sup> In the Balkans, this is the salient divide. Martha Nussbaum, a pioneering scholar on cosmopolitanism, advocates "[students] be taught that they are, above all, citizens of a world of human beings, and that, while they happen to be situated in [a single country], they have to share this world with the citizens of other countries."<sup>5</sup> Building this shared world is critical where oppositional identities prevent the full realization of peace, and is the task of a cosmopolitan education.

Nowhere else can we so viscerally come to see ourselves as part of an expansive, united human group, struggling with simi-

lar situations, emotions, and relationships, than on the stage. This makes it the ideal cosmopolitan classroom. Where else can we so plainly tell our stories and have them received and understood by people unlike ourselves? And where else can we become, for an hour, someone new whose struggles we will adopt as our own? These are the precise questions – and assumptions – on which the Kosovar intervention rested.

**SCHOLARLY WRITINGS** on cosmopolitanism were integral to the program's development, including those of Kwame Anthony Appiah, one of the leading contemporary voices on the subject. He identified the phenomenon of starting conversations across boundaries of identity which otherwise separate us. "The cosmopolitan curiosity about other peoples," according to him, "does not have to begin by seeking in each encounter those traits that all humans share. In some encounters, what we start with is some small thing we two singular people share."<sup>6</sup> "Playwriting for Peace" began, too, with this notion. On the first day of workshops, a group of former strangers gathered together in a spacious creative warehouse on Pristina's south side. The walls were littered with slogans in Albanian and English, shouting "No one is illegal!" and "Creative Open Safe Local Inclusive" Split into pairs, participants engaged in activities like "Craziest Common Thing," where in the course of fifteen minutes, they had to find out enough about each other to determine the unlikeliest of their shared



The students explored many ways of expression and collaboration.



oddities. What was immediately obvious was this: more unites us than keeps us apart.

### Cultural specificities and fundamental sameness

As visiting foreign playwrights, the importance of cultural exchange was not lost on us. Facilitators participated daily in the activities, joining in learning “sameness” across international borders. In return, during our first week together, students excitedly shared their traditions, preparing “Russian tea” in Turkish glass cups with lemon and sugar. They DJ-ed writing sessions, proudly introducing us to Kosovar pop musicians and Albanian operettists; some brought homemade *baklava* after weeknight weddings and others insisted we indulge in eating *llokuma* together in the mornings. While cosmopolitanism is often advanced scholastically in opposition to nationalism, interventions in Kosovo proved its nuances; nationality is an identity we hold, and with it, the traditions, languages, and specialties it brings. Cosmopolitanism asks us to celebrate these cultural specificities, but in doing so, not to lose sight of the far more profound qualities which connect us. It is not a call for homogenization, but rather, a call for a celebration of the particular among the many.

Exploring our fundamental sameness became routine, and participants became familiar with putting seemingly dissimilar

voices into conversation. In “Calling Strangers,” students wrote various individual identities on notecards, then drew a card at random, taking on that identity for the exercise. Partnered with another participant, each pair wrote a dialogue between the two “strangers.” Nussbaum states that in a cosmopolitan education, “[students] must learn enough about the different to recognize common aims, aspirations, and values” among the human community.<sup>7</sup> In the workshop activity, students had to ask: is there a relationship between an astronaut and a young actress? Between Beyoncé and a social media influencer? Between a sunglasses seller and an alien? Certainly. The list of strangers goes on, and the dissolution of strangeness follows.

**OUR STUDENTS REFINED** their skills of expression and collaboration, and as summer passed, another powerful tool of the theatre became clear. The very essence of dramatic scene-writing embodies conflict resolution without much prompting. Whether a monologue, ten-minute play, or full-length production, dramatic works are always driven by a conflict, and their denouements contain its resolution; the time between is merely a set of tactics and perspectives that move characters out of stasis and toward change. Using dialogue for conflict resolution is the purpose of theatre. (But it sounds an awful lot like diplomacy, too.) In “Dinner Party,” students passed around papers in a circle,





Workshop at the National Gallery in Kosovo.

adding one thing to each drawn “table” – some added the meal, others the guests, and still others the conflict. Each student was then given a table and had to draft a dialogue in which each dinner guest spoke, and by the scene’s conclusion, they resolved a given conflict. Sure, the issues at hand were not globally consequential – a daughter wishing to move to Paris and her parents’ opposition, encouraging young kids to read more books, and determining who would pay for the meal. But the activity allowed us to consider, literally, who is at the table and what, together, they might accomplish.

### Places and creative conflicts

The program reached its mid-way point with the arrival of August, and workshops moved to the second space: an intimate, plant-covered, sunlight-harboring public space in the north of the city, where only a few steps outside landed us in a historic bazaar, ancient infrastructure of exposed bricks, and the towering mosques for which Pristina is architecturally known.

Beneath the street’s marble pillars, our students discovered the three main pillars of writing a short drama; namely, the set-

ting, the characters, and the narrative arc. Place (or setting) affects the telling of a story, and through the daily workshops our students began to explore both the macro- and micro-locations which fuse to set the stage and determine the conflicts that will

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be addressed. Micro-settings, like park benches or living rooms, might host personal dramas, like those between friends or lovers. Yet, the conflict remains contextually dependent on a macro-setting: a city, a country at war, a particular year in history. How does a night spent on a summer balcony differ in the roaring American 1920s, from that of the war-torn 1998 Kosovo, or the Nazi-invaded 1941 Warsaw ghetto? Every

story has a macro and a micro place, and it is in understanding both that we disentangle their continuities and nuances.

Places can also inspire new stories, as it did for one of our students who expertly used conversations overheard on Pristina’s promenade to write her dramas. “Street drama,” as we began to call it, was the real-life observation of human stories taking place in the public all around us. And while the street certainly plays host to the complexities of human relationships, performance can also be staged intentionally on the streets –

removing the hierarchy often associated with closed, formal theatres. To highlight the transformative power of performance in nontraditional spaces, “Playwriting for Peace” sponsored a guest workshop by *Haveit*, a radical four-woman collective using public performance as activism. They have been described as “new super girls who fight for freedom of expression and the liberty of being.”<sup>8</sup> As reported to *Kosovo 2.0*, they stage their demands through performances on the street because “it is between art and activism.”<sup>9</sup> Our students gained a heightened understanding of their own creative power.

WHILE DRAMATIC WRITING confronts the transformative power of dialogue, the workshops initially focused on facilitating a deeper exploration of our personal complexities. Students constructed identity collages, drew their “inner and outer worlds,” wrote letters to past and future selves, and hung their private wishes anonymously on tags on a planted tree. These activities rest on the notion that prioritizing introspection is a critical part of understanding others. If we can recognize in ourselves a complexity which we possess but do not externally wear, then we can also recognize that complexity in others, even when it goes unseen. Foundational to this complexity are our emotions, which, try as we might to conceal them, regularly dictate our actions. Emotions shape the entirety of theatre, and understanding our own emotions makes them recognizable beyond ourselves. A student can write a scene about Marilyn Monroe grieving her unborn child because he, too, knows grief; in scene-writing, he not only recognizes it, but replicates it. The situation causing grief matters little – the important thing is that we can look upon those in grief, recognize the emotion, and respond as we would have others respond to us. Theatre allows us to embody this understanding.

## Concluding in peace

As August ended, the workshops moved to their third and final location: Kino Armata. The students’ works were eventually staged here, the first time any dramatic work has been performed in the theatre since its re-opening last year. The building, formerly used for the Yugoslav People’s Army, was out of use for nearly thirty years.<sup>10</sup> Barbed wire and railings surrounded the building until its revitalization in 2017; the space, itself renewed, symbolizes the acceptance of change and purposive efforts towards healing through the creative arts.

In the performance, we strategically cast our students in the reading of one another’s works. Dialogue allows many storytellers a role in a single story and each occupies a different situational perspective, riddled as they are with their own backstories. The telling and embodying of the lives of their fellow playwrights and characters become habitual. In giving voice to a character that may seem dissimilar from them, our students find ways to relate to anyone.

**“A CENTRAL AIM  
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The intervention in Pristina continues to inspire further action, including collaboration with transcontinental civil society organizations, like Changing the Story, which leads art-based peacebuilding projects in post-conflict countries around the world. Also important to the program’s continuity was the training of other local facilitators on the Serbian border in Mitrovica.

Should regional tensions amplify, local practitioners will be prepared to take action. Though small, the intervention begins innovating in geopolitical applied theatre techniques.

Perpetuating peace will be a lifelong commitment in Kosovo and many other regions of the world. But for five weeks in historic Pristina, a group of former strangers became friends, collaborators, and confidants, telling stories of our truths, discussing our histories, and spinning worlds from words. Peace, for a while, persists.

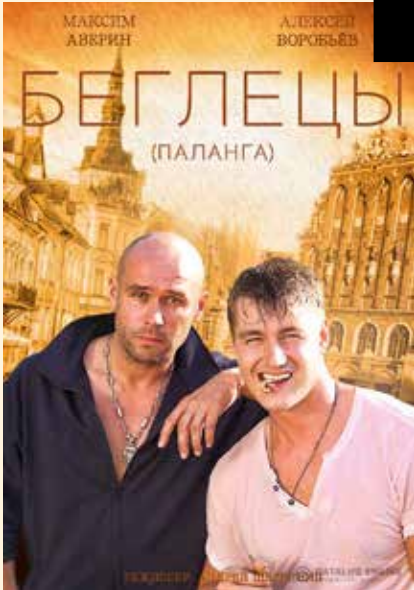
A central aim of students of cosmopolitanism is to “learn to recognize humanity wherever they encounter it, undeterred by traits that seem strange to them, and [to] be eager to understand humanity in all its strange guises.”<sup>11</sup> What is the stage, if not a place to disguise humanity so as to reveal it? ✕

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# PRI-BALTI FICATION ON RUSSIAN TV



**LOOKING AT SMALLER  
BALTIC NEIGHBORS  
THROUGH RUSSIA'S  
“MIND’S EYE”**

by **Dzmitry Pravatorau**

## abstract

This article will introduce the term “pribaltification”, designating the tendencies in the Soviet Union and Russia to imagine and represent the Soviet Baltic republics – and later the independent states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – as a largely uniform political and cultural entity, and to significantly blur the cultural and linguistic distinctions between the natives of these republics/countries. Analyzing the narrative and semiotic systems that underpin design and production strategies in an audio-visual text of a Russian television serial *Gastrolery* [Guest Performers], I will demonstrate that representations/metageographies of Lithuania and Lithuanians articulated in the film closely align with the principle of “pribaltification”. Thus, an image of Lithuania and Lithuanians appears to be employed synecdochically, whereby one specific state embodies onscreen all three Baltic countries as a whole. I will also suggest that “pribaltification” in *Gastrolery* may not be driven exclusively by popular Russian metageographies of the Baltic States. Thus, analysis of the serial may make it possible to observe traces of the Russian state’s geopolitical discourse on the Baltic States.

**KEY WORDS:** Pribaltification; Baltic States; Russia; discourse; metageographies; stereotype; television.

“We haven’t differentiated between you since Soviet times. You are pribalts, and that’s it”.

YouTube user commenting on *Gastrolery*<sup>1</sup>

“Friends from Russia visited me [in Lithuania] and said that we live here like they live in America”

A Russian woman from the Lithuanian SSR in the street in Soviet Vilnius<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

A Russian colloquial noun, “pribalt” has long defined a non-Russian native of one of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, once occupied by the USSR and collectively called Sovetskaya Pribaltika [Soviet Baltic]. In this article, utilizing the root form of this colloquialism, I will introduce the term “pribaltification”, understood as a manifestation of mental mapping whereby cultural, political and linguistic distinctions between Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians are significantly blurred.<sup>3</sup>

As an example of “pribaltification” in an audio-visual text I will demonstrate how in a Russian television serial, *Gastrolery* [Guest Performers], an image of Lithuania and Lithuanians appears to be employed synecdochically, whereby Lithuania, a specific state of the Baltic group, embodies onscreen all three Baltic countries as a whole. This is, for example, prominent in



human geographical portrayals of Lithuanian people, and in the visualization of the local “Western” architectural landscape. Such portrayals are driven by intertextual references that evoke highly internalized and largely unquestioned Soviet and Russian metageographies based on popular positive and negative myths and stereotypes about the three Baltic countries. I will also suggest that televised “pribaltification” in the case of *Gastrolery* may not be driven exclusively by popular Russian metageographies of the Baltic States. In Russia, in which the media, and especially television, are highly controlled by the state, the meanings and scope of “pribaltification” on television may instead be negotiated across popular and practical (elite) geopolitical domains. Thus, in *Gastrolery* it may be possible to observe traces of the Russian state’s geopolitical discourse on the Baltic States.

Before proceeding to an analysis of *Gastrolery*’s audio-visual text, I will provide a theoretical overview of interrelations between metageographies, stereotypes and geopolitical discourse. I will also identify the context of interactions between the Russian media and the state, and indicate how this context may define the character of geopolitical images in television programs.

## Metageographies, stereotyping and geopolitical discourses

When one imagines the world geographically, or “mentally maps”<sup>4</sup> it, she activates “simplified” or “meta” geographies that allow her to “order every-day and long-term spatial information” relating to “the surrounding world”.<sup>5</sup> Mental mapping, according to Péteri,<sup>6</sup> is accompanied by the “construction of region-like units” which is characterized by the cognitive foregrounding of resemblances rather than dissimilarities observed within those units. These “region-like” mental geographical constructs can also frequently be assigned a hierarchical placement on a “civilizational” scale adopted in a specific political, cultural and historical context. Thus, various regions may be differentiated as being located between “backward” and “developed”, “civilized” and “barbaric”, “Asian” and “Western” extremities of the scale. In the domain of human geography, mental mapping is manifested through the process of “peopling”, that is, transferring particular names or monikers to – and identifying mental, cultural and physical characteristics of – the population within the constructed units.<sup>7</sup>

Among real-life instances of “region-like unit” construction, one could identify, for example, the frequent Western portrayal of the Middle East as an exotic and backward homogenous region.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the West often depicts former post-communist countries as islands of poverty and disorder, with Kotkin’s label of “Trashcanistan” aptly transmitting the mood of such descriptions.<sup>9</sup> The Baltic nations approach images of Russia from an identical angle: Russia is typically imagined as a militaristic state with bad roads, and perceived in its culture to be closer to

the “Asiatic” than the “European” or “Western” extreme of the alleged “civilizational” scale.<sup>10</sup> One of the most prominent examples of “peopling” is the representation of Russians as chronic alcoholics in need of constant authoritarian supervision by a strong leader. Such popular clichés are still widely articulated among the Baltic nations.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, metageographies refer to simplified and constructed knowledge about regional and human geographical peculiarities. They are nourished by an amalgamation of widespread myths and stereotypes that exist in folklore and/or are propagated by the media, real facts, and personal experience of cultural contacts. Before being taken for granted and frequently internalized without much questioning,<sup>12</sup> metageographies are shaped in the mind over time, and also depend on the specific political context of the time.<sup>13</sup> This renders engagement with other cultures largely pre-configured and biased.<sup>14</sup> Thus, instead of aiming for an objective reality, individuals in a certain society employ their “mind’s eye”<sup>15</sup> to imagine the world and construct relevant stereotypical representations.

Stereotypical collective representations facilitate the process of collective identity (re)construction<sup>16</sup> whereby in-group members (“Us”) “recognize, describe or identify themselves” as being distinct from “Them” – “Others” situated outside the group’s environment.<sup>17</sup> For an in-group member, an “Other” is simultaneously a medium to determine what the group is not – to demarcate symbolic boundaries between “Us” and “Them”. In the reality of international relations, national identity construction proceeds alongside the creation of such mental demarcation lines between “Our” nation and geopolitical “Others”. These lines are informed by geopolitical representations and images, enabling actors to undertake the process of world “diagnostics”, identifying which states’ political objectives are reconcilable/non-compatible with one’s own.<sup>18</sup> National identities are not of a permanent or irreversible nature. They are actively constructed and reconstructed, constantly narrowing or widening the symbolic demarcation lines between oneself and an “Other”.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the role of the “Other” in relation to “Us” will also be continually (re)defined, with an “Other” to be potentially located along a continuum of “otherness” at different historical periods that are characterized by varying dynamics of international relations.<sup>20</sup> In this way, an “Other”, for example, may be perceived as a friendly or hostile actor, a backward or superior group to “Us”.<sup>21</sup> Németh<sup>22</sup> demonstrates how the relationship dynamics

between Finland and Estonia during the 20<sup>th</sup> century changed with respect to Finnish perceptions disseminated through documentaries and television fiction. From “little brother” during the interwar period of close interconnections, “Russians”/Soviets during the period of Soviet occupation and West-East geopolitical confrontation, to a fellow EU member country and a cheap holiday destination – Estonia has experienced degrees of exclusion

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Celebrations in Raigala. The creators have used genuine national symbols like the Lithuanian tricolor in the show.

and inclusion from Finland, narrowing or widening its symbolic demarcation lines.

Geopolitical knowledge determined by continuous redefinition of mental demarcation lines, according to Ó Tuathail and Agnew<sup>23</sup>, is a product of discourse. Discourse is not restricted to written and verbal texts that highlight geopolitical “truths”. It is rather “a set of capabilities”, of “socio-cultural resources”, of “societal mythologies” that render geopolitical texts meaningful.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, in effect, discourses generate “anti-geographical” knowledge.<sup>25</sup> This means that actors such as individuals, academics or politicians foreground “controllable geopolitical abstractions”<sup>26</sup> in the process of mental mapping instead of acknowledging the complexities and diversity of the geographical areas in question. Like national identities, discourses are also dynamic:<sup>27</sup> they can be transformed and modified depending on the socio-cultural and political context of the time. The dynamics of a geopolitical discourse, consequently, can inform the dynamics of relations between “Us” and “Them”, altering demarcation lines or the perceived distance and attitude to an “Other”. In the reality of international relations, this would translate into the dynamics of the foreign policy of a particular state towards other actors in the system.

## Geopolitical discourses in popular culture and on television

Popular culture remains an important resource for geopolitical discourses, facilitating processes of circulation and legitimation among the public.<sup>28</sup> As a mirror for popular geopolitical images reinforced by widespread metageographies of other states, nations and regions, popular culture, as Kolosov<sup>29</sup> argues, has in recent decades become an object of focus for the domain of practical geopolitics. The latter is embodied by an official foreign policy agenda, political speeches and diplomatic practices, and has become increasingly responsive to public opinion and mass media culture.<sup>30</sup> Thus, domains of geopolitics (also including for-

mal or academic geopolitics)<sup>31</sup> are not entirely isolated from each other, but, as Szostek puts it, are permeable.<sup>32</sup>

Such permeability may attain a considerable level in authoritarian states in which the media, as well as academic and expert environments, are highly controlled by the authorities.<sup>33</sup> In Russia, for example, such permeability and strong unity of a political agenda that absorbs increasingly anti-Western attitudes across different domains of geopolitics is particularly visible.<sup>34</sup> As Kiriya and Degtereva<sup>35</sup> indicate, all types of mainstream Russian media, and especially television, are almost completely controlled by the Kremlin and its big business allies. As a result, television in highly controlled societies may transmit to the public those geopolitical representations that have been negotiated, to an extent, with the public itself. However, it would be inappropriate to assign exclusive agency in relation to geopolitical reality creation to the Russian regime. Anti-Western geopolitical rhetoric functions quite well for a society that is feeling disenchanted by its general helplessness in creating change in Putin’s Russia but is also harboring deep complexes of alleged humiliation by the West, and is longing to restore the former superpower.<sup>36</sup> Such complexes and desires appear to be advanced by popular metageographies formed in the Soviet and early post-Soviet periods, when the West was portrayed as an enemy of the Soviet Union, and was then blamed for Russia’s social and economic disasters in the 1990s.

Returning to *Gastrolery* – the serial to be analyzed in this article – as a potential projector of geopolitical images, it is useful to note that the show in question is a media product that contains elements of comedy. For such a production the genre obviously demands a special focus on humor in order to provoke laughter in the audience. Dodds and Kirby<sup>37</sup> suggest that the appreciation of humor depends on national states of affairs, and is mostly acquired over a prolonged period through society, folklore and the media, but can also be regulated through the same channels. For laughter to be provoked, then, jokes in films and serials as



SCREENSHOT: NTV

Raigala's Police Chief and Mayor played by Latvians Arnis Liticis and Ivars Kalniņš.

audio-visual texts have to refer to well-established metageographies that have been internalized by the public, manifesting the degree of permeability between different domains of geopolitics. Humor projected through mass media has the potential to re-articulate the unifying power of a nation, and restate differences between a socially constructed “Us” as a unified body and a signified “Other”.<sup>38</sup>

## Methodology

In order to analyze the serial I will utilize the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of a multimodal audio-visual text as approached by Kress and Van Leeuwen.<sup>39</sup> Like all television serials, *Gastrolery* is an example of a text in which Russia's negotiated geopolitical discourse on the Baltic States has been potentially articulated. The serial's text is multimodal because it combines aural/sound and visual modalities that are simultaneously perceived by the audience. It is also multisemiotic as the two modalities are underpinned by respective semiotic systems: soundtrack, noise effects, dialogue, speech and visual effects, writing, gestures, colors, editing techniques, etc.<sup>40</sup>

When approaching the analysis of the serial's narrative I will scrutinize the design and production plan of the serial. The design plan is reminiscent of a specific content “package” that a creator can take advantage of when preparing a product for a specific kind of audience.<sup>41</sup> In the case of *Gastrolery*, the “design” plan relates to the production's genre – television entertainment, or a tragi-comic serial. “Actual material articulation of the semiotic event”, Kress and Van Leeuwen<sup>42</sup> suggest, is the manifestation of the “production” stage of an audio-visual text including, for example, such techniques as casting decisions, landscape visualization, sound expression or footage editing. Because discourses can only be expressed through different semiotic systems, it is necessary to concentrate attention on the latter and attempt to pinpoint potential intertextual relationships of *Gastrolery*'s narrative with existing Russian metageographies

of the Baltic States. For this task, along with the CDA method, I will provide a review of academic literature on how the Baltic States have been imagined in Russia within different domains of geopolitics.

## Which country is depicted?

The 16-episode tragi-comedy *Gastrolery*, produced by well-known Russian actor, Sergei Zhygunov, was first aired in 2016 on the Russian federal channel NTV, and then uploaded via YouTube onto NTV's official account. The serial's narrative follows the adventures of two Russian criminals, brothers Vladimir and Mikhail Saboneev who, following a conflict with a local mayor, leave their native city of Tambov, planning to reach Brazil via Lithuania and Sweden. Stuck in the fictional Lithuanian seaside town of Raigala, however, the two brothers gradually establish a rapport with the locals, develop romantic relationships with Lithuanian women, and decide to stay, eventually building successful businesses and careers in the town. In Raigala, the brothers present themselves as Vladimiras and Mykolas Saboniai – Russified ethnic Lithuanians who have returned to their homeland.

As the story takes place in Lithuania, on the one hand the production team of *Gastrolery* has been sufficiently precise when identifying the nominal country featured in the plot. In the serial, Raigala's bureaucrats' offices are equipped with authentic Lithuanian tricolor flags and coat of arms, while local policemen drive apparently genuine Lithuanian police vehicles and wear a specific uniform. Some relevant historical and political references are also made, for example, the rule of the medieval leader Grand Duke Vytautas, President Smetona's government, or Lithuanian anti-Soviet resistance. Nevertheless, if one pays attention to depictions of Lithuanians – in particular, the portrayal of their speech and emotions – as well as visual representations of the social environment, and the local architectural and natural landscape, it could be suggested that representations of the human



and landscape geography of Lithuania may have been employed in the serial as synecdochical instruments that identify all three Baltic nations. Thus, *Gastrolery* appears to implement production strategies that are tightly coupled by the means of intertextual relationships with the metageographies of the Baltic nations and their states, which have been predominant in Russia since Soviet times.<sup>43</sup> While the show does not employ any explicit allusions to specific popular (audio-visual) texts, it nonetheless requires viewers to possess a significant degree of popular cultural and geographical knowledge of the Baltic region.<sup>44</sup> The depiction of Lithuanians in the serial is managed overwhelmingly in line with ethnic, cultural and political hegemonic stereotypes about the Baltic nations, including those disseminated by popular jokes taking into account the tragi-comic nature of *Gastrolery*.

## Pribalts: homogenous

Specific casting decisions and the actors' verbal performance point to deliberate attempts at portraying Lithuania according to a collective internalized image of "pribalts". The moniker of "pribalt" designates a non-Russian native of one of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, collectively labelled as Sovetskaiia Pribaltika [Soviet Baltic] during the decades of Soviet occupation. The colloquialism of "pribalt", nowadays considered by the Baltic nations to possess imperialist undertones,<sup>45</sup> continues to be actively utilized in the Russian-speaking world.

The image of "pribalts" in Russia has been reinforced by stereotypes and myths gradually accumulated through literature, cinema, the media, personal cultural contacts<sup>46</sup> and popular jokes.<sup>47</sup> For example, a typical "pribalt", according to Krikmann, could be popularly portrayed as speaking heavily accented and incorrect Russian with long-drawn-out syllables; or as a Russo-phobe who wouldn't serve a Russian-speaking customer if the latter addressed a "pribalt" in Russian.<sup>48</sup> As Klubkov indicates, after the breakup of the USSR, the minimal or non-existent experience of contacts between a large number of people from former Soviet republics and the Baltic nations continues to sustain widespread and internalized stereotypes of "pribalts", significantly blurring the cultural, linguistic and political distinctions between the three states.<sup>49</sup>

As Krikmann demonstrates,<sup>50</sup> it was only after the Soviet disintegration that the Baltic nations became explicitly targeted by Russians in popular jokes. This may have been connected to Russian grievances over the allegedly decisive role of the Baltic republics in the USSR's destruction.<sup>51</sup> A large percentage of such jokes engages with imagined daily interactions between "pribalts" and Russian speakers, underpinned by presumed realities of local ethnic co-existence. In these popular depictions, cultural and political differences between the Baltic nations have increasingly been minimized, and salient linguistic and emotional distinctions significantly dimin-

ished. For example, in a Russian popular joke about Estonians one can frequently utilize a Lithuanian last name pattern when indicating an Estonian person. Another instance could be the incorrect application of history and political knowledge in relation to a specific Baltic state.<sup>52</sup>

In *Gastrolery*, a prominent linguistic characteristic, which many Russian actors playing Lithuanians persistently emphasize when speaking either Lithuanian or Russian, is comically exaggerated drawn-out speech. A person familiar with the Lithuanian language and its average speed would identify the grotesque character of the actors' intonations, which are intentionally overdone and caricature-like speech melodies reminiscent of Finno-Ugric (Estonian or Finnish) rather than Lithuanian (Baltic) prosody. 'Stretching' vowels is sometimes coupled with slowness and delayed reaction – a widespread Russian stereotype of a "slow Finn or Estonian"<sup>53</sup> applied here to Lithuanian film characters. As Shmeliova and Shmeliov<sup>54</sup> underline, humor in ethnic jokes is often the result of perceiving an ethnic "Other" as someone manifesting non-normative and non-standard features in comparison with one's own culture – a perceived "standard". Curiously, according to a long tradition originating in the Russian Empire, the Baltic nations and sometimes even Finns continue to be represented in Russian folklore as *inorodtsy* [of foreign descent], a type of imperial "Others", not "foreigners" separated from Russians by international borders.<sup>55</sup> This is confirmed by Klubkov,<sup>56</sup> as the word-building model that utilizes the prefix "pri" (as in "Pribaltika") was never used in Russia or the USSR to refer to foreign territories. Thus, in the case of the linguistic and ethnic features of *Gastrolery*, humor emanating from comical situations portraying Lithuanians appears to be largely driven by collective and overly schematic images of "pribalts" as formerly Soviet and currently post-Soviet imperial "Others": speaking long-drawn-out Russian, making mistakes or reacting slowly to questions.

The stereotype of the alleged "homogeneity" of "pribalts" may have also been cultivated by the means of Soviet popular cinema. Soviet filmmakers regularly cast Baltic actors in the role of "foreigners" in Western literature adaptations, spy films and fairy tales. The extreme popularity of Soviet Baltic film productions in the Soviet Union, together with the frequent lack of viewers' actual cultural contacts with "pribalts" and with real foreigners from beyond the Iron Curtain, resulted in a situation in which Baltic actors and actresses quickly became an

embodiment of a "Western" person onscreen, facilitating the creation of a "foreign" image in cinema and in ordinary life.<sup>57</sup> Many films of Soviet Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius cinema studios employed a mixed cast of Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian actors and actresses, which increased the perception of such films as being "Western" or non-typical Soviet productions.<sup>58</sup>

An intertextual reference, point-

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CULTURAL CONTACTS  
AND POPULAR JOKES."**

ing to the previously mentioned widespread Soviet casting practice, is present in *Gastrolery*. The creators recruited three popular Baltic Soviet-era film actors: a Latvian, Ivars Kalniņš, his compatriot, Arnis Licitis, and an Estonian, Lembit Ulfsak, who all play Lithuanians. Occasionally, when the characters of Kalniņš and Licitis converse in “Lithuanian”, both actually speak Latvian to each other, which is not evident to the common Russian audience. Another Latvian celebrity who is widely known in Russia – a young Latvian pop singer, Intars Busulis, provided his accented Lithuanian vocals for the serial’s soundtrack “Lithuanian rap”.

### Pribalts: “fascist”

At the end of the 1980s, strong national aspirations and openly anti-Soviet orientations of the once independent Baltic nations triggered the emergence among many Russian speakers of a popular depiction of a “nationalist” and “fascist pribalt”. When the Baltic states became independent again in 1991, an international argument with Russia soon erupted concerning the destiny of a large number of Russian-speaking Soviet migrants. These people, who had not lived in the Baltic states before their illegal annexation by the USSR in 1940, were predominantly not eligible for automatic citizenship (with the exception of Lithuania).<sup>59</sup> However, even the gradual improvement of the Russian-speaking minority’s position in Baltic societies, which has taken place under pressure from international and European institutions, does not prevent the Kremlin from sustaining the myth of “Baltic fascism” (actively promulgated by the media), whereby the rights of Russian-speaking minorities have been (allegedly) methodically and incessantly violated. Problems integrating Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic states certainly remain, but references to “fascism” appear to be deliberately exaggerated by Russia, both domestically and internationally, in an attempt to link the problem with other prominent political and economic Russian-Baltic issues, and gain leverage in negotiations.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the Baltic nations’ official rejection of the main narrative of Russia’s Great Patriotic War (in the Baltic region, 1944 is regarded not as the year of liberation from the Nazis, but as the beginning of the second Soviet occupation) continues to aggravate state relations.<sup>61</sup>

The stereotype of “nationalist” or “fascist” pribalts in the analyzed serial is echoed in an allegorical and almost grotesque manner when the protagonist Mikhail gives a passionate interview on TV after managing to neutralize a gang of Estonian bank robbers. While speaking to a journalist, he aggressively beats the robbers who are lying on the ground and claims that he will not allow “sneaky foreigners to set foot on sacral Lithuanian soil”, enumerating potentially unwelcome ethnicities afterwards. Immediately following the interview, Mikhail becomes well-known in the country, and some unnamed high Lithuanian authorities

order Raigala’s City Council to employ Mikhail as a police officer because “this guy is very promising”. Although the plot’s turn refers to nationalism in the Lithuanian context, it would arguably be relatively easy for an ordinary Russian viewer to associate the nationalist tirades depicted here with “Baltic nationalism” in general. The presumed uniformity of Baltic attitudes towards foreigners and Russians in particular is echoed in one of the episodes when a man from Tambov, sent to the Baltic to search for the Saboneev brothers, comes to Estonia. The only place shown here, apart from stock footage of Tallinn’s Old Town, is a bar in which dangerous looking leather-clad (a possible reference to the outfits of stereotypical neo-Nazis) Estonians frown at the man who asks for a drink in Russian.

### Pribalts: “agrarian” and “peripheral”

Quite a prominent Soviet and Russian stereotype associated with “pribalts” has also been that of *khutoriane* [farmstead people],<sup>62</sup> possibly echoing the historical importance of agriculture for the Baltic states’ economic subsistence, the Baltic nations’ close connection with their native land and the rich peasant foundation of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian national cultures.<sup>63</sup> One may also enquire as to the extent to which this label of a “farmstead person” evokes the situation in the Russian Empire – most prominently in Lithuania – in which the majority of Baltic peoples lived in the countryside, while the capitals and large towns were predominantly inhabited by Poles, Jews, Russians and Germans.<sup>64</sup> In the post-Soviet era, this stereotype may have been reinforced by the fact that many Soviet-built factories in the area were rapidly closed by the Baltic states after they regained their independence. In the context of broken economic links with other Soviet republics that were previously the main internal markets for Soviet Baltic products, many such factories became highly unprofitable.<sup>65</sup> However, according to Russian popular interpretations that are actively supported by the Kremlin-supervised media, the traditionally agrarian Baltic states were presumed to be simply unable to preserve and maintain the industrial heritage that the “generous USSR” presented to the “underdeveloped” countries of “ungrateful” Baltic nations.<sup>66</sup>

In *Gastrolery*, Raigala is depicted as a seaside resort. However, almost all its inhabitants engage in agricultural or nature-related activities and live in detached summer houses or on farmsteads, which might be a reference to the *khutoriane* stereotype. No major industries are shown in the vicinity; local businesses

are small and struggling. One can consider how such portrayals may also be connected to the prevalent post-Soviet Russian images of the increasingly impoverished “Pribaltika”, supposedly struggling under the neoliberal diktats of Brussels. According to such accounts, having once been a Soviet region with developed industries and a high standard of living, the new Baltic EU members had to get rid of former successful enterprises.

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Vilnius Catholic Church of the Ascension presented as a local church in a seaside resort town of Raigala.

This allegedly happened not only because the factories were unprofitable for independent Baltic countries but also because such plants were “Soviet-built and had no place in independent Baltic states”. Becoming a Western periphery, it was presumed, however, that the new agrarian EU members were unable to compete with Western European manufacturers and growers.<sup>67</sup>

The narrative portrays the Saboneev brothers as strong leaders determined to bring prosperity back to Raigala. During an argument with Raigala’s mayor, Lokys, an ethnic Lithuanian, locals note that the businessman Vladimir Saboneev has done more for the welfare of the town in a year than Lokys has done during his entire term. Though Vladimir’s business is of dubious legality, he nevertheless manages to provide many locals with jobs and entertainment. Thus, the order and prosperity that return to Raigala become an echo of the popular and elite discourse in Russia – even articulated by Putin himself in relation to Lithuania<sup>68</sup> – that the Baltic states are a poor periphery of the EU, “failed states”, weakened by Western neoliberal economy and huge immigration to Western Europe. In this case Russia is presented as a potential economic savior of the Baltic – the latter only needs to resume friendly relationships with its big neighbor to become prosperous again. Thus, Russophobic Lokys, embodies Baltic authorities that allegedly facilitate “the diktats of Brussels” and carry out “anti-Russian” foreign policy. In contrast, Baltic people, as portrayed by the inhabitants of Raigala, do not support their politicians’ geopolitical orientations and are friendly towards Russia, which is consistent with the official Kremlin discourse that frequently demonizes Baltic leaders but not necessarily the ordinary population.<sup>69</sup>

### Pribalts: “Western”

Stereotypes need not necessarily be exclusively negative.<sup>70</sup> It is therefore crucial to underline that Soviet and Russian stereotypes that feed metageographies of “Pribaltika” have also displayed neutral and positive tones, revealing a significant amount of genuine admiration for the region and locals, and thus, simul-

taneously, a degree of confrontation with previously outlined negative stereotypes and myths about “pribalts”. The populations of other Soviet areas widely imagined the Soviet Baltic republics as being “our abroad”, “our West” and Soviet “façades”<sup>71</sup> – a more prosperous and progressive region in comparison with other “non-Western” USSR republics; a model region to be emulated elsewhere in the Union. For example, this was discernible in the Baltic region’s better access to consumer goods – at least until the late 1970s<sup>72</sup> – and higher living standards, presumed to be like those in the real “West”. Tourists from other Soviet national republics were also attracted by “Western” customer service, especially in seaside resort cities like the Latvian Jūrmala.<sup>73</sup> The imagined “Westernness” of locals was presumed to be reflected in such personality features as politeness, a strong work discipline, attention to detail and law abidance.<sup>74</sup>

Baltic human “Westernness” manifests itself in the serial through the depiction of Raigalians as being polite, showing good manners, trying to be as helpful as possible, and generally following the rule of law. On the first day of the brothers’ sojourn in the town, the locals are shocked: someone (the younger Saboneev brother) has stolen two bottles of vodka from a small store. People are portrayed as being genuinely surprised, as in this comically exaggerated portrayal of a “safe and civilized Western” society, such misdemeanors would instantly make the news. As Zhygunov himself puts it, the Lithuanians in this story possess a “greenhouse” character<sup>75</sup> – they are relaxed and poorly adjusted to the Russian “tough” life of daily competition for a place in the sun – something that the Saboneevs eagerly engage in while staying in this small EU town.

An undeniably important influence on Russian-speaking people’s image of “our West” was also exercised by the immediately visible cultural differences. Having experienced long periods of Polish, Swedish and German rule in the area, and maintaining a firm Western political and cultural orientation during the interwar years of independence, the Baltic states could indeed be visibly foreign to a tourist from the USSR’s East.<sup>76</sup> When visiting



“Pribaltika” one could observe the “Western” baroque, gothic and art nouveau architectural heritage of the old towns of the Baltic capitals.<sup>77</sup> This architecture, which looked quite unusual to an ordinary Soviet citizen, was frequently used by socialist filmmakers in cinematic roles of urban landscapes in an otherwise almost inaccessible Western Europe or America.<sup>78</sup> The local languages’ use of the Latin-based alphabet in comparison with the predominantly Cyrillic-based alphabet of other Soviet republics, and the deep Catholic and Lutheran traditions that influence the daily life and social relations of the locals, demarcated a clear boundary between the rest of the Soviet empire and a “Soviet Western Other” to an Eastern Soviet tourist.<sup>79</sup>

Apart from an emphasis on the human geography of “pribalts” in the serial, the creators have implemented several production strategies to visualize the landscapes that render the imagined “sense of place and history”.<sup>80</sup> This is associated with the widespread Soviet and Russian trope of “our West”, and underlines the “Western otherness” of the local inhabitants and their culture.

The “material articulation” of the imagined “Pribaltika” already starts manifesting itself in promotional materials prepared for the show. For instance, the choice of visuals for the early serial’s poster – initially *Gastrolery* was to be titled *Begletsy/Palanga* [Fugitives/Palanga] – speaks in favor of a deliberate intention to evoke “symbolic geographies”<sup>81</sup> of the whole “Pribaltika” rather than those of Lithuania exclusively. The poster is a collage with an image of the reconstructed House of the Blackheads in Riga (Latvia) on the right, a spire of the St. Nicholas Church in Tallinn (Estonia) on the left and an unidentified Old Town street – which could in reality belong to any of the three Baltic capitals – running through the center. No actual sights of the well-known Lithuanian seaside town of Palanga are included.

The actual serial’s backdrop, particularly the architectural landscapes that are portrayed, are likewise consistent with the aesthetics of “our West”. According to Zhygunov,<sup>82</sup> the project’s producer, it is difficult to determine the precise location of fictional Raigala – scenes were shot in different locations both by a hired Baltic production team and members of Zhygunov’s crew. The former provided genuine Lithuanian aerial views and landscapes, including well-known Lithuanian tourist sights, countryside scenery and views of the Curonian Spit. All acting scenes were shot by the Russians themselves in the Leningrad region of Russia by the Bay of Finland. During the editing stage, clips of various origins were merged, forming a cinematic landscape patchwork.

The visual content of the commissioned footage inserted into each episode for several seconds on multiple occasions operates as a “landscape of place”,<sup>83</sup> introducing viewers to the geographical context in which the story takes place. Although panoramic and aerial views were produced by a Baltic production team in real Lithuania, the use of footage and its editing suggests

the producer’s objective of recreating a concentrated portrayal of a typical Baltic – and not necessarily Lithuanian – town featuring “Western” architecture. Thus, not unlike Soviet viewers who had minimal knowledge of the Baltic republics, an audience not familiar with Lithuanian landmarks might have successfully imagined the Baltic resort of Raigala when observing the amalgamated landscape patchwork. This patchwork not only includes scenery from the Curonian Spit sand dunes and the Baltic Sea, as well as woods and beaches shot in the Leningrad region, but, interestingly, it also includes visuals of the baroque historical center of Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, situated not in the western but in the eastern part of the state. One can also observe in the serial a medieval Gothic-Romanesque island castle apparently located in Raigala, but in reality found in Trakai, several hundred kilometers from the Lithuanian coast to the east. In the same manner that architectural sights found in all three Baltic States are utilized on the serial’s promotional poster to represent Lithuania’s Palanga landscape, it is not difficult to visualize Latvian and Estonian sights mixed with Lithuanian landmarks to convey the visual aesthetic of an imagined “Pribaltika”. The fact that crumbling Soviet-built residential high rises, found almost everywhere in the Baltic as in other post-Soviet areas, were not included to portray the local architectural landscape might be another indication of an intention to present a refined “Western” landscape of neat, small streets and historical architecture not visually stained by bleak Soviet residential towers.

## Discussion

I would like to stress that in the serial being analyzed, the range of stereotypes potentially underpinning the Russian metageographies of the Baltic States and their natives is most likely not restricted to the examples provided in this article. However, even a selective focus on the respective intertextual references found in *Gastrolery*’s audio-visual text appears to reveal the presence of an amalgamation of widespread internalized Soviet and Russian metageographies of the Baltic States consistent with the “pribaltification” principle. The design and production dimensions of the serial’s multimodal text expose images of “pribalts” as “homogenous” in language, speech or temperament, with Lithuanians represented as caricatural Estonians or Finns, an “imperial Other” to laugh at. The story also echoes a stereotype of a “fascist” or “nationalist pribalt” circulating widely not only in Russian folklore but in the media and also among the elites.

The Lithuanian/Pribaltika’s province is portrayed as a peripheral and economically unsuccessful region allegedly unable to prosper in the neoliberal and highly competitive economic environment of the EU. The success of the Saboneevs’ businesses in Raigala resonates with the discourse promulgated by the Russian elites that the ordinary Baltic people would benefit from closer cooperation with Russia. Positive representations of “Pribaltika” manifest

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themselves in the general narrative and production dimensions of the audio-visual text. In line with relevant Soviet-era human geographical imaginations of “pribalts” as “Western”, Lithuanians, in comparison with Russians, are depicted in the story as hard-working, law-abiding, disciplined and well-mannered. Visual landscapes of Raigala are recreated according to the aesthetic of the “Soviet West”, rather than being consistent with the genuine geography of the Lithuanian coast. The cinematic patchwork that visualizes a plethora of Romanesque, Gothic and art-nouveau buildings establishes a concentrated portrayal of a local “Western” landscape.

Thus, the audio-visual text of *Gastrolery* utilizes the geographical entity of Lithuania as a synecdoche to refer to all three Baltic States and their nations. As Brüggemann indicates<sup>84</sup>, comprehension of the Baltic nations and their distinct histories and cultures is almost absent in Russia. Russians overwhelmingly continue to mentally map the Baltic region as the former “Soviet West” or as “Russophobic Pribaltika”, a geopolitical “Other”, now a full member of blocs perceived by Russia to be hostile. In fact, even the term “Baltic”, firmly established to designate Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia during the Soviet era only, is not questioned in Russia in comparison with the Baltic States themselves.<sup>85</sup>

As mentioned previously, metageographies of the Baltic nations referring to the “fascism” and “peripherality” of the three countries are present in the multimodal text of the serial. The fact that Russian political elites have increased the articulation of such stereotypes in recent decades suggests that such myths have been firmly embedded in Russia’s geopolitical discourse on the Baltic States. In the context of a highly controlled media environment, popular and practical (elite) geopolitical images can inform and nourish each other, negotiating a synthesized discursive output. No evidence has been available of whether *Gastrolery* was explicitly commissioned by NTV,<sup>86</sup> the third most viewed channel, which is owned by the state holding *Gazprom-Media* on behalf of the state. But whether or not Zhygunov, himself a supporter of Putin’s politics, produced the serial as an ordered product, *Gastrolery* appears to be an audio-visual text predominantly based on the negotiated meta-geographical output that is well aligned with the Kremlin’s “controllable geopolitical abstraction”<sup>87</sup> of the Baltic States.

This article does not aim to deliver any foreign policy prognoses. In particular, I do not argue that the Baltic states should be alarmed by contemporary Russia’s imperial syndrome in spite of rising moods of revanchism in the Kremlin, frequent provocations in the Baltic NATO airspace, Russian-Belarusian military exercises near the Baltic borders,<sup>88</sup> or even Putin’s 2018 weapons presentation aimed at intimidating the West with a new type of missile.<sup>89</sup> Rather, the aim of this article is to call for more serious, expansive and detailed academic research, not only of the most prominent Russian feature films to engage with the topic of national identity, such as “Brat-2” [Brother-2] or “The Barber of Siberia”, but also numerous Russian small screen productions broadcast by state-owned channels. Another crucial factor would be for renowned scholars of popular geopolitics to apply

greater interest to Russian television serials, particularly Western academics who, regrettably, continue to sustain their focus on audio-visual texts originating in liberal democratic states in which the media are not controlled as much as they are in authoritarian countries.<sup>90</sup> Television remains the most widespread and popular type of media in Russia,<sup>91</sup> and because *Gastrolery* is only one example among many Russian small screen productions of different genres that engage with popular geopolitics, the prospects of such research appear to be lavish. ✕

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Note: All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

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# “One must do one’s best to undermine the system”

**Tomas Venclova in a conversation with Stefan Ingvarsson on literature, Lithuania, and being a historical optimist in Europe today.**

**STEFAN INGVARSSON:** It is an acknowledged fact that you, Tomas Venclova, a poet and a scholar, represent a way of being European that can be called global Europeanism. You were born in Lithuania, studied in Russia, and have been working a considerable part of your life in the US. But I want to return to the very beginning of your life, since global Europeanism has to start somewhere. In your case, it starts in Klaipeda and in Vilnius. And I would therefore also like to start with Klaipeda. Is it a town that you visit often today?

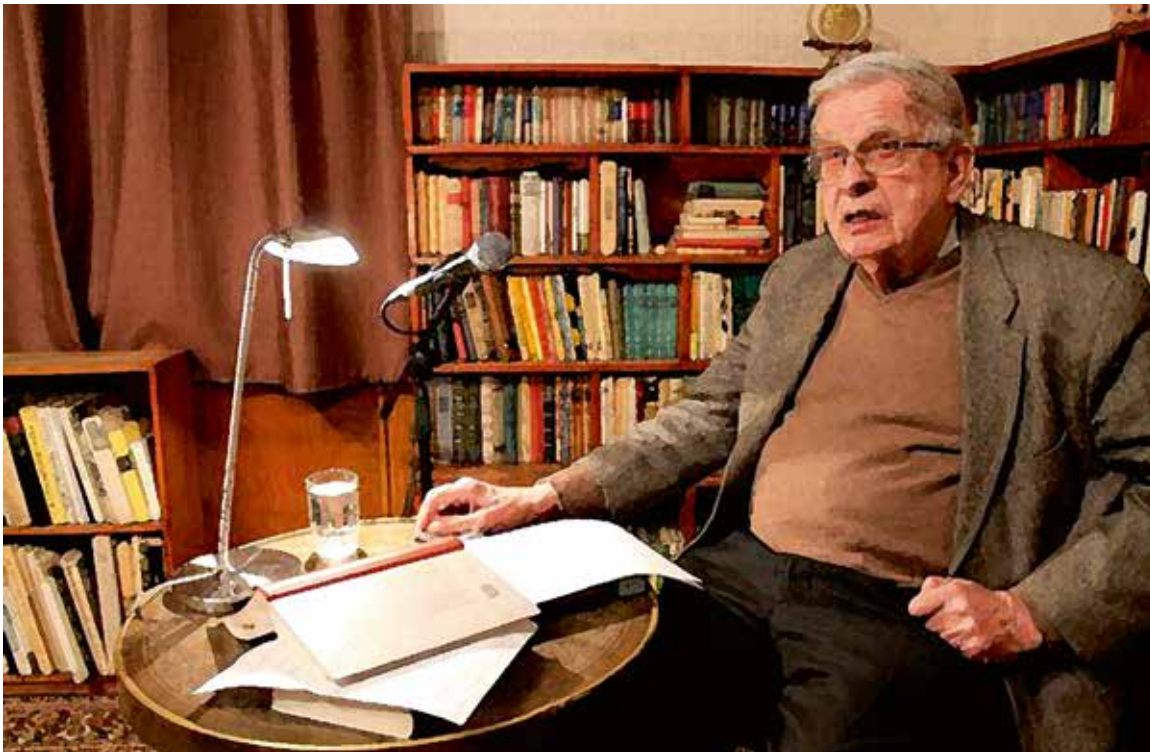
**TOMAS VENCLOVA:** “Oh, yes, very often. I was born in Klaipeda, which was called Memel in German, and this is the historical name of the city. It is not very big: a harbor city on the shores of the Baltic Sea. I was born there but we had to leave Klaipeda when I was two years old. I was born in 1937. When Hitler took it in 1941, virtually all Lithuanians left, but later Klaipeda was returned to Lithuania, this time to Soviet Lithuania, in 1945. But throughout those years, it remained a Lithuanian city, and is still a Lithuanian-speaking city. Before the war it was a German-speaking city. In its history it is like a miniature Gdansk, or Danzig, with a very similar fate even though much less known and much smaller. People around Klaipeda were mostly Lithuanian speakers, just like people around Gdansk spoke mostly Polish or Kashubian. Klaipeda was an interesting amalgam of languages and cultures. It reminds me of the amalgam described by Günter Grass in his Danzig novels.”

**Do you have any emotional or nostalgic attachments to Klaipeda?**

“I definitely have a very strong emotional attachment to Klaipeda. I once wrote a poem about the city, *A Poem about Memory*. That is an old poem; in Lithuanian it rhymes and has a song-like quality, which was lost in translation, although the translation is good but still.<sup>1</sup>

So, this is about Klaipeda, the city that had been almost totally destroyed by 1945. But some parts survived, including the house where I spent the first two years of my life; even the hospital where I was born is still there. I have a very strong emotional attachment to Klaipeda, just as I do to Vilnius, too. And I often mention it in my essays and in my poems.”

“I definitely have a very strong emotional attachment to Klaipeda. I once wrote a poem about the city, *A Poem about Memory*.”



**TOMAS VENCLOVA** (born September 11, 1937, Klaipėda) is a Lithuanian poet, prose writer, scholar, philologist and translator of literature. He is one of the five founding members of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group. In 1977, following his dissident activities, he was forced to emigrate and was deprived of his Soviet citizenship. Since 1980 he has taught Russian and Polish literature at Yale University. Considered a major figure in world literature, he has received many awards, including the Prize of Two Nations (received jointly with Czesław Miłosz), and The Person of Tolerance of the Year Award from the Sugihara Foundation, among other honors.

Tomas Venclova reading his poetry in the memorial library in the museum of the Venclova Family in Vilnius.

**Your first journey was quite short because after Klaipėda your parents lived in the suburbs, or a village outside Kaunas, but it was Vilnius that became a formative city for you, where you moved after your father returned [from Russia in 1944]; what kind of city was the Vilnius you came to?**

“That is a long story. My father was a leftist writer – a fellow traveler, as they said then. During the Soviet occupation he became Soviet Lithuania’s minister of culture. In 1943 he retired and became just a freelance writer, but he was still a member of the so-called *nomenklatura*. That is a long and complicated story, that I described in my last book *Magnetic Nord*, which is sort of a memoir or a very long interview. Those who know Polish literature might be reminded of Renata Gorczyńska’s *Miłosz par Miłosz* – my book is of the same kind. Or let us say, of the same genre as Solomon Volkov’s *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*. I described my father’s story and my own.

Speaking about Vilnius: I came to Vilnius when I was ten years old and spent thirty years of my life in the city. Somebody said that Rome is a strange city – one must either visit it for three days or live there for thirty years. Anything in between is pointless. The same can be said about Vilnius. Vilnius is a city you can visit and understand a bit of in three days or in thirty years. I was lucky to spend thirty very important years of my life mainly in Vilnius, although I also spent part of the time in Moscow and St. Petersburg, then Leningrad, which I believe were also formative cities in my life. But Vilnius was most important. First of all, it was and still is a multicultural city, probably the most multicultural city in Europe, with the possible exception of Trieste or Prague. But I think it is even more multicultural, and more complicated. For several hundred years it was mostly a Polish speaking city. Those Poles who lived there considered themselves to be Lithuanians, and at the same time Poles and Polish patriots. There were also ethnic Lithuanians, speaking Lithuanian, who considered themselves Lithuanian patriots, but they were not so numerous in Vilnius.

If I were looking for a comparison here in Sweden to explain Polish-Lithuanian relations, then, in this part of Europe they remind me a bit of Finnish-Swedish relations in Helsinki or Helsingfors, Turku or Åbo, Tampere or Tammerfors, and so on. There is a similarity here. Swedes represented the aristocratic part of the population while Finns were peasants living not in the cities but around them. Such was also the case in Lithuania: Poles were the educated class, landowners and the nobility, living mainly in the cities, while the Lithuanians were peasants living around the cities. From the Lithuanian point of view, it was even worse in Vilnius since villages around Vilnius were





ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON

## A Poem about Memory

Tomas Venclova (1978) in translation by Jonas Zdanys

/.../

*The return home waits for us like the hour of death,  
White post-was dust, the trunk of the wilted tree,  
The empty fortress ditches, crumbled lighthouses,  
The rooms that open for all beyond the cracked walls.  
The wind carries the leaves, cold flows to shore,  
Above the rock and grave grows the September light,  
And near the ocean edge, heaped with past and space,  
Blackened boats glitter in the shallow waters.*

*That's only the line of years, the line of alien old age.  
That's how the grass and rain unite beyond the hills,  
That's how the dictionary thicket binds the destinies of  
Things*

*And the lost voices of the world come back to us.  
Don't be afraid to turn around: I too fell  
How the heavy panting lies on our shoulders –  
It's only the black earth, clay, dampness, the well, oblivion,  
The shores of unknown, unfamiliar nonexistence.*

*You stop among letters, glasses, rinsed boards,  
In the dead and rich sash of ebbside, together  
With several attendants who have long since disappeared,  
And the heat catches and hides you like a shadow.  
And vanishing in time, you don't feel the coming of fall,  
How around you change the skies and waters  
While a spirit, empty and greater than your life,  
Like a scene etched on retina, breaks apart deep in  
Things.*

also Polish speaking. I believe the authorities succeeded in resolving that situation rather wisely in Finland, but not in Lithuania, and therefore, some enmity between Poles and Lithuanians, though dwindling, is still perceptible there.

On top of this complicated situation there was also a Jewish population, and a very numerous one. Half of the city's population were Jews with their own cultural *milieu*, great synagogues, great libraries and so on, speaking mainly Yiddish but also Russian. They knew Polish; some of them, but not all, even knew Lithuanian, but their preferred second language after Yiddish was Russian. Then, there was also Hebrew, the language of the synagogue, the language of scholarship, to a large degree, a language of literature. In addition, there were also Russians who came to live in Vilnius during the tsarist period from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>; and there was a more ancient group of Russians – the old believers – who had left Russia for religious reasons; and the very first Russian, even before the old believers, was Prince Andrei Kurbsky whom we could consider the first Russian dissident. Kurbsky left Russia under Ivan the Terrible's rule [as a political opponent] and corresponded with Ivan in a famous exchange of letters. Recently this correspondence was declared to be fake, but I do not believe it; I even wrote an essay about it insisting that it was authentic and important as the very first historical monument of Russian dissent. Kurbsky is the patron saint of Russian dissent of all times. Going back to Vilnius, there were also Tatars living there, there were Karaites; there were Belorussians – and by the way for Belorussians, the city was a kind of Jerusalem, as it was for Lithuanians and Poles. The Jews also called it “the Jerusalem of the North”. The relationships between Lithuanians and Poles at certain periods also remind me, unfortunately, of the relations between Jews and Arabs in the real Jerusalem. As for Belorussians, Vilnius was their Jerusalem, while Minsk was something like Tel Aviv for them; their real Jerusalem was Vilnius. So you can see what an incredibly complex city it was.”

“Everybody in Lithuania felt extremely threatened by the prospect of Russification, since this was the practice of the tsarist period.”

**When you came to Vilnius, it was also a literary environment. We know what it was like then: the Jews have perished, the Poles are leaving, Soviet Russians and Lithuanians are moving in, and the university has been reopened as a Lithuanian university when you start studying there. Very soon, you also became a part of the literary milieu which was trying to create a literary Vilnius in Lithuania. Can you tell us about this environment?**

“Yes, we were not very well acquainted with the literary history of Vilnius. First of all, it was part of Polish literary history. The best Polish poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and probably of all time, Adam Mickiewicz, was a student in Vilnius. His most famous Polish narrative epic poem, *Pan Tadeusz*, starts with the famous apostrophe, ‘Lithuania, my fatherland!’ This is paradoxical enough, for the best Polish poem of all times to start with ‘Lithuania, my fatherland’, but there is also a second level to the paradox, because the Lithuania he speaks about is not the Lithuania of today but Belarus. When I try to explain this to the Western public I usually say: imagine a German-speaking poet born in Transylvania that now belongs to Romania but then constituted a part of Hungary; a German-speaking poet who never visited Vienna or Berlin, was educated in Budapest, and started a beautiful German narrative poem with the words ‘Hungary, my fatherland!’ – while this fatherland is now in fact not Hungary, but Romania. This is a very, very complicated story. Also, the best Polish poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Czesław Miłosz, graduated from Vilnius University that was Polish at that time, as it was in Mickiewicz’s time.

When I became a student at Vilnius University, I even wrote a paper about Mickiewicz in Vilnius and thus gained some knowledge of this, as well as of the Polish language, because when writing about Mickiewicz one has to understand some Polish. It was easy for me because my mother spoke Polish. She came from a mixed Polish-Lithuanian family and spoke both languages fluently. My father was a Lithuanian speaker, but he also knew some Polish, so for me it was rather easy since I learnt Polish early in my life, and especially because after 1956, Polish literature, periodicals, and Polish magazines all became extremely interesting, much more interesting than either Lithuanian or Russian newspapers.”

**But this was also a specific period when Lithuania had become a Soviet republic; there was not really a lot of hope that this would change. People had to find a way of creating a Lithuanian environment for literature and the humanities inside the Soviet Union. How did you feel about this task at this time?**

“Everybody in Lithuania felt extremely threatened by the prospect of Russification, since this was the practice of the tsarist period: all schools and all the press were Russian, and the university was closed. However, this time it turned out differently. Russians came to live in Vilnius in rather large numbers, but Lithuanians still prevailed. Nowadays, Vilnius is a Lithuanian-speaking city with a Russian community that is not very large; I would even say

it is quite marginal. In my opinion, what really happened was not Russification but a different problem: Sovietization, that used the Lithuanian language for its own purposes. The university still taught in Lithuanian, most of the schools remained Lithuanian, the press was mostly in the Lithuanian language – but all of that was absolutely Soviet. In Polish there is an expression, ‘*dębowy język*, la langue de bois’ that means the ‘wooden’ Soviet language. There was Lithuanian television and Lithuanian theatre, but until the year 1956 or even a bit later, it was all totally Soviet. One was thus being transformed into a homo sovieticus, so to speak. First of all, it was somewhat boring. But secondly, all that was pure lies, for I saw life around me and it was difficult and dangerous, while in literature, in the newspapers, in the radio, and on TV (though TV started later) life appeared beautiful and perfect: life was entirely Soviet which meant the best in the world. One could develop a cognitive dissonance, I would say. But the city itself with its architecture and its multiculturalism was so interesting because it was beautiful.”

**But you said that it took you several years to learn to appreciate it.**

“Yes, because, as you see, on the shores of the Baltic Sea there are three Baltic capitals: Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. Riga is a beautiful European city very much like Stockholm, I would say, smaller but still similar. Tallinn is another beautiful European city looking like the towns on the so-called German Romantic road, like Rothenburg for instance. Vilnius, however, is totally different: strange, chaotic, and in some parts definitely ugly. But it has some magic that Riga and Tallinn do not have. A magic city, Vilnius: not even Paris possesses such magic. Paris is probably one of the most beautiful cities in the world, but it still lacks a bit of magic. But Vilnius has it.”

**It is probably the same kind of magic that Akhmatova would find in a good poet.**

“Probably, probably. Miłosz also used to say that Vilnius is a magic city and that nothing is to be done about it. A charming and a very strange city. Maybe there is a similar kind of magic in Prague, but still Vilnius is better than Prague, for me. I often quote a story about a Lithuanian student who visited Europe in the early 1930s and wrote a book where he made the famous statement about Florence: ‘The city is nice, very similar to Vilnius, although worse.’ I almost agree with him. It definitely reminds one of Florence, but I like it better than Florence, and many people who have seen both like it better.”

**So would you say that for you this poetry, history, and beauty became an antidote to Sovietization?**

“Definitely, and very much so. And then things started to change. Stalin died, and in 1956 things started changing very seriously in that part of the world: first of all, in Poland. I was a Komsomol member at that time, part of the communist youth movement, and also one of the very small number who were called true believers. Partly because of my family, I definitely believed that communism indeed promised a happy future for the entire world.

Then, all members of the Komsomol in Vilnius University were informed about Khrushchev’s secret speech that said clearly and simply that Stalin was a killer, a murderer on the mass scale. While he was still alive, we had to learn a poem in school about Stalin by the best Lithuanian poet of that period, Salomėja Nėris. That was a terrible poem. It reminds me of one poem by Miłosz where he quotes the poem by Lucjan Szenwald, a Stalinist poem, one of the most beautiful Polish poems. From a technical point of view, it was on a quite acceptable level. I actually grew up

with that poem about Stalin by Salomėja Nėris; I learned it at school. It so happened that I knew Salomėja because she was a close friend of my father. And then, in 1956, I found out that Stalin was a mass murderer of the same kind as Hitler. As for Hitler, I was pretty sure that he was, but I was not so sure about Stalin. It came as a shock. But just like some other Soviet people at that time, I decided that it was terrible and must be corrected.

Then something started happening in Poland: October 1956, known as the Gomulka thaw. I was nineteen years old and I said to myself that Poles were nice guys; they were starting to get things right. And then, also in 1956, something started happening in Hungary. And I said to myself that Hungarians were even nicer than Poles: they were correcting things very seriously, we still had a happy future before us. But then, the Soviets invaded Hungary and crushed the Hungarian uprising in the cruelest and I would say most absurd way imaginable. And for me that was like a Zen Buddhist exercise when the teacher taps you on the head with a bamboo stick. In a fraction of a second, you do become a real Zen Buddhist, you understand everything: who is Buddha, what is karma, what is nirvana – just everything. November 4, 1956 was for me that bamboo stick; on that

day I understood. I understood that the system was incorrigible, that it could not be set right but could only fall. It would probably never happen during my lifetime, but still one has to do one’s best digging tunnels to undermine the system.”

“The best idea was to be a translator because you can translate Shakespeare, Pushkin, and Dostoevsky.”



**One has to undermine it.**

“Yes, yes, to undermine that system. One must do one’s best to undermine the system. And that was my life from the age of nineteen onwards for probably at least twenty years.”

**But of course in order to be able to write full time in the Soviet Union, or translate full time, you had to be a member of the Writers’ Union.**

“Yes.”

**And you applied to become a member of the Writers’ Union, both as a translator and as a poet.**

“Yes, that was the story. When a person makes a decision to dedicate their life to undermining the Soviet system, then a very pragmatic question comes up: How to get an income. The best idea was to be a translator because you can translate Shakespeare, Pushkin, and Dostoevsky – perhaps not so much Dostoevsky, because he was not very much encouraged – but you can translate Tolstoy, Dickens, Adam Mickiewicz, why not? Probably not Wyspiański, but Mickiewicz was possible: definitely not Miłosz, because he was the enemy of the people, but Mickiewicz was ok. More than one person made their living as a translator. They were not necessarily unhappy. One was expected to translate in a politically correct manner, in the Soviet meaning of the word. But I avoided this and practically never did it. I translated neutral things: some fiction, from Russian but also from Polish because at that time I already knew Polish well; I also translated from English, and that was how I made a living. It was a modest living but it was acceptable, a way of living without any compromise with my conscience. But I was still expected to do some sort of office work. Everyone had to serve but that sort of work was compromising because in the office you were always required to do something strictly Soviet, so to speak. That was when I tried to join the Writers’ Union because when one was formally a member one could live on royalties only, without needing to take an office job. But my application to the Writers’ Union was rejected.

That was a simple story. The best known and most influential writer of that period, Eduardas Mieželaitis, said, ‘This candidate cannot be accepted because he does not correspond to Paragraph One of the rules of the Writers’ Union.’ I was not even aware of the existence of Paragraph One. But Paragraph One declared that the candidate must contribute to the strengthening of Soviet power by his or her work. Then, somebody explained to Mieželaitis that Venclova was applying as a translator. To which Mieželaitis retorted that as a translator I failed again to meet the requirements of Paragraph One because being accepted by the Writers’ Union as a translator was like an honorary degree, while I translated T. S. Eliot, Pasternak, and Akhmatova, but I never translated communist poets. In this sense Mieželaitis was perfectly right. Still, since they rejected me as a member my life became somewhat precarious.”

**There was also that famous debate organized by the Writers’ Union in Vilnius between you and another young poet, or, according to another story, you were supposed to read in front of an audience, and the idea was to denounce you as a bourgeois poet, which they actually tried to do. How did you respond to this situation?**

“It was like this. At that time Boris Pasternak had published his famous novel *Doctor Zhivago*, which I was not exactly fond of, to be honest. And I am still not a big fan of his novel, but I am a big fan of Pasternak’s poetry. When I met Pasternak, the only time in my life, a meeting that lasted only half an hour, I was introduced to him as a young fellow who was trying to translate his poetry. Pasternak said, ‘Do not do that; my poetry is pretentious, stupid, it is simply bad. If I wrote anything worth mentioning it is my novel.’ I did not agree with him; I rated his poetry then, as I do now, much higher than his novel. I even told him that I liked his poetry better, but I could not convince him. But then Pasternak, as probably everyone knows, was awarded the Nobel prize. He could not go to Stockholm, and was forced to reject the award. There is part of *Doctor Zhivago* that I definitely like. The novel is not bad, but it is more interesting intellectually than artistically. But there is one part of it that is really interesting from the artistic point of view. It is the poems in the novel that are supposed to be by Zhivago, but it is certain that Pasternak wrote them himself. Those are good, like every poem Pasternak wrote; those are really good.

One more story in this connection. These poems from the novel were circulated in the form of small typewritten booklets in Moscow, and not only in Moscow. I had one such typewritten booklet that I always kept with me, but once I forgot it in the student canteen. Ten minutes later I realized that I had left it on the table there, came back to the canteen, and said, ‘My goodness, I left the booklet with my own poems here’. The women who served the food brought me the booklet and said, ‘You write such beautiful poems!’

When my application to the Writers’ Union was being considered, there was another applicant there, a young

poet of my age – a very talented man, by the way, very talented. He died some ten or fifteen years later, after he became a heavy drinker. Some of his poetry really makes sense and is still popular in Lithuania. But at that meeting the committee was trying to represent each of us as two different kinds of poet – one who was acceptable and another, in my humble person, who was unacceptable. One young critic said ‘Tomas Venclova’s poems could even have been written by Doctor Zhivago’, by which he meant that someone writing such poetry should be imprisoned, or maybe even shot, because Doctor Zhivago was definitely an enemy of the people, and so was Pasternak himself. They asked me what I thought about that. I said I could not discuss *Doctor Zhivago* because nobody there had read it, including myself. At that time, I really had not read *Doctor Zhivago*. And, I concluded, I was not prepared to discuss books I have never read. That was an insulting comment because a Soviet person was supposed to be able to discuss books he or she had never read and know everything about them – everything that was printed in the newspapers: For instance, that Pasternak’s book was inimical to the Soviet power, an artistic failure, and especially an ideological failure – but it had to be an artistic failure, too. Everybody was repeating these words about *Doctor Zhivago* all the time. So, at that meeting I said, ‘No, we will not discuss *Zhivago*, but I like Pasternak’s poetry. Pasternak is one of my poetic teachers; not only Pasternak, but also Mandelstam, and Akhmatova, and Tsvetaeva.’ That was like a bomb, an explosion; the meeting ended, and I was not accepted by the Writers’ Union. I left the room together with one of my very close friends and talked about what happened, and I said, ‘Today’s meeting was like learning life’s meaning, the meaning itself of life.’ And that was true.”

**What gave you courage in this situation? You were very young.**

“Young people are sometimes courageous. On the other hand, there was the problem of my father. My father was an official person.”<sup>2</sup>

**He was the member of the highest Soviet elite?**

“Yes, we can compare him to Kruczkowski<sup>3</sup> in Poland, whom he knew, maybe also Broniewski<sup>4</sup> with whom he was also acquainted. Nowadays, people in Lithuania often say how easy it was for ‘that one’, that is me, to be a dissident because his father always helped him. That is not true. For my father, my activities were a major problem, but he never lifted a finger to help me, though the family name probably helped. For that reason, I was probably more courageous than others. But that does not mean that I think the others were right to sit quietly. If I had a chance to say something out loud that other people were afraid to say I would say it. That was my position. That is the story.”

**We started in Vilnius just after the war. You found yourself inside the reborn Lithuanian language university, inside the Lithuanian literature into which you were practically born and of which you became a part. However, quite early you also started reading Russian and Polish authors and promoting translation as a window onto other literatures. Could you please tell us about these relationships? On the one hand, you were a passionate part of the Lithuanian language and culture, a culture that was struggling to survive and remain under Soviet rule, while on the other hand, you were a young writer looking out into the world and trying to reach things that were not available in Vilnius or Lithuania. You went to Moscow very early. When I read your descriptions of Moscow, especially in your poetry, they produce an impression of grimness, cold, chaos, and oppressiveness. But at the same time, you said that the luck of finding the right people is associated with Moscow. They helped you on your journey to world literature, into the world of intellectual discussions.**

“In pre-war Lithuania, during the interwar period, you could easily become acquainted with world literature if you wanted to, the most recent world literature, including Proust, Joyce, Kafka, Rilke, and Pasternak. All these were available in translation. Besides, people knew languages; English was not very popular at that time in Eastern Europe, but many people knew French and German, as well as Russian and Polish. One of the most popular poets in Lithuania was Oscar Miłosz, a distant relative of Czesław Miłosz. Czesław Miłosz used to say that Oscar Miłosz was ‘a better poet than myself and deserved the Nobel prize more than I did.’ Oscar Miłosz opted for Lithuanian citizenship and became a Lithuanian diplomat, although he never learnt the Lithuanian language; his native language was Polish, and his adopted language was French. He wrote in French, and was quite an adequate poet in that language.

In the Soviet period, all those possibilities were blocked. But I learned Polish and started buying books by Polish authors, such as Lem, Mrozek, Szymborska, and Różewicz. I also had a large collection of Western authors in Polish translations. That was a window into the world: you could read Proust and Kafka in Polish. It was a special situation with Kafka when someone brought seven copies of ‘The Castle’ to a Vilnius book shop. Proust was sold openly, as were Faulkner and of course Hemingway, but not Kafka. Kafka was burned, but those seven copies survived, and I got one of them. I used to say that Lithuania was the only country in the world that carried out Kafka’s last wish, because in his will, Kafka said that his books should be destroyed.

Most of those books were considered as acceptable and I gained some knowledge of Polish literature and poetry, including Miłosz. Books by Miłosz were never sold openly although one still could get isolated texts. His famous book *Native Realm* (*Rodzinna Europa*, or *My Europe*) arrived in Lithuania in an extremely complicated way: It was sent in separate pages in letters, or sometimes the pages were used to wrap chocolate or cigarettes. The process of transmitting the book took one and a half year. But finally, the entire text was in Lithuania and was made into a book. I got hold of it in its entirety.

Later, I went to Moscow, and there I found the right people. One of these was my first wife. She was the first love of my life, a very serious and important relationship for me, and she knew everyone. She introduced me to very interesting people. Of course I had read absolutely stunning Russian poetry of the Silver Age. For example, Mandelstam's book *Tristia*: I still believe that this is the best poetic book of all times, including Horace or Petrarch. Mandelstam's *Tristia* is the best lyrical book of all ages. I read it and I was not only stunned but also overwhelmed by it – there is a famous term invented by Harold Bloom, 'the anxiety of influence'. I was influenced by Pasternak, and Mandelstam, definitely, but I think that anxiety of influence belongs to the poets who write in the same language. If you imitate poets who write in a different language, for example Russian, or Polish, or English for that matter, you do not feel, or at least do not feel that strongly, the anxiety of influence because the difference in language changes everything; the language creates the necessary distance.

I was also lucky enough to meet some survivors of that period, including Mandelstam's widow Nadezhda and Anna Akhmatova herself."

**Because I feel anxiety when I am under pressure, your story about Akhmatova in her last year gave me an excruciating feeling. You were taking her to visit a young poet living in a Moscow suburb. It was dark, his apartment was on the sixth floor, and as we know those *khreshchiovki* apartment blocks have no elevators...**

"Thank god, it was on the second floor."

**Yes, but you took Akhmatova to the second floor without realizing that it was the wrong *khreshchiovka*.**

"They looked extremely similar, yes. Akhmatova did forgive me but not immediately. If you are still not bored by my long talk, I will tell you a funny story about Akhmatova. Akhmatova was really a great poet and a great survivor. I was introduced to her and was absolutely paralyzed because it felt like being introduced to Pushkin, or Mickiewicz or even to Shakespeare. A university classmate of mine, Judita Vaičiūnaitė, now unfortunately deceased, and I, produced a book of Akhmatova's poems translated into Lithuanian. Vaičiūnaitė only rarely left her apartment in Vilnius but I was a globetrotter: I went to St. Petersburg and presented the book to Akhmatova. I was told then that hundreds of hack writers used to approach Akhmatova but she was a kind lady and always found a way to deal with them. If she said, 'Your rhymes are astonishing' or 'You are a master of the metaphor', that meant 'Just go away and never return'. But if she was genuinely interested in your work, she would say, 'There is some magic in your work'. She said that to Joseph Brodsky, and Natasha Gorbanevskaja, but she only said it very rarely and just to a few people. To me she said, 'Oh, Lithuanian, that is a very interesting language, a very unusual language, and I know for sure that it is the oldest surviving Indo-European language. Please read some of your translations.' I read one translation for her, then another, and she said, 'The intonation is OK'. That meant, 'Go away and never return'. I was on the verge of suicide, but I was very lucky because immediately after my visit, Viacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov came to see Akhmatova. Ivanov is now also deceased, but he was a great scholar, a great linguist, and knew at least 50 languages including Hittite and Ainu; well, including everything. His Lithuanian was as good as mine. He was a very good friend of Akhmatova, and quite young, only ten years my senior, and I was still young at that time. He visited Akhmatova, and asked, 'What is this? Oh, your poems in Lithuanian translations!' He took a look at them and said, 'You know, these are adequate translations'. Then, Akhmatova called me on the phone and said, 'Now I know that there is some magic in your translations, so please come and see me; we can talk about different things.' Which we did, and I am happy to have seen Akhmatova more than once in my life.

But our last meeting was that time when I brought her to the house of the young poet in Moscow and mixed up the buildings. Akhmatova was very sick; she had heart problems, and climbing even to the second floor was a problem for her. So that was the greatest mistake of my life, but later a female friend of hers called me and told me, 'Anna Andreevna forgives you; you can visit her once more,' – but it was too late, because very soon afterwards she died."

**"English was not very popular at that time in Eastern Europe, but many people knew French and German, as well as Russian and Polish."**



**How did you meet Brodsky?**

"Brodsky came to Vilnius. As many of you know, Brodsky was arrested by the Soviets as *tuneiadets*, a social parasite, because he did nothing except write poetry. He also had some contracts for translations, but the court did not take that into account and decided that he was a social parasite and was to be sent to do manual work in Northern Russia for five years. The whole world reacted so strongly with protest, including Russia, by the way, so strongly that he only served two years of his term."

**It was one of the first times when international protests made a difference.**

"Probably the very first time. They were not only international protests, because Akhmatova also did her best; she asked Tvardovsky, Marshak, and Shostakovich to speak on Brodsky's behalf, and they all did. Brodsky was released and returned to St. Petersburg. But during his time in exile he had become a really great poet. In that village of Norinskaia he wrote about a hundred poems that are among the best Russian poems ever written. He wrote quite well even before his exile but after he came back it was absolutely clear to everybody that he was a poet of the same stature as Pasternak or Akhmatova. When he came back, he was unhappy for various reasons, including strictly personal ones. His friend, Andrei Sergeev, the same person who I was trying to visit when I took Akhmatova to the wrong building, told Brodsky, 'Joseph, go to Vilnius; you have never been there. There are nice people there; you will forget your troubles because you will meet the right kind of people.' In Vilnius, like Moscow, you have to find the right people. One of those that Sergeev recommended was Ramūnas Katilius who was my classmate and a very close friend, a physicist who knew literature better than many literary persons. Ramūnas Katilius is unfortunately no longer with us, but back then, Brodsky went to his flat and it was there I met him. After some time we became not just acquaintances but even friends."

**How would you describe Brodsky?**

"When I met Brodsky, I knew for sure that he was a genius: I had read his poetry. But as a person he did not make any special impression. A famous art critic and historian, Aleksandr Gabrichevskii, an old man, once said after meeting Brodsky, 'This is the most talented man I have ever met in my life.' And people would say, 'Well, Mr. Gabrichevskii, shame on you! You have met Stravinsky, Kandinsky, and Tolstoy; how you can say such a thing?' But Gabrichevskii repeated again and again, 'This is the most talented man I have ever met'. And that was true. But in general, Brodsky was a difficult person. He could be arrogant, and he was also very vulnerable. He had incredible intuition. He was very happy in Vilnius; he fell under the spell of Vilnius' magic. He wrote a cycle of poems about Vilnius, one of the best cycles ever written about the city. He also went to the Lithuanian seashore, to Palanga, where he made at least a dozen close Lithuanian friends, an important experience for him. In one of his poems he speaks about the Roman Empire and says that if you happen to be born in an empire, the best thing is to find a province by the sea to live in. For him, Lithuania was that province. Lithuania was also his substitute for Poland, because Poland and Lithuania are very similar, although the languages are very different. But generally, it is the same Catholic Baroque *milieu*, the same architecture. It also became a substitute for Italy, because Vilnius is an Italian city to a great degree, since it was originally mainly built by Italian architects and reminds one of smaller Northern Italian cities such as Bergamo, Vicenza, or Padua. Thus, Vilnius was really very important to Brodsky."

**"When Brodsky left, many people close to me had also left for the West and I found myself in a sort of vacuum, a total emptiness."**

**And both of you ended up in exile. We must open up this chapter now. What brought you to this final decision, emigration? I know it was not easy.**

"Brodsky was a bit afraid to go abroad because he was not sure that he would be able to write such good poetry there as in Russia. But he was forced to emigrate. Technically it was easy. He was Jewish and at that time, Jewish people could move to Israel even if there were some problems. But they did not necessarily go to Israel when they left the Soviet Union; they went to Britain, the United States, or elsewhere. So did Brodsky, even though he hesitated very much about leaving the Soviet Union. The first letter he received when he came to the United State was from Czesław Miłosz, who wrote, 'Well, Joseph, I understand you are afraid that you will not be able to write in exile. This sometimes happens, but it is up to you. It is a measure of your work. Some people can work in exile; it is possible.' Miłosz, for example, was one such person – but not the only one; Tsvelaeva also

wrote her best work in exile, as did Mickiewicz. Cyprian Norwid wrote his entire work in exile. So it is not impossible. Brodsky said many times that that was the most important letter he ever got in his life. As for me, I was not that afraid about writing in exile, first of all, because I do not consider myself a genius. If a poet like myself disappears ... well ... At the same time, I had an inner feeling that I would continue writing and nothing bad would happen to me.

When Brodsky left, many people close to me had also left for the West and I found myself in a sort of vacuum, a total emptiness. That was difficult experience. I wrote an open letter to the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist party saying that I had never agreed with them during all of my conscious life, that this fact was no secret to anybody including the Central Committee, but that earlier I could contribute to Lithuanian culture. However, now I could not do that anymore. They simply stopped publishing me, even my translations, to say nothing of my original work. In this situation, I said, I feel that my staying here is meaningless. I appealed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the existing law, asking for permission to go and live abroad. What I was doing was absolutely crazy. I was not Jewish; I could not be allowed to leave for Israel. Such things were simply unimaginable. But I got some help; Brodsky, Miłosz, and Arthur Miller made my case famous. A play by Arthur Miller was staged in Vilnius and the theatre was full every night, but for some strange reason it was taken off the stage. Nobody understood why, not even the actors, not even the stage director could understand why. But I understood. That must have been because Miller had spoken on my behalf. Later I met Arthur Miller and asked him, ‘Did you speak on my behalf at that time?’ He said, ‘Yes, because Brodsky and Miłosz asked me to, and I signed a petition for you, and that is about it.’ So my guess was correct. My case became a cause célèbre, and finally they let me go. In contrast to Brodsky I was rather optimistic about leaving and this feeling proved to be correct. I was pretty sure that I would never get a job in my field, thinking that maybe I would become a truck driver in the Bronx. Why not? In many respects, it is better than life in the Soviet Union. But I was lucky. Thanks to Brodsky, Miłosz, and other people, I got a job in academia, and worked for thirty years in Yale, which is a good place, teaching Russian poetry to American students. That was good experience. And I never ceased to write poetry. I am not a very prolific poet. I write two or three poems a year. But still, during my life I have written about 250 poems; they have their audience, not only in Lithuania, but also in other countries. Speaking about Sweden, I now also have two books of poetry and a book of essays in Swedish.”

**You have said that in the West poetry survives at university, while in the East poetry survives in prison. That was a view from the time of the Cold War, but how do you think this relationship looks today?**

“First of all, I would say, that sentence is well known: in the West poetry survives on the campuses, in the East it survives in the camps. Now it is definitely different. Even in Russia, poets now rarely end up in camps; it still happens but it cannot be compared with the situation in Soviet times. It is different.”

**Now it's not writers but filmmakers, and theatre directors...**

“Filmmakers, and sometimes even writers, but it is not as widespread as it used to be. If we are now talking of politics, I will dare, too. I am usually asked what I think about Vladimir Putin. Usually, people say, Putin is Stalin Number Two. To this I usually answer, ‘Well, you are young people, you have only seen Putin, but I have seen both of them. There is a difference between Stalin and Putin even though it is not as large as one would like it to be.’ But the difficult new situation for poetry is that interest in poetry is definitely diminishing. Hans Magnus Enzensberger once said that in any country, be it Sweden, Iceland, China, Russia, the United States, or Lithuania, there is always the same number of poetry readers, always a constant number,  $\pm 1345$ , except that in small countries this means a greater percentage of the population reads poetry, and in large countries it means a much smaller percentage in relation to the population, but the absolute number,  $\pm 1345$ , is always the same. This is good joke, but in the Soviet period we made an exception to this rule of the Enzensbergian Constant, because there were hundreds of thousands who read poetry. Nowadays we are back to the constant, but this is not bad for poetry. I think in Mickiewicz’ time it was the same; there were probably  $\pm 1345$  persons who read Mickiewicz. Maybe there were more, because of the political situation then that was like in the Soviet Union, but not many more. In the time of Norwid, there were definitely even fewer, even though Norwid is as good a poet as Mickiewicz. Brodsky considered him to be even better than Mickiewicz, but Miłosz did not agree.”

**You have always been curious about the world and have tried to remain Lithuanian while at the same time be a world citizen. Coming from cities that were torn by nationalism, by ethnic cleansing and war, how do you see the present-day situation in Europe with its recurrence of nationalism?**

“Well, first of all it is not so difficult to be a world citizen and Lithuanian at the same time. It is easy, a natural thing. I do not think there are many Swedes who consider this a dichotomy. A Swede is by definition a world citizen, as are English people, French people, or Italians, and so on. The same is true of Lithuanians nowadays. That dichotomy has become anachronistic and senseless. You do not lose your Lithuanian identity by becoming a citizen of the world. I do not feel like I lost mine. My Lithuanian language is probably better nowadays than when I lived in Lithuania. I am still contributing to the Lithuanian culture, not to any other culture. Some of my translations may be

known in other countries, but these are only translations. I would say that of course, it was Vladimir Putin who started this anachronistic wave of populism in Poland, in Hungary, in the United States if you will.”


**Or maybe Berlusconi.**

“Maybe. I am not a specialist in Italian affairs, but I consider myself a bit of a specialist in Russian affairs. In our part of the world it started with Putin. Kaczyński in Poland is extremely anti-Putin and anti-Russian, because Polish nationalists are both anti-German and anti-Russian by definition, but at the same time Kaczyński promotes the same values as Putin – if they can be called values. I am happy that this has still not happened, and probably will not happen, to Lithuania. But of course such political trends do exist, and I am strongly against them, because it could bring Europe back to the situation which it was in during the 1930s. Everybody remembers how that ended for Poland, for Lithuania, and for Russia, by the way, and, finally even for Germany; it ended very, very badly. I do not want that situation to be repeated, and I argue against it strongly in my essays.

/.../

Identity is often connected to historical victimhood. I think that victimization should not be overstated, even though it is a real phenomenon. It definitely happens and it is a very bad thing, but it should not be overstated. Virtually every ethnic group, every nation was victimized at some period of its existence or another. But identity does not consist of that feeling of being a victim. Identity is an issue of free choice. One can choose Lithuanian identity without being a Lithuanian. For me, it was less of a free choice because I was born in that country, in that language, and I decided early enough that I should work for that country, for that language, for that ethnic group. But it is not necessary. Identities are fluid; they are interwoven, they are complicated. They are much more interesting than simply a product of victimization. Some people in Lithuania, lots of journalists, even writers, built their Lithuanian identity on this feeling of victimization but in my opinion, that is the wrong way to build an identity. Alexander Ginzburg, a famous Russian dissident, once said, ‘You Lithuanians have a stylistic problem. When you write for the underground press you always write ‘bloody communists’, but why don’t you write just ‘communists’ – that would make a stronger impression’.”

**So when you look at this part of the world, that this center here is studying, are you an optimist?**

“I will repeat something that I often say. There are various kinds of optimists. There are optimists as such and historical optimists. Optimists as such say, ‘Everything will end well’; historical optimists (to whom I belong) say, ‘Everything will end well, but I will not live to see it.’ But when I said this to a group of Russian dissidents, one rather famous political figure of the Russian opposition said, ‘I am a strategic optimist, which means everything will end well, but I do not know when and how’. There was also a Ukrainian there who made the very best remark: ‘And I am an apocalyptic optimist: everything will end well but nobody will live to see it’. Still, I remain a historical optimist.” 

Stefan Ingvarsson is a Swedish cultural writer and translator

Note: This conversation was an open event taking place on November 28, 2018. It was organized by the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University together with the Institute for Lithuanian Culture, and the Embassy of Lithuania in Sweden. This is an edited version. Transcription by Anna Kharkina.

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- 3 Leon Kruczkowski (1900–1962) was a Polish writer and publicist, and a prominent figure of Polish theatre in the post-World War II period. 1945–1948, he was a Deputy Minister of Culture and Art. Leon Kruczkowski also held the following positions: Deputy to the Polish parliament (Sejm) from 1946 to 1956 and member of the Polish Council of State from 1957. He is recognized as having had a significant influence on post-war Polish cultural policy.
- 4 Władysław Broniewski (1887–1962) was a Polish poet, born into the intelligentsia. Broniewski was closely associated with the political left. Upon the outbreak of World War II he was in eastern Poland, then under Soviet occupation, and was promptly imprisoned for his independent views.



# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE AGE OF ANXIETY

*The CEEISA-ISA Joint Conference in Belgrade, 16–19 June, 2019, organized by the Faculty of Political Sciences of Belgrade University.*

In June 2019, scholars came together in Belgrade for the CEEISA-ISA Joint Conference to discuss international relations in the age of anxiety. The current increase in international populist discourse and far-right movements and the democratic regression in Central and Eastern Europe were the focal point of the discussion. There was also time to reflect on the difficulties in bridging the divided histories of societies in Europe and the difficulties in implementing the international politics of memory and commemoration. Questions that arose revolved around whether there are any prospects for reconciliation as a way to de-escalate the violence in the world.

**THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER** Associate Professor Bahar Rumelili, Jean Monnet Chair at the Department of International Relations at Koc University, addressed how “the age of anxiety” became a key reference point after World War I in philosophy, literature, and the arts. Rumelili dwelled upon the conceptualization of anxiety and how anxiety as a concept has a prominent place in political, philosophical, and psychological thought and provides a theoretical point of view for understanding the socio-psychological dimensions of not only domestic and foreign policy of

**“POLITICAL LEADERS USE THE FEAR OF THE FUTURE TO MANIPULATE THEIR CONSTITUENCIES.”**

governments, but also individuals’ mass-mobilization and agency. Both on the state and group levels the shared uncertainties such as rising populism and fundamentalism could be discussed in light of the existentialist concept of anxiety. The existential conceptions of anxiety seen in relation to fear, certitude, and authenticity highlight the characteristics of nationalist and religious ideologies and authoritarianism that serve the containment of anxiety. Even though we do not live in a relatively more dangerous world today, the line between known and unknown uncertainties creates a political sphere in which political leaders use the fear of the future to manipulate their constituencies. Such fears and uncertainties create the terminology of risk calculation and subsequent

feelings of anxiety. At this point, by looking at pre-modern times, we can see that religion stimulated uncontested knowledge about the unknown and provided control over the unknown future. Thus, it decreased feelings of anxiety. In modern times, with the growth of secularism, national communities were described as symbols of immortality and as the materialization of an anticipated future for subsequent generations. However, in our current post-modern period, uncertainty, risk, and anxiety are not only related to the future, but also to the present. In addition, the production of anxiety emerges as a political technique because of the use of hard uncertainty. Ideas, discourses, narratives, governance strategies based on emergency planning, prevention, and pre-emptive strategies are the tools by which international anxiety is propagated and in turn shapes political actors’ behaviors.

Rumelili also touched upon how international relations scholars who study



From the CEEISA-ISA Joint conference, in the venue of Belgrade University.

PHOTO: CAGLA DEMIREL

international anxiety focus on the known unknowns in international relations, namely states' intentions and possible actions, and how states manage these uncertainties. Realists think they can manage uncertainty with power, while liberals think they can control it with rules and institutions, and constructivists believe in identities and norms.

Authoritarian leaders build their governments on the political production of anxiety. For example, the leadership of the Trump administration in the US makes other states anxious because an international arena where alliances can

be easily broken, and agreements can be arbitrarily withdrawn creates unpredictability and a feeling that nothing is certain.

Despite all this, Rumelili challenged the negative understanding of anxiety by claiming that anxiety can be revealing, encouraging, and emancipating if one learns how deal with it properly. Rumelili stated that in existentialist thought there is a link between anxiety and freedom, and its implications on agency can be liberating for societies for the sake of changing current structures and political institutions. Accordingly, the positive implications of anxiety could increase the initiation of peace processes, deliberative decision-making, and so on. Thus, discovering the role of anxiety in revolution, social movements, and the politics of climate change (as seen in the example of Greta Thunberg's climate activism, which resulted in raising global awareness about the climate crisis all around the world) can broaden the understanding of the term. As a result, Rumelili highlighted the positive and revolutionary potential of anxiety that could serve as a facilitator of emancipatory agency in international relations.

**IN LIGHT OF** the theoretical background introduced by the keynote speaker, the conference presented very valuable discussions on legitimacy, authority, and

order in relation to the age of anxiety. It also included many interesting panel debates on various issues surrounding the concept of international anxiety, ranging from the crises of liberal democracies to energy security and from challenges of EU normative power in the enlargement process to migration and human security.

Beyond the general theoretical discussions, there were respected panels on regional studies for scholars interested in Central and Eastern Europe, covering a broad range of issues such as the EU's eastern enlargement, peace-build-

ing attempts, and memory challenges in the Balkans. The dissolution of Yugoslavia, Yugo-nostalgia, and Serbia's political past and future were vital topics and were discussed in most of the panels. Furthermore, a special film screening event was included in the conference program.

**THE FILM** *The Other Side of Everything* directed by Mila Turajlic, depicting a broad picture of Serbia's tumultuous political inheritance, was well worth watching. The documentary starts with the story of the apartment where the director grew up and sheds light on Serbia's political history through the leading figure in the film, her activist mother Srbijanka. Srbijanka narrates the story of how the apartment was confiscated after the Communist Revolution. Srbijanka's personal and family history is entangled with significant moments in the country's political past through peculiar events. For example, her then-government minister grandfather was one of the signatories of the union agreement that created Yugoslavia in 1918. And Mila Turajlic herself played a remarkable role in the October Revolution (the overthrowing of Milosevic) by standing by and giving inspiration to the activist students. The clear message that has been given by Srbijanka's voice highlighted the general problems all regional countries are still struggling with, such as the fight against oppression, far-right na-

tionalism, and the younger generation's pessimism towards the future.

Apart from the panels and film screening, one of the progressive steps provided by the conference for the participants was the opportunity to develop methodological guidance.

**THE METHODS CAFÉ** was designed especially for PhD students and fellow scholars who wanted to discuss the different methodologies they work on in an informal setting. Scholars, divided into small groups with the guidance of a nominated mentor, held discussions on varied topics ranging from process tracing to postcolonial methodology. I myself was very much interested in the topic of interviewing strategies. Notwithstanding the limited validity of interviews for scientific truth seeking, the importance of their practical and performative value was emphasized. The roundtable discussions were very fruitful, and every participant had an opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and the challenges they have faced. Possible tactics for overcoming such challenges were also collectively discussed. For example, the institutional limitations of a study in which the focus group is Kosovar and Serbian policemen raised broader questions in relation to finding interviewees, expected and unexpected responses, and ethical considerations. The methods café not only provided mentoring support for the participants, but also enabled an occasion for networking with scholars working with similar methodological approaches.

Last but not least, the conference was also innovative because the provision of support and mentoring opportunities for female scholars. This valuable occasion for developing and strengthening a female academic network started with a mentoring lunch and was followed up by a mentoring café and a roundtable discussion on "Survival Strategies for (Female) Scholars" with the guidance of Annick T. R. Wibben. ✕

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**"AUTHORITARIAN  
LEADERS  
BUILD THEIR  
GOVERNMENTS  
ON THE POLITICAL  
PRODUCTION  
OF ANXIETY."**

# BEYOND CULTURAL AND SPATIAL BOUNDARIES IN RIGA

*Annual contemporary art event in the Baltics: Survival Kit. Riga, May 2019.*

“We express generalizations born of our unfamiliarity with those places that are not our own. Thus, in some cases, geographical imaginaries may produce stereotypes and uninformed judgments about the lives and environments of others. But in other cases, they may be ways of imagining utopic worlds that we can compare with our own surroundings in the hope of building a future”.

These are the words of Anželsa Miralda, one of the curators of the artwork's exposition “Survival Kit 10” Festival, held in Riga in September 2018 and then once again in May 2019. Expressions such as “geographical imaginaries” and “utopic worlds” are used to lead people to dream about distant lands, very different from Latvian society and its cultural scene. Based on these premises, the role of the Survival Kit Festival is to bring these imaginaries close to contemporary society in Riga, leading to a transformation of the conception of geographical and mental borders.

## The outlands as a state of mind

The importance of the “outlands” is the real focus of the manifestation, and this is also why one has chosen to host the expositions in unique places. Indeed, the locations selected for the first and second part of the event were, respectively, the Riga Circus and the abandoned building of the faculty of Physics, Mathematics and Optometry of the University of Latvia.



Both locations are in remote parts of the city, away from the center, in which the main institutions are located and where normal activities take place. This choice follows the purpose of requalifying and promoting peripheral areas in order to broaden the artistic influence in the city. The second part of the Festival is located in an area called “Pārdaugava”, on the west bank of the Daugava, a river in Riga. This area, partially detached from the chaotic city center can be regarded metaphorically as an outland, according to the Survival Kit 10.1 Festival Catalogue. The event, known as the largest contemporary art festival in the Baltic states, presented the artworks of 34 artists involved in re-addressing burning issues such as identities, culture and borders. The global and local nature of the festival made it a unique “window” on the works of artists from all over the world and their responses to socially critical situations. Indeed,

each year, the festival has attempted to draw attention to contemporary problems of interest to the city of Riga, such as the complex identity of individuals and the widespread racism and closure of contemporary society.

**THE FESTIVAL, FOUNDED** in 2009, attracts more than 10,000 visitors every year, always discussing new themes and societal issues from different cultural perspectives by several artistic tools. The success of the festival belongs to much to three women – Solvita Krese, Inga Lāce and Anželsa Miralda – who are part of a larger team at the Latvian Institute of Contemporary Art. However, what makes the festival and the Institute itself unique, is also the flexibility of its shape and the particularity of its existence. Indeed, the Institute is not a traditional cultural space like a museum or art venue, but a fluid project that always changes locations and themes. In this regard, Inga Lāce, in an interview with the curator of the exhibition, asserts the specificity of the role of the institute in Latvian cultural society:

“We are not a museum and we don’t actually have a museum of contemporary art. We are merely trying to raise those issues that are topical in society”.

The festival encourages artists to question the traditional division of geopolitical and cultural space into center and periphery and to shed light on the complex construction of identity. The Survival Kit 10 Festival is indeed a place of critical discussion of standard definitions, not only of geopolitical borders, but also of identity borders. As stated on the festival’s website: “Geography and migration are taken up as core themes in the hope of revealing the complexities embedded within different local communities”. The event highlights the difficult themes of ethnic conflicts and divisions from all over the world and use Latvian society, in between the Russian and the European world, as a lens for the global challenges.

### Doors that divide and connect

When entering the building that hosts the festival, the vivid atmosphere of the past permeates the walls, windows and furniture. Everything would lead the visitor to believe that nothing had really changed from the closure of the building as the university of sciences. But suddenly, when approaching the numerous doors and spaces, the particularity of the place is revealed. From videos, to songs, from all kinds of radio and media installations, the festival reveals its incredible artistic and intellectual potentiality. Undoubtedly, each door of the building represents a transition into a different world and a different way of thinking. The name of each artist is displayed at the respective entrance to the room’s, just next to the university room’s name. Suddenly, the visitor is personally involved in understanding the individuality of the artists and their perception of the issue presented. The local Russophone association of poets *Orbita* presents an installation called “Poetry Happening”, as something that cannot be immediately understood because, while still outside the exhibition room, one hears someone reading a poem. However, when entering the room, the



voice is interrupted and is replaced by the noise of a disturbing interference. In fact, as the main message of the installation is displayed, the visitor is not permitted to easily access the world of poetry and the artist’s creation. In this way the exhibition locates itself in the festival as an outland that is an inaccessible place, though, as expressed in the Catalogue, “it is not a foreign land, separated from ours by a visible or invisible borderline, but rather a place to which the observer has no direct access”. The poets display the difficulty of understanding contemporary poetry as opposed to an easy pop culture that requires little effort. The individuality and unicity of human agency and creativity is also displayed by the work of Andrejs Strokina and Deniss Hanovs, an independent photographer and a cultural researcher and professor. “*Nye riba, nye myaso*” is the title of their installation, which played with this Russian expression “neither flesh, nor meat” with the aim of supporting the concept of the heterogeneity of the Russian culture and language in a Latvian environment. The work introduced the idea of the hybridity of people and spaces taking as an example the city of Riga and its mutable spaces, in between the Soviet past and the modern Latvian state. The concept explores the feeling of disorientation of the inhabitants “suddenly finding themselves behind a topographic looking glass [...] affected by urban schizophrenia”. This urban confusion, engendered by the introduction of new activities and the process of globalization that is affecting the city’s development, is also part of an identity confusion that oscillates between a past comprising a Soviet identity and a present comprising a Latvian one.

### Beyond borders, bridging time and space

The reality of the festival and its role for the city is described by the curator Inga Lāce, who underlines the importance of it in a nation in which there is no diversity and narratives of division are largely widespread in society. The purpose of the festival is also to escape ethnic categorization and discrimination. Indeed, as Lāce affirmed: “When you say that there are two communities, then you are already creating these boxes and you are pitting one against the other”.

**THE FESTIVAL** precisely aims to go beyond the definitions of borders and communities. Surely, people in the society are highly separated from each other, but “if you could somehow imagine that one community uses different languages [...] and different times, perhaps it would become an issue and politicians would polarize society less”, as stated again by the curator. Changing perspectives is a central idea that is to be found in the exhibitions, objects and sounds of the festival. One photographic exhibition described the story of the artist Diāna Tamane’s mother, who was accused of smuggling two pots of flowers when crossing the border between Latvia and Russia. Actually, her mother had not intended to break the law but simply wanted to take the flowers to her husband’s grave, which had become part of Russian territory after 1945. This image of cross-border practices in the name of family ties and affection may be one of the symbols that most perfectly suits the spirit of the festival.

**TO CONCLUDE**, in a society in which ethnic boundaries are still evident and work as lines that separate individuals, the festival places itself as a solution, as a different perspective, a bridge among cultures and as a survival kit. ✕

**Michela Romano**

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Introduction.

# The property of missing persons

Cultural heritage, value, and historical justice

**T**he Russian film director Aleksei German's masterpiece, *Khrustaliy My Car!* is set in the last days of February 1953, the week before Stalin's death, the seven days of passion for the main character. A successful and powerful man, a military doctor, lives in the expectation of an imminent arrest. When his time comes, after an attempt at escape, the man surrenders to his fate; we follow him into imprisonment to witness his inhuman humiliation, and then, upon Stalin's death and the release from prison, his flight into freedom, into a widely open space of nothingness. There, he disappears, literally vanishes in the air: a man without properties and without property, a missing one most probably not going to be missed very much.

At the beginning, in his home, we see him and his family surrounded by a grotesque overabundance of material objects. The large apartment is populated by too many people all of them loudly crowding and quarrelling in the large kitchen surrounded by a weird assortment of out-of-place objects occupying too much space and suffocating the humans. These are artworks and interior decorations, valuable furniture and beautiful utensils that do not at all belong where they are, a



From the Russian movie *Khrustaliy My Car!*

precise period detail of the everyday life of the Stalinist elite. These are most probably objects requisitioned from homes and art collections of the already disappeared ones, the victims of earlier waves of terror, to be later distributed to those who still remain. They are given in temporary possession to the remaining ones as a sign of their short-lived privileged status. The property of the earlier missing ones has also stayed behind, alienated from its own value, meaning, history, and context

and now waiting for their present owners to disappear in their turn, without a trace. These things constitute a silent Greek chorus, they are witnesses to the main character's fabulous ascent to fortune followed by a precipitous fall into infinite "missingness".

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN**, "to be missing", or "to go missing"? What kind of category is that, what are its figures and symbols, and how does it relate to our sense of histori-

cal continuity, our claims of historical legacy and cultural heritage, what is its critical potential in the understanding of cultural value and historical justice?

**CHARACTERISTIC FOR OUR** time is the sense of something missing that is symptomatic of the ambiguous relation between an incomplete present and an irreplaceable past. We say that something is missing when it was there but now cannot be found where it should be; we say that someone is missing when one is not present where one is supposed to be. About those who are missing we say that they are conspicuous with their absence, or even that they shine with their absence (*Fr. brillent par son absence*). In this case, it is precisely absence that shines forth, unconcealed: a presence-in-absence, or even a presence-by-means-of-absence. What is missing is something that should be and is not: thus, missing is a matter of value and justice.

Value and justice become especially relevant when the past finds representation for itself in artifacts like those that crowded the apartment of the unfortunate Stalinist general, or broadly speaking, in material objects of cultural heritage. In its original context, the French word for cultural/national heritage, *patrimoine*, was a revolutionary concept, a neologism and a euphemism to describe goods without owners. Those were precious objects and artwork confiscated by the French revolution from the houses of the nobility and from monasteries by law of terror, or simply stolen by mobs pillaging and burning palaces, estates, and churches, killing the aristocracy and raping nuns. The Thermidore invented a word for these “excesses”, vandalism.<sup>1</sup> It also found a way of dealing with the excesses of material objects thus obtained at the expense of terrible loss of life among their dispossessed owners. The Thermidore invented the word and the function to handle the overproduction of

**“AS HUMAN LIFE  
EXTINGUISHES IN  
CATASTROPHES,  
THE LIFE OF OBJECTS  
GETS MORE AND MORE  
ACTIVE.”**



From the Russian movie *Khrushchev My Car!*

material property in violence: *patrimoine*, objects belonging to the *patrie* because otherwise they had no one to belong to.<sup>2</sup> They were to be sent to museums to serve education, promote enlightenment, and instill patriotic feelings.

In general, social disasters always result in the disproportionate excess of things: while humans perish *en masse*, artifacts survive in the form of market commodities and museum exhibit; as human life extinguishes in catastrophes, the life of objects gets more and more active in market exchanges, expropriations, and lootings. The history of Eastern Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed many such episodes, some of them discussed in the

essays by Polina Barskova, Irina Sandomirskaja, and Iuliia Demidenko in this issue. In his comment, Ove Bring develops the relation between heritage and justice in

the legal sense as he considers the matter from the point of view of international law.

**IN ONE OF HIS** wartime poems, the French poet and the hero of the Resistance René Char famously proclaimed, that our in-

heritance is not testified to us by any preceding will. Indeed, the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century consists of irremediable human catastrophes, and their residues overflow present-day museum displays, museum storages, and auction houses. Our legacy as we received it from the past may very well represent a case of questionable ownership, and the heritage we consider ours can easily turn out to be contested goods. And still, René Char continues, “You only fight well for causes you yourself have shaped, with which you identify – and burn.”<sup>3</sup> Even though not testified to us, things do constitute our heritage, not because we are entitled genetically or legally, but because of the choice we make to inherit, i.e., to assume responsibility for the missing of the ones that have not been saved and for the memory of the circumstances in which the missing of persons occurred.

**20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY COLLECTIVE** memory is incorporated in such objects, our inheritance consisting of things that represent, broadly speaking, the property of people who went missing in the historical catastrophes of the age. When claiming our legacy, we should be critically aware of the economics, ethics, and politics that lie in the foundation of such inheritance. Discourses and practices of collective memory, ideologies and rhetoric of historical legacy and cultural heritage nowadays,



Scene room filled with objects, from the Russian movie *Khrustaliov My Car!*

whether public or private, have to do with identity politics and the presumed continuity between the past and the present. Jean-Luc Nancy in an interview below develops a critical reflection of cultural heritage to which, as he claims contrary to the current narratives of identity politics and belonging, we have no natural rights, either genetic or legal. Mikhail Iampolski contributes to the critique of the ideologies and practices of heritage by placing them into the contexts of modern historization with its the ever developing and complex processes of production of time and temporalities, and especially in the current situation that he describes as “the suspension of time”.

**FROM A DIFFERENT POINT** of view, Johan Hegardt compares the present-day historical memory with archaeological excavations, constantly driven forth by yearning after the missing past. Elements of the past, once missed and then miraculously recovered in the excavations of collective memory, transform into assets of cultural capital and patrimonialization, the process that was started by the European revolutions and constitutes unalienable part of modernization, now changes into a heritage hype under the influence of digital media with their demand of ever-increasing flows of spectacular, sensational, and easily appropriable “historical” discoveries. In a methodologically important comment, Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback warns against the threat contained in the expansion of categories to subsume all phenomena under

the same title. Patrimonialization is just one of such strategies leading to complete elimination of all differentiation in our knowledge of the past, and therefore all critical capacity in interpretation. Following the poetic method proclaimed by Paul Celan, Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback proposes the idea of a “narrow path” as a methodological counter-measure against such non-differentiation: a critical attention that is highly relevant in the study of a region like Eastern Europe and the Baltic Rim where the non-differentiation in the matters of history and politics has already demonstrated its potentially disastrous consequences. Viktor Shklovsky once talked about the necessity for the present day to make “a revolutionary choice of the past”. Political forces in the Eastern part of Europe are nowadays making what appears to be “a reactionary choice of the past”. Importantly, it is a still a choice. ✕

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## The scattering of art in revolutionary Petrograd

“In the autumn-winter of 1917, district Soviets were given wide-ranging rights in the redistribution of de-privatized dwellings.

**Iulia Demidenko**



Famous ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya’s mansion in St Petersburg was occupied by the Bolsheviks in 1917 and her valuables were scattered.

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The State Public Library at night, 1942.

Gone missing:

# Books and their owners in the siege of Leningrad

by **Polina Barskova**

In this contribution, I will speak about two kinds of missing instances – books and their owners – focusing on one of the most devastating episodes in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that of the siege of Leningrad, when more than a million inhabitants of the city perished from hunger. As a result of this military and political catastrophe, all social relations were redefined (among those who survived, of course), making contrasts of privilege sharper, enhancing the black market, and creating new economic networks, both state-run and private.

No doubt, an enormous quantity of books was destroyed in the siege, including private collections and libraries, but it also

rendered reading itself an endlessly trying feat, as we see from one diary: “All day yesterday I was reading Merezhkovskii’s *December the Fourteenth*, first having ripped the book into two halves, because I cannot hold such weight in my hands.... The book weighs too much for my emaciated arms, and I couldn’t hold it for very long while lying down.”<sup>1</sup>

But books could also bring salvation, at least in the physical sense – even serving as a source of food in December 1941/January 1942, as another siege diary reveals: “Coming up on my menu, the spines of numerous books, which after all feature high-quality glue! Things aren’t so bad!”<sup>2</sup> Beyond such extreme



instances, books constantly played a role in the survival of Leningraders, who exchanged them for food and used them as fuel for heating homes (several sources attest that German books were the first to go into the fire). Books thus constituted a significant resource for many families during the first and most deadly year of the siege. Consuming books (reading, buying, collecting, as well as eating them) was therefore a double-edged occupation: while chasing after books, the siege subjects risked their life – but also found a potential to be saved. Thus, in a letter to a colleague one of the savviest of siege-time bibliophiles, the book collector, appraiser, and connoisseur Fedor Shilov wrote about one private library he was appraising:

**The books are all on the history of Russia, focusing especially on the history of the Church and the schism. The owner passed away from emaciation and not only had not sold his books, he kept on buying more until the last minute, getting carried away with his purchases because they were cheap; food is expensive, but books are going for a song .... What was the deceased trying to accomplish?**<sup>23</sup>

The book milieu of the besieged city was surprisingly rich and was replenished from diverse sources. For one thing, starting from the first months of the war, the Soviet propaganda machine turned out all sorts of material deemed suitable for the current situation. This material could range from a condensed version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (in fact, merely fifteen pages of ideologically appropriate extracts) to brochures with instructions, for instance, on how to prepare oil-cakes. Leningrad bookstores, most of which were only closed for a short time during the lethal winter of 1941–1942, were filled with books that had come off the presses in early 1941 and had never been shipped outside the city. Finally, rare books in huge quantities were experienced a renaissance – some came to light out of the darkness of abandoned apartments, others were exchanged for food and medicine by desperate owners, while others were simply given away as the only means of saving these rarities from destruction.

In what follows, I observe the relationship between books and their owners in the siege, a community *in extremis*, when new and radical conditions were created for the use, ownership and exchange of books thereby ascribing new meaning and new value to books.

... Leningrad, August 1942. A group of officials is present at the opening of a “vacant” room in an apartment (“vacant” in the specific sense of the term *vymorochnyi* during the siege, i.e., whose inhabitants are all dead or missing). The apartment, as it turns out, belongs to Zinaida Bykova, or Zinaida Tse, a poet and translator and widow of the book collector and bibliographer

Pavel Bykov (1844–1930), in his time one of the most prominent in his field. There exists a record of this inspection that dutifully lists what remains there in Bykova's two almost empty rooms – a bed with an old blanket, two small chairs, an oil portrait of Bykova's deceased husband, three voluminous bookcases, and seven baskets of books and manuscripts. In a room that, in the official phraseology of the document, “had not been entered by the deceased” for several months, the visitors found numerous books and autographed manuscripts strewn upon the floor.

Nobody ever found out what happened to Zinaida Tse, one of the very many victims of the siege who often died unknown in the streets, their unidentified bodies taken to a ravine for burial. Yet, we know more about the fates, identities, and tasks of those people who were present at the act of inspection of the room and its contents, a somewhat unlikely group comprising a member of the local police force who signed the form describing the room, several employees of the Leningrad Public Library, and Fedor Shilov, the book collector already mentioned above. What was their business in this apartment and what brought them together, a policeman, a clandestine book collector and the librarians?

Of all the Leningrad libraries, it was the celebrated Public Library that turned into a real fortress during the worst months of the first winter of the siege. There was just one room there in which people could receive books, and just one area in the library canteen, next to the oven, where they could get warm.

In numerous accounts of library activities during the siege, we find descriptions of the library, a difficult yet disciplined and orderly workspace resisting its chaotic surroundings.

It also produced a unique kind of reader – the navigator of the space of the siege – in the person of the archivist or librarian who could successfully operate in the library despite the darkness, which was the primary obstacle to reading during

the time of the siege. The archivist Ekaterina Suslova was one of them:

**It was always dark in the archival depositories. The lonely, sick workers are lying ill in the rooms of the archive. Small groups of soldiers are continuously present in their departments and at their posts .... In pitch darkness, on one of those days when there isn't even enough kerosene to light a lantern – and you can't enter a depository with an oil lamp, it's against the rules – the archivist .... enters the depository. A dark room, dark stacks, dark windows that don't let in any light from the street, dark boxes of sand. And the archivist walks about in the depository, among the stacks, carefully stepping around a barrel of water here, a box of sand there .... Everything here is familiar, having been**

## **“OF ALL THE LENINGRAD LIBRARIES, IT WAS THE CELEBRATED PUBLIC LIBRARY THAT TURNED INTO A REAL FORTRESS DURING THE WORST MONTHS OF THE FIRST WINTER OF THE SIEGE.”**

studied down to the minutest detail. Every dead end, every edge, every nook and cranny is well known. The most useful thing here is “archival intuition”, the archivist’s professional memory that preserves not just knowledge of the dead ends and nooks and crannies of the depositories, not just knowledge of the makeup and contents of documents in a section, but also the numbers of archival collections, files, binders, boxes, rooms, stacks .... The archivist may move slowly due to exhaustion, but nevertheless make her way confidently and directly to her target, to the correct stacks, shelf, or binder. Climbing a ladder, a dark figure merging with the dark stacks. Sometimes remembering where certain materials are, and sometimes recognizing them by the feel of their size, thickness, or paper quality, [the archivist] finds the necessary files in the darkness and takes a binder or two down from the shelf. Carefully she climbs down the ladder and, clutching the files to her body, she plods through the darkness out of the depository.<sup>4</sup>

In this expressive description, memory and trust in the archive’s static orderly system helps the archivist in the siege to overcome the darkness. Inside the library, sometimes barely recognizable human bodies can be found, staff and patrons starved to death, and sometimes utilities might not be functioning, but the organization of the books and documents is invariably perfect, a utopian instance of order within chaos.

Even those eye-witness accounts least retouched by censorship describe the library as a site of organized resistance to the privations of the siege. Their authors generally agree that life under such conditions was almost impossible, but somehow this does not contradict their assertion that their work barely suffered – as if libraries, as impeccably organized as they were, were running by themselves. The moment the authorities in Smolny called with a request for information (e.g. on the recent Volga famine, or the edibility of grass and tree bark, or sometimes even for books for pleasure for Comrade Zhdanov and his staff), the library personnel would brave the cold and dark to search for the materials that would always be found on the appropriate shelves and in the appropriate files. Library space as a regulated system capable of withstanding its catastrophic environment recalls Michel Foucault’s description of a city in the time of plague, “a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism”: “This [is an] enclosed, segmented space...in which each individual [for the library, replace Foucault’s ‘individual’ with ‘book’ – PB] is constantly located, examined and distributed.... The plague is met by order.”<sup>5</sup>

The disciplined reading space of the library finds its opposite in the ghostly, chaotic spatiality of the “vacant” apartments that Shi-

lov’s team with library representatives enters in order to inspect the apartment for rare books and to save them by taking them to their centralized collection, and thus replenishing the collection – this was precisely the task of the group that was inspecting Bykova’s rooms. To continue the Foucauldian connection, during their sallies into those “vacant” apartments, what the librarians found there were plagued spaces – spaces of reading that were disturbed and confusing after they had lost their missing readers.

In the empty apartments of dead book collectors, the Public Library’s librarians discovered a topography of book collecting in a most chaotic condition. The “vacant” apartment of the bibliophile represented a conflict of decay, absence, and material memory. Unlike the state library with its protective capsule of utopian order, private libraries preserved traces of their missing owners’ ambitions as readers and collectors and, even up to the very last moments of their lives, of those collectorly desires that are so precisely described by Walter Benjamin in his essay “Unpacking My Library”.<sup>6</sup> Benjamin says that collectors act by “receiving [...] things into our space.”<sup>7</sup> But what if “our space” of collection is so completely lifeless and the “things” (in this case, books or book remnants) merely indicate the collector’s desires posthumously?

The archive of the Public Library contains hundreds of official documents detailing the condition of “vacant” apartments of bibliophiles at the time of their inspection by librarians and the

local police. Reading them today, we discover trajectories in the evolution of collectorly interests and strategies used by the owners in their attempts to use their collections for survival. We also find out in what kind of environments reading and collecting took place, information that would have remained invisible if it were not for these acts of searching and recovering. The re-collection and re-circulation of books from these dead apartments became one of the most painful yet exciting chapters in the epic saga of

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St. Petersburg-Leningrad bibliophilia.

Reappraising the missing book collections of the dead and missing persons, the team – Shilov himself, the librarians, and the policeman – find themselves at the moment when the very notion of privacy loses its meaning, and as the secrets of clandestine collection exchanges are revealed and taken over by the state the books become the objects of a different system of ownership and are inscribed into different catalogues of knowledge. Collections were thus re-collected, and this procedure of re-collection erased the memory of the previous order to which they belonged.

... With her characteristic bitter irony, another memoirist, Liubov Shaporina, writes about her “frivolous” bibliophilic urges during the time of the worst privations: “Very interesting books are cropping up nowadays at the antiquarian bookstore



PHOTO: SERGEY STRUNNIKOV/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



PHOTO: SERGEY STRUNNIKOV/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Visiting the library in Leningrad 1942.

on Simeonovskaia, and instead of saving up for a coffin, I go hunting for books. It's ridiculous."<sup>8</sup>

At first glance, this seems to indicate distraction or escapism from the harsh reality of the siege. I would argue, however, that this also signals the choice of mobility against stasis, and suggests that books played a role in this dynamic. One of the salient features of the siege is the drastic change it wrought in the cityscape and in spatial mobility; the frozen city seemed to be constantly on the move in the midst of events that required ever new routes and routines. Quite often, being static or immobile was tantamount to death; for instance, one had to move very fast in order to escape something as real as a bombing raid, and one had to remain active in order to resist the so-called "moral dystrophy" (*moral'naia distrofiia*), the morbid condition of psychic and moral decay due to hunger, stress, and fear, one of the most frequent (self)-diagnosed "diseases" of the first siege winter (by analogy with the medical term "dystrophy" (*distrofiia*) and used in the siege to describe the physiological effects of systematic starvation and emaciation). The mobility required for chasing books could help in survival (of both bibliophiles themselves and the books they treasured). Navigation of the city in these pursuits offered another intriguing perspective on the connection between urban pasts and the present of the siege.

The writer Vitalii Bianki, the author of popular children's books about nature, visited Leningrad in February–March 1942 and noted an active book trade in his diary:

**Most of what is being bought up is exciting "pulp" stuff, adventure novels. And old classics. Anything that describes a life not like the present one. Collectors and lovers of rare books continue their maniacal and, of course, quite fruitful, chase after valuable, now discounted, items.<sup>9</sup>**

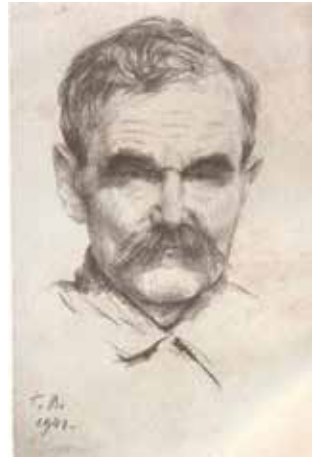
Both Shaporina's and Bianki's accounts confirm that rare book collecting was on the rise in the devastated city. The pain of the present aroused an interest in the past or, rather, such pasts as are shaped in popular fiction. A thirst for this sort of reading was satisfied by several ambitious booksellers who had come to dominate the book market in the besieged city. Bianki mentions Gennadii Rakhlin, a remarkably active and knowledgeable book collector, who during the siege managed to organize several bookstores.

Rakhlin's book trade thrived during the siege thanks to his old contacts among collectors, most of whom were former members of the famous Bibliophile Society of Leningrad from the 1920s. Established in Petrograd in 1923, during the motley years of the NEP, the Society was trying to carry on the glorious tradition of St. Petersburg bibliophily. It popularized antiquarian books in publications, exhibitions, rare book auctions and exchanges, and even in poetry readings. The Society's manifesto states that "one of the main goals of bibliology is the study of rare and art editions of the past and present."<sup>10</sup> In his memoirs, Erich Gollerbach, an outstanding art and literary critic and one of the Society's leaders, commented humorously: "True bibliophily is inseparable from the spirit of trifles charming and airy, and bibliophilic discussions should be well seasoned with Attic salt, with a lot of everyday observations mixed in."<sup>11</sup> In the 1930s, drastic political changes forced the Society to officially cease its work. But while trying to avoid attention to their taste in books, many Society members continued collecting books in secret. An antediluvian remnant within the Soviet present-day, life in this hidden world was finally disrupted by the siege that exposed and annihilated collections and collectors alike. What had been secret now became known and registered in police protocols.

Two examples give us an idea of the consequences of the interest in antiquarian books in the reality of the siege. Erikh



Portrait of Erikh Gollerbakh by Georgii Vereiskii.



Portrait of Fedor Shilov by Georgii Vereiskii, 1941.

Gollerbakh (1895–1942) was one of many dedicated bibliophiles who perished during the siege. A prominent critic and the author of a seminal history of Russian graphic art, he was a very popular figure among St. Petersburg bibliophiles.

Judging by Gollerbakh's diary written during the siege, books protected him from danger and the threat of deterioration. He often describes libraries as shelters: "I am rescued from the stench of present circumstances by the Public Library, among books. The Public Library is the only place where one can, at least in part, be distracted from gloomy reality. You sit among books, and it seems like everything is the way it was of old."<sup>12</sup>

But gradually this sense of protection and comfort gives way to disappointment – and a growing alienation between the despairing *blokadnik* and books:

**I returned the books. I had neither the time nor the desire to do any careful reading. More precisely, what hindered me was the fact that I was sharply, painfully aware that this whole charming world of literary and philosophical meditations has been pushed back somewhere into the past, and has become unnecessary and out of place in this menacing time of ordeal.<sup>13</sup>**

This tragic vacillation is symptomatic of the rift between books as agents of continuity connected to one's private past and their incapacity to protect the besieged subject. As was the case with so many, books failed to save Erikh Gollerbakh. He is reported to have lost his mind and gone missing during the evacuation across Lake Ladoga, and his unique library was dispersed after his disappearance.<sup>14</sup>

The tragic demise of Erikh Gollerbach and his collection was the norm in the grim reality; however, the siege provided incentives (albeit torturous ones) for the development of new collecting strategies and philosophies. Fedor Shilov was a key figure in the revival of book collecting in the dying city, dramatic and controversial as the time itself and described by contemporaries

as an impeccable, merciless, and cynical connoisseur of the antiquarian book: "At meetings he could be embittered, acrimonious, unbearably fault-finding, but nevertheless he enjoyed great authority as an appraiser of rare editions."<sup>15</sup>

Shilov ironically described book collecting as a sinful passion and adventurous hedonism: "All is vanity of vanities and vexation of spirit, but if weak people find in this vanity their life's joy, the only question then becomes who is devoted to what: some to good eats, others to whoring, still others to books .... Book owners go forth to bring joy to people mired precisely in such vanity."<sup>16</sup> His history as a book collector, trader, and evaluator is quite characteristic.

Shilov came to St. Petersburg as a young man to work for some of the most influential booksellers in imperial St. Petersburg, until he eventually opened his own bookstore, which closed soon after the revolution. It was then that Shilov began his semi-official, semi-clandestine career as the city's most knowledgeable appraiser of antiquarian books. Between 1918 and 1939, he served as the Soviet government's international book trader and also played a key role in collecting manuscripts for Gorky's *World Literature* series and for the Leningrad Literature Museum.

Most books from Shilov's own unique collection perished in a fire in 1942, and only meagre remnants were saved. After several months of illness and depression, probably due to the shock of this loss, Shilov sold what remained to the Public Library for a mere 1,500 roubles. This led to a collaboration when, following Shilov's instructions, the library established a special fund to save rare book collections from "dead" apartments. Its archival records contain inventories for the evacuation of such collections, marked "prompted by Shilov", because he knew all the ins and outs of the Leningrad book collecting and trading network and was active in rescuing the city's rare books. The year 1942 saw a great increase in the redistribution of antiquarian books in the city; according to documentation, the Library purchased 20,299 volumes, as compared to only 112 in 1941, and evacuated even more, 76,000. At Shilov's suggestion, a group of librarians would visit the "vacant" apartments of those collectors who were dead or missing, often resulting in impressive discoveries.<sup>17</sup> Among the items located by this group were massive specialized collections and manuscripts by, for example, Voltaire, Catherine the Great, Pushkin, Dostoevskii and Turgenev.<sup>18</sup> But for the most part, they would explore the libraries of ordinary Leningraders, those collections that the memoirist Maria Mashkova soberly calls "joyless", the victims of theft and marauding: "We took away Murashkinskii's library – the usual scene. He died of dystrophy, his family too, and his property was just carried off by friends and acquaintances; a significant portion of his library was retrieved from the apartment of other dystrophics; the looters themselves had all died." With a naïveté bordering on cynicism, the usually quite sensitive Mashkova exclaims in her diary: "It is now possible to fill out the Library's collection broadly and lavishly: many library owners have died..."<sup>19</sup>

Shilov's life at that time was fully dedicated to locating, recovering and reappraising antiquarian books: "I get up at six – I



have to chop and saw firewood – and barely make it to work by nine; then there is not a minute's rest until three, and then I visit various addresses or negotiate prices with [book store director] Lebedev and Rakhlin (which drags on for weeks), and get home at ten."<sup>20</sup> Most of the valuable books he located found their way into the specially created Reserve Collection [*Rezervnyi fond*], (later disbanded), some into Rakhlin's bookstores for public sale, and some – the most valuable ones – via the black market into the collections of the city's powerful figures, both in the Party and in the criminal world.<sup>21</sup> His work was philanthropic and self-serving at the same time.

Shilov's collaboration with the Library allowed him to control the flow of rare books in Leningrad. In a letter to a fellow collector, he wrote: "There are junk books that sell quickly [...]. Some good books are starting to turn up as well. Take heart, you'll get your hands on books again – you'll manage to create such a library, all the devils will be sick!"<sup>22</sup>

Unlike the official mandate of the Public Library to serve the higher system of Leningrad as part of the central hierarchy, for Shilov, "ordering the world" through collecting seems to have been a means of reconstruction, of healing his own traumatized self through the satisfaction of book hunting and protecting the memory of his deceased peers by preserving parts of their lives at least through the rescue of their collections. As opposed to the impersonal, regulated collection work carried out by the Public Library, Shilov saw his task in book collection as a combination of fighting against the scattering of the world and protection of the right to that "creative disorder" (like Walter Benjamin's collector)<sup>23</sup> that is inseparable from the spirit of individual collectorship. Gollerbach perished when his encapsulated realm of reading was violated and destroyed by the siege. In contrast to this, Shilov managed to preserve and even reinvigorate his own collector practices by re-collecting the collections of others. His was a project of reconstructing and maintaining the city's collective readerly memory. The way chosen by Shilov was towards a new relationship between the traumatized self and the traumatized city. The book lovers, collectors, and dealers of the siege were moving antiquarian books on strollers and sleds, as they had done with dead bodies several months earlier, thus reorganizing the devastated spaces of the changed city. From the "vacant" apartments of missing people, books that materially represented material and symbolic values of the past were running through – and up against – a new reality, a contact or collision that engendered new forms of inquiry and of collaboration between past and present. ✕

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Note: This is a reworked and shortened version of a chapter from Barskova, Polina, *Besieged Leningrad: Aesthetic Responses to Urban Disaster* (DeKalb, IL: NIU Press, 2017).

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# The missing of history in heritage

H. G. Adler's novel *The Wall*

by Irina Sandomirskaja

“...every transformation of the forgotten leads to error. No direction provides a reliable sense of things to come, and the roads of time continue to become lost in confusion; dreams gnaw away at them and mock the certainty of hours. Then there are no more hours, the realms of past and future are shattered, not to be recovered or put back together, nor do they lie agape before each other, for only a demented mind would still cling to the idea of them. The run of things is twisted and destroyed; there is nothing left to retrieve.”<sup>1</sup>

This is a quote from the novel *The Wall* (*Die Unsichtbare Wand*) by Hans Günter Adler (1910–1988). Written in 1956 and then reworked several times in many attempts to get it published, the book only reached the German reading public in 1989, a year after the author's death. *The Wall* is the concluding work in Adler's triptych of Holocaust novels. Rounded up together with other Jews in Prague in 1940, Adler was deported to Theresienstadt where he lost his parents, then further on to Auschwitz, where his first wife was gassed, and then to Buchenwald. His days and works after the liberation were dedicated to the historical, sociological, and artistic reflection on these experiences and their aftermaths. As a writer of fiction, both prose and poetry, he was not very successful, at least not during his lifetime. All of these novels in the Shoah trilogy were published too late to become classics of the genre. Even nowadays, although the blurb on the English language paperback edition describes the novel as “majestic” and “mas-

terful and utterly unique”, one still cannot say that its author has gained recognition as a creative writer. *Panorama*, the first novel in the trilogy from 1948, a story about a Jewish boy in Prague before, during, and after the war, was only first published in German in 1968. *The Journey*, based on his and his family's experiences in Theresienstadt, written in 1950–51, was published eleven years later, in 1962, i.e., earlier than the first novel. *The Wall*, as already mentioned, had to wait for publication for almost 30 years.<sup>2</sup>

However, Adler's non-fiction writing was acknowledged already during his lifetime, namely his meticulously documented research of the Nazis' administration of the mass extermination of the Jews.<sup>3</sup> His work was highly valued by Adler's contemporaries like Adorno and Canetti, while Hannah Arendt used his material in her critique of the Eichmann trial. However, his books still remained practically unknown to international readers.

**EVEN HIS MASTERPIECE**, the volume about the history, sociology, and psychology of the Theresienstadt ghetto and concentration camp, a foundational work in Holocaust studies, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945: The Face of a Coerced Community*<sup>4</sup>, a treatise of over 800 pages, was not translated into English until 2017 – even though Adler lived in exile in England until his death in 1988 and all of his books were written there. Adler's name would have probably remained unknown to the general public had it not been for W. G. Sebald who wrote about the Theresienstadt book in his world-famous novel *Austerlitz*. In search of his family histo-



ILLUSTRATION: MOA THELANDER

ry, Sebald's main character discovers Adler's writing quite soon after Adler's death (just like the reader of *The Wall*, too late). The reading of the Theresienstadt book proves for him to be difficult as if it were written in Babylonian cuneiform, as he unravels, syllable by syllable, the technical jargon of the ghetto's bureaucracy and reconstructs in his mind the unimaginable reality behind it: "... such terms and concepts as *Barackenbestandteillager*, *Zusatzkostenberechnungsschein*, *Bagatellreparaturwerkstätte*, *Menagetransportkolonnen*, *Küchenbeschwerdeorgane*, *Reinlichkeitsreihenuntersuchung*, and *Entwesungsübersiedlung*."<sup>5</sup>

Yet, even though sanctioned by a literary authority like Sebald, Adler the fiction writer and the poet still remains largely unread. In the meantime, *The Wall* fits perfectly with the subject of the property of missing persons and how this property, once in the ownership of one group of people, with time transforms into cultural heritage collectively owned by an entirely different group of people who administer and manage the victims' past for their own purposes and in their own interests. As a result of such re-appropriation, material monuments of collective memory remain – such as museums, for instance – but there remains, at the same time, no memory. Or, as Adler concludes, of the past "there is nothing left to retrieve".

The novel is narrated on behalf of the main character, a returnee from a concentration camp, now officially categorized as a missing person. The book represents a meticulous investigation of this curious legal and bureaucratic-administrative status and the human condition it produces. It is a life of being existentially missing from the world of human relations, a reality gaping

with an emptiness left after disappeared humans and destroyed families, surrounded by a chaos of missing bits and pieces that remained after.

### On being missing as being missed (by no one)

After the war, the narrator, Herr Doktor Arthur Landau, lives a quiet humble life in emigration in a metropolitan suburb with his wife and children. In the opening pages of the novel and at the very end of the volume, we find him at the same moment of time: standing in his tiny garden, watering his plants, and struggling with a hallucination. In his daydreaming, two individuals, Mike and Brian, both pallbearers, come to him regularly to take him away and bury him alive. No one but Arthur knows about these visits. The novel consists of Arthur's flashbacks, apparently chaotic and disjointed – now, he is back in his native city upon his return in the status of a missing person, looking for his missing family and property; now, after his return, he is at a museum storage facility employed as a keeper inventorying the museum's collection of family portraits left after their disappeared owners; now, he is among the intellectuals in the Metropolis where he has moved hoping to start a new life and to do research. It is not always easy to make sense of these disordered and disjointed time frames.

Immediately after the end of the war, he is back in his native city, back from somewhere where multitudes have drowned and only a few were saved. It was from here that he and his family had disappeared some years before, without a trace of memory

left behind them. Before the catastrophe, he had much that used to be properly his – his birthplace, his friends and neighbors, his family and home and all the property in it. Now, Arthur has to learn the truth about being a missing person – “missing” means, simply, “being missed by nobody”. Not only is property lost for the missing person, but also the missing person is lost for the world, never to be recognized or remembered.

A *missing person* – der *Verschollene*, as in the title of Kafka’s unfinished novel – is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century legal term and a euphemism for someone who disappeared traceless; someone whose death can only be legally declared based on indirect evidence, but can never be certain as an accomplished fact. The term belongs to an official classification assigned by the administrative system that does not know how to deal with someone who vanished – and then suddenly returns. Arthur is not real because he is present only in his physical and not his legal person. He realizes that being missing is worse than being dead; the dead have a closure, they can return, even though merely as proper names on official death certificates or grave stones. But what is proper to a missing person? Even his name is no longer his proper name. Missing persons do not come back; they remain suspended in uncertainty, without the fact of their being alive or dead ever being attested – or cared about. This is what Arthur argues in a conversation with a woman, a widow whose husband had been tortured to death by the Gestapo:

“With Arno (the murdered husband) it’s not as bad as it could be, Frau Meisenbach. The authorities at least let you know that he is dead. Terrible that he’s dead, and yet good that he’s dead, something certain around which different ideas can form. ... [His] end is certain, it is recorded, it can’t be changed. ... But how when there is nothing, neither an end nor a continuance?”<sup>6</sup>

The structure of the story has the same pattern as a missing person trying to regain his missing life: a life that has no end (in both meanings of “end”) but without a continuation, too. It is this uncertainty that informs Adler as he writes his narrative. Having no structure, no organization – no *Selbstverwaltung* (self-management, self-administration), one could even say – its language unfolds in endless periods, without divisions into parts or chapters, without boundaries drawn between now and then, here and there, or reality and hallucination. Throughout the novel’s over 600 pages, the narration just rolls out like a roaring torrent to flood the reader. As a missing person, Arthur misses (or is missed from) time and space, and in general everything that is proper to man: a name, a fate, a death – was his life a fate at all? “For it was without name, and I was not at all certain if the nameless could have a fate.”<sup>7</sup> Nor is he suitable for, or capable of bearing witness; apart from remaining legally a non-person, the missing person is also speechless:

**“APART FROM  
REMAINING LEGALLY  
A NON-PERSON, THE  
MISSING PERSON IS  
ALSO SPEECHLESS.”**

If one (who is killed – I.S.) turns up and is there, then he will speak. But the condition of the missing who have gone away is that they are away, far away, not a word from them, even the place where they have been taken unknowable, whether they have been shot or poisoned and the bodies burned and the pulverized ashes scattered; no one wrote it down and preserved the names, because it is memory that has been murdered more and more thoroughly than a speaking life.<sup>8</sup>

But even in the way of going missing, there is a gradation: a missing civilian ....

... is worse than the missing in action. A marked departure into the unknown. A war memorial will have a name that one can think about. But the ones I mean are never even allowed to be called missing. They are the non-missing, of whom there is no account. Completely and utterly done away with. Unwanted and therefore not missed. Disappeared, the loss of their memory met with derisive laughter. Released from all fates, expelled from the worst of fates. People who existed until a certain yet unknown date, then no longer, no longer people, not even dead people but, rather, nothing at all.”<sup>9</sup>

### Suffering missing knowledge

When once asked about the cause behind his amazing military successes, Napoleon is reported to have replied, “There is no fate [in this], only organization.” For the missing person, a person without properties (or property), there is no fate either – only the organization of the system that disappears, dehumanizes, and annihilates him. Adler himself was a great scholar of such organizations, a historian, sociologist, and psychologist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century political subject, “the administered man” in modernity’s most radical cases of administration, such as deportations, ghettos, and concentration camps.<sup>10</sup> In his historical writing, Adler came forward with two principles underlying the manage-

ment of human life in machines of extermination, *Zwangsgemeinschaft* (an enforced community, or a community of coercion) and *Selbstverwaltung* (self-administration). *Zwangsgemeinschaft* is an oxymoron reflecting the dark irony and ambiguity of human cohabitation under terror – communities in principle cannot be enforced but should result from the political will of their

members. Similarly, *Selbstverwaltung* is the term to denote the very method that the SS applied to manipulate the Jewish Council in governing the ghetto, the object of Hannah Arendt’s analysis in her criticism of the Eichmann trial. This is another of those terminological inventions in Nazi social engineering, implying that the “administration” of the victims’ lives and deaths would be implemented by an authority elected and empowered by the victims themselves. The hypocrisy of such administrative euphe-



misms in the administration of life and death was fully transparent to all who had gone through the system – and appeared as incomprehensible as Babylonian cuneiform to the outsiders.

Herr Doktor Arthur Landau is also a master of euphemism. He comes to the Metropolis as an independent researcher working on “a study that I plan to call ‘The Position of the Creative Artist in the Age of the Large-Scale Social Organization That Threatens Culture’.”<sup>11</sup> However, the investigation by a missing person about administration, i.e., the apparatus that produces him as a missing person, is now subject to new censorship, this time from the lips of someone who is on Arthur’s side, a comrade in struggle rather than his prisoner who shut him up earlier. This is a venerated colleague, the world-famous sociologist Professor Kratzenstein (modelled after a prototype who is believed to be Adorno). Professor Kratzenstein supports the project but does not believe in the ability of the victim to be “objective” as a sociologist. According to him,

**Whoever was unlucky enough to have been condemned to such isolation, such a one couldn’t understand matters correctly, even if he was stuck in the middle of it. Because, as a result, not only had one lost contact with life; one had also lost the proper standards. ... That I (Arthur – I.S.) had been a witness to the catastrophe was all well and good, but I had long since lost any inherent right to research such material, rather than only be a part of it.”<sup>12</sup>**

Thus, it is no longer the system of *Zwangsgemeinschaft* but another one, that of objective social science, which confirms and seals the non-identity of the missing person as a missing one in the community of free thinking and reflecting, progressive individuals. “My convoluted sorrow”, as Adler described his own novel, is also a definition of the “convoluted sufferings” of his character – from one labyrinth he steps into another, in which a different system of principles deprives him of what is his proper, an ability of and a right to thinking, a critical reflection of his time and experience. Suffer he can, but reflection on the machines that produced his suffering is better left to others.

## The property of missing persons

“Only one who possesses things can be.”<sup>13</sup> Or, only one who is possessed by things can be. Things that belong to us define who we are as subjects. In this sense, we belong to them. In the world of missing persons, there are too many things compared to too few of those who have returned. People are missing while things are in excess – there are too many of them, not owned by, nor owning, anybody. Friends and neighbors do not recognize the returnee, but numberless strangers are leaving someone else’s property with him, cheap useful things, household items once left by the victims to those who remained to be kept until

the owners came back. Like any other Tower of Babel, even the perfectly administered project of extermination cannot be complete, something always remains. Only the dead people’s memory is complete – for those who returned having “... only passed through ... the extermination was not successful and therefore there is no complete memory. In short, memory is unattainable.”<sup>14</sup>

Abandoned artifacts in their frightening overabundance also haunt the storage facility of the local museum where Arthur is employed to make a catalogue of the “collection” – in fact, a storage of looted goods from Jewish homes and religious communities. The “collection” is lying in chaos – the wartime museum (where the loot had been displayed) has been uninstalled, but the exhibits are still there. They are to be inventoried and

re-installed in a new museum to represent a new narrative as dictated by the winners. Ancient cult objects, works of art, family relics, and other things of artistic, historical, or ethnographic value. However, these, too, belong to the economy of the “missing” – they are not owned by nor do they own anybody, not even the marauders. It is in the midst of these unowned valuable objects that Arthur finds a place to hide the worthless ones, those left to him by the good neighbors of the missing ones.

The prototype is the Jewish museum in Prague organized by the Nazis immediately after rounding up Prague’s Jews: the Nazis were, according to Adler, “well informed conquerors”, “the overlords” who

**... not only made history; they also loved the old history and tried to conserve it .... Here the conquerors have provided an indisputable service. The living were killed, and their past in stones, images, books, and objects, as set down by their ancestors, was collected, taken care of, and brought to life.”<sup>15</sup>**

Adler returned to Prague in order to work on the history of the Theresienstadt ghetto. When the ghetto was abolished, all documentation was transferred to the archives of the (former) SS Jewish museum, by that time also closed down by the new administration. While working there on his Theresienstadt study, Adler also researched this eerie institution. The SS project to museumify Jewish history and culture had been conceived and implemented at the same time as the living Jews of Prague were being robbed and deported right next to the museum’s medieval walls. Jewish property seized by the “conquerors” got stuck inside the “convolutes” of the scientific project of the Nazi *Geistwissenschaften*, whose institutional traces were now to be erased by a new Jewish museum being erected instead of the SS project. Thus, historical and aesthetic objects first lose their identities, then are assigned new ones, only to lose them again and to be reassigned anew in accordance with a new nomenclature. Owned by no one, they go through cycles of consecutive

museumification, demuseumification, and remuseumification. Adler calls these agonies of memorialization “the transformation of the forgotten”.

Just as the ghetto, the SS Jewish museum was administered on the same principles of *Selbstverwaltung*. The perfectly systematized storage and informative displays that Arthur finds there were produced by Jewish museum experts and workers whom the Prague Jewish elders sent to work there under orders from the SS. These people performed their tasks as best they could and thus postponed, but did not escape, the common fate at the end. “... Most of the ones who worked here back then were hauled off. You know, of course, that the workers were not here of their own choice but were forced laborers. Only a few escaped being sent off ....”<sup>16</sup> “Hauled off”, “sent off”, “sent away”: without a destination and like inanimate objects, looted goods themselves rather than human beings.

## History: the transformation of the forgotten

What is history? The director of Arthur’s museum knows the answer: “When it [an event] occurs but has already happened and is already over, then it is history. But, of course, it has to be designated as such at some point in order to be known.”<sup>17</sup> Museums are means of designation – they stand there, with all the goods inside them, to put an end to historical events, to represent them as “already over” and thus to certify that what has happened is no longer there and can be safely forgotten. Yet Arthur, the missing person, cannot achieve closure so easily, “hanging between history and an event, a fragile condition.”<sup>18</sup>

The museum is an institution whose techniques, routines, and competencies are effective in the transformation of the forgotten. In this case, the museum with all its treasures of cultural heritage evolves simultaneously, in parallel to, and out of the destruction of what it is supposed to historicize. Museum images – installations and exhibits – literally take over the lives, places, and narratives of the disappeared human beings.

Just like memories in the transformation of the forgotten, these artifacts – whether works of art, religious objects, or old pots and warm clothes from somebody’s household – also undergo a number of transformations. The property of the disappeared first becomes mere “things” without name, use, or status. Then they turn into museum artifacts of ethnographic, aesthetic, or historical value (at least those of them that are not stolen by the “conquerors” nor rejected by the experts). Then, again, with the collapse of the museum project, what used to be displayed as cultural heritage turns again into “just things”. They burden their custodians who only wish to get rid of them. Arthur inspects family portraits among which the museum selects pieces of higher market value; sometimes they have addresses of the last owners written on the back side (the orderly routines of the

“conquerors”) to which they are not going to be delivered. People are expendable – which is “awful” (Arthur is told by one of the bystanders, an idealist young man) but such is life; everyone dies sooner or later. But with things, it is different, things need to be saved, “... things of value that are lost are irreplaceable. Burned-out galleries, Gothic domes, Baroque palaces – these are the true losses.”<sup>19</sup>

In the final analysis, selected to be included in the “conquerors” private collections, or to be displayed in the museum to represent the “conquerors” cult of knowledge, or hidden in private homes, things were, indeed, saved – as distinct from their owners, who were not. Such substitution of things for people would become a recurrent motif in the novel – on the one hand, things standing as representatives and witnesses for dead people, but also things participating in a conspiracy against the missing ones, helping survivors to deny the traceless disappearance of the disappeared, both the fact itself of the disappearance and their own knowledge of the circumstances, the reasons why, and the faces of the perpetrators.

There will be no restitution, for there is no one to make a claim or to return the goods to. Yet for Arthur, it is not he who chooses the things he hides, but rather the things that want to be with him. This is a *Nachlass*, the true heritage – things that choose him and that he himself belongs to, that obligate him against his will. The museum is a proud institution of heritage preservation, the place where a new national identity and a new future for the liberated na-

## “THE PROPERTY OF THE DISAPPEARED FIRST BECOMES MERE ‘THINGS’ WITHOUT NAME, USE, OR STATUS.”

tion are being forged out of the destruction and oblivion of the very recent past. The museum becomes a mere parody, an evil travesty of Arthur’s own custody of abandoned and worthless objects; the new institution, in all justice capitalizing on property once already stolen and then abandoned by the robber. Galleries, Gothic domes, Baroque palaces, and other *true* losses were “saved” precisely because those who needed saving – the human beings who once populated and cultivated these domes and palaces – had been abandoned to their fates. As Arthur sums up, “We were not the ones to be sorry for, we only needed help. Meaning rescue ... There was much too sorrow for us and too little help. Sorrow, compassion, and help that never came.”<sup>20</sup> This is the truth that the new museum seeks to hide – a new forgetting following in the footsteps and reaping the material fruits of the Nazi destruction.

## Saving, preserving, protecting: the end of history

“The dead are gone, crushed and scattered, but their things speak the language of the dead, and so it will be until we get rid of the things or the shadows that cling to them.”<sup>21</sup>

How can one get rid of those shadows? Adler’s novel ends with an episode that evokes once again Kafka’s *America*, the unfinished novel about a disappeared man, a missing person. In his

wanderings, Karl Rossler finds a place for himself where he feels wanted and no longer missing, the Natural Theater of Oklahoma, “the greatest theater in the world”, where there are jobs for everyone and anyone without an exception. At the end of Adler’s novel, Arthur’s hallucinated pallbearers take him away on a long journey at the end of which he finds himself at a conference organized by the International Society of Sociologists – that very scholarly organization on behalf of which Professor Kratzenstein earlier rejected his research. Now, the society is celebrating him, Dr. Arthur Landau, for his contributions to the sociology of oppressed people. The venue is a weird entertainment park where conference participants are entertained with various festivities and attractions, among which the most popular one is “the panopticon – the contemporary museum”. It implements an entirely new concept of museum science, better than the previous principle of selection by historical or aesthetic value. There is no selection – anything can be included in its collections. No more remainders, no more unwanted memories – literally everything will be consumed by the display. Complete utilization, nothing to retrieve in the past. A panoptical memory means there is nothing to remember or to revise, and no ownerless objects are to be left to rot in storage any longer, and everything is to find a significance for itself – a history of complete freedom that has “everything for anyone”. No longer objects speaking the language of the dead, no more things unable to find a purpose; whatever junk that was surrendered to Arthur by the uneasy keepers is now represented much more vividly, “free of dust, the frames repaired and everywhere useful labels that could not have been more informative.”<sup>22</sup> In the park of entertainment with its panopticon, history comes to its end in the form of perfectly preserved and protected heritage. It is a totally transparent, fully available, visible, and knowable past, a past that in the panopticon will be forever saved from reflection, interpretation, and critique. ✕

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“We know what we are losing...”

# The scattering of art in revolutionary Petrograd

by **Iulia Demidenko**

**T**he history of revolutionary Petrograd covers the period between the two times when the city changed its name, in 1914 and 1924.<sup>1</sup> During this period, it came to witness a world war (not accidentally called the Great War) and two revolutions, as well as cold, famine, and destruction. Even though difficult to assess, the consequences for museums and collections, both private and public, were enormous, as they were for a variety of art institutions and, even more so, for private persons such as collectors, artists, art critics, and so on. We can follow the radical transformations that took place especially during 1917–1920 through newspaper publications, private journals written by artists, collectors, and *Kulturträger* of that period, as well as archival materials, and first and foremost through minutes from board meetings at the Russian Museum and the Hermitage.<sup>2</sup> They also shed light on the unprecedented rate and scope of the changing hands of art production in Petrograd and, as a consequence, can shed light on the effects involved.

The transformations were not limited to simply re-distributing valuable art objects in the interests of the victorious revolutionary classes, neither were they due to simply nationalization of private art collections, nor even the dynamic processes of museum organization. These were already reported during the Soviet time, and in considerable detail even though not always quite precisely. Truly important was the unprecedented growth of activities in the practically deregulated art market and a broadening of its social base. There appeared new actors who had never before dealt with art collectors, art dealers, or even amateurs. This had economic as well as political and ideological reasons. The overall result was that the idea itself of property rights in relation

to art as a segment of the economy was completely changed.

As early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, before the revolution, St. Petersburg already had a well-developed network of museums, among them imperial and departmental, public and private collections varying in subjects, dimensions, and the value of their holdings. There was a vivid artistic life with art exhibitions and magazines and a rapidly evolving art market attracting new actors. Art treasures from collections owned by the court and the nobility could be seen by the public, e.g., at the historical-artistic exhibition of family portraits organized by Sergei Diaghilev in the Tauride Palace in 1905.<sup>3</sup> The 1904 historical-artistic exhibition at the Baron Stieglitz Museum of Decorative and Applied Arts consisted entirely of art from private collections and was complete with an album in luxury edition.<sup>4</sup>

With increased democratization, a new trend appeared in Russian art collecting. Not only individuals, but also hotels, such as the famous *Evropeiskaia*, and even restaurants were buying Russian and Western artworks. Thus, the famous Donon restaurant owned a superb collection of bronzes and canvases attributed to Teniers and Wouwerman. Original artworks decorated private mansions and operations halls in major banks. Already by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not only the rich and the artists, but also the ordinary people were collecting: the intelligentsia, lower rank civil servants, the military, and small tradespeople. A new trend of inexpensive collecting appeared with its specific interest in graphic art and collectibles like folk toys, children's art, advertisements, and so on. For instance, postcards became popular collecting items after the regular publication of postcard catalogues started in 1901, and a special magazine





*Members of the World of Art Movement*, by Boris Kustodiev (1916–1920). The artist and art collector Alexander Benois is seated in the center of the painting, surrounded by other members of *Mir iskusstva*.

dedicated to postcards started in 1904. By the early 1900s, collecting postcards, exlibris, posters, etc., had already become a fashion. A typical example of collectorly desires was Alexander Benois, the central figure in the period's artistic life.<sup>5</sup> Alongside painting and European drawings, he collected fashion plates, book vignettes, photographs, objects of folk art, children's drawings, and toys. Applied art also became an object of careful cultivation and collectorship, no longer just as decoration to create an atmosphere. New collectors became actively involved in curatorial work exhibiting both contemporary and old art, and there were many groups that artists joined specifically for the organization of art shows.

**HOWEVER, IT WAS ONLY** when the Revolution came to the capital that the true dimensions of the movement became evident. While the Revolution was gaining momentum between February and October 1917 and further on, crime in Petrograd was getting more and more serious. Press from that time tells stories of burglaries and expropriations naming art owners who fell victim and whose names were previously completely unknown either to the general public or to the experts. Museum holdings were expanding through numerous, partly compelled, donations and sales by private collectors, who also left their holdings at museums for safe storage. Thus, the significant scale of collecting activities became evident. In private collections, one would often find unexpected things. For instance, in 1921 the Hermitage purchased

**“NOT ONLY THE RICH  
AND THE ARTISTS, BUT  
ALSO THE ORDINARY  
PEOPLE WERE  
COLLECTING [ART].”**

a veil “from the mummies of Ramses II and Ramses III” from an obscure private collector, and it also negotiated with another private individual the purchase of two Egyptian mummy heads.

Documents from museum archives describing transfers of private collections to museums demonstrate the extraordinary level of activity in art collecting before the Revolution and in museum organization after the revolution in the 1920s–1930s. Thus, until its liquidation in 1937, there was a *Muzeinyi fond*, Museum Fund,<sup>6</sup> a collection of artifacts and archival documents assembled earlier out of former private holdings, all of them of exclusive value and rarity. After the fund

was terminated, these pieces were scattered in all directions all over the country to be included in disparate museum collections. In the 1930s, the authorities decided that the Hermitage would in future specialize in Western and oriental art while the Russian Museum would take care of

Russian art. At that time, thousands of artifacts were transferred from the Hermitage collections into other depositories.

Yet, in spite of the massive sales, pillaging, and pogroms that came with the Revolution, and in spite of the Bolsheviks' nationalization and requisition campaigns during the 1920s, there were still considerable amounts of art and historical objects remaining in private ownership. As late as 1941 objects from private collections continued to flow into museums all over the USSR. Until then, there existed a committee for expertise and purchase in Leningrad with special funds assigned by the state to buy

artworks from the population that were later distributed among state museums. The committee purchased paintings, sculptures, prints, and applied art from Leningraders to send them on to the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and to art galleries and art museums all over the country. There were so many art objects accumulated in the city that they sufficed to fill not only Leningrad's museums but even museums in other cities. This demonstrates how rich and previously underestimated St. Petersburg art collections were.

With the revolutionary chaos and destruction that started already in February 1917, a process began, paradoxically, of further revitalization and expansion of the art market in Petrograd. Throughout 1917, parallel to the increasing economic collapse, the demand for artworks was also steadily increasing. The value of money was disappearing through inflation, and securities lost all value due to the nationalization in 1917–1918 of banks with all their property and other private property. Yet art objects appeared to remain a more reliable investment: despite all, there still remained numerous passionate art lovers in the city. No matter which of the current “isms”, contemporary paintings from art shows sold out almost immediately to connoisseurs. In 1917, just before the February Revolution, when the World of Art (*Mir Iskusstva*) opened its exhibition, Alexander Benois wrote in his journal: “The vernissage was a brilliant success: we sold art for 40,000 roubles!”<sup>7</sup> “The demand for art was extraordinary. At art shows, everything sells right away,” Nicolas Roerich wrote to his wife from Petrograd shortly before the October Bolshevik coup.<sup>8</sup> The demand was hysterical and did not seem to depend on style or school, the name of the artist, or even the quality of the painting. In February 1917, in the exhibition space of the Art Academy, a posthumous exhibition of works by the academy member Iosef Krachovskii was on show, judged by its critics as “miserable”. Nevertheless, almost all objects displayed there were sold. Even after October, Alexander Benois’ elder brother, the watercolor painter Albert Benois, was surviving (and compared to the rest of famished Petrograd, doing quite well) by selling his works. As late as the Soviet 1920s, the demand for work by the Silver Age celebrity Konstantin Somov remained unabated and he could hardly cope with the stream of orders, even though the general interest in modernist art had declined. In the cold and famine of those early years<sup>9</sup> it was quite possible to trade art for wood and food. The author and critic Kornei Chukovskii reported in 1919 that the artist Iurii Annenkov charged him a *pud* of wheat flour for a portrait.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, things could work out quite differently for others, as for instance, for the graphic artist Nikolai Gerardov who took his life due to hunger in 1919. And this was not an isolated episode.

Besides sales at art shows, galleries, and dealer’s offices (like the art bureau run by the famous art dealer Nadezhda Dobychina), there were also quite busy private art traders, or

rather, speculators, and there also existed various art stores, storages, and pawnshops. Some of them were well known from pre-revolutionary times. But there also appeared new legal sales agents run by new Soviet institutions. For instance, one such art store belonged to the First Petrograd pawnbroker (one among altogether about a dozen similar shops), or a dozen second hand stores that were run by the Petrokommuna.<sup>11</sup> In the press, one could read curious things, like the story about a team of workers who started a store on Liteinyi Prospect to sell what they described as “everything possible” and what in reality turned out to be art and other valuable artifacts.

WHILE PRIVATE AND state-run trading organizations bought artwork from the people, there existed special organizations that dealt with objects yielded by nationalizations and requisitions, as well as property classified as “ownerless”. Such objects were collected at the storage at the Palace of Arts (as the Winter Palace was renamed then) and traded at the Gosfond store that was run by the regional people’s education department (also located at the Winter palace). There were special storages for “ownerless goods” (most often, expropriated or pillaged in acts of vandalism)

at Gorprodukt (trading in consumer goods) and the Petrokommuna, as well as storages that belonged to central agencies such as the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Trade, the Workers and Peasants’ Inspection, the People’s Commissariat of Trade and Industry, and so on. Almost every Soviet organization had an art storage of its own to collect, keep, and trade valuable objects. This fact alone demonstrates the amount of art treasures accumulated in the city and the dimensions of art trade at that time.

Also, the Cheka, later (O)GPU, had their own storage; it was from there that the Russian Museum received, for instance, some paintings by the 18<sup>th</sup> century artists Dmitrii Levitskii and Fedor Rokotov.

In addition, there were also quite ordinary street markets actively involved with trading in art, often of first-rate quality. Merely two days after the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917, newspapers were reporting: “At the Aleksandrovskii marketplace, two unknown men in navy uniforms were selling a golden frame decorated with precious stones that they quite openly declared had been taken from the Winter Palace. For the frame, the burglars asked 20,000 roubles. No one dared detain them because they were armed with rifles.”<sup>12</sup> Three years later, Petr Neradovskii, the famous art historian at the Russian Museum, informed the board that the museum had purchased a portrait by Leon Bakst that was once the property of the sugar magnates Tereshchenkos. The man who sold the painting to the museum had acquired it from an unknown sailor at a street market.<sup>13</sup> Because the Tereshchenkos’ collection had already been deposited at the museum for temporary storage, the board took the honest decision to include the portrait in their collection and not in the

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museum's own holdings. Later, the collection was returned to the original owners, but what happened to the portrait in question nobody knows.

These examples demonstrate from what kind of new sources art appeared on the quite lively market. Like during no other period, after the revolution art became an object of lively criminal interest.

The unprecedented growth of crime is of course easy to explain. New groups of people had been arriving as migrants from the outside and could not all possibly be registered. Already in the autumn of 1914, conscripts and their families started flowing into Petrograd, then the center of all state and military administration, seeking better positions and places of service. War refugees were moving into the capital city, too. After treatment in Petrograd's military hospitals, the wounded or sick military personnel were demobilized and stayed in the city. They had little means of sustenance and plenty of seductions and bad examples in front of their eyes. In the earliest revolutionary events in February–March 1917, mobs were seizing police precincts, destroying documentation, and attacking prisons to set free prisoners of the tsarist regime. Among those, political prisoners constituted but a small fraction. Large groups of criminal offenders were at large, joined by deserters who also found themselves safe in the large city. The revolutionary authorities were incapable of and inexperienced in fighting crime. At the same time, from the very first days of the February Revolution, high-flying rhetoric was concealing the brutish reality. Plunderers and pillagers appealed to social justice, namely the revolutionary redistribution of wealth. On the revolutionary day of February 27, 2017, a many thousand-strong crowd of people occupied the Tauride Palace where the Provisional Committee of the State Duma was holding its meeting. Immediately, all silver tableware disappeared from the Duma's canteens. The “victorious proletariat” after October were no better. In 1918, when the Congress of Committees of Poor Peasants (*kombeds*) convened to celebrate the first anniversary of the October revolution, its delegates left their hotels taking “knives, forks, spoons, and even window curtains with them...”<sup>14</sup>

**AT FIRST, ROBBERS ATTACKED** passers-by in the streets, then burglars took over and started robbing private houses and apartments. The nobility's palaces and mansions were equally attractive to both idealistic “revolutionary expropriators” and ordinary criminals, as well as large apartments owned by the rich. Starting in February, the situation was gaining momentum. After the Bolsheviks occupied the retired dancer and the tsar's favorite Kshesinskaia's mansion, they could not be evicted even by court order, and Kshesinskaia sued the Provisional Government for 2 million roubles in compensation for the valuables that remained in the house. She won the case but never received the money; but the court order did produce unpredicted results when in June 1917 the objects from the mansion disappeared, armed soldiers took guard at the entrance, and a plaque was mounted on the wall declaring that the house was now the property of the people.<sup>15</sup> Legally, the plaque had no significance at all. “People's property” was just scattered among the new au-



Art treasures owned by the court and the nobility could be seen by the public, e.g., at the historical-artistic exhibition of family portraits organized by Sergei Diaghilev in the Tauride Palace in 1905 (above).



Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev was an art critic, patron and ballet impresario. Painting by Valentin Serov, 1904.



Poster advertising the Historical Exhibition of Works of Art at the Baron Stieglitz Museum, 1904.



Famous ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaia's mansion in St Petersburg was occupied by the Bolsheviks in 1917, and her valuables were scattered. Kshesinskaia left the country in 1920.



The mansion's drawing room.



Kshesinskaia's mansion is an art nouveau palace located at the centre of St Petersburg. It was occupied by the Bolsheviks during the revolution of 1917, and Vladimir Lenin held several speeches from the mansion's balcony.

thorities. Later, Kshesinskaia recollected having seen Alexandra Kollontai wearing her outfits. Another object, a golden cigarette case with an inscription from Crown Prince Nicholas, changed hands many times before Lili Brik received it as a gift from her then husband, the Soviet general Primakov, later to be expropriated when he was arrested by the NKVD.<sup>16</sup>

After October 1917, robberies and burglaries acquired truly massive dimensions. In the summer of 1919, specialists at the Russian Museum were inspecting the studio of a recently deceased sculptor whose complete collection of books, manuscripts, and small sculptures was found missing. To prevent something like that from happening again, in 1921 the museum took over the famous artist Sergei Makovskii's library when Makovskii had to emigrate in haste in 1920. Earlier, in autumn 1919, a special committee inspected the summer palace that belonged to Agathon Fabergé, the son of Karl Fabergé, himself a jeweler and art collector. Already before the revolution, this place was known as a "smaller Hermitage" because of the extremely valuable objects kept there. By the time of the inspection, Fabergé had already been arrested and released three times and his house subjected to multiple searches, after which the red military used it as their lodgings. The committee experts had to report that the collection had been stolen in its entirety.

**IN FEBRUARY 1920**, the board of the Hermitage reported the disappearance of a bust by Donatello from the Stroganoff Palace. In June, the committee inspected the Oranienbaum Palace and also reported massive losses: "as for art furniture and interior design, there is nothing left that would be of any artistic interest, and, by the way, from the Large Palace, there disappeared in an unknown direction a painting of the Hermitage level of quality and international value, *A concert* by Ekhout, dated 1753."<sup>17</sup>

After the October coup, criminal records read like a nightmarish detective story: burglars breaking in literally a day before the committee for the protection of art planned its visit. In June 1921, the Kazan Cathedral and the Church of the Resurrection of Christ (on Spilled Blood), both situated close to the Russian Museum, were broken into. In 1922, because of the growing number of burglaries, the director issued a special order introducing security watches up to six rounds a night. Inventories of the Anichkov Palace (since 1918, the Museum of the City) record losses and make occasional comments like "taken away by vandals on the night of February 25, 1922."<sup>18</sup> Robberies also took place in the Hermitage. Thus, in January 1923 a canvas by van Mieris was stolen directly from the display (later restored to the museum).

At first, pillaging was not specialized, and thieves would take paintings and prints alongside money and gold. However, during the NEP, art became a special object of criminal interest. In the summer of 1923, Benois, at that time the director of the painting gallery at the Hermitage, writes in his journal: "...stolen, cut out of their frames: this is a new phenomenon, it makes one wonder. I am not even reporting any special cases, they are too numerous."<sup>19</sup> How many objects disappeared like that and what happened to them afterwards is impossible to say.

I must point out again that even in legal or semilegal sales, let



alone plain crime, the artifacts in question were objects from the property of the so-called *byvshie* (literally, “former people”, meaning the former privileged ones). As early as 1918, this word was already in use referring to the nobility and merchants, state bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, the priesthood, and the intelligentsia. During the years of red terror, the word, even though defined vaguely, also occurred in official documents. These *byvshie* had come into the ownership of art before the revolution, and after the October coup and Bolshevik repressions they also became the main sellers. In the late 1920s, there was an attack made in the press against the Museum of the City at the Anichkov Palace because of its alleged attempts to protect the property of the former exploiting classes. And indeed, in 1928 the museum was closed and its holdings were scattered. Benefiting from these movements were various groups, including the *byvshie* who sold the works as a means of survival, but also old and new collectors, the revolutionary nouveau riche, and those who stood close to the new authorities.

And indeed, the authorities’ legitimate actions were not so different from plain pillaging. Already in February 1917, *revvizitsiia* became a household word. The Romanovs’ estate was requisitioned first. In March 1917, revolutionary military detachments attempted to requisition the Large Palace in Peterhof.<sup>20</sup> In most cases of such actions, historical artifacts were destroyed or disappeared. In March 1917, Benois accompanied a commissar on an inspection of the Oranienbaum Palace. He noted that even though the Large Palace had suffered damage, its outstanding collection of Meissen china had survived. After October 1917, this collection also disappeared.

**ACTIVISTS AMONG THE** intelligentsia were trying to curb the destruction and initiated a number of committees and councils to protect art and historical monuments. In May 1917, the official Committee for the Protection of Monuments of Art and Antiquities was established, and on July 1, 1917, the Art Historical Committee of the Winter Palace.<sup>21</sup> The well-known artist and art collector Vasilii Vereshchagin was elected its chair, once the founder of the *Starye Gody* magazine and of the (imperial) Society for Monument Protection and Conservation. The goal of the Committee was to receive and inventory property from imperial palaces and to identify artifacts that would be valuable as museum items. In August of the same year, three other committees were set up to deal with imperial palaces in Gatchina, Peterhof, and Tsarskoe Selo. However, these committees could do nothing against the uncontrollable exportation of art and the pillaging of precious metals, china, bronzes, and paintings. The Soviet regime also used such organizations for its own purposes. During the first years after the October revolution, Narkompros would set up similar committees. In 1919–1920, representatives from the Hermitage, the Russian Museum, the Museum of the City Petrograd, and others

were all participating in a special committee distributing among themselves valuable artifacts from the Anichkov Palace.

**ALREADY DURING THE TIME OF THE** Provisional Government, some palaces and mansions were described in great detail and compensation was planned for the owners. Some money was even paid out to those whose houses were requisitioned “for revolutionary purposes” by various political parties. Needless to say, the Provisional Government’s commitments were null and void after October. No rules or systems applied then in any measures taken by the new authorities.

Still, organizing a museum would be a useful strategy to protect a collection from dispersion. For example, after the October coup, Bolshevik revolutionary sailors intended to set up their club at the Stroganoff Palace. Lunacharsky and Benois interfered by declaring the palace a museum – which, however, did not protect it from being pillaged afterwards in 1919–1920. In 1918, they gave the status of a museum to the studio of the deceased artist Konstantin Makovskii, including all objects in it, and the

private apartment of Mikhail Roslavlev, an architect, painter, and the owner of a large collection of art by *Mir Iskusstva*. During the same year, the Soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies in Tsarskoe Selo intended to occupy the palace of Grand Duke Pavel Aleksandrovich. To prevent the takeover, Narkompros declared the palace a public museum. A complicated plan by monument protection activists to save the Anichkov Palace

## **“IN AUTUMN-WINTER OF 1917 DISTRICT SOVIETS WERE GIVEN WIDE-RANGING RIGHTS IN THE REDISTRIBUTION OF DE-PRIVATIZED DWELLINGS.”**

resulted in the establishment of the already mentioned the Museum of the City Petrograd in 1918.

None of these museums survived for a long time, and already by the 1920s all of them were closed. The original owners would as a result lose any rights to their property, and only in a few cases were some of them allowed to stay in their own home turned museum, for instance, in the capacity of a keeper. This is what happened to Senator Evgraf Reiter’s (and Russia’s largest) collection of engravings and lithographs.<sup>22</sup> In 1918, the Russian Museum acquired all 25,500 sheets of it for a purely symbolic sum of 20,000 roubles. In return, Reiter was employed as a keeper and given an apartment at the Russian Museum close to his collection, because by that time the former senator had already been evicted from his own place and had nowhere at all to live.

Life itself forced collectors to sell their treasures. It was in Petrograd (much earlier than in other Russian cities) that the Bolsheviks first started relocating tenants and “compacting” (*uplotnenie*) lodgings in requisitioned private homes. The new municipal politics decreed the nationalization of all private housing property. Even though the campaign was only complete in 1921, already in autumn-winter of 1917 district Soviets were given wide-ranging rights in the redistribution of de-privatized dwellings. In January 1918, a special committee was established in Petrograd to ensure occupancy by proletarian families of

houses and apartments of the bourgeoisie. In March 1918, all housing space above the new norm was decreed to be subject to requisitioning, and non-compliance or attempts to conceal housing spaces was to be punished by eviction and confiscation. Apartments of the former rich were thus transformed into communal housing, where neither entire art collections nor even isolated artifacts could be kept. It should be added that those *byvshie*, or *netrudovye elementy* (Russ. “idle elements”, non-working disenfranchised persons) were also deprived of the right to employment and were heavily taxed. They had in other words hardly any means of survival. Many of them also expected to be deprived of their collections in the near future and feared for their lives if that were the case.

And still, legal art sales by art owners at that time increased considerably such that the most significant and valuable items nevertheless found new homes for themselves in museums, at least at first. In what concerned the visual arts, Bolshevik leaders were almost indifferent, so thanks to the efforts of cultural lobbyists the new authorities at first were easy to convince to fund purchases for museum painting collections. The result was that during the years of revolution, state museum holdings increased manifold.

Selling a collection to a museum (given the will of the museum to acquire it) was one way to protect it, and another was to transfer the collection's core components into a museum for temporary keeping. This latter practice was invented by artists employed at museums or sitting on museum boards. It had first developed during the time when such precautions became relevant because of the defeats the Russian army was suffering in the war, and later during revolutionary rioting. In what concerns the imperial museums, after February 1917 they were all given state status and could therefore provide the artifacts in their keeping with some safety. Their storages were closed for the general public and possessed enough space to house boxes with collections. Already in March 1917, Benois writes about his attempt to convince an aristocratic family to deposit the family collection of china and silverware at the Alexander III Museum. He failed then, but later on, the silver did eventually land in the museum storages, only to be sold abroad during Stalin's secret art sale campaign in the 1930s.<sup>23</sup> The Russian Museum was active in accepting private collections for keeping, which the Hermitage refused to do, but already in 1918 became aware that this was a mistake. In September 1918, Sergei Troinitskii, the director, addressed the Hermitage board at an extraordinary meeting asking them to revise the decision: “By accepting artifacts for keeping, the Russian Museum undoubtedly succeeded in rescuing many valuable objects. In the present situation, private collections are under the threat of destruction, and for their salvation, maybe, the Hermitage should revise its standpoint.”<sup>24</sup>

Many collections first deposited for safekeeping in museums were later taken over to be officially included in the museums'

own holdings. Such was the fate of collections from the families of the disenfranchised nobility. Thus, one of the best museums in Petrograd, the already mentioned Museum of the Central School for Technical Drawing (the former Stieglitz School) accepted for keeping collections that belonged to outstanding noble families. Yet, in quite a short time, the Museum itself had to face the threat of being abolished, and in autumn 1923 its facilities with all museum collections were given over to the Hermitage – at that time the only organization that could provide protection both for the collections kept there and for the unfortunate Stieglitz Museum itself. The Museum was reorganized to become a branch of the Hermitage, but even in this capacity it only survived until the beginning of the 1930s.

ON NOVEMBER 10, 1918, the Decree on the registration and protection of monuments of art and antiquity was published, adopted even a month earlier, in October. Now, private owners were obligated to have their collections registered and no longer allowed to sell or hand over the objects anywhere without first informing the authorities. As was always the case in the matters of the Bolsheviks' law, the decree's formulations were vague, and the practice remained only partially under control. Collectors and antiquarians suspected that this was an attempt to gather information for further requisitions. They first stopped contacting museums with offers of sale or transfer of things for keeping, not

hoping that the museums could protect them from pillage – but later these contacts intensified so that soon museums could not find free storage to house more artwork. In 1923, the writer Evgenii Zamiatin, arrested several times, imprisoned, and finally exiled abroad, was trying to protect just 8 paintings and 30 drawings by depositing them at the Russian Museum. Because of lack of space, the board only agreed to accept the smaller objects. In 1922, the authorities

demanding that the museums should immediately submit complete lists of deposited art. In the mid-1920s, all deposited collections were proclaimed national property and given over to the museums that now became their legitimate owners.

In order to protect art, many collectors in early Soviet Russia would donate art, but the tradition itself of donating had been established long before, and not only to the Hermitage or the Russian Museum, but also to smaller museums. The diplomat and art historian Prince Vladimir Argutinskii-Dolgorukov, for instance, devised a collecting strategy specifically with a view to donating the collection in future. When making an acquisition, he would take notes of the museum to receive the artifact, so that even in our time objects that once were in his collection can be seen at the Hermitage, the Russian Museum, the Louvre, and the Museum of St. Petersburg History. The Revolution gave an additional impetus to donors. For example, in 1918, Alexander Polovtsov Jr., a diplomat, ethnographer, and orientalist, who had many times on earlier occasions made museum donations,

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handed over to the Stieglitz Museum a large part of his collection after his private mansion was requisitioned.

However, even if a piece of art found a place in a museum collection, that still was no guarantee of safety. The status of a museum as a state organization would not stop burglars, or the multiple attempts by the authorities to re-distribute museum holdings, with the result that rare and valuable artifacts legitimately owned by museums in Petrograd were isolated and relocated, to be used for political purposes. Already in 1917, in connection with the Bolsheviks' peace negotiations with Germany (the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk), the parties started discussing the surrender by the Bolsheviks of the so-called Kassel (Malmaison) collection from the Hermitage. Those were paintings from the Kassel palace once looted by Napoleon and relocated to Paris to decorate the Malmaison palace. Alexander I acquired the collection in 1814. Representatives of the Hermitage applied much effort to exclude this item from the peace treaty. Another case was the conclusion of peace treaty after the 1921 Polish-Soviet war when the now independent Polish republic demanded that Soviet Russia surrender valuable assets obtained by the Empire in the course of partitions. Among other things, the Polish delegation claimed collections and individual artwork from the Hermitage, the Gatchina palace, and the Art Academy. Those artifacts once belonged to the royal palace in Łazienki and the Warsaw Library. A special Russian-Ukrainian-Polish committee was then set up to negotiate these matters.

Relocation was also going on inside Russia. Museums in Moscow, for instance, were objecting against the return to Petrograd of museum and church artifacts that had been evacuated from the capital during the war. They also demanded that Glavmuzei (the main museum administration) transfer a number of pieces from old Petersburg collections, even those of the Hermitage and the Russian Museum, into the administration of museums in Moscow, the new capital. Finally, already in the beginning of the 1920s, in the course of cultural revolution with its slogans of decentralization and democratization, an intensive campaign started relocating art from former private collections deposited in Petrograd's major museums to provincial ones, quite often just recently organized.

**IN 1918, WHEN THE** Bolsheviks by decree separated the church from the state, active, even though still relatively cautious, measures towards the alienation of church property were already being taken. In 1922, the Bolsheviks' violent campaign culminated in the confiscation of valuable objects owned by the church.<sup>25</sup> This was proclaimed to be a measure for famine relief and was accompanied by repression and atrocities against the priesthood and the believers. In the acts of massive destruction of churches, it was still possible to protect some buildings and objects, like old icons, by transferring them into museums. Another committee for the evaluation of antiquary objects was established under the auspices of the People's Commissariat of Trade and Industry and its head, Leonid Krasin, with the purpose of preparing a large-scale art sale for profit.<sup>26</sup>

In the mid-1920s, there started another dramatic episode of



In 1927, the Bolsheviks prepared 406 items of the Romanovs jewelry to be sold through Christie's. An article was published describing them as "a valuable collection of beautiful, mostly 18<sup>th</sup> century jewels... They used to belong to the Russian Crown and were acquired by a special syndicate. Now, the jewels are on sale to be traded for the mutual benefit of our countries."



The committee charged with selecting pieces of Russian imperial jewelry to be auctioned in London, 1927.



Alexandra Feodorovna (June 1872 — July 1918), was Empress Consort of Russia as the spouse of Nicholas II, the last Emperor of the Russian Empire.





The famous art dealer Nadezhda Dobychina. Painting by Alexander Dolovin, 1920.



Artist and art collector Alexander Benois. Painting by Leon Bakst, 1898.



In 1918, Alexander Polovtsov Jr., a diplomat, ethnographer, and orientalist, handed over to the Stieglitz Museum a large part of his collection after his private mansion was requisitioned.



art relocation and destruction of collections, and now the sales of museum exhibits was carried out on a massive state-run official basis, both abroad<sup>27</sup> and inside the country. Items for sale were forcefully selected directly from museums and libraries, those institutions that were by definition designed to protect them. For instance, in 1926 a part of the Diamond Fund was sold to the British antique dealer Norman Weiss, and in 1927 Christie's auctioned some of the Romanov jewelry. In the 1930s, such sales acquired truly grandiose dimensions, and museum workers were appealing to Stalin to stop the sales.<sup>28</sup>

In such circumstances, smuggling art treasures abroad was not the worst option for a private collector. Even before October collectors were selling through foreign antique dealers and their agents. Afterwards, for art to cross state borders was more complicated, but the stream did not diminish, as demonstrated by the artist Osip Braz selling in Sweden part of his European old master's collection at the end of 1917.<sup>29</sup> In the summer of 1918, the newspaper *Vechnoe slovo* reported: "Hundreds of agents make massive purchases of paintings, china, bronze, and furniture before they arrive on the market, so that we never even find out what exactly we are losing. Antique dealers from olden times evaluate art objects taken abroad quite highly, not less than 300 million roubles."<sup>30</sup> It is believed that in some cases foreign commissioners used the support of the authorities. In 1919, the Sovnarkom issued its decree "On prohibition of exportation of objects of art and antiquities", interpreted by the market as a measure against free art trade. A similar measure had already been proposed before the February Revolution, but then Benois resolutely criticized it. Now, the decree provided the authorities with another instrument of repression but it failed to stop the export of art that now continued illegally and grew out of control.


**NOWADAYS, ONE HUNDRED** years later, one cannot but conclude that the history of private collections during the early 1900s still remains unwritten, the dimensions of losses still not evaluated, and the cultural regulation from those years still not systematized and not analyzed in full. No due respect has been paid to the professionals – those artists, museum specialists, conservators, antique dealers, collectors, and art critics – who spared no time nor efforts to monitor the arts scene, to collect and check information about pillaging and plunders, and to compile inventories and descriptions for every monument. It was predominantly their enthusiasm that protected museums, collections, and individual monuments and the construction of the museum system in general. Not only in Russia, but also internationally, the immense and tragic consequences of art plunders have not been researched, nor has any reliable mechanism been elaborated that could protect artwork and their owners. ✕

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Section of the Elgin  
Marbles frieze from  
Parthenon, Athens.  
On show in British  
Museum.

PHOTO: YAIR HAKLAI/  
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

# THE HERITAGE OF THE MISSING

Some remarks from an international law perspective

by **Ove Bring**

I will approach our subject from the perspective of international law, which is relevant because here we have to consider international claims. These claims cross borders and are being made for the return of cultural objects that have been transferred to other countries.

First a remark about terminology. It is obvious that words like “missing” and “belonging” will be used. As a consequence, terms like “restitution” and “ownership” come into the picture. Restitution is a rather clinical and objective term, while “repatriation” is more subjective and nationalistic, indicating that what is being missed belongs to “us” as part of the national patrimony or national cultural heritage. In the case of the Parthenon Marbles, the Greek government has used the less nationalistic formula of “reunification”, arguing that the monument itself needs to be reunited with parts of it that have been scattered abroad. This is an argument of cultural belonging.

The term “legal” is distinguished from the term “legitimate”. Formal legality is the same as lawfulness, while informal legitimacy indicates what is defensible from a moral or political point of view.

As we know, objects dating back to, for example, ancient Persia, Greek antiquity, and Roman

times, are being missed. These objects are perceived as representing the cultural heritage of Mediterranean, Oriental, and African countries. We are thinking of cultural objects that have been taken away in the past and are now to be found in other countries, often in museums of the Western world, in cities like London, Paris, Berlin, New York, and Los Angeles, or in private collections throughout the world. Claims for restitution are being made, but the counter-argument is that what is being missed now belongs to the possessor. The museum, art dealer, or art collector in question will argue that the object has been acquired in good faith, *bona fide*, from someone else who was believed to be the rightful owner. Therefore the possessor claims ownership.

There is an emerging regime of international law for protecting cultural heritage that focuses on three things: (1) conflict resolution between disputing parties, (2) safe return of cultural objects to legitimate claimants, and (3) criminal justice meted out to individuals who have acted in bad faith, *mala fide*.

Some claims seek to rectify the wrongs of colonization, affecting particularly

indigenous peoples who are now seeking to recover objects looted from them. For example, the British military expedition in Nigeria of 1897 looted scores of bronze sculptures from the city of Benin, artifacts that found their way into museums and private collections in Europe and the United States. Claims for restitution have been made since the 1960s. The Benin Bronzes are on display in the British Museum and have been exhibited *inter alia* at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. In Gothenburg, a PhD thesis in archaeology was presented in 2016 on the subject. It was written by Staffan Lundén and was titled *Displaying Loot, The Benin Objects and the British Museum*. Lundén shows how the British Museum’s public relation department argues that the display of the loot has been a good thing. They claim that the West have learned to appreciate African art, and that, in a sense, this cultural awareness makes up for the looting itself.

The plunder of Benin City was not an isolated event in colonial practice. In 1868, when the British captured Maqdala in Ethiopia, they seized an enormous war booty. Likewise, in 1874 and 1896, when Kumasi, the Asante capital (in present-day Ghana) was sacked, a large booty was taken. The looting in China of the Beijing Summer Palace in 1860 was carried out by French and

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## “WESTERN MUSEUMS OFTEN ARGUE FOR GLOBALISM, THAT THEY LEGITIMATELY DISPLAY THE COMMON HERITAGE OF US ALL.”

British troops. In 1900, during the suppression of the Chinese Boxer Rebellion, a wave of looting followed the occupation of Beijing by British, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and US troops.

FOR A LONG TIME there was no legal prohibition against the taking of spoils in war. For example, during the 1600s Swedish troops seized artifacts and books in Denmark, Poland, Prussia, and Bohemia (for example, the Silver Bible in Prague) and incorporated these objects into the Swedish “national heritage”. Another PhD thesis, on the history of ideas, was published at Stockholm University in 2015. It was titled *Krigsbyttets biografi* ([The Biography of War Booty]) and was written by Emma Hagström Molin. The dissertation explores how war booty was understood during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and how ownership as a consequence of military victory was taken for granted.

After the Napoleonic wars, during the Vienna conference of 1815, a new attitude of international morality took over. Cultural property taken during the wars was returned to its earlier locations, for example, the sculpture of bronze horses in front of St. Marcus Church in Venice. Later, the protection of cultural objects was dealt with by legal instruments on the laws of war. Military destruction and plunder was prohibited. This was made clear in the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. The protection of cultural property in times of war has in modern times been updated in the Hague/UNESCO Convention of 1954 and in later Additional Protocols.

More recently, the legal focus has been directed at the booming art market and at trafficking of cultural objects. Emphasis has been placed on rules for the restitution of stolen property or the return of illegally exported property. This is the object and purpose of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on Cultural Property, signed in Paris, and also of a convention signed in Rome in 1995. The former convention focuses on administrative procedures, while the latter has a more legal approach. The Rome Convention was draft-

ed by the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) and prescribes restitution in cases where objects have been illegally exported but in which the possessor can be compensated if they were acting in good faith and showed “due diligence” at the time of acquisition. Just to argue “It was in good faith” is not enough and it must also be shown that concrete measures were taken to ascertain the provenance of the object – one must show “due diligence”.

Unfortunately, the stakes are often too high in the commercial art world to rely on mediation and other friendly dispute resolution techniques. Litigation and criminal justice are often needed. The Rome Convention relies on court proceedings although the convention has not been widely ratified and is therefore not binding for many states. In contrast, the older UNESCO Convention is widely ratified, but also more general and less effective.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO CREATE an effective legal regime of cooperation and dispute settlement. One problem is the adversarial terminology. We have common heritage versus national heritage, cultural internationalism versus cultural nationalism, and globalism versus parochialism. Western museums often argue for globalism, that they legitimately display the common heritage of us all. Nevertheless, they have come to realize that if objects have been acquired under unlawful or immoral circumstances in the past, the correct way to handle the issue is through negotiation. There is in fact an ongoing trend of agreements between state organs and museums.

This trend has emerged as a natural response to a repeated practice of claims for restitution. This practice of international claims has developed into a modern phenomenon, *Parthenon syndrome* as I have called it in my book on the topic. Greece has since 1835 sought the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Athens and to the

Akropolis. The marbles were transferred to England by the British Ambassador Lord Elgin at a time when the Ottoman Empire

ruled over Greece. The Greek claim for restitution has served as an example for others, and since the 1950s other countries around the Mediterranean have followed suit, including Libya, Italy, Turkey, and Egypt. Similar claims for restitution have been made by Ethiopia, Nigeria, Peru, and other countries. These claims are perfectly legitimate. Although cultural objects in a global perspective belong to our common cultural heritage, they also belong to the geographical regions of their origin.

I HAVE USED the word “region” for a purpose. Cultural property might not be linked to a current state, but it will always be linked to its region of origin. A great deal of what states wish to label as belonging to *their* “cultural patrimony” or “national heritage” was produced before the modern system of nations came into being and by members of societies that no longer exist. Cultures die, but their remnants live on. The modern inhabitants of a region, even if their DNA does not confirm a link to an ancient past, feel the cultural connection. The perception of “belonging” is legitimate, and the modern territorial state can undertake a responsibility for the protection of its “national heritage”. At the same time, as I have already emphasized, the protection and display of cultural property is an issue for *all* mankind. If the property is legally acquired, or acquired under morally acceptable circumstances, it could legitimately be displayed anywhere in the world. Cultural heritage belongs to us all. ✖

Ove Bring is Professor Emeritus of International Law, formerly Legal Adviser at the Swedish Ministry, expert in International Law on the use of force, the Law of the UN Charter (including the Law of Peace Operations), International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law, the law of Diplomatic Protection, Foreign Investment Law and International Claims.

# “There is no heritage”

**Irina Sandomirskaja in a conversation with philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Trawny on the subject of nationalism and cultural heritage.**

**Day one:** *Thiel Gallery, Stockholm*

IRINA SANDOMIRSKAJA: Dear Jean-Luc, dear Peter, thank you very much for agreeing to join me in this conversation. It was very thoughtfully, as usual, suggested by Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback and organized somewhat in haste, and I am grateful to both of you for finding a moment to talk with me. Marcia and I together with some other colleagues are collaborating in a project constructing a critique of heritage as a mode of production of value and its ideologies and practices. Both Jean-Luc's and Peter's work in critical theory has been widely acknowledged and is especially relevant in the critical reflection of nationalism, an intellectual and political phenomenon that nowadays is quite spectacularly growing stronger even though its anti-democratic character has been exposed in so many instances of critical reflection. Nationalism as it appears nowadays, at this time of crisis of democracy in Europe, probably constitutes the only set of values that can be described as a truly European heritage and legacy, a bulwark of the dreamworld of the nation as organic self-sufficiency as opposed to democracy, or, to use Jean-Luc's term, *communauté désœuvrée* (inoperative community).

I would like to make a short introduction to this conversation in order to explain the questions I am addressing to you and why. We are sitting and talking surrounded by the grand interiors of the Thiel Gallery (Thielska galleriet), one of Stockholm's finest museums, a precious collection of Swedish Modernist art and design, a monument to the colossal effort of Ernest Jacques (Jakob) Thiel (1859–1947), a banker, at one time Sweden's richest man, an art collector, and a friend and supporter of the arts and artists. This gallery is nowadays one of the best examples of carefully collected and preserved Swedish national heritage. Surrounded by these objects, in the atmosphere of refined connoisseurship, it is difficult to be critical towards heritage and its ideas and the formation of its values. In one of his essays, Jean-Luc Nancy came forward with what appears to be the ultimate critical position in this sense when he proclaimed that “there is no heritage”.<sup>1</sup> However, look around us. Here it is, the highly prominent and impressive and undeniable presence of national values appearing in the form of beautiful artworks, tastefully designed historical interiors, and advanced museum technologies. There is much heritage, perhaps even too much.

It might sound ironic in this surrounding, but I would like to return to the special relation between cultural heritage and communism, or, in a broader way, about communism in its relation to the problem of the past. It was quite recently that I discovered this problem for myself. Tomorrow, Jean-Luc will be at Södertörn University giving a lecture about community. I would like to remind you, Jean-Luc, how we first met personally. This was several years ago, when I was participating, together with a group of colleagues, in a seminar in Strasbourg, a trip that Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback organized for us specifically to discuss your book about the inoperative community. This is a book that we have been reading and discussing intensely since then, and we are certainly looking forward to your lecture tomorrow. Because since you wrote this book — this manifesto, I would say, of a free, democratic, and cosmopolitan Europe — things have changed, haven't they.





PHOTO: MARCIA SA CAVALCANTE SCHUBACK

Irina Sandomirskaja in conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Trawny, listening beside.

JEAN-LUC NANCY (JLN): Oh yes, certainly, indeed.

**So you would probably not consider it a trivial repetition if I ask you this question about communism and its problems with the past. How do you think this problem appears now, when the meaning itself of the inoperative, but constitutive "co-" in "community", has been challenged, although in a new manner, again?**

JLN: But Peter has told me that he recently gave a lecture and told his public that there is no heritage – and that was without any connection with me.

PETER TRAWNY (PT): Yes, I was giving a paper on Heidegger's legacy – with a question mark – and I claimed that there is no heritage in his sense.

### Are legacy and heritage the same?

PT: No, no, they are not synonymous, but that was not the point. We were speaking about the relation between heritage and inheritance, and Jean-Luc in his article was writing about *hérédité*, which would be a third notion. It would be interesting first to think about the relations between these three phenomena. For instance, speaking about Christian heritage or cultural heritage, how does one think of its relation to heredity? Speaking about communism – who would think that this connection is valid given the fact that Marx was against inheritance and that for him revolution was a form of interruption and breaking up with heritages.

**Speaking about interruption of inheritance by revolution, I was recently listening to an interview with a Russian bureaucrat who deals with urban development somewhere in a northern city in Russia. She was complaining that it is totally impossible to deal with any urban planning in contemporary Russia because in the cities, "everything is heritage".**

PT: (laughs)

JLN: Contemporary Russia?

**In contemporary Russia, yes, but those places she speaks about were obviously proclaimed as heritage sites during the Soviet period. As opposed to what Marx said about revolution interrupting inheritance, in practice "heritagization" in Soviet Russia started immediately after the revolution and was promoted by the revolutionary regime. Initially, the Bolsheviks rejected repetitions and returns in history (and cultural heritage is a phenomenon of return) in approximately the same way as Marx and Engels rejected repetition in revolution in the *Communist Manifesto* and in *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*. They were also strongly against the commodification of the past. The late Soviet regime's relation to the Bolshevik legacy is of course a complicated question. Nevertheless, in short, nowadays, literally all is heritage of one historical period or another, in one system of values or another.**

JLN: I do not know if I could say anything about Russia, because I do not know Russia. There is a feeling that for a long time there has been a continuity in Russia, a link to all that is past, for instance, in Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*. It was a film about the heritage of the tsars, and Ivan's victory over the boyards was compared to the revolution and its opposition to the church.

As Peter says, revolution means a fight against the past. I believe the time between Nietzsche and maybe Lenin is, precisely, the time of rupture. Nietzsche breaks history in two. This is on the one hand. On the other hand, communism itself, at least according to Engels, can be thought as a kind of heritage, namely of the first Christians. According to Engels, it was the early Christians who were the first communists.<sup>2</sup> And in a way, this is true, because the Acts of the Apostles – the book of the New Testament that follows the Gospels – contains a very well known description of their life in community, all of them living together and sharing common property<sup>3</sup>. There is a story there about a couple among the apostles who did something wrong with regard to the community, and then there was a kind of trial, a common condemnation and a punishment from God – they died because they kept for themselves something that should belong to all.<sup>4</sup> I think that maybe this idea of the community of the apostles has indeed something to do with the attitude in Christianity towards wealth. There is probably no other religion that would have such hatred of wealth. You remember the story of the cleansing of the merchants from the temple, or the speech against the rich in the epistle of St. James in which he proclaims against all the rich.<sup>5</sup>



**JEAN-LUC NANCY** is a French philosopher who has written more than twenty books and hundreds of texts or contributions to volumes, catalogues, and

journals. Nancy's first book, published in 1973, was *Le titre de la lettre* (The Title of the Letter, 1992), a reading of the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and written in collaboration with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. Nancy

is the author of works on many thinkers, including *La remarque spéculative* in 1973 (The Speculative Remark, 2001) on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Le Discours de la syncope* (1976) and *L'Impératif catégorique* (1983) on

Immanuel Kant, *Ego sum* (1979) on René Descartes, and *Le Partage des voix* (1982) on Martin Heidegger. In addition to *Le titre de la lettre*, Nancy collaborated with Lacoue-Labarthe on several other books and articles. Major influences

And I think that has to do with philosophy as well. In Plato and after him in Aristotle there is the criticism of the sophists. They turn language into a commodity, they take money for language, they teach how to speak for money. And Plato says, “I do not do like that in the academy; I teach for mere food, and I make no money with that.” Aristotle also strongly criticized the idea of making profit with money, for instance, in his criticism of a poem by Solon.<sup>6</sup> Solon wrote that there is no limit to richness, while Aristotle argued that Solon was wrong because there is a limit, as there is a limit to any kind of technique, and it is the same with money. And I think it is the period between Plato and Christ that was precisely the time that Marx called precapitalism.

### Not after Christ?

**JLN:** After Christ there begins a time of suspension, and then only later capitalism starts. And I think (maybe someone has already done it?) if one would write the history of Christianity from the Renaissance and maybe until Marx, you will really find a lot of contradictory statements, some criticizing richness and some encouraging it. The church itself was enormously rich. So at stake is something that belongs to complete mutation – maybe, not exactly of richness but of the meaning of gold, silver, and precious stones. In the time before the Greeks, and of course, in Egypt, the pharaoh would be buried with a lot of jewelry. You know, the mask of Tutankhamun, and so on. Which would be understandable in Egypt, but it stops being understandable at the time when Athenian imperialism is born, and trade begins, or in Rome, for instance, when people start building houses in order to rent them out and make money. It was there already, the possibility of making money by trading grain from North Africa or Sicily. This was a matter of the state, but the state was hiring people to do that for the state.

And at that time Christianity – actually, before Christianity – it was philosophy that first came forward with condemnation of all that. There was a feeling that a kind of appropriation had appeared that had been unknown before, a kind of appropriation that was not exactly illegal but immoral, but why? The appropriation of riches by the pharaoh in Ancient Egypt was not only legal, but also moral because it was a sacred deed, and there was a relation between gold as a sacred symbol and the sacrality of the pharaoh’s person.

Maybe one can say that the critique of richness has to do with the criticism of idolatry in the Bible. You can buy your idol with all the gold and precious stones you want, but it still remains merely a statue, it does not speak. Maybe we could say that the idea of community appears in Christianity as an idea precisely of non-private appropriation of richness and at the same time the reduction of the role of money to the means of buying what is necessary for life but not in order to create capital.

**PT:** In this respect, since we are speaking of the historical background, this critique of richness in the New Testament is actually a repetition of what happens in the Old Testament, at the very beginning of the Jewish religion. It is the story of the golden calf. In Jesus, the critique of richness is also a Jewish motif, which also leads us to Marx, in a way, if we want to draw this parallel.

**JLN:** Absolutely right, absolutely. But precisely then there is a split, and the fight between Judaism and Christ is the testimony of that. We remember the story of the cleansing of the temple, when Christ says to the merchants, you are making the house of my father into a den of robbers, you are stealing. The story of the golden calf is extremely important because the golden calf is the opposite of the law – when Moses comes with the law, he finds the calf standing there in the middle of the people. This all is part of the whole transformation of the Western world, the Mediterranean area.

include Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Friedrich Nietzsche. The only monograph that Jacques Derrida ever wrote on a contemporary philosopher is *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*.

**PETER TRAWNY** is a German philosopher and professor at the University of Wuppertal. Trawny’s approach to philosophical problems uses a phenomenological-hermeneutic method. The focus of his work is on questions of

political philosophy, ethics, art and media philosophy, as well as questions of art and literature.

In his most recent works, Trawny is dedicated to the elaboration of a philosophical understanding of globalization and cosmo-

politanism. In addition to his research and teaching, Trawny is involved in the scholarly edition of Martin Heidegger’s collected works.





PHOTO: MARCIA SA CAVALCANTE SCHUBACK

Jean Luc Nancy is elaborating his thoughts for Irina Sandomirskaja and Peter Trawny. The Thiel gallery, Stockholm.

One can see that the idea of communism is in a way an anticapitalist idea because it should be the idea of *using* – not only money, but everything, all resources. This is the question of use, the value of use against exchange value. There are a lot of problems here, but this is the starting point. It is very interesting and even surprising what happens in Christianity later, with Francis of Assisi. We know that Francis considered poverty the main virtue. However, for Francis poverty meant using everything for a good life and not for the accumulation of capital. So, at the same time his criticism was against the nobility who were accumulating treasures, and he considered it right to take money from the nobility because they did not use money in the proper way, because their money was not for the good of the people. He demanded that they should give that money back to the people, but by people Francis meant the first bourgeois (even though of course there were no proletarians as yet) – but bourgeois in the sense that those were the people of the city. And then you can say that Francis created a positive energy for the invention of capitalism because he put forward the idea of circulation, the idea that money should not be lying in vain because there exists a good use for it. But I do not know enough of that. For example, Agamben has written a book about Francis and poverty and he disagrees completely with the idea of that Italian historian, at least in what concerns Francis himself.<sup>7</sup> You know, in the history of Christianity, and especially in the history of Western Christianity, there arose all the time again and again the question of how we should use richness in a good way. More and more, the good use was defined by two things – technology and the technology of the State that allows, for instance, one to make ships that can cross the sea. Long before Columbus, when Marco Polo went to China, what was at stake then? It was something quite different from use – he wanted to find things there that they did not have here and that are precious precisely because we cannot sell them. Marco Polo does not use much technology, but the very idea of going there is important. Later, Columbus had Marco Polo's book with him on his ship. Technologies on the one hand, and on the other hand, the State. The State becomes necessary precisely with the formation of the bourgeois society, and then one uses technology to start building all kinds of machines, including social machines – to create something different from the feudal order. Thus, the state that was meant for managing the good of the people at the same time has to use all of its means to make money, and it becomes itself the most important maker of money.

**PT:** But still, I would just add something. Speaking of heritage in the historical perspective, we will have to consider the Roman law, because, I guess, this is actually the origin of all terms that we all use when speaking of heritage and inheritance and the like. Even if we can start with Jesus and with Jewish interpretations concerning richness, the meaning of heritage, or heredity, or inheritance, even if these all have a meaning in the Christian system, they still come from the Roman side, I would say. This will be important for your topic, Irina, to think about.



JLN: Yes, this is right and so true. When Carl Schmitt states that our political concepts are all secularized theological concepts, I think in a way he is totally wrong. Because theological concerns, at least in the church, in ecclesiology, and in part of dogmatics, have their origin in Rome. It was the sacralization of Rome that made the church – Rome was not exactly secular, but Rome was at least the only phenomenon in history when a city itself became sacred. The god of Rome is Rome. Historically, there is an idea of coming back to Rome, the idea of the empire – all empires, maybe including the Third Reich, did have something that resembled Rome, but a precise representation did not occur, and that marks the separation of the state from society. There are a lot of social problems in the history of Rome – but the state becomes a separate sphere in Rome in the meaning of stability. And then the idea of communism in Marx is precisely about eliminating this separation, as the young Marx says, making politics disappear in order to come back to all realms of society. And then, once again, communism means the rupture of the heritage of appropriation, and in this way we can say that heritage coming from Roman law is not the only form but a very important form of private appropriation.

“Speaking of heritage in the historical perspective, we will have to consider the Roman law.”

## **Day 2: Rönells', a second-hand bookstore in Stockholm**

**Let me just remind you that yesterday we stopped at the moment when you started speaking about Rome, the state, and stability.**

JLN: Yes, and ...? Shall we continue?

**Yes, please continue.**

PT: Our topic is heritage.

**Yes, heritage is our topic, we were discussing communism, and before you took up the topic of Rome you were speaking about the Bible and the Greeks.**

JLN: Yes, I know, I know, but the question is rather to know how to come back to the topic of heritage ...

**I think the connection that you wanted to make was that the legal aspects of heritage and legacy all come from Rome.**

JLN: Maybe, maybe in the legal sense, juridical form we know, and with the link to the Bible and property, but I know nothing about heritage other than cultural heritage – do you know?

PT: I don't know.

JLN: I think there are two meanings of heritage – or, rather, there is only one, but it goes back to *heir*, *heres* in Latin, the one having the right to take over the property of the father. And then, as most often is the case in our culture, the one having this right is the son. But already here something comes first that is connected to masculinity, to the son, because the daughter was often not an heir in the same meaning.<sup>8</sup> And today, as you know, in the Islamic world, there is a question about heritage for woman. In Tunisia, the new constitution has changed the rules about inheritance by the daughter. Until now, there has been almost nothing for the daughter, no right to any kind of heritage – but now it has changed.

But with that also comes the second meaning of inheriting, the idea of heritage as the legacy of a culture, as culture inherited by a people. And I would say, in both cases, there arises the same question – from where does the right to be an heir come? In a sense, everything becomes more intelligible when we think in terms of a culture or a society because a group has a language, and the language is something that is heritage in quite a mandatory way because children speak the language of their parents. And with the language, there comes a lot more, including all the customs of the tribe, etc., etc. But when heritage is considered in the meaning of family relations – the son, the father, etc. – where is the foundation of that right? Is it blood? It seems to be blood. But if we assume this, then *heritage* becomes like *heredity* – and what does it mean, heritage like heredity? Because heredity is transmission of the natural character. Of course I have something in common with my mother and father, and some natural traits of the ethnic character, etc., but beyond that, things belong to the social and cultural realms. Of course I receive something that is handed down to me by such a large social context. Maybe it depends on something that appears quite superficial to me – where I was born, where I spent my youth, etc., etc. For example, yesterday or the day before Peter and I were talking about French and German philosophy and things like that. And I said, for me, “German philosophy” is a strange formula because philosophy has no ethnicity. Greek, German, French, Italian, even with a

**“Christianity is a very important part of the European culture, but not all of it.”**

little touch of Spain – are all philosophy. Maybe I would rather speak of Latin philosophy as something special, and this has to do with language, because from the Middle Ages until Descartes philosophy was written and spoken in Latin. And after that there starts a history of translation – and, I would say, translation played an interphilosophical role. When the French first translated Hegel, that first translation was sometimes really funny, you know. Take just one thing. In the first translation of Hegel, *Begriff* was translated as *notion* and not as *concept*.

Well, then, on the cultural level, if I speak of European heritage, especially in modern tomes, since Descartes – it makes sense, OK, it is not African heritage. But, for example, when people in Europe argue that European heritage is mainly Christian heritage, this is not so clear, because Christianity is a very important part of the European culture, but not all of it – otherwise, you have to consider the history of Christianity and the ways Christianity transformed itself, and the ways it constructed itself so many times.

Well, and then the notion of heritage as we have it nowadays is no longer modeled after the family, because you have no right any longer to decide what was in the past. The transmission of culture means that each act of passing on transforms the goods that are supposed to be inherited. I inherited my parents' house together with my four sisters and brothers. We sold the house and each received a certain amount of money. Which means, if I inherit after my parents as I did, I inherit in the capitalistic way: there is no transformation of the inheritance, but a return to the general equivalent of money. But if we look at this in a different way, what happened was a total transformation because it was no longer the house of our parents. Such is life, and it is normal that the house of my parents becomes something of the past.

Then what does it mean to be an heir? I must say I do not know. I know a lot of things about my culture and about my family as well, my parents and grandparents, my great grandparents. I even know who was the first Nancy in my branch of the Nancys, because there were many Nancys. For instance, *Nancy* could be a Jewish name, because it is the name of the city. But it is not, because we know that he was an orphan to whom the name Nancy was given as a child.

**You have a long memory in the family.**

JLN: No, it is not long, it begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of my sisters has a photograph of the first Nancy taken at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**But... If Peter allows me — you probably want to say something or to comment, I do not want to be impolite... But I have a different question here.**

PT: Then, you *are* impolite. No, no (*laughing*) – please go on.

**I wanted to ask you about — the property of missing persons — and the situation in which you have no direct blood or family connection, about the situation of not inheriting but rather coming into inheritance. I am referring to the text you wrote about *beni vacanti* and how we become owners of goods that we have no familial connection to.<sup>9</sup> And how inheritance in this case is not important from the point of view of family transmission but becomes a problem precisely due to the fact that this transmission was interrupted and suspended in uncertainty. A missing person is the one about whom we do not know if his is living or dead. There is no will, no testament, and we have to deal with something that is simply left after, left without a testament. Something that remains and that does not have inheritors by blood. I was thinking about how in our time, in the European history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, virtually all that we have inherited — all cultural heritage — is originally the property of missing persons, the millions and millions of them. Would you agree to this? And then the question is, how do we — here again comes the question of the foundation, the ground — on what ground do we nowadays own what belonged to people who went missing.**

JLN: But we have that line by René Char, a quote from his poem that Hannah Arendt was discussing: “our heritage has no testament.”<sup>10</sup> A testament means the rule for using goods, which is the heritage, and the testament is the organization by the owner of the future use, and then the testament itself depends on the national law. In France, I know, I can through my own will determine that part of my estate that should in the future be inherited by my children. Myself, I can use a certain amount of the money, that is my own property, but not very much, for instance, but if I want I can give Peter fifty euro. But if I say I will give him a hundred euro, my children will say, no, no, you don't have the right, this is ours.

So that means – and this is interesting – that even private heritage is submitted to the general social and political law, and this law is different from the one that determines the use of the goods by myself. And in principle – I do not know exactly which law it is or how it works – there is something that is called *jouissance* (in the legal meaning,

legal *jouissance*<sup>11</sup>) and this means total use without restriction, until the destruction of the property. So, if I want to destroy the apartment of which I am the owner I have the right to do so. The only problem is, I am not the only one who owns it.

**So, your *jouissance* is limited.**

JLN: If my wife and I say, OK, this apartment is ours, we destroy it, or we sell it, and then we burn the money, and so on. I think certainly it would not be possible by the law precisely because of the legal aspect of heritage. Because our children have the right to what we own. I cannot destroy my goods.

**If you have children, you cannot.**

JLN: I cannot. So, there is a contradiction – if you want to do whatever you want with your goods and to decide absolutely freely what to do with your heritage, you have to be alone and without heirs.

**Yes. Would that be some kind of response to René Char? Concerning his thesis about our freedom in relation to heritage without a testament?**

JLN: It is not because Arendt was alone and childless that she took up the question – but she meant that *we* (moderns) are alone, we have no children, we do not belong to a society with rules.

**But there is something really ambiguous about these words by Char, when he speaks about the absence of a testament preceding our inheritance. I found a similar idea in an article by Viktor Shklovsky, in which he denounced the idea of inheritance and called on the present-day to make “a revolutionary choice of the past”.<sup>12</sup> Shklovsky wrote this in 1937, the year of Stalin’s Great Terror, which makes it difficult to interpret – he was not a hero like Char, a resistance fighter who renounced testaments by an act of will. Does the absence of a testament really mean that we are completely free to choose a past for ourselves, or does that mean that we are completely free to destroy the past like in this kind of *jouissance* that Jean-Luc described?**

JLN: No, it says nothing about the past. It says there is something because there is a past, but we do not know, we have no rule, no discourse, no knowledge, no way to know what we have to do with that. For me, it is precisely the question of how we can understand our past. Since a certain time, roughly since the beginning of modern time, we saw that the past was in relation to the present like parents are in relation to children, and that it was what was called progress. Progress means going towards something better. And now, we discovered that we did not really get to the better, at least not at all levels, not to mention the best.

PT: I just want to remind that Hannah Arendt probably knew the phrase by Heidegger from *Being and Time*, where he says that all that is good comes from heritage – *alles gute ist Erbschaft*. And for Heidegger, it is definitely true; he would say that there is a finite beginning of us, and therefore, when we start something new, it is always referring to the past. We can never begin absolutely. Only God can begin absolutely. I would think that in a way, Hanna Arendt is reacting to these words by her lover, master, and professor. She would hardly doubt that there is a history – history is something we can deal with. But like Jean-Luc said, we do not know what to do with it, we do not know what the next step is. And Heidegger seems to have a point here when he says that all we can do in philosophy is read Plato; we always read Plato. We cannot imagine a philosopher who would not read Plato. Maybe today we have reached that point that such philosophers could exist, but that would be a certain loss.

JLN: OK, but to read Plato does not mean only one thing, that I get a book by Plato and read it again and again. Each reading changes Plato. For instance, if I am reading Plato after Heidegger, I have Heidegger on my mind, metaphysics and everything, and Heidegger then becomes my heritage. So, there is no heritage without transformation of the heritage itself, and without any testament we are transforming the past each time, so – personally, I do not know what the past is, there is only the present. At the moment, not only for me as an individual, but as a member of society. And speaking of Plato, Plato changes not only as the result of a reading by Heidegger. He changes because even change changes.

There is also another quotation, from Hölderlin’s *Death of Empedocles*, when he says to the people, “Now you have to forget everything that you learned: all your customs, all your knowledge, and you have to start anew.”<sup>13</sup> It is impossible to do, but he says you have to do this. Why does Hölderlin put these words in the mouth of his Empedocles? In a way, Hölderlin, for the first time, produces the first testimony of the beginning of an end, or of the end of the first beginning – now I am speaking like Heidegger – and then we come to the question, what does it mean, a new beginning? Certainly it is an impossibility, and in Heidegger’s terms, I would say it is the question of how the first beginning contains in itself its own end. That is the question of the fallenness of being – the fallenness of being

that is given with being and belongs to being. I am not able to explain that entirely, but Heidegger does not speak of *a new beginning*, nor of *another beginning*, but of *something else as a beginning*.

PT: Yes.

JLN: So maybe that is the question of a new beginning, which means we come to a certain point and we have to restart, and restarting implies links with the past – but something else in the beginning...

PT: Jean-Luc, I have a question to you as a philosopher, no, really as a philosopher for the future, for your afterlife – I am sorry for that.

JLN: Sorry for what, for the afterlife? But no, I am not immortal.

PT: The idea of heritage presupposes of course an intention by someone who wants to give something to his children. If I want to build a house, I want it not only for me but also for my children, for the future. Inheritance is a gift. If it were otherwise, it would be stealing – then we could say we take it from there and the other does not want to give it, he wants to keep it, he has to keep it, and so on. But normally we do not speak about stealing in our relations to history, we are not the thieves of our past.

You, in the writing of your books – do you have this intention to give something to someone who comes after you and who is your heir? Are you an inheritance yourself, are you creating inheritance for the future?

JLN: I don't think so. I do nothing, I do almost nothing.

PT: At least you can say that there are people who read your books and who are taking what they read in your books into the future, so in this sense you cannot deny the possibility that you are preparing a heritage.

JLN: OK, OK. But I am not giving – this is the point.

PT: You are not giving – so do you need a thief to take things from you?

JLN: Yes, if you wish.

PT: A good reader is a thief, then?

JLN: Oh, OK, OK.

**So there is no testament in reading. The reason I read is not because there is a testament, my right to read you is not because there is a testament telling me that I am allowed to read you.**

JLN: Absolutely not, no.

**No. Then, where does my right come from, is it just my decision?**

JLN: It's just your decision – but what does it mean, "your"? It is absolutely not *my* decision that I write books, it is absolutely not *my* decision but something that comes from my society, my culture, my time, etc. – and I am absolutely unable to think about something like a will to give, even to my children. I do not feel that I am responsible to give something to my children – I am not speaking of destroying my goods, but maybe I could use them in a way that at the end when I die there is almost nothing left. It depends on a lot of things, how many children you have, to which children you want to give something. Sometimes there is something you do not want to give to some children. I have a very concrete example. If you have one child who needs much more money than the others do – a younger child, when the older ones already have their lives while the younger for some reason is not independent enough and he needs more money. I know the others will say, "What is it, he receives much more than I did when I was his age." I know I am speaking of something that is very concrete.

And then I need to say – and I did say that – that before, a long time ago, I invested much money in a house for my first wife, and this house belongs to the older children. But it is impossible to make a calculation. So, what does it mean, I do not know but maybe I am too old. This is why I am so sensitive to the words of Empedocles in Hölderlin. Because in a way – I think at each moment – it is as if there would be no past and no future, but there is only something that happens when there comes a moment.



**There comes a moment, yeah. Peter, I think you are doubting. You are in doubt.**

**PT:** Mmm ... No, I was thinking of the problem of justice. Because Jean-Luc was speaking about justice. So if we go on speaking about heritage, obviously it should have something to do with justice. The question then would be whether in our relation to the past justice would be in a way at stake. Even if there is no gift and no giver, even if nothing like this exists, maybe there is a kind of responsibility and we have to listen to some things and not listen to other things, and this responsibility could have something to do with the moment of justice. For instance, take the whole discourse about cultural memory, or take something – an event (unavoidable now) – an event like the Shoah. Why is it a moment of justice in the fact that we listen to the voices of the victims and not to Hitler's voice, for instance. Or some people only want to listen to Hitler's voice and they say, we want only this, and now we do not want to listen to the voices of the victim. Maybe the question of justice in relation to that is in place here.

**JLN:** Absolutely. But is this a relation to the past – the Shoah and Hitler – or is it, on the contrary, a relation to the present, so that it is happening now, in a certain way, because there is a way of speaking of Hitler, and this way is a fact of the present? I do not know, it might be a weakness of my mind, but I feel that everything only is in the present. The past is OK, I know that it is the past, but it is exactly in the same way as memory according to Bergson. Memory is the actual memory where a few things of the past come out and are there in the present. All the rest is ... OK. And, for example, today we speak about Plato. Of course Plato plays a role and will for a long time, but maybe we are living in a world, in a culture, where Plato is not very significant. I think Plato was aware of many, many technologies of his time, while I am unaware of the enormous majority of technologies of my time. I am not in the same relation to my present as Plato was to his, and what does this mean? Oh, maybe that means I am not Plato. But I would like to return to your question, Peter. And you, when you write, are you writing to make a gift?

**PT:** No, no, no, but I am not you (*laughing*). No, I don't have this self-interpretation. Maybe if I dedicate something to somebody, then of course it is a gift, I want to give that to somebody. So, if you are dedicating a book to somebody – you could dedicate a book to your children, for instance. But as far as I know, those were only small things I dedicated to people in my age, not to the future, in this sense. But of course you could do that in a way. Probably maybe someone who has a huge *Nachlass* ...

**You cannot have a *Nachlass* if you are still living. You have to die first, then you have *Nachlass*.<sup>14</sup>**

**PT:** No, no. There is a book by Robert Musil that is called *Nachlass zu Leibtzeiten* (*Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*).<sup>15</sup> Of course, this is a kind of remains. *Corps*, *corpus*, something that remains after death, and if that is something in Heidegger's meaning, then maybe there is a promise, and a promise is probably something that has a future dimension.

**But you said yesterday that you had told the Americans in connection with Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* that there is no legacy – and what did you mean?**

**PT:** Well, I actually said in that paper that our relation to a philosopher is not part of his legacy, but the legacy means becoming a philosopher. The heritage of philosophy, or of a philosopher, actually, in my view, is becoming a philosopher. So Heidegger never says that his interest is the education of small Heideggers. He does not want to have a legacy, he wants to see philosophers. And one can only become a philosopher if one breaks with the heritage, if one interrupts history. Like I said before, it would be very radical to think of a new beginning like Empedocles. He does not jump into the volcano without a reason but because he is failing tragically. But the heritage of philosophy can only be becoming a philosopher and never becoming a member of Heidegger's legacy.

**JLN:** And then you cannot say that becoming a philosopher is something good, because to be a philosopher is not an object. Kant says nobody has the right to call himself a philosopher – but only a student of philosophy.

And as for the *Nachlass*, I don't want to have any *Nachlass*, and the first part of my *Nachlass* is already gone, destroyed. I keep nothing. I was asked by the Centre of Archives in Paris if I would like to give my archive to them, and I said, no, I wouldn't. What I published belongs to the public. But my notes, first versions, etc. – there is nothing of interest in them.

**“If we go on speaking about heritage, obviously it should have something to do with justice.”**

**But everything you leave on the Internet will remain forever — your emails, for instance. They cannot be erased. Maybe you should have left the first versions to the archives.**

JLN: I think everything will be self-erasing.

**Hopefully.**

JLN: Because there is too much.

**I think things will be self-erasing in the sense that there will be no human eyes to read them, but there will be machines, and not even reading but sorting things out. Human eyes are incapable of reading all of it.**

PT: It can develop into a new form of archaeology — in a couple of decades, there will be people digging for Jean-Luc Nancy.

**Finding small small pieces of Jean-Luc Nancy, putting them together in a totally wrong way and saying "that's it, this is what Jean-Luc Nancy is like".**

JLN: OK.

PT: A dinosaur.

JLN: Of course, I would agree to that.

**And this is their right to read you the way they choose to, even if the reading is totally wrong, but no one can forbid it.**

JLN: Twenty years ago, in the national library in Strasbourg, a Belgian researcher found a piece of parchment that turned out to be a text by Empedocles. They organized a ceremony in Strasbourg to present it. The scholar discovered the fact that it was by Empedocles by using a database, a collection of older Greek literature on the computer.<sup>16</sup> So he could check what he had on the fragment with the data on frequency and proximity, and finally it was evident that it was indeed a piece by Empedocles. But there are certainly many other pieces somewhere that nobody has ever found — and what of it? If it is better to have more pieces of Empedocles, or not, I do not know.

**It's very difficult to be like you in this relation, because normally people want to collect and preserve things. Everybody wants to preserve everything. Why, what is it, some kind of greed?**

JLN: Greed? *Avarice?*

**It is like you cannot let go. You want to keep and keep things forever. Just not letting things disappear.**

PT: But there you obviously have the problem of thinking of the European subject without private property. A subject without the world of objectifications. In this sense, private property is not only something that the subject can have by accident. Already in the Hegelian thought the objectification of the subject is necessary. Objectification belongs to the subject, it is impossible to think of the subject without objects, and not only without objects, but without objects belonging to him. And then, there you have the link, the problem of inheritance and subjectivity. Heritage is of course, in a way, the objectification of history, and in this way we objectify ourselves in things. So that history also becomes a thing. If you speak of history as heritage, history is already a thing.

JLN: But Hegel himself says that you cannot deduce the pen with which you are writing. There is some accidentality, an essential accidentality of the object, in my writing with a pen. Hegel says, "My coat, I have nothing to do with it, it is a matter of my tailor." But maybe to be a philosopher — to be in philosophy — or to be a subject in general — means in a way to be out of any possible objectification.

PT: Of course, it is possible. Because Hegel of course would also say that a subject — a bourgeois subject, a civil subject — has to live in a family, has to marry, and so on.

JLN: Of course, this is the bourgeois subject. But the Geist as a subject...

PT: Maybe the Geist is also a bourgeois subject.

JLN: No. No, I do not think that, the Geist has *Unendlichkeit*.

PT: This is the early Hegel, but in the time of the *Encyclopaedia*, it is already a different Hegel.

JLN: Oh, but at the end of *Encyclopaedia* he writes about the Geist enjoying itself infinitely – Infinitely! So infinitely means devoid of any objectivity or objectification, there is no objectification of infinity.

MARCIA: I don't want to be the restriction of this *jouissance*, but I think it's time to leave. It's always time to leave.

**It's always time to leave.**

JLN: Oh yes. ✖

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Note: This conversation was arranged by Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, and edited by Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback and Irina Sandomirskaja.

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- 3 Acts of the Apostles 4: 32–36 "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had, With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need".
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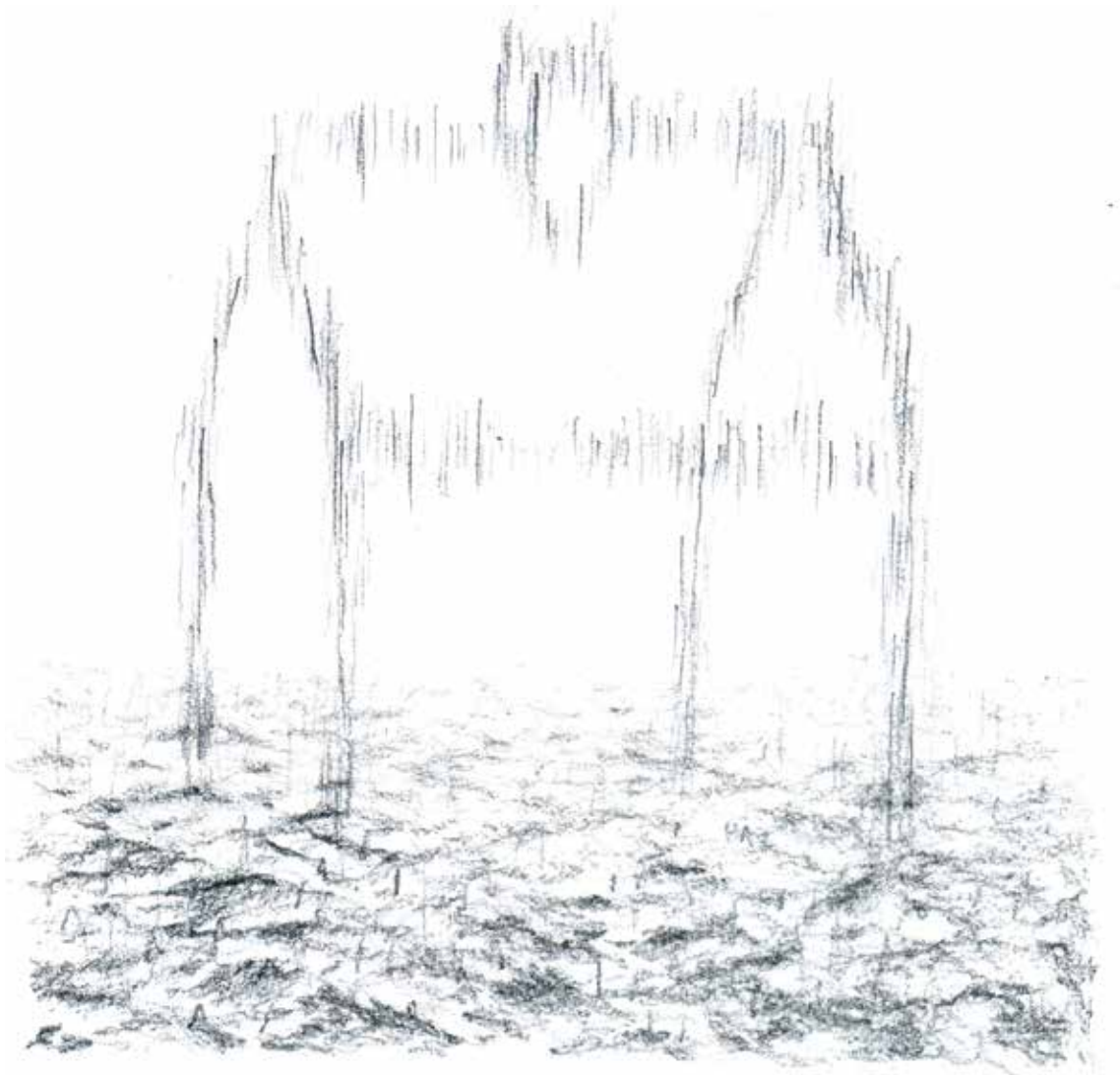


ILLUSTRATION: MOA THELANDER

# WHAT IS MISSING?

by **Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback**

*Verschluchzt in leeren Zelten  
ist das Wunder  
(Lost in the empty tents  
is the miracle...)*

Paul Celan

**W**hat is missing? This question is ambiguous. On the one hand, it is a kind of philosophical question: What is “missing”? It reproduces the form

of the question that Aristotle recognized as the paradigmatic form of all ontological questions: *ti to on*; what is “being”? On the other hand, it encourages us to search for something that should be, but is not available, that is missing. The question is thus both ontological and empirical. If we are attentive to this ambiguity, we can recognize the question as highly performative because its accent and tone can lead us along one track or the other. Even more, the question requires a gesture of atten-

tion: to its ambiguity and to the condition for it, which in this case is the English language. In Spanish and Portuguese, languages that have two verbs for “being”, *ser* and *estar*, both meanings of this question would be clearly distinguished using either one or the other of the two verbs, which would resolve the ambiguity. Thus, the question “What is missing?” also calls attention to the difficulty in translating it. “What is missing?” is therefore also a question about translation. We could say,



even if a little bit too hastily, that translation is indeed a question about missing.

**LET US REMAIN**, however, in the language of this ambiguity, the English language, and follow the ontological-fundamental orientation in which we ask what this word “missing” means? Dictionaries and etymology point to three key notions in missing: missing means *lack*, to *go wrong* or *fail*, and to *escape* or *avoid*, as in the idiom “to give something a miss”.<sup>1</sup> A lot could be said in regard to these three semantic keys and their intertwining in language, but I would like to follow another path and depart from what could be called the value attributed to the question of “missing” in aesthetical-philosophical discourses in late modernity. Of course, the problem of missing is constitutive of every philosophical question – one could maybe call it *the* philosophical question *par excellence* – as it appears in the concept of *steresis* (privation) and in the role it plays in ancient and medieval ontologies<sup>2</sup>. Philosophical searching has been defined for centuries as the search for universal truths, values, and meanings, i.e., for senses that are shared by all, the search for the “one and all” – *hen kai pan*. This means that some kind of a missing is already acknowledged in the very origin of this search. Indeed, in the beginning of metaphysics there is a missing, and the search for universality and totalization of meaning reveals, negatively, a privation (a lack of totality) in the origin. Thus metaphysics affirms this negativity and the need to complement it, or supplement it, by universalizing and totalizing. As privation, missing means what has not reached totality either because it is still on the way to it or because it went wrong, it gave it a miss.

The search for totality is at the core of different kinds of metaphysics. A history of the very notion itself and a history of the experience of totality can be followed, and not only in the history of ideas, and

not only in the West, but also in the arts and in different forms of aesthetic experience. Western modernity made a shift from the idea of totality as a *composition* of parts (totality as being; totality of being) to the idea of an organic totality, totality as, and of, *becoming*. We might

## “DICTIONARIES AND ETYMOLOGY POINT TO THREE KEY NOTIONS IN MISSING: MISSING MEANS LACK, TO GO WRONG OR FAIL, AND TO ESCAPE OR AVOID.”

also speak about the difference between the idea of totality as something static and ecstatic. The latter involves a growing totality that is experienced as having no way out of it, in which every missing part is already fulfilled by the total. Here, even what is missing in the system appears to be part of the system. Marx was a great thinker of totalization in this mode, and for him capitalism was nothing but totalization – not an organic totality that grows and develops in time and space, but *totalization through fragmentation*, a totality that grows the more it fragments and disunites. We could say that Marx understood totality in the sense of Hegel’s “bad infinity”.<sup>3</sup>

“**TOTALIZATION THROUGH fragmentation**” means totalization of meaning through fragmentation of meaning. In this formulation, totalization corresponds to undermining: a process with a “thermodynamic” structure that becomes more and more explicit the more the process of totalization – or, as we say today, globalization – expands. At stake is the dynamics described by Nietzsche in his analysis of nihilism, namely the dynamics of devaluation of all values and the loss of meaning of every meaning. What Nietzsche saw in general and what history has been presenting to us in concrete detail is how

values devaluate through continuous revaluations and how meaning becomes meaningless through continuous increases in ambiguity and the multiplication of senses. This is the dynamo driving capitalism. Capitalism means, indeed, the devaluation of all values because this

reduces everything to the only value, that of money, that is, to price. This is, however, only possible if the meaning of being (as well as the being of meaning) becomes both ambiguous and redundant. Such “monetary reduction” signifies that everything must lose every solid determination, definition, and delimitation, in short, all mean-

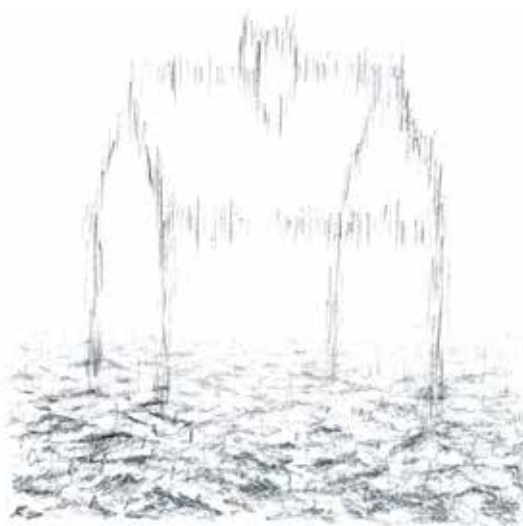
ing, and become whatsoever, so that this “all-turned-whatever” can be used, misused, or abused whenever, wherever, and by whomever. We can speak here of continuous dis-ontologization that renders possible continuous re-ontologization. Indeed, money has not so much to do with numbers as with an economy of meanings, in which meanings lose their meaning and acquire whatever meaning at all depending on the “demand”. Marx described this economy as the economy of general equivalence; in it, everything is rendered equivalent to everything else, and every meaning reduces to meaninglessness – which presents itself as open meaning, i.e., as the liberal freedom of determination. This process lies at the core of reification.

**THE QUESTION ARISES** of how to resist this process of such totalization when meaning becomes total by means of its fragmentation. The romantics and 19<sup>th</sup>-century idealists proposed a framework that still remains a source of inspiration for different strategies of resistance. For them, totality was organic and could only be thought of and experienced as a becoming. If every becoming is dangerous and risky, it is because it comprehends not only the risk of not coming to be, of failing, and of going wrong, of missing

itself – but also the risk of dissemination and fragmentation. For them, fragmentation was a risk involved in becoming itself rather than in totality. To face this risk, they proposed a more organic and vital notion of totality, one that could incorporate what was missing in the traditional views of totality as a composition of parts. This new notion proceeded from the freedom of the singular, itself irreducible to a totality. In order to counter the risk of fragmentation, they assumed totality in contradiction and not in harmony. To capture the freedom of the singular, the dialectics of part and whole – the orienting one in ancient and medieval ontologies – proved to be inadequate, while other dialectics, for instance, the one between interiority and exteriority, turned out to be more productive. Thereby the ineffable of the singular could find a language for expressing interiority, intimacy, and intensity. The question thus became how to find a conception of the universal, of totality, that could encompass the freedom of the singular and its irreducibility to the total or to a system.

**THE ROMANTIC** solution was the concept of fragment – which no longer meant a missing part in a whole (even if it was, indeed, what the conception of the whole was missing) – nor a part longing to be integrated in a whole. The romantics defined a fragment as a whole in its non-total, unfinished, and incomplete nature. The fragment, as August Schlegel phrased it, is “like a miniature work of art, it has to be cut from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine.”<sup>4</sup> The fragment was both totality in its incompleteness and totality inside a larger totality of the All-One, like an animal inside an animal or a soul inside a soul.

The concept of “fragment” was conceived both as revitalization of totality and as resistance against fragmentation brought about by totalization. Considering the fascination that the concept of



## **“NOTHINGNESS IS NOT A NEGATION OF THINGS, BUT THE OPENING OF AN INFINITE RELATION.”**

fragment has been provoking in philosophy, aesthetics, and artistic practices since then, it would not be mistaken to follow the French art historian Jean-Marie Pontévia here who considers the fragment as one powerful example of “resistant rests”<sup>5</sup> against totalization, that is, against the “system”. Pontévia gives an inspiring discussion of the different kinds of such resisting fragments in art history, defined as “strategies of contingency” and implemented in artistic practices and new aesthetic principles. Supplement, disintegration, dissemination, heterogeneity, multiplicity, absurdity, hybridity, anarchy, strangeness, the uncanny, the unfinished, detail, non-finito, series, rest, and waste are terms for such strategies to resist totalization, today discussed in terms of globalization and the global expansion of neo-liberal techno-capitalism. These strategies of contingency know that missing is not something to be fulfilled insofar as the system fulfills itself precisely through fragmentation and therefore through the continuous process of producing instances of missing and misses. However, exposing how totalization acts through fragmentation, they emerge as resistant rests of vulnerability and openness, where the impossible invades the totality of the possible.

**ONE SUCH STRATEGY** of contingency is the lacuna, an empty space in the place

of a missing fragment. The word “lacuna” has a curious etymology deriving from the same root as lagoon and lake. Representing a fragment, the lacuna is different from the fragment as discussed above. This fragment implies fracture and rupture, and also a remainder or rest, something left lying apart after the rupture. The lacuna is rather reminiscent of a lake than of a lack, or maybe it could be seen as the lake of a lack and in this sense as a kind of whole – one can dive into it, one can live off it, and so on. Above all, however, the lake connects a

certain view with a certain gaze and thus forms a landscape. Maybe the lake of the lacuna can be traced back to the birth of landscape painting (as in paintings by Albrecht Altdorfer, featuring landscapes around water.) By this comparison with the lake, the lacuna – the body of missing – has a strong visual dimension. As a term, the word is used in different fields. Technically, one of its oldest uses was in architecture (1690), referring to the so called “lacunar” paneled ceilings. In mathematics, in natural history, as well as in psychiatry, terms related to lacuna (lacunary, lacunous) have been used to denote various objects and states characterized by discontinuities and gaps. But most usually, lacuna is used as a term in the interpretation of gaps and missing fragments in manuscripts and artworks.<sup>6</sup> The word is also connected to “laque”, the red color used in east-Asian furniture and artworks. In all of those meanings, *lacuna* represents an absence, or rather, a strongly visible presence of an absence, invisibility made visible. One way or another, every instance, every case of missing makes absence appear as something present – the invisible as something visible. In a certain sense, it would be possible to claim that the lacuna also makes visible the (f)act itself of rendering-visible-the-invisible.

Nothingness is not a negation of things, but the opening of an infinite rela-

tion. The notion of the lacuna and the way of thinking of it as a lake of lack allows us to discuss the differences in minutia that can be worth thinking about. Even though standing in the place of something that is missing, the lacuna itself is the experience of a void in which nothing is missing. Maybe this is what a lake is – a void in which nothing is missing. It is the question of the openness of the void, or how the void opens another sense of presence, to escape the language of presence and absence that we have inherited from philosophical tradition and that remains at the basis of different discourses of missing.

**THIS OTHER SENSE** of presence lies at the core of Paul Celan's poetics. Maybe we could call Celan a "lacunar poet". In a poem from the posthumous volume *Zeitgehöft*, "[*Timestead*]", Celan speaks of *Zeitloch*, "a time hole", and of *Leertext*,<sup>7</sup> a portmanteau word made of "emptiness" and "text", aptly rendered by the translator as "a lacuna". In another poem, Celan speaks of *Schriftleer*, writvoid, an agglutination of lacuna and writing. Thus, Celan discovers the lacuna's profound connection with writing and reading, and with language being experienced as language, as *leere Zelten*, void tents. For Celan, language is lacuna, it is open and void, indeed a void without void, and the word is a pause, a *Wortlücke*, a "word-gap", a *Leerstelle*, "a vacant space", a lacuna, in which "you can see the syllables all standing around."<sup>8</sup> "Open and void", like a refrain, appears many times in Celan's poetry. In his *Meridian* speech, Celan uses this expression when discussing precisely the question of our experience of speaking with things – not about, but *with* things, *mit den Dingen*, a "with", with things being partners in a conversation, being there in every conversation. He says that in our conversation with things we are always in a question, namely the question about from where and to where things come and go. In this question, Celan insists that we are always coming to an end

but are precisely there – at the end and edge – where we are suspended in the open, the void, and the free. In this question, "We are *weit draußen*, far outside, and poetry is the search for this place," he says.<sup>9</sup> This place, *weit draußen*, far outside, is not really a place but, as he describes it, it is rather a "*Toposforschung*", a topological research, a *topographische Skizze*, a topographic sketch, a finger searching on a map like a blind man in a room. It is above all an attitude, that of an attentive presence, the presence of an attention to almost imperceptible contours, details, and indications, an attention to the tensions between the no longer and the always still there, indeed not even to "things" themselves, but to the eachness of each thing, and hence to another sense of otherness. What Celan's lacunar poetry invites us to think about is a gesture of attention to the *minutia*, where instead of speaking about missing we can pay attention to the experience of nearness that the minutia propose, as if walking on a tightrope, step by step, on the hovering line of existence, a walking that demands intensive presence, not thinking about targets and goals. Celan called this attention to the minutia of existence *Engführung*, following a tight path – the enigma of narrowness. In ancient Greek, narrow is said with the word "eng", which would allow one to speak here in terms of an "engnigmatic" path.<sup>10</sup>

**THIS "ENGNIOMATIC"** path of attention is attention of reading, I think, and of an attentive presence to the lacunae of the world and of being, to the being-in-the-lacuna, in the lake of lack, of the world today. ✕

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## references

- 1 Miss, n., late 12c., "loss, lack; " c. 1200, "regret occasioned by loss or absence," from Old English miss "absence, loss", from missan "to miss"....Meaning "an act or fact of missing; a being without" is from late 15c.; meaning "a failure to hit or attain" is from the 1550s. To give something a miss "to abstain from, avoid" is from 1919. (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/miss>).
- 2 Aristotle, *Physics* 193 b 19, *Metaphysics*, 1048 b 37–49 a5.
- 3 See Bernard Bouttes & Gérard Granel, *Cartesiana* (Paris: Editions Trans-Europ-Repress, 1984): 153.
- 4 Friedrich Schlegel. A. Fragment nr 206.
- 5 Jean-Marie Pontévia. Peinture masque et miroir Ecrits sur l'art et pensées détachées. Tome 1 (Paris: William Blake Editions, 1985).
- 6 Remounted page from *Beowulf*, British Library Cotton Vitellius A.XV, 133r [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nowell\\_Codex](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nowell_Codex).
- 7 Die Posaunenstelle /Tief im glühenden/ Leertext, /in Fackelhöhe / im Zeitloch://hör dich ein /mit dem Mund.[*Zeitgehöft*, 1976] (The trumpet part /deep in the glowing/ lacuna/ at lamp height/ in the time hole: // listen your way in /with your mouth. Paul Celan, Joris, Pierre, *Breathturn into timestead: the collected later poetry*. Transl. by Pierre Joris, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 621.
- 8 *Gespräch im Gebirge* (*Conversation in the Mountains*).
- 9 "Only the space of this conversation can establish what is addressed; can gather in into a 'you' around the naming and speaking I. (...) Whenever we speak with things in this way we also dwell on the question of their where-from and where-to, an 'open' question "without resolution, a question which points towards open, empty, free spaces – we have ventured far out. The poem also searches for this place." Paul Celan, "The Meridian; Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Georg Büchner Prize, Darmstadt, 22 October, 1960", in: *Collected Prose* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 37–55.
- 10 "Enlarge art? No, on the contrary, take art with you in your innermost narrowness. And set yourself free." Paul Celan, "The Meridian", 52.



ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON

# On the production and suspension of time

by **Mikhail Iampolski**

I must apologize for starting with trivialities. However, it always happens that as soon as one chooses a very general framework one immediately drowns in trivial things.

Modernity is very often associated with the idea of linear history that moves from the past towards the future, and the future seems to be more important for this kind of historicism than anything else. For a long time, a period of unstoppable movement towards the future was called progress, and organized modernity was its moving force. To some extent, this determined the temporal reorientation of Western civilization towards the future and towards the endless production of the new, a factor that, in a way, can be seen as a key to the extraordinary success of the West.

**THE IDEA OF PROGRESS** emerged as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Nietzsche already severely criticized this kind of historicism. He attacked the very idea of linear history, and his invention of eternal recurrence was in itself an interesting and symptomatic reaction against linearity. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, we already see a lot of statements concerning the end of history, and I should certainly mention Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. However, this idea of the arrest of history can easily be traced back to Hegel who was probably the first to talk about it. Later, the idea is repeated again and again. I should mention Alexandre Kojève, for instance, who was most influential in the general reflection about the end of history, or Francis Fukuyama, more recently. In 1952, Arnold Gehlen coined another term to char-



acterize our time, *posthistoire*, the modern feeling of living in a time when history is over and the movement towards the future has stopped. We must admit that now, this is exactly the feeling shared by everybody in the present day. There is no clear feeling in the public that we are moving towards any kind of articulated vision of the future. This feeling of *posthistoire* is becoming generalized, so that post-modernism is also to some extent a reflection of this arrest of time's movement towards the future. In this context, among a great many thinkers who reflected on this situation, I will only mention Marc Augé, the French anthropologist, who called his book *Où est passé l'avenir?* [What has happened to the future?],<sup>1</sup> and François Hartog, a scholar of Greek antiquity, who published a highly influential book in which he talks about the modern era as a time of *presentism*.<sup>2</sup>

Their message is that we are living in an undetermined present that is not open to the future, and such a present finds a reflection for itself in social phenomena that have no clear temporal perspective, such as hedonistic consumption. I am not alone in thinking that there is something enigmatic about the fact that the view of history as moving forward had such a very short life. It starts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century we can already observe the first symptoms of crisis, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century becomes a perpetual crisis of this kind of historicism.

**THE THEORY OF SECULARIZATION** was an attempt at an explanation that gained much influence because it came quite early. It has been, and should be, criticized – important criticism can be found in the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg's significant book on the legitimacy of the modern age.<sup>3</sup> The idea of secularization was most strongly promoted by Carl Schmitt, and later re-interpreted by Karl Löwith, a student of Heidegger who published a book on meaning in history in 1949.<sup>4</sup>

What, briefly, are the implications of secularization? It means that the modern idea of history is presented as a projection of the theological concept, the original formulation of linearity in relation to time in which history starts at the Fall and moves towards an eschatological event, the coming of the Messiah. The progress of time is directed towards salvation, a theological teleology that projects onto the secular vision of history, the secularization of history. This modernist vision of history is commonly thought of as simply replacing the idea of salvation by a different teleology, that of a social utopia: communism in place of the eschatology of salvation, or the Nazi Thousand-year Reich, or a social-democratic utopia of equality and justice – in short, the theory of secularization tells us that whatever the destination is, we are moving towards a substitute for the eschatological event.

Carl Schmitt, however, proposes a different idea: that secularization itself causes the crisis of history. When God is removed from the picture and replaced with a utopia – such as those that followed one after another throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the result is to cancel the meaning of history and produce movement

without a goal, where the movement remains, but the goal disappears. Then, people start talking about the acceleration of time – a very popular topic in current discussions. An interesting situation arises, with time accelerating but the future disappearing.

Hermann Lübbe, the German philosopher, is specifically interested in such ideas of temporality. He discusses the acceleration of time as a dynamic in which the endless chase seeking to produce something new results in the immediate obsolescence of everything.<sup>5</sup> What we produce today is already dated tomorrow. By trying to produce the new we only accumulate an enormous amount of the old. Also, instead of producing the future, the acceleration of time results in enormous amounts of the past. Because everything appears as something already ob-

solete, and as immediately obsolete from the start, it equally immediately accumulates in the ever-proliferating archives and museums. The exponential growth of the museumization of everything is the by-product of time's acceleration. Works by modern painters are almost immediately acquired by museums, while formerly an artist had to wait for at least fifty years. In technology museums, you

find computer models that are only ten years old displayed as if they were archaeological antiquities.

For Schmitt, secularization was a complex process of the transformation of theology into a philosophy of history and of philosophy of history into politics, economics, and fundamental technology. Technology becomes the moving force of progress. Now every kind of progress is technological progress. We do not believe in a bright future, but we do believe that a new iPhone model will contain no defects or mistakes. Technology becomes the moving force of all innovation. What Schmitt was talking about was technological neutralization of meaning – i.e., technology's perceived ability to provide for the kind of neutralization that in earlier times had been expected from philosophy, and before philosophy, from theology.<sup>6</sup>

**INTERESTINGLY, WHAT IS** happening nowadays appears to be that the process of acceleration has brought about “the shrinking of the present”. The present shrinks as it is immediately transformed into the past, and Lübbe noted in this connection that the avant-garde is precisely the thing that appears dated; it feels more dated than old styles because it is incorporated into the production of the new to a considerably greater degree, and therefore becomes obsolete almost at once. More than anything else, the avant-garde is the area of the production of the past: the colossal amounts of memoirs, artefacts, and photographs that are accumulated in archives – in different kinds of archives, including personal ones, but also state archives, and many others of different kinds.

What archives produce is not immediately integrated into history – I will explain that later – but only into a spacious virtual archive for history that I call memory. Even though it is not part of history, memory is important because it can be historicized.

**“AN INTERESTING  
SITUATION  
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DISAPPEARING.”**

This is what historians do when they look for traces of memory in archives and then reinterpret them so that they can be incorporated in the historical narrative.

Inscribing memory in history is a complex process: it looks as if traces are arranged into a chronology, into a linearity of time, dates coming one after another. But this is not exactly the case. In Heidegger's early article "The Concept of Time in the Science of History" (1916) he declares that dates have no meaning for history.

**The historian can do nothing with the mere number 750 in the concept of "hunger crisis in Fulda in the year 750". He is not interested in the number as a quantity, or as an element which has its particular place among the ordered numbers one to infinity, divisible by 50, etc. The number 750 and every other date in history is significant and of value in the science of history only with regard to the historically significant content. <...> If I ask "when" concerning an event in history, then I am asking about the position in a qualitative historical context, not "how much".<sup>7</sup>**

Fundamentally, this is something that deals with incorporation in certain configurations of dates, of facts. Georg Simmel, who developed his philosophy of history somewhat earlier, wrote that in order to be inscribed in history, an event must be necessarily atomized and individuated: the historian has to produce historical dates or events as discrete elements that can be placed into configurations to produce meaning. If they are presented as simply constituting a chronological line, it will be not possible to produce any meaning at all, and whichever dates there are, whether 750, or 760, or whatever, will mean nothing. They need to be related to other events, becoming part of history only when incorporated in a structure of meaning.

**SIMMEL ARGUES THAT** in order to become historical, an event should be articulated; it should have an individuality and differentiation, and this is the only way for it to occupy a defined and permanent position in time. Fundamentally, in order to create history, Simmel continues, you must know how to place the event into the development, since only such atomized instances can participate in structurally meaningful interactions. An event must simultaneously participate in unfolding time and allow understanding beyond time. Unless meaning is projected onto what is going on, this will not be historical but remain an amorphous accumulation of events that makes no sense.<sup>8</sup> In this connection, I cannot help thinking about the unfortunately forgotten German-Jewish philosopher Theodor Lessing who titled his 1919 book *Geschichte als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen*, [History as the projection of meaning upon the meaningless]. This is exactly what Simmel was trying to do.

But what is interesting in this process of historization is that in order to enter history, an event should be taken out of chronology. You must create an atemporal configuration of events in order for this configuration to become historical. This is very

important to me: the fact that history is always produced by taking a step out of time. If you remain wholly in the linearity of unfolding there is no history; in order to make sense of history, you must interrupt its unfolding.

A discussion that I find absolutely fundamental in this respect can be found in Gaston Bachelard's critique of Bergson. Bachelard wrote two books against Bergson, *Intuition of the Instant* (1932) and *The Dialectics of Duration* (1950) in which he claims that Bergson's idea of duration – *la durée* – was wrong because we cannot develop a consciousness or experience of time as pure continuum of this kind. Time is made of interruptions. That is why Bachelard proposes *rythmanalyse*, i.e., time as a rhythmic structure that combines moments of rest with sudden leaps forward. This dynamic is similar to what Heidegger would describe as ecstasies. Here, time is produced in various modes of temporalization: existence turned toward the future; thrownness turned toward the present, and facticity turned towards the past. Time is always producing complex configurations, and without this complexity at the moment of choice, at the moment of rest and arrest of motion, of virtuality – there is no time at all.

**THIS IS IMPORTANT** because history always deals with such moments of atemporality, such instances of the arrest of time. But, as Simmel writes, there are also such events that cannot be incorporated in history. The battle of Zorndorf in 1758 was an important encounter between the Prussian and Russian armies during the Seven Years' War. As an isolated totality, this battle can be easily inscribed into the history of the war, but that would be merely a constructed totality. On the contrary, the "genuine" event – the fight between two soldiers killing each other – does not constitute a historical fact, does not constitute part of a configuration of events that is made sense of by taking it out of time. Such elements are not inscribable in history; they only belong to memory. History needs the establishment of temporal positions for the understanding of things, while memory remembers otherwise than by creating models and is not based on understanding in this sense – and therefore it resists historical inscription.

As I have already said, nowadays we are dealing with gigantic and ever-increasing amounts of archival material, text and objects making up the body of collective memory, that storage of virtuality waiting to be transformed into history. However, there is a different side to this, directly related to heritage, – I propose to return to this later. Here I must just note that this relation between linear unfolding of an event and simultaneously the breaking of the linear unfolding is a complex movement that plays an important role in the history of museums. From its very beginning after the French revolution, the museum has been trying to solve the problem of what it collects and exhibits: For it is not quite clear what exactly is preserved and displayed exhibited in museums. There are basically two approaches: one is to collect masterpieces, the other, to demonstrate the history of art. Even now, different museums rely on different principles of collection. In museums like the Hermitage or the Louvre you are shown a lot of what is called "secondary artwork" whose presence in the display is justified because it provides a broader

picture of historical development. But there are also other museums that only collect masterpieces, to represent the timelessness of great artworks without any context organized around them. Art historian Hans Belting describes this contradiction: the museum's desire to trace the historical development in art in its entirety that is compromised by the status of the artwork as an object of admiration and an embodiment of perfection, that, it was feared, was in danger of slipping away. The artistic marvel transcends history.<sup>9</sup> As soon as you attempt to insert beauty into history it loses its absolute status and thus the idea itself of the masterpiece is undermined when object is inscribed into the narrative of historical unfolding.

**THIS REMINDS ME** of a wonderful fragment by Alberto Savinio, brother of the artist Giorgio de Chirico, from his book *Maupassant et "l'autre"*<sup>10</sup> [Maupassant and "the other"]. Savinio writes about the great Homer, Dante and Shakespeare, defining them as writers who challenge genealogy. It is impossible to explain Homer genealogically, as following in the footsteps or being under the influence of someone else in literature. Rather, these writers are oases, or islands fully isolated from history. Savinio suggests that if the work and all memory of those giants suddenly disappeared, the world might lose in value, but its destiny would not suffer any loss. This is indeed interesting: Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare all have tremendous and fully atemporal value – which, paradoxically, makes them quite irrelevant historically.

This complex relation between history and memory is nowadays increasingly taken care of by the state. It is remarkable that historicizing archives, for instance, is not seen as a task for an individual, but represents an enterprise for the state. There are also, as we know, museums, archives, and historiographies developed by universities, that are not under the state's direct control but in a close relation to the institutions which in their turn are dependent on the state. Thus, the state is responsible not only for preserving memory but also for organizing the passage from memory to history.

As I already said, the work of the historian is to find those elements in the archive that remain unincorporated and to rewrite them into history. A good example is women's history that had been ignored for a long time before it became an important field of knowledge, thanks to the feminist movement. Certainly, the role of universities is unique in this work of creating meaningful configurations of historical facts and events out of bits and pieces of collective memory.

**THE ROLE OF THE STATE** is to normalize the pathologies of political and historical discourses. This is also the normalizing function of history: projecting meaning means projecting norms. The *Historikerstreit* ([historians' quarrel] of the 1980s was fundamen-

tally a controversy around the issue of normalization, a debate between the French and German schools in history writing and between two outstanding historians, both dealing with the history of the Holocaust: Saul Friedländer, the author, among other works, of the seminal *Nazi Germany and the Jews*<sup>11</sup> and Martin Broszat, a prominent German historian.<sup>12</sup> Both were highly respected scholars, their work indispensable for Holocaust and WW2 studies, and both of Leftist convictions. Ideologically they shared more or less the same approach, but Broszat, a proponent of the structural method in history, claimed the necessity to historicize Nazism, to place Nazism into a logic of historical development. Friedländer opposed this idea, claiming that finding a structural logic in Nazism would normalize it and destroy the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a horrendous phenomenon beyond normalization.

Broszat justified his approach against "mournful and accusatory memory" of the Jews "who remain adamant in their insistence on the mythical form of this remembrance"<sup>13</sup> (a turn of phrase that enraged Friedländer, the witness of the Shoah). Broszat's point was that this "mythical form", the product of a mournful attitude, required a correction for otherwise it would not be possible to understand the events historically: in order to historicize, memory should be neutralized. Friedländer responded by pointing out that writing history always flattens the event and destroys its shocking character by inserting it into a series of comparisons, antecedents, and analogies. Friedländer claimed that German historians were unconsciously seeking to diminish the tragic significance of the Holocaust and this also led him to deny *Alltagsgeschichte* – another influential movement that had emerged in Germany in the 1970s, a movement in which Broszat was also active and which proclaimed memory the object of history (of the everyday).

*Alltagsgeschichte*, the history of everyday life, is now an extremely popular direction in historical research, with series of books dedicated to a wide variety of subjects: for instance, the everyday life of French troubadours or of prostitutes in Rome. Essentially, the history of everyday life is precisely a massive attempt at the historicization of memory, dealing with objects that do not constitute big historical events onto which meaning can be projected – yet this is exactly what it does. On the other hand, this is in opposition to the historical discourse of the Shoah, with Shoah historians like Friedländer (who, in the spirit of Claude Lanzmann's film, preferred the name to 'the Holocaust') being inclined to think of history in messianic terms.

This re-emergence of teleological history (as I discussed earlier) with its messianic element in the reflection of history is nowadays very much associated with Walter Benjamin – but not only him. At the opposite pole, we find the history of everyday life is completely opposed to the idea of the messianic interpretation. These are the two mutually opposed directions in contemporary

**"THE STATE IS RESPONSIBLE NOT ONLY FOR PRESERVING MEMORY BUT ALSO FOR ORGANIZING THE PASSAGE FROM MEMORY TO HISTORY."**

history theory: one heading towards a teleology, the other towards a normalization of history.

Friedländer certainly had grounds to criticize Broszat for “flattening”. In his history of the Nazi state, Broszat wrote about the German bourgeoisie who lived through the Nazi period without even noticing that anything particular was happening. Bavarian peasants continued the same way of life during the years of Nazism as they had done before and would do after the Nazis’ defeat. Everyday life is presented as a reality in which the Nazis did not exist at all. Their regime became inscribed in the historical narrative as part of the time’s normal course, with nothing exceptional about it.

**WHAT IS IMPORTANT** here is that this transformation of memory into history happens parallel to the appropriation of memory by the dominant political discourse, by the state. The Holocaust is the most important topic for both history writing and for memorial construction – that ongoing process of Holocaust memorialization that started in the 1970s, and since then has been steadily expanding year after year, indistinguishable from a victim cult, with victims’ memory becoming so dominant that, in my opinion, the result will be that eventually the Holocaust will indeed finally be normalized in terms of political discourse.

Enzo Traverso in his book *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory*, – a highly controversial book – states that the memory of the Holocaust allows for sacralization of the fundamental values of liberal democracy, such as pluralism, tolerance and human rights, the defense of which takes the form of “a secular liturgy of remembering”.<sup>14</sup> In principle, I think, I agree with him. There is indeed a trend to use the memorialization of the Holocaust for the promotion of liberal and social-democratic values, paving the way for the eventual incorporation of this unique and horrifying memory into a historicizing political discourse.

I would like to mention another moment here, also a fundamental one in what concerns secularization: strong criticism is directed at the idea of secularization claiming that the Christian idea of history is not historical at all because it relies on the notion of the suspension of time. After *parousia*, i.e., the coming of the Messiah, time will stop. It would be therefore wrong to interpret it as a model for modern history because this whole interval between the *parousia* and the Last Judgment is a period in which time is suspended, when there is no more time.

Carl Schmitt claimed that it is possible to historicize the non-historical theological vision of eschatology. He quotes St. Paul’s words about the Antichrist: “And now you know what is holding him back”. Paul’s ‘to *katechon*’ relates to the last days when a secret power of lawlessness is at work that postpones the revelation of the Second Coming and will continue to do so until it is removed at the promised time. This means that with the stopping of time, chaos will reign, and order and structure will collapse. But something will intervene and prevent this chaos. Without clearly defining what where *to katechon* is, Schmitt returned to this concept many times throughout his life both before and after the war, as he believed in ‘to *katechon*’ as a political reality of

the present day. *To katechon* was his idea of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s reality, living in a situation described by Paul in his second epistle to the Thessalonians, between *parousia* (the Second Coming of Christ) and the last judgement, and not falling into complete chaos thanks to a *katechon*, “an original historical force”<sup>15</sup> preventing things from falling apart, holding them back. Schmitt claimed that this force was the state, the empire. It intervenes in chaos by producing institutions and laws.

**WHAT I FIND MOST** interesting in this statement is that Carl Schmitt is talking about the “original historical force”. I will quote from him, that “... as a figure of *κατέχων* [*katechon*] however remains capable of overcoming the eschatological paralysis that would otherwise occur.” (ibid., 169) As soon as time is suspended, the possibility to open history appears. While the teleological dimension is outside history, it is the state that intervenes to start history. History emerges in the act of holding back chaos, or, as Schmitt expresses himself in an important fragment:

... history that is not merely an archive of what has been but nor is it a humanistic self-mirroring of a mere piece of nature circling around itself. Rather, history blows like a storm in great testimonies. It grows through strong creations, which insert the eternal into the course of time. It is the striking of roots in the space of meaning of the earth. Through scarcity and impotence, this history is the hope and honor of our existence.<sup>16</sup>

We might recognize here the Benjaminian idea of history as a storm. But what is specific to Schmitt is the definition of history as something that inserts the eternal into the course of time. Schmitt’s eternal is order. History introduces order through injecting the eternal into the course of time. This is yet another way of normalizing.

But if we return from heaven to earth, the state, of course, is not really a *katechon*, but it is still very important for the creation of the future in history, though in a different sense. The state not only creates the transformation of memory into historiography; the modern state with its history is a warranty for the existence of the future. The future is opened very much due to the functioning of the state. What do I mean? When we retire, we believe that we will receive our pension in future, and the state will take care of us. When we enter the university to obtain a degree, we believe that the diploma will be valid and will have a certain value in future. Both beliefs are associated with the state that allows us to think like this. All kinds of values that are issued by the state are important for our lives because they give us guarantees for the future. It is partly thanks to this *katechon* that is the state, a highly economic and political one, a *katechon* that retains things.

**THE INVENTION OF PAPER** money was a seminal event in this context, since paper money is based entirely on faith in the future. The Bank of Scotland started printing paper money at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Metal money served as an antecedent for



paper money in the creation of value. A promissory note was something out of which paper money eventually evolved. You go to a bank and hand over some gold to the banker, and in exchange you receive a promissory note as an obligation from this banker to return the gold to you when you need it, for instance, to travel to another country. Then you go to a branch of the same bank and hand in the promissory note which has certain value because you previously exchanged money for it: in other words, something exists in the past that creates the value for the future. We accept paper money in payments only because we believe in future. We believe that the banknotes will be accepted next day or in a year: the state provides us with guarantees that the future will unfold in a certain organized way. Paper money has the power of actually creating this feeling of the future.

There is a great book by Brian Rotman in which he also discusses the story of paper money.<sup>17</sup> He writes there about the scandal that paper money brought about, that of the loss of anteriority: since the value of assignments relies on the future, there remains nothing in the past that could create value. Krzysztof Pomian in his classical essay *La crise de l'avenir* [The crisis of the future]<sup>18</sup> also writes about a reversal in the order of time because of this current association of value with the future and not the past.

This process emerges at the same time as modernity develops, projecting life into the future. However, faith in the state is weakening considerably nowadays. We do not believe in our currencies any longer; they are no longer as stable as they used to be, and we doubt the ability of the state to guarantee the value of our degrees since nobody knows if they will provide employment. So there is a general decline of this reversal from the past to the future, Pomian's *basculement du temps* (ibid., pp. 8–9) – a decline that creates presentism, as I mentioned earlier, and that I find quite remarkable. Parallel to this, we observe everywhere the disappearing charisma of leaders and a waning faith in political institutions and political organizations. In general, faith is losing its potential to serve as *katechon* and create a temporal perspective for us.

As I promised, against this background I now come back to the problem of heritage, an important dimension of time as heritage. Heritage represents precisely the case of the eternal being inserted into the course of time, but at the same time, value is only produced in relation to the future, i.e., without an antecedent. In this situation, a problem arises of continuity on which the state itself could be based, since people must establish the state on some solid foundation in order to believe that it creates a future for the nation. Heritage becomes a resource for the creation of such an atemporal basis for the state, providing it with a sense of continuity.

I am thinking, as an example, of the episode in the 1920s–30s when the Soviet state organized a series of sales abroad of art masterpieces from Russian museum collections – a gesture that

could be interpreted as the negation by the state of the importance of continuity for its own existence. The state appeared to be projecting itself entirely into the future and seemed to have no interest in preserving these treasures for itself as its own symbolic foundation that it was leaving behind. In monetization, this kind of basis in cultural heritage disappears, and with it, a system of social values and a warranty for the future also disappears.

**INOW MOVE ON** to the final part of my presentation in which I will try to introduce the factors of money and economy into my analysis, a connection between heritage and money that is both profound and not quite evident.

First, let us recall that different types of production, including industrial production, are associated with specific temporalities and ideas of history. For instance, standardized industrial mass production bears within itself the utopia of universal accessibility of products and consumption equality. Ford's Model T was designed as a vision of a car to be used by everyone, in standardized cities, and eventually in a new mass society organized on principles of equality and social justice.

It is only the new that has value in this mode of production, since a mass-produced object is not worth buying if it is already used. A certain configuration of value and time is inscribed into the production and circulation of things.

However, if the future disappears from the social horizon – as I claimed at the beginning of my presentation – a disappearance that we are registering in our society nowadays – this mode of production also loses its significance. This starts the process of de-industrialization of the West and the relocation to the third

world, where developing countries start producing cheap mass commodities without any prestige to them, that are consumed without any symbolic value at all. However, these are exactly the kind of products that in the 1920s were associated with a certain social utopia and derived a certain value from this association.

Nowadays, sociologists register a paradoxical turn of economics towards the past. In 2017, Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre published a book that very soon gained considerable influence, under the title of *Enrichment: A Critique of the Commodity*.<sup>19</sup> By enrichment, they do not mean simply increasing wealth by getting more money but rather use the word in the sense of transformation, a technical meaning as used in metallurgy, for instance, where the technology of enrichment (beneficiation) is applied to improve the quality and value of the metal. Thus, enrichment is the accumulation of value in something that already has value. It is not the production of new value but increasing the value of something by manipulating it. Boltanski and Esquerre describe the current state of capitalism as an economy of enrichment.

Their reflection is directly connected to what I have been

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talking about because theirs is a kind of economics that does not look to the future for the increase of new wealth, but additional wealth is extracted out of value that is already there. In order to make the present value grow even further you must add a narrative to this already existing object, to enrich it (as iron is enriched in iron ore) by adding symbolic value to the value that it already has.

I include here, in my awkward translation into English, the following long quotation from this book; I hope it will explain what the authors are claiming:

**The economy of enrichment corresponds not only to growing specialization in the area of culture and to a more evident symbiosis between culture and trade, but also to an original mode of the creation of wealth based on a much more intense exploitation of special deposits that accumulate over time and to which narratives add values. It is an economy that extracts its substance from the past. This economy of the past is not based on the industrial production of standard products to be sold new but on the valorization of what already exists, like antiques or vintage items, or objects from the less remote past, or monuments, or real estate sites, i.e., on the domain known as cultural heritage. But this [economy of enrichment] is also valid for works of art, even by contemporary artists, when these are considered as if they belong to a temporality that extracts them from the present and allows us to think about them from the point of view of the future, as if they already belong to the past, or maybe to eternity because they are destined to be preserved forever by the museums.<sup>20</sup>**

This is the process Boltanski and Esquerre call patrimonialization (from Fr. *patrimoine*, patrimony, cultural heritage). In the logic of the economy of enrichment, everything transforms into sites of heritage: we eat historical cuisine, increase the value of wine by claiming that it originates in a historical *terroir* – in this way one can transform anything into something more valuable. Boltanski underlies specifically UNESCO's role in enriching the value of the past by creating its ever increasing list of sites to be preserved because of their cultural value, which in its turn increases the value of real estate there, and so on and so forth. Alongside the de-industrialization of Europe, a parallel process of its culturalization and patrimonialization is taking place.

I would like to quote some truly impressive figures from Boltanski and Esquerre: In 1974, almost 5,900,000 people in France worked in industry. Since then, France has lost 40% of its labor force; the country has deindustrialized by the same percentage. However, during the same period, internal con-

sumption has doubled: the French are producing almost half the amount while consuming almost twice as much.

**HERE ARE SOME** figures characterizing international tourism, because tourism is, of course, a big industry that flourishes due to the patrimonialization of everything. In 2012, international tourism involved 1.035 billion people travelling the world. In 1950, there were only 25 million. In France, 1.3 million people work in tourism businesses on a permanent basis, plus another 1 million temporary jobs.

What is more interesting is how culture is becoming an industry in a most extraordinary way. The following statistics come from France, but these figures are more or less characteristic for the rest of the Western world. 700,000 people in France work in cultural production, a 50% increase as compared to 1990, and in the context of a sharp decrease in manufacturing jobs. In show business, the increase is 95%. In jobs associated with literature, it amounts to 58%, in the arts to 44%, and in design and decoration to 123%. Painters and photographers are now more numerous by 21% and 20%, respectively. Importantly, 77% of these people are below of the age of 40. Another significant fact is that between 2000 and 2007, growth of 23.3% in family spending on culture was observed, that is, an increase of almost a quarter.

A characteristic scenario of patrimonialization is when a center of industry becomes a cultural center. A good example is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, formerly an industrial city that has developed into a major center of cultural life. Cultural activity helps to valorize, and valorization is strongly dependent on various forms of heritage around which cultural activities are organized and proliferate. Here, we can differentiate between

two ways of increasing value. One is the creation of narratives around places (for instance, where some artist once lived) and landscapes (that the artist once painted) – thus places and landscape develop additional value as objects of cultural heritage.

Another method of patrimonialization is restoration – in my opinion, a process that is starting to replace the process of production.

Instead of producing, we restore; we make material investments in the past to achieve material actualization of the past as a commodity. Restoration is fundamentally different from productive labor, because productive labor creates value, as many economists have argued from Adam Smith and Marx onwards, measured by time invested in the production of objects, therefore with a conditional beginning and a conditional end. Production became standardized with the introduction of the machine because machines require the same amount of time to produce the same object. Productive labor, as you know, produces use value that transforms into exchange value when this object moves from production to trade. Exchange value does not depend on the invested time, but on the conjectural prices in the market. It

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is created by the object's relation to other objects circulating on the market and therefore represents movement, if you will, from diachrony to synchrony, if by diachrony we understand linear time and by synchrony, a system of relations in their entirety. In either case, exchange value is no longer determined by the measurable time of production.

As for the restorer's labor, it is specific because it does not produce use value. The value of a restored artwork cannot be measured by the time invested in restoration. It does not matter how long the restorer has worked to restore the piece. It is not the time that produces value but the historical narrative that is attached to the object and refined (enriched) by the process of restoration, a process for producing (cultural) riches with an economy different from that of commodity fetishism. It is central to all the practices and institutions of the past, nowadays subsumed under heritage preservation.

Local narratives stand in a complicated relationship to the diachrony of history and in even more complex relations to memory – but this presentation is hardly a proper place to go into these complexities. To finish, I would like to say that, in my opinion, in order to understand the relation between value, time, culture, and heritage, we have to take into consideration the permanently changing and very complex organization of time and temporality, more complex than the circular time of myth or the linear time of ideology. Rather, the temporalization we are dealing with nowadays is a suspension of time. This suspension becomes most evident in its complexity when applied to the issues of heritage; therefore it is a problem that concerns both history and memory today: how to place heritage into a historical context, and thus to historicize and temporalize it.

Thank you for your attention. ✖

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Fig 1. The excavation at Torsburgen, 1982.

PHOTO: JOHAN HEGARDT

Missing people, missing times:

# The Internet, archaeology, and the spectacular

by Johan Hegardt

In the third chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens writes about secrets of the city – the blocks, the houses, the apartments, and the hearts of the inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Why this focus, if secrets were not important? In his book *In the Swarm*, Byung-Chul Han concludes that no secrets can exist on the Internet.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the key word is, according to Han, transparency, which of course is very good in many situations, but not always.<sup>3</sup> With no secrets, there can be no surprises. Thus through the Internet we are drawn to the *spectacular*.

This essay takes its point of departure in two excavations I carried out on the island of Gotland between 1988 and 1989 and between 2001 and 2005 as well as on a boosted excavation conducted at Sandby Borg on Öland in the present. The question asked in this essay is if there is a difference between archaeology

done prior the digital age and archaeology done in the present, and if there is a difference in terms what impact this has on our understanding of missing people and missing times. I use the word “missing” here because archaeology is in search of a missing past that it needs for its narrative about the coming-into-being of the present.

## Missing people, missing times

Archaeology literally means “words of the past” – “arché” being the past and “logos” being words. Today “archaeology” is used in different contexts. There is “media archaeology” or something rather contradictory such as “contemporary archaeology” as well as the archaeology of Foucault (the archive) or Freud (the brain). But there are other more conventional forms of archae-



ology, for example, Mediterranean archaeology dealing with Greek or Roman history or medieval archaeology dealing with the medieval past.

Archaeology is the study of materiality and its relationship to time,<sup>4</sup> and chronology is crucial if objects are to be separated from each other in time. In archaeology, time is serial. It has a beginning and it moves forward in a straight line into the future. By understanding time like this, time will always produce new remains for archaeologists to excavate and new forms of heritage for us to debate and fight over.<sup>5</sup>

Time is ordered according to two concepts – prehistory and history. History includes written sources, which prehistory does not. Time has been divided by two abbreviations, BC and AD, but these two abbreviations have been questioned. The argument is that by using Christ for dating, a large part of the world is excluded. Instead, the abbreviation BP has come into use, which stands for “Before Present”, meaning before 1950 because it was in the 1950s that radiocarbon dating was invented. BP is understood as a more neutral dating standard than BC and AD. Some have argued that instead of “Before Present” we should talk about “Before Physics” because after the start of nuclear weapons testing carbon isotopes in the atmosphere have been artificially altered making radiocarbon dating after that unreliable.<sup>6</sup> It has also been suggested that the abbreviation BCE, meaning Before Common Era, should be used. What all these abbreviations have in common is that they aim to be as neutral as possible.<sup>7</sup>

Missing time is re-articulated into chronological boxes placed on top of each other. These boxes contain smaller chronological boxes placed on top of each other. There can exist many parallel series of small boxes in the large boxes. Each small box contains the findings of archaeology, or rather, the findings from missing people (today also the life-like reconstructions of missing people). Archaeological museums are usually ordered by placing one of the larger boxes in one room and the other large boxes follow suit in a chronological order in the coming rooms. In these rooms or through other forms of communication, archaeology tells the stories of missing time and missing people. The ordering of a missing time and of missing objects and structures is thus explained through narratives with a focus on missing people.

## The first excavation, 1988 to 1989

It is the spring of 1982, my class of archaeology students from Uppsala University is excavating *Torsburgen*, a huge prehistoric so-called hill-fort in Kråklingsbo parish on the east side of Gotland. We are here to learn the craftsmanship of archaeological excavations. I could have used this excavation as one of my examples discussed in this text if it was not for the lack of information and memory. A few photographs and a few, some embarrassing, memories are all that I have left from those days. Had it been

today, there would have been an immense amount of information on the Internet. Yet, how much of that information would still exist after 36 years, a colossal lump of time in the age of the digital? It is in fact, when I write this in 2018, only 20 years since Google was introduced. Four years later Facebook was established. The first Apple smartphone reached the market in 2007.

In the spring of 1986, a friend and I are traveling on bicycles from his summer residence in Grötlingbo parish to the huge Bronze Age cairn *Uggarde Rojr* situated in Rone parish in the south east of Gotland. I have recently finished a student paper about the cairns on the island. The Bronze Age is one of three prehistoric chronological boxes. The other two are the Stone Age and the Iron Age. This three-age system was introduced in 1836 by the Danish antiquarian Christian Jürgensen Thomsen (1788–1865). His system did not have any clear dating. The Bronze Age was, however, dated to 1700–500 BC (or 3650–2000 BP) by the Swedish antiquarian Oscar Montelius (1843–1921) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cairns are monumental burial mounds from the older Bronze Age and are built with stones piled upon each other. The one we are on our way to is the largest on Gotland,

with a height of 7 meters and a diameter of 50 meters. In the surrounding area there are seven to eight more, but they are smaller.

When standing on the top of the cairn, my friend unfolds a map over the area. Looking closer we discover a ring-fort marked on the map. Its name is *Gudings slott* and it is not far from where we are standing. We follow the map towards the fort.

Prehistoric forts on Gotland can sit on top of limestone cliffs (hill-forts),

but they can also be situated on flat land and are called ring-forts. Being prehistoric, the stones are not held together by any binder or cement. Instead the stones in the walls are neatly piled upon each other, but have during the course of time slipped off each other. I will not go into details here, but we notice that the ring-fort has a strange construction. We also find some graves in one part of the structure. Because stones from the wall had been used when organizing the graves and one grave had even been placed on top of the now very low wall, it is obvious that the graves are much younger than the fort. The graves are not more than a meter high, and with a maximum diameter of four to five meters.

**THAT'S IT.** We do nothing more. We return to our bicycles and go back to my friends place to do other things. Had it been today, we would have communicated our findings to friends and colleagues. We would even have checked the Internet for information. When searching the Internet when writing this essay, I find out that an excavation has been going on at *Gudings slott* since the summer of 2018.<sup>8</sup>

But we did none of this, of course. Instead I went back to my department at Uppsala University and talked to my colleagues

## “THE ORDERING OF A MISSING TIME AND OF MISSING OBJECTS AND STRUCTURES IS THUS EXPLAINED THROUGH NARRATIVES WITH A FOCUS ON MISSING PEOPLE.”



Fig 2. View from the top of Uggarde Rojr, 1986.

PHOTO: JOHAN HEGARDT



Fig 3. Dead man. (My iPhoto application tried to identify a face in the image! This means that it did recognize the skeleton as a human.)

PHOTO: JOHAN HEGARDT

about the place. I tried to find information about *Gudings slott* in the University library, but there was not much information to be found. Together with my colleagues we formulated a research question. Hill-forts and ring-forts are difficult to date because the walls usually don't hold findings, but if the small graves on the fort could be dated we would be able to give the fort at least a relative date. When the graves were put in place, we argued, the fort must have been completely out of use. This also implied that it must be much older than the graves, and with some luck we would be able to connect the fort with the Bronze Age cairns in the surrounding area.

The first thing I had to do if I wanted to excavate the ring-fort was to contact the landowner. Through phone enquiries, I got his name and phone number. He agreed. After that, the University contacted the authorities on Gotland and informed them that a representative from Uppsala University would be excavating at *Gudings slott* the coming summer. That was it. But I needed a place to live, and something that could transport me from my living space to the site. I was in luck. An old nonconformist church was available, but it had no running water and no radio or television and, of course, no Internet. I would be alone and cut off from the world, and I was on the island of Gotland, not in some remote jungle in some far away country. I had two options if I wanted to communicate. I could go to the farmers from whom I rented the church or walk up to a street corner close to the old medieval stone church where there was a phone booth.

Every morning I rode down to the site on a bicycle. I had my lunch with me. I worked alone moving stones, some too heavy to be lifted, and soil. The only help I had was my friend's father who arrived randomly with his car. During the two months that I excavated, I had only a handful of visitors – local people finding an interest in my work and a few friends from Stockholm.

In the late afternoons, it was amazingly suggestive excavating an old grave all alone and far away from any house, any main road, and any farm or people. I was in the middle of my own world, with my own thoughts. It was completely quiet except for some birds and insects in the trees around me, small lizards here and there, or the sound of a tractor far away. And I could not communicate with anyone. Nothing was distracting me from my work. In the evenings, alone in the old nonconformist church, I read books, for example, Charles Bukowski's *Women* (maybe not recommended today).

**TO BEGIN WITH**, I recovered parts of a human skeleton scattered around the stones in the trench. Shortly afterwards I found some objects. One of the objects blew the hypothesis that we had worked out at the University. It was a *fibula* from the Viking Age, the last stage in Swedish prehistory. The *fibula* has the shape of an animal head and is in Swedish called a "djurhuvudformat spänne" (animal-head brooch). It was very typical for Viking Age Gotland and was dated to the beginning of the 11th century AD (or 1950 BP).<sup>9</sup>

A *fibula* of the kind that I had found points to a woman's grave. Today we might dispute that because we state that things never can be taken for granted and because we believe that

things never are as they look, but at the time, before the Internet, things were much easier and straight forward – a *fibula* is a brooch and therefore attributed to women.

What I had found meant that the fort could have been built a thousand years after the construction of the Bronze Age cairns and still be old enough and out of use when the graves that I was excavating were put in place. But I had started and I needed to proceed. Before I left, I had to finish the whole trench and found a second burial.

If the first burial had been disturbed, the second one was *in situ* (in place), but did not hold any objects. Osteological studies could, however, show that it was a man.

I AGREE THAT this is a very romanticized description of an archaeological excavation, and that is and was also the point. I understood that things were changing in archaeology and wanted to test how it once was done. Archaeology on Gotland developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and soon the island became one of the most important places for archaeological research in Sweden and Northern Europe. Things were done slowly, and many times the archaeologist used a bicycle for transportation. The island was quiet and not many tourists visited it. When the more organized surveys started, archaeologists had never before explored most places. My excavation done between 1988 and 1989 would show that this history was coming to an end. New theories, methods, regulations, and so on were on the way.

But I did excavate in 1989, too. Having only been able to finish half of the grave, I needed to finish the second half. In May 1989, I brought with me four students in archaeology and we excavated two more burials inside the same grave, both with findings pointing to women. When not excavating and with no Internet to disturb us, we travelled the island, this time in a rented car, visiting other archaeological sites. In 1991, I published my theories and my findings in a journal that was connected to the Department of Archaeology at Uppsala University.<sup>10</sup> The journal does not exist any more, but the publication does and can be found in libraries.

The objects are stored with the Swedish History Museum as are the remains of those once buried in the grave. For something like 989 years, these people rested in peace in their graves, except one, that had been disturbed, probably by looters, before I arrived. I have many times asked myself what I was up to. What needs and desires did I have? Why use dead people only for the purpose to test a hypothesis or to have my own romantic needs pleased? However, remember what I wrote above, that archaeology is about missing time, chronology, and the separation of objects and humans into small boxes inside larger boxes. What I did was the right thing. The romantic part had, of course, nothing to do with the scientific archaeological part, or maybe it did?

## The second excavation, 2001 to 2005

I was right; things did change and I took an active part in it. In 2000, I received, together with two colleagues, a four-year research grant from the Faculty of Arts at Uppsala University. I also received a grant from *Helge Ax:son Johnsons Foundation*, which enabled me to buy the first version of the MacBook Pro and a Sony digital film camera. We were going digital and we were throwing ourselves into a new form of archaeology with many names, which should be both democratic and transparent – public archaeology, communal archaeology, and local archaeology. Post-colonialism and post-structuralism had reshaped archaeology. I was now very far away from my previous excavation, leaving a rather closed and even secret world behind me for a new open and transparent world. The excavation we did within the project was only a small part of the overall research that was done.

The place of choice had its own history, which meant that I knew the landowner. Including him and his family in the excavation was crucial. A second step was to include the local community. We were now on the most southern part of Gotland. The local community here consists of two different populations, those that live on the island all year, mostly farmers and their families, and the summer population. This second

**“AT THE TIME, BEFORE THE INTERNET, THINGS WERE MUCH EASIER AND STRAIGHT FORWARD – A FIBULA IS A BROOCH AND THEREFORE ATTRIBUTED TO WOMEN.”**

category is mainly rich families from Stockholm who own old farms or new luxurious houses for their summer vacation. We wanted visitors and we got visitors.

We excavated the remains of a 1,500-year-old (500 AD, or 1450 BP) building situated at the end of a long dirt road. By placing a trench in the middle of the ruin, crossing its stonewall and ending some four meters beyond the wall (Fig. 6), we hoped that we would not find any objects of importance. In my previous excavation I found many objects, which could be conserved at the department at Uppsala University and sent to the Swedish History Museum to be stored there, but during my second excavations things had changed. If I did find things, they should be sent to the museum in Visby and I had to pay for the conservation. Not knowing what one might find, conservation can be expensive (we did find two *spectacular* objects that would put me in an extremely problematic situation and take years to solve, but that's another story<sup>11</sup>). Therefore we were looking for construction structures. But the excavation was also an alibi for another investigation. By including people, we wanted to explore how they understood the past and archaeology. There was no social media or smartphones to make use of. All we could do was to create a home page on the Internet. But this was a complicated thing, not creating the page, but concluding what it should contain and with whom we should communicate. There was also another issue, maybe the most important, namely the question of scientific accuracy. If we were to work scientifically, was the Internet the best place to present our findings? Could the public understand



our scientific explanations, and how could the scientific community value them? If we could not answer these questions, what was the alternative? We concluded that we needed to create a new form of language that had the image of being scientific, but was not at all scientific, but pseudo-scientific, fooling people – through the *spectacular* – into believing that what they read and took part in was actually the outcome of scientific research. This was of course a huge problem and an issue that I will look closer into in the following. It goes without saying that whatever we did publish on the Internet is now gone forever.

## Gudings slott revisited

As mentioned, exactly thirty years after my excavation at *Gudings slott* started in 1988, the graves and the “fort” are again being excavated under the leadership of Dan Carlsson, who is a well known archaeologist and an expert on the island’s prehistory. I have not been able to find any official web page, which is good, but the excavation is covered in the media. The focus is on one particular burial where a calf has been found buried on top of a woman. A photograph is also being circulated, showing a group of people excavating. The media do not mention anything about Carlsson’s broader and important research questions.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the focus is on the *spectacular* burial, and this is repeated on the Riksantikvarieämbetet (RAÄ) – Swedish National Heritage Board – web page.<sup>13</sup>

What this suggests is that the public, through the media and the Internet, is only served the *spectacular* parts, even repeated by RAÄ, of a much wider and complex research project, and they are tricked through the *spectacular* to believe that they know what is going on and therefore become followers.

## Narrating Sandby Borg

When referring to a web page, we always write out the date of our visit. The reason for this is that a web page can change at any time. This implies that a web page is only reliable at the moment we visit it. A printed text will always be the same even though we might read it differently from time to time. It is the readers who change the meaning of the text, not the author. On the Internet, it is the opposite.

When visiting the official web page for the excavation at Sandby Borg, the first thing I meet is a text encouraging me to visit Facebook and Instagram. The excavation has a blog, is uploaded to YouTube, and can be followed on Twitter and Facebook. The project, which has had research funding since 2015, has been going on since 2011 and has been crowd-funded and is also financed by numerous organizations. The project is briefly explained on the website: “The scientific project deals with the Iron Age ring-fort of Sandby borg on Öland where previous investigations suggest a violent massacre in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. The victims were not buried, but were left lying where they fell. This has created very unusual archaeological material providing

a unique insight into the life histories and death of individuals, as well as people’s social organization and material culture during the middle Iron Age.” However, it is emphasized that the excavation is only a small part of the work done by an archaeologist. The important part starts when the excavation is over.<sup>14</sup>

The hype surrounding the project is a consequence of the *spectacular* findings of the people who were killed there. Had they not been there, the excavation would hardly have been noticed. The web page contains no references to published material, except for five reports. Instead, I search for published material on *The Swedish libraries search service* (LIBRIS). Out of 22 “publications” listed by LIBRIS, I find three different categories – references to media publications, for example, television programs; the five mentioned reports; and two publications that can be seen as scientific. (Reports from excavations must be published through RAÄ and have no scientific importance.)

There is a lot of information on the Internet surrounding the Sandby Borg project, but there are only two scientific publications so far, namely a licentiate paper<sup>15</sup> and a peer-reviewed publication.<sup>16</sup> Both texts can be found as open access, but are not mentioned on the web page, as far as I can see. Furthermore, I have not been able to find any references to conference participation nor information related to university seminars. The focus is obviously on Internet-based communication with the public. The point is,

of course, to promote the excavation and the project leaders and to spread information to the public, but as I stated above, what we have here is pseudo-science, tricking the public into believing that they are taking part in a research project, something even emphasized by the project leaders when they state that the real research starts when the excavation is over.

Some day the excavation will come to an end. The web page will be closed, and all the information once on the Internet will disappear. Depending on the entity involved, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter might still be holding some information, but after some time this too will become irrelevant.

Sweden has many prehistoric hill-forts and ring-forts, but for future research such Internet communication is without any meaning at all, as it will all be gone. The only things that will survive are the scientific publications that a project can produce. The question is if they will have the time, even though they have research money, to produce these important texts, focused as they are on blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and media coverage.

## Joakim Carlsson and the Swedish History Museum

On October 17, 2018, the leading Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* published a fascinating article by Joakim Carlsson, who used to be a social media communicator at the Swedish History Museum.<sup>17</sup> Translated into English, the title of the article reads: “Hi

**“THE HYPE  
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KILLED THERE.”**



Facebook, I resign". Carlsson not only left Facebook, he also left the museum for a new job that had nothing to do with social media.

Everything is digitalized in Sweden, every archived document, every art piece stored in art museums, and every object in history museums, or at least this is the plan. The cost for this is enormous, and most of the work is paid for by tax money or state-financed research funds. The point is that archives and museums are state-owned institutions and paid for by tax money and therefore everyone must have access to the stuff.

**A FEW YEARS AGO** the Swedish History Museum received funding from one of the bigger research funds in Sweden. The purpose was to digitalize an important collection of objects for researchers and for the public. When I asked if they had checked if there was any need for this information among researchers and the public, I got the answer "we don't know". They would spend a lot of money on a project without knowing if there was any need at all for this information. But that's how it works, and it is an understatement stressing that this is a very naïve and costly way forward. A similar critique could be launched against the Sandby Borg project, and of course against my second excavation. If we could count the number of people who have spent their time taking part in producing the Sandby Borg Internet-information along with the costs and working hours to produce it, we would maybe be able to see what resources have been spent on each individual. From there we could ask if it was worth it, knowing that most of the information very soon will dissolve from the "cloud" and into thin air.

Carlsson's job was to communicate with the surrounding society, but he not only questions Facebook, but also the strategies that he worked with. He writes that if the museum should be visible they needed to use a pitch – the *spectacular* – that would encourage discussion and/or sharing, which, he explains, on the Internet always leads to a brawl or some sort of bizarre humor.

This is the consequence, but the general rhetoric is that placing information on the Internet is a question of democracy, of transparency, of everyone being included, of education of the masses, and so forth. But is it really? It's probably to the contrary. Byung-Chul Han talks about overheating among people in the achievement society, where the Internet play a significant part.<sup>18</sup>

## Concluding remarks

To answer the question that I introduced this essay with, there is a clear difference between archaeology done prior the Internet and archaeology done in the age of the Internet, not only because of the obvious existence of the Internet, but because of the focus on the *spectacular*.

We are, as my examples show, tricked into believing that archaeological research, museum practices, and the digitalization of museum objects, archived material, and so on will make a secret world more open and transparent and that this will be positive for the public, democracy, and for the scientific community. The real world is, however, much more dynamic and



Fig 4. Students excavating at Gudings slott in 1989. PHOTO: JOHAN HEGARDT



Fig 5. Stored remains of missing people.

PHOTO: JOHAN HEGARDT



Fig 6. Visitors.

PHOTO: FREDRIK ANDERSSON

diverse but always out of reach for the public because of our naïve desire for the Internet. Archive and museum activities are a practice done in reality, not on the Internet, and so is research. It is irrelevant how much information that we produce on the Internet, because it will never capture the work and practices going on in the real world. Internet information is also dissolved quickly, it loses its *spectacular* impact in a short period of time and new information must be uploaded continuously to keep all of the Internet's different channels alive. What this suggests is that when feeding the Internet with information to keep it alive, the Internet is sucking our capacity to think, talk, and communicate, out of our brains.

What we have seen here is that placing things on the Internet without any deeper reflection is a dead end at best. If we want to take the public seriously, we must learn to communicate with it on a readable level, with published texts that can be stored in libraries and thus exist over time. If we use the Internet, a web page is all that is needed, and its purpose must be made clear from the beginning. The web page shall be basic, communicate on an understandable scientific level, and make clear where the visitor can find serious texts from the project to read. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and similar channels must be avoided. Only then can research be transparent and true to the public on the Internet. And even more important, only then can we behave ethically toward missing times and missing people and avoid being trapped by our desire for the *spectacular*, or, maybe even worse, reducing our research findings and knowledge to the *simplistic* and the *banal*. ✕

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## The Chernobyl disaster. From the explosion to the closing of the plant

### Chernobyl: History of a Tragedy

Serhii Plokhy,  
Penguin (2019),  
432 pages  
Winner of the  
Baillie Gifford  
Prize 2018

**C**hernobyl: *History of a Tragedy* is a very much needed book, published in May 2018, one year before the miniseries *Chernobyl* was broadcast on HBO, and I wish that the book would get just a tiny bit of the attention that has been paid to the TV series during these last few months. The author of the book, Serhii Plokhy, currently works as a professor in history at Harvard University, but grew up in Western Ukraine around 500 km from the Chernobyl power plant. He was diagnosed with an inflamed thyroid. Obviously, Plokhy wants to enlighten readers about the dangers of nuclear energy, but he is first and foremost a historian, eager to create a chronological mosaic over what happened on that disastrous night, on April 26, 1986, at the Chernobyl power plant in Ukraine, and to grasp its consequences in the days, months, and years that followed in the aftermath of the catastrophe.

In his forward, Plokhy defines his book in terms of “the first comprehensive history of the Chernobyl disaster from the explosion of the nuclear reactor to the closing of the plant in December 2000 and the final stages in the completion of the new shelter over the damaged reactor in May 2018” (p. xiv). This quote captures the essence of the book, namely the ambition to write the complete Chernobyl story, based on various documents, including testimonies, diaries, interviews, and recently released archive documents. The question is: is it possible to write the complete story of the world’s greatest nuclear catastrophe that occurred 33 years ago and which still constitute a traumatic event on both a personal and a national level? Yes, it is, and Plokhy has succeeded exceptionally well with this task. Even more, I think this kind of comprehensive narrative constitutes an antidote for political mythmaking and the spreading of conspiracy theories about what is rightly referred to as the world’s worst nuclear disaster.

The narrative style of this book can be defined within the spectrum of what is usually referred to as New Journalism. The historical events are narrated like a story in a novel, peppered with concrete details specifying the place, day, and hour, what the weather was like, what clothes people were wearing, and what the “characters” were thinking and feel-



*The Monument to Those Who Saved the World* is located in Chernobyl, Ukraine. It is dedicated to the firefighters that died putting out the fire at the Plant in 1986 and to the Chernobyl liquidators that cleaned up after the accident.

ing in the particular situation represented. The greatest benefit of this biographical-chronological narrative, written in the third person by an omniscient narrator who escorts the reader through the story, is the possibility for the reader to gain a comprehensive overview of the historical events and identify with the people who participated in this disastrous chain of events. As an example, we become acquainted with the energetic, 35-year-old engineer with dark, curly hair, who in 1970 unexpectedly was awarded the highly prestigious task of constructing a new power plant in Ukraine close to the medieval city of Chernobyl (describing Viktor Briukhanov, who was to become the director of the nuclear reactor facilities at Chernobyl). Or the pregnant woman who ignored the regulations at the hospital in Moscow and despite the high levels of radiation to which she exposed her body kept visiting her husband until his death (describing Liudmila Ihnatenko, married to the fireman Vasil Ihnatenko, who’s testimony initially was published in Svetlana Alexievich’s *Chernobyl Prayer*).

**NEVERTHELESS, AT SOME** points this technique of dramatizing the past contributes to weakening the relevance of the narrative. This is the case when details appear to be more gossip than relevant facts that helps enrich the narrative, such as the blood pressure of Briukhanov’s wife, or the fact that this Valentina Briukhanova has eyes so beautiful that her husband felt “he could drown in them” (p. 24). Yet another negative side of this narrative style is that the integrity of the voices quoted from the testimonies cannot always be maintained. When, for example, Liudmila is quoted from Alexievich’s book, her words appear to be much more prosaic compared to the poetic dimension of her



## Continued. The Chernobyl disaster

voice in the complete testimony published in *Chernobyl Prayer*.

Having said this, Ploky's book is an impressive work, contributing to establishing a chronological weaving of the Chernobyl catastrophe. Actually, Ploky's book could be described as the very opposite of Alexievich's book *Chernobyl Prayer* and therefore is a good complement to her book. While Ploky's main goal is to create a credible and coherent narrative of the chronological chain of events that occurred 33 years ago, Alexievich does everything in her power to avoid this omniscient narrator, eager to make conclusions about the past. In contrast to Ploky's narrative, suggesting that closure is possible, Alexievich's book from 1997 – published only 11 years after the catastrophe – dramatizes hundreds of first-person narratives, confessing their memories of the Chernobyl catastrophe directly to the reader, thus informing us that the experiences narrated are far from being healed and not yet ready to be integrated into a coherent third-person narrative.

Ploky's method of dramatizing history and writing the story of Chernobyl, from the beginning to the end, is perfect when trying to grasp this absurd, complex, and paradoxical historical event. What I really appreciate about the book is its ability to create a credible narrative of the everyday life and praxis that followed in the aftermath of the catastrophe. In spite of the chaos, traumatic experiences, and the lack of information, decisions had to be made and measures had to be taken. In short, life continued after the apocalypse. One example, nicely captured in the book, is the seemingly normal Saturday in Pripjat, April 26, a few hours after the explosions in reactor four at the power plant around 3 km away. While 132 people (firefighters, operators, and engineers) were being transported to the Pripjat hospital, life continued as usual in the city; couples were getting married, children were playing in the sand along the Pripjat river, and people were eating ice cream, fishing, and having a good time. Of course, signs of the accident were present at that point; the fire at the power plant was visible from a number of locations in Pripjat, a rumor about sick firemen was circulating, and the intercity telephone lines were cut. Nevertheless, hardly anyone could grasp the meaning of these signs, on some occasions not even the experts.

**ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF** the contrast before and after the catastrophe is to be found on an ideological level. Soviet ideology nurtured a blind belief in technological progress, and when launching his electrification plan in 1920, Lenin defined Soviet power in terms of communism and "electrification of the whole country". Before the Chernobyl catastrophe, Soviet reactors were regarded as indestructible, and Anatolii Aleksandrov, director of the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, described the RBMK reactor with the words "safe as a samovar" (p. 49). During the trial that was held against six managers and safety officers for violation of safety rules and negligence of duty, one of them refused to plead guilty to the charge against him regarding safety



Abandoned building in Pripjat.

rules at enterprises subject to explosion: "He [Briukhanov] claimed that no instructions had ever defined a nuclear plant as an enterprise subject to explosion hazards" (p. 275). When the Soviet RBMK reactor exploded, it had severe consequences on the environment and on peoples' health, but it was also fatal for the Soviet ideology, which is an important reason why Chernobyl has been regarded as contributing to the collapse of the Soviet Union five years later in 1991.

The collapse of this Soviet flagship stands in stark contrast to the chaos and primitive activities that followed. After the catastrophe, Soviet citizens were forced to become robots, so called "bio-robots", thus completing the task that robots failed to fulfill because of the high levels of radiation. As a result, 3,000 soldiers were cleaning away the radioactive pieces of graphite on the roof of reactor three with the help of shovels. A few days after the first explosions in reactor four, the scientists feared further explosions, partly because of the increasing heat. In order to establish a freezing system under the reactor, it was planned to excavate tunnels under the reactor. Because of worries that the reactor building's foundations would shift when using heavy machinery, the 380 miners that were hired for this task "had to dig virtually with their bare hands and push carts full of soil out of the





Unfinished Reactor 5 Chernobyl, Ukraine.

PHOTO: CLAY GILLILAND

tunnel also by hand” (p. 224). It was extremely hot in the tunnels, and of course no fans could be used because of this risk. Nevertheless, the miners did not walk around naked, as they do in episode three of the HBO TV-series *Chernobyl*!

**FINALLY, TO DEAL WITH** this kind of catastrophe in a totalitarian system built on lies, disinformation, and propaganda seemed impossible. When empirical observations (graphite on the ground next to reactor four) indicated that one of the reactors must have exploded – two systems collided: the ideological system and the empirical observations at the accident site. Clearly, this collision contributed to slowing down the process of rational decision-making, not only because of fear of the authorities, but also because people simply could not believe what they were seeing with their own eyes, even less so regarding statements from other people. The fact that the technological equipment at the scene of the catastrophe was not sufficient did not make this decision-making any easier. According to the second KGB report, based on information available at 3:00 p.m. on April 26, the radiation levels near the reactor were estimated at 1,000 microrentgens per second. In reality the levels were much higher, but at that point the dosimeter at hand only had a scale of 1,000 microrentgens per second. The other do-

simeter was locked away in a safe and no one among the persons present had the key.

Nevertheless, a system inhibiting efficiency in some areas can be extremely supportive in other areas. The central power in Moscow actually had all the power and resources necessary – not least human resources – in order to deal with the consequences of the catastrophe in a highly efficient way. This leads me to the chapter in Plokhy’s book, which was most difficult to read, namely “Counting lives”. Here, we get to know the praxis that soon became established by the commission tasked with handling the cleanup work in the aftermath of Chernobyl. The efficiency of a certain effort was evaluated in relation to the number of human lives that had to be paid. The praxis in this particular case is a painful reminder of the way Soviet ideology functioned in general. When it comes to the sake of the Soviet state, human lives must be counted – the collective is always more important than the individual. In his epilogue, Plokhy reminds his readers of all the reactors under construction in the world, most of them outside Western Europe: “Are we sure that all these reactors are sound, that safety procedures will be followed to the letter, and that the autocratic regimes running most of those countries will not sacrifice the safety of their people and the world as a whole to get extra energy and cash to build up their military, ensure rapid economic development, and try to head off public discontent? That is exactly what happened in the Soviet Union back in 1986” (p. 347). ❌

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## Linking gender and food in the late Soviet context. Narratives, discourses, representations

**Seasoned  
Socialism:  
Gender  
and Food in  
Late Soviet  
Everyday Life**

Ed. by Anastasia Lakhtikova,  
Angela  
Brintlinger, and  
Irina Glushchenko.  
Bloomington,  
Indiana: Indiana  
University  
Press, 2019.  
396 pages.

**T**he book contains a collection of essays that explore the multiple intersections of gender, food, class, and culture in the late Soviet context. The volume is markedly interdisciplinary, with authors from cultural studies, food studies, history, sociology, and literary studies, who draw on a variety of sources and approaches. Positioning food at the core of both female and male everyday experiences in the late Soviet Union, the ambition of *Seasoned Socialism* is to fill a gap in intersectional and interdisciplinary studies of gender and food in Soviet studies. Alexei Yurchak's theoretical model serves as a starting point for many of the studies in the volume. Drawing on extensive previous research, Anastasia Lakhtikova and Angela Brintlinger's introductory chapter sets an agenda and engages in a discussion on, among other things, Soviet experiments in the food industry and social engineering, the discrepancy between ideals of proper nutrition and existing practices, and the hypocrisy of Soviet gender equality politics. The editors advocate for the epistemological fruitfulness of linking gender and food in Soviet studies, reflecting on the potential and limitations of Soviet era source material and the applicability of feminist approaches and Pierre Bourdieu's model to the Soviet case, as well as the sociology of choice in totalitarian contexts.

**THE VOLUME OPENS** with Adrienne K. Jacobs' essay that explores representations of gender roles and home cooking in Soviet Russia in the Brezhnev Era (1964–1982), the period of a so-called “crisis of masculinity” and “return to the home”. Focusing on popular culture and public discourse, the inquiry is based on Russian language sources – the popular press, Soviet cinema, memoirs and cookbooks. As the study reveals, a complex image of the *khoziaika* (“housewife”, “hostess”, “lady of the house”) emerges from the cookbooks of the late 1960s and 1970s, entailing a wide range of skills, tasks and responsibilities (p.38). While maintaining a full-time job, she is also a multitasking manager of the household economy, an inventor, a cleaning lady – all in one. The cookbooks of the so-called “national cuisines” of the peoples of the Soviet Union, as the author reveals, hint at women as vital carriers of cultural tradition and culinary customs (p. 40–41). Jacobs maintains that the Soviet kitchen was a female space, where she enjoyed autonomy and control. It was also a site for mother-daughter bonding, with food playing a vital role in girls' socialization. Popular culture and public discourse, as the author reveals, manifest a strong correlation between women's domestic and kitchen skills, on the one hand, and romantic fulfilment, womanliness, marital harmony and happy family life, as a worthy marital partner, on the other (p.42). In Soviet melodramas of the 1970s and 1980s, women could have their chances of “women's happiness” disrupted if they relied too heavily on factory-made and commercially cooked food, or stuck to devotional (more fashionable, not “traditional Russian”) dietary preferences. Apart from *shashlyk* (grilling, barbecue), representing a “man's dish” prepared performatively for special occa-

sions outdoors, late Soviet cinema reinforced the idea that a man cooking at home is rather exceptional, indicating imbalance, misfortune, loneliness, absence of women – deviation in any case. The author concludes that the Soviet public discourse on food during the 1970s and early 1980s reinforced a rather traditional understanding of women's role in the family (p.51) that was distanced from the emancipatory rhetoric of the 1960s. Irina Glushchenko's contribution follows the same line, focusing on representations of “men's patriarchy” and “women's emancipation”, as the author puts it, in three Soviet films of the early 1980s, namely *Moskva slezam ne verit* [Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears], *Beregite muzhchin!* [(Take care of the men)], *Vremia zhelanii* [The season to make wishes]. She reasons that the three films typify gender relations in the late Soviet era, signifying the unresolved contradiction of the very idea of women's empowerment in its Soviet version, namely the combination of two incompatible roles, those of working mother and housewife, while at the same time uncovering the male “inferiority complex” and discriminatory logic within a family circle.

**ONE OF THE EDITORS**, Anastasia Lakhtikova, aims to explain why educated professional Soviet women chose to engage in cookbook projects and spend time cooking fancy dishes, given their “double burden”, as well as constant food-supply problems. To do so, she analyses twenty manuscripts of personal cookbooks from six Soviet republics, whose compilers lived in various republics between the late 1960s and mid-1990s. In contrast to Soviet cookbooks and culinary publications that were expensive and not easily accessible, personal cookbooks, sources of private origin, are a perfect illustration of what people ate and cooked. Lakhtikova argues that personal cookbooks, illuminated by interviews with their creators or successors, document personal and social identity-building activities reflected in the women's aspirations to be excellent homemakers, and the quest to gain pride in doing so (p.85). Lakhtikova speaks of the two different realities of Soviet women. One is filled with activities and obligations related to “traditional gender roles,” those that were usually taken for granted and not appreciated. The other reality that comprised activi-





Illustrations from the book: M. O. Lifshits, chief ed., *Kulinariia* (Moskva: Gostorgizdat, 1955), pages 790–791, 800–801.

ties of “sustaining *obshchenie* (communication and companionship)”, in Lakhtikova’s own words, was of a different kind. And women not only participated in this reality; they shaped it and made it possible (p.86). One of the factors that motivated professional women to pursue excellence in cooking and maintain personal cookbooks was underappreciation and a search for praise, which was absent in the everyday domestic realm (similar to the world of academia, as noted by Natalia Pushkareva). It was also about networking in a work place usually originating in shared practices of food preparation and consumption, and recipe exchange (pp. 94–96). Finally, apart from a quest for appreciation and social interaction, according to the author, creative self-realization and empowerment (the author even speaks of “a women’s cooking subculture”) were the driving forces that motivated women in their cooking projects, even though they were supposedly the most fulfilled and “the most emancipated of Soviet women,” as Lakhtikova notes.

Benjamin Sutcliffe’s essay opens to the reader the moral universe of food, hunger, senses and envy in Yuri Trifonov’s novel *House on the Embankment*, demonstrating how Glebov, the novella’s protagonist, mirrors Trifonov’s concerns about the rise of Soviet consumer culture and the “degraded ethics of the intelligentsia”

and its “spiritual poverty”. The novella draws on the culinary and the corporeal to illustrate how greed, careerism, envy and ambition abrogate *iskrennost’* (sincerity), the quality Trifonov valued most highly (p.116). In the novella, food (Napoleon cake, the smell of boiling cabbage) is bound to memory; it appears as a metaphor, a telling category that dominates Trifonov’s disturbing images of the morality and everyday life of late Soviet intelligentsia. With his novella, as Benjamin Sutcliffe suggests, Trifonov draws attention to the “full stomach” of people such as protagonist Glebov, who typify a generation for which principles are less important than things (p.127).

**OLENA STIAZHKINA’S** paper explores societal and gendered practices of prestigious food consumption in the context of the late Soviet economy of scarcity, unveiling the layers of perceptions of “prestigious foods,” ways of acquiring it, and the role of class and status in forming “the symbolism of prestige.” The Soviet authorities’ role as the only source and gatekeeper of the “food-basket” was undermined by new social groups associated with the shadow economy, Stiazhkina argues (p. 157). She starts by analyzing the meanings of the charged word “provider” (*dobyichik*), essential to late Soviet everyday discourses, and its connotations and variations. The practice of obtaining foods and goods was associated with hunting and battle; therefore, the word “provider”, the author claims, signifies admiration and encouragement, the characteristics of male behavior regardless of profession, age or social position, and often applied by a woman to a man who managed to bring home goods (p.135). No special name, however, was invented for “she”, who stood at the side of a male provider. She could have been a spouse or a housewife, sometimes

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## Linking gender and food in the late Soviet context

a mistress (*soderzhanka*), a lover or a girlfriend, even a mother or a sister of a provider – no name, but a relation (pp. 137–138). While the memory of famine and deprivation shaped perceptions about “prestigious foods” in terms of quantity and volume, Stiazhkina maintains that the images from the *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*<sup>2</sup> as well as popular cinematic and folkloristic representations of feasts (*pir*), forged an idea of “high-status” foods in terms of aesthetics and methods of preparation. Perceptions about “prestigious foods” also evolved as “a reaction to the chronology and the geography of scarcity,” in the author’s words (p. 140). Stiazhkina recalls an argument from previous research on the existence of “special food orders” due to the geographical factor, since different parts of the Soviet Union were supplied differently, an argument that seems extremely important for this study. As previous research suggests and Stiazhkina reminds us, in late Soviet everyday life, the idea of prestigious foods was not the same everywhere; it was fluid and depended on food-supply circumstances in specific parts of the Soviet Union (pp.140–141). Stiazhkina describes the ways in which procurement of and access to prestigious foods depended on the kind of privileged social group to which the provider belonged. According to the author, the very mechanism by which practices of prestigious consumption were formed challenged the whole idea of Soviet social, ethnic and gender equality.

Introducing the reader to a dacha microcosm in the Tver and Moscow regions with its complexities and paradoxes, Melissa L. Caldwell’s essay has an anthropological character and derives from the analysis of interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1995 and 2007. Caldwell examines the gendered dynamics of the Russian dacha lifestyle, focusing on the ways in which Soviet-era gendered norms of labor were simultaneously encoded and reworked, in the author’s words, in Russians’ experiences with dachas and dacha food. The distinctions between physical and affective dimensions of dacha labor are of prime focus for the study (p.167). The dacha microcosm, centered on food-related activities, was marked as a space of intense physical gendered labor. Despite the prevailing depictions of men being responsible for the physically demanding activities of construction and repair on which dacha narratives relied, in practice these gendered depictions were not necessarily borne out by personal narratives, the author argues (pp. 176, 178). As noted, the older generation of women might share a common reality of being single or widowed, divorced or never married. The retired female interviewees for Caldwell’s study frequently recall the tasks they took on regardless of gender, such as construction and renovation projects (p.178). Accounts of dacha work, as the author points out, rather speak about imagined gender roles and the gendered division of labor (p.189). Caldwell’s study also discloses a generational difference in perception. Dacha work, the author sums up, was described by the elderly Russian interviewees as “work”, and “duty”, something that required commitment, whereas for the younger generations, dacha activities



Illustrations from the book: M. O. Lifshits, chief ed., *Kulinariia* (Moskva: Gostorgizdat, 1955).

were associated with relaxation (pp 182–183). For many older Russians, the author notes, dacha lifestyle and food are key to the concerns connected with “cultivating a form of national citizenship”, preserving the national heritage, and passing on Russia’s cultural values and physical past to future generations (pp 184–185). The author concludes that the assumed distinctions between male and female, labor and leisure, shift within dacha space.

LIDIA LEVKOVITCH EXAMINES the literary representations of alcohol consumption and drinking in Vil Lipatov’s 1970 novella *Seraia mysh* [Grey Mouse]. She argues that, while both the novella and material from the officially sanctioned women’s monthly journal *Rabotnitsa* [Woman Worker] stereotype drinking as an exclusively male problem, with women as allies in government anti-alcohol initiatives, they also illuminate the nuanced and varied roles that men and women occupy, and even reveal “the emergence of alternative practices enabled by reproduction of the official discourse” (p 194). The novella is examined within a broad context of the Soviet official position on alcohol and the paradoxes of so called “vodka politics”. In con-



trast to *Rabotnitsa*'s anti-alcohol content that condemns drinking due to its negative impact on family and productivity, *Grey Mouse*, the author suggests, discovers "boundary spaces negotiated by drinking men and nondrinking women and tries to decipher their meaning and explain their lure" (p. 215). Although both men and women in Lipatov's novella reproduce an authoritative discourse that is critical of drinking, the gendered differences are still noted. While men support moderation, women, reflecting on their supposed place at the forefront of the government's anti-alcohol campaign, tend to promote complete abstinence. According to the author, placing women at the forefront and letting them articulate the late Soviet official discourse on alcohol in a literal way challenges the traditional understanding of the feminine sphere as being quietly subversive (p. 216).

Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's approach, Ksenia Gusarova conducts a case study of dietary recommendations presented in *100 Minutes for Beauty and Health* by Polish author Zofia Wędrowska, a book written in an innovative style, which brought Polish tastes to Soviet women and shaped notions of femininity, health and beauty in the late Soviet era. As Ksenia Gusarova reveals, Zofia Wędrowska herself was a representative of the socialist bourgeoisie, and the norms and ideals she promotes in her book conform to the features of Bourdieu's bourgeois *habitus* with its food aestheticization and abstraction, self-imposed restrictions and dieting, ritualization of eating, and the domination of form over substance. However, as the author concludes, despite all the literary and discursive tricks serving the aim of food abstraction and aestheticization, Wędrowska makes clear the key function of her heroines' and readers' bodies. It is work, and her diet is for "working women." Hence, the late socialist *habitus* appears as a hybrid of the "proletarian" and the "bourgeois," in Gusarova's words.

Ona Renner-Fahey's contribution investigates everyday practices connected to foodways in the women's camp subculture described in Irina Ratushinskaya's memoir *Grey Is the Color of Hope*. The memoir portrays a community of East European women of different ethnicities and religions, Ratushinskaya's fellow prisoners, who, as Renner-Fahey puts it, by drawing on

their collective knowledge of and abilities in gardening, cooking and nutrition, and on their inventiveness as a community, managed to manipulate foodways in the camp and gain agency (p. 249). According to the author, Ratushinskaya constructs a powerful counter story to the male-focused master Soviet camp narrative by structuring her memoir around how her camp's community of women, each playing a specific role, subverted the camp authorities thanks to its collective knowledge of foodways and its "ethic of care" (pp. 248, 250). Erasing from her text much of the official labor or treating some aspects of the imposed regime with sarcasm, as the author explains, Ratushinskaya instead depicts everyday practices and routines such as gardening, procuring food, sharing rations, and advocating for nutritional needs, as well as sharing detailed knowledge of health concerns connected to hunger strikes, forced feeding and treating illnesses (p. 252). By not structuring her memoir around the imposed regime and instead allowing "the moments of reprieve", in the words of Renner-Fahey, to structure the narrative, Ratushinskaya creates a text of resistance and gains control in an otherwise powerless position, as the author concludes (p. 254).

**SCRUTINIZING SELECTED** works of William Pokhlebkin, Alexander Genis, Pyotr Vail, Lyudmila Petrushevskaya and Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Angela Brintlinger examines the literary treatments of cabbage – "the food of poverty" – seen by many as essentially Russian. The author suggests that the five writers are split along gender lines in their approach to cabbage, and this divide is manifested in the genre of their works. The two female authors pen literary fiction, similar to the fairy tale genre, while the male authors select the genres of essay, dictionary and culinary history (pp. 272–273). Brintlinger's analysis suggest that having employed an "authoritative nationalistic voice," the male writers use cabbage to claim the right to define Russian national identity and "Russianness," whereas the female writers go beyond the culinary to highlight social and family values, presenting and evaluating the so-called feminine tasks of birthing, mothering and nourishment. In Brintlinger's opinion, these male and female representations of cabbage and its place within food writing and fairy tales reproduce ideas about Russian identity. The male view emphasizes how cabbage was central to the Russian peasant diet, while also using it to highlight positive traits of the Russian character, while the female view focused on birthing, motherhood and nurturing the Russian family (pp. 274, 281, 285).

Following the literary studies approach, Amelia Glaser turns to the analysis of Nonna Slepakova's everyday poetry, that invokes visual images of food, kitchen and material objects and culture. A poet of the Leningrad 1960s generation, Nonna Slepakova (1936–1998) contributed to developing a poetics of everyday Leningrad life and material culture that originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (pp. 298, 299). Glaser argues that by gendering the individual's struggle between *byt* and *bytie*, present and future, Slepakova creates a poetic system for analyzing the postwar

## Continued. Linking gender and food ...

Soviet domestic sphere (p. 298). While avoiding political issues, Slepakova's poetry of everyday Soviet life undermines the very rhetoric of progress, maintains the author (pp. 301-302). Rejecting the path of the bright future, in Glaser's opinion, Slepakova used food to emphasize cyclicity.

**FINALLY, THE ANTHOLOGY** is rounded off by Darra Goldstein's foreword and Diane P. Koenker's afterword. In her concluding essay, Diane P. Koenker ponders on three aspects that the eleven papers of the volume tackle and reflect on, namely the question of class in the allegedly classless Soviet society, the blurring of lines between work and leisure in the world of food, and the ideological façades of Soviet socialism.

Ethnicity, the concept that lies behind some essays of the volume more than others, is not analytically addressed in *Seasoned Socialism*. These categories are just as important as class in comprehending the nexus of food and gender in a Soviet context. A few lines in the references to the introductory chapter contain the seeds of an interesting discussion on the heterogeneity of the Soviet empire, its space, culture and society (p. 29, reference 53). The kaleidoscope of power trajectories, hierarchies, and logics that are otherwise intangible in the constellation of gender, food, and class in everyday Soviet life might have been reflected if the ethnic and geographic diversity of the Soviet Union had been taken into consideration and problematized. With its discoveries and revealed complexities that go far beyond the twenty years of late Soviet era, *Seasoned Socialism* invites a wide range of readers and scholars to an intellectual feast. ✖

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## references

- 1 Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
- 2 *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* [*Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche*], written by scientists from the Institute of Nutrition of the Academy of Medical Sciences, first published in 1939, is the earliest official culinary publication of the USSR.

## The revision of Herstory. Global state socialist women's activism from

**Second  
World,  
Second Sex:  
Socialist  
Women's  
Activism  
and Global  
Solidarity  
during the  
Cold War.**

Kristen  
Ghodsee. Duke  
University  
Press, 2019,  
328 pages.

**K**risten Ghodsee gives a voice to state socialist women's activism during the 1975 United Nations International Year of Women and the following United Nations Decade for Women 1975–1985. Underlining the importance of cooperation and solidarity among women activists from the Eastern Bloc and the Global South, she demonstrates how these powerful allies dominated the decade's conferences and situated them on the international stage. This book provides a fascinating narrative of women's socialist activism, including compelling oral histories, archival sources, and rich photographic illustrations. Two case studies focus on women's activism in Bulgaria and Zambia. The former was the hub for socialist activists during the decade, while Zambia represented a country from the Global South whose women's organization stayed in close contact with women from Eastern Europe.

In this stunning monograph, the reader is ushered into the Cold War period and can vividly see how superpower rivalry and machinations from both sides of the Iron Curtain informed the International Women's Year and the subsequent UN Decade for Women. The author argues that superpower rivalry and "Second" and "Third" world women's activists catalyzed changes in Western women's rights. She argues that these allies helped attract attention to women's issues in Western countries because they had to deal with accusations concerning the failure to ameliorate women's lives at a time when women's emancipation had become an index for social progress. The UN conferences on women represented another battlefield of the Cold War and "male leaders of all nations felt pressured to guarantee some form of women's rights to prove the superiority of their ideological commitments, to demonstrate their modernity, or to keep up with the enemy." (p. 242).

**WOMEN FROM THE** Eastern Bloc dominated the conference discussions, as well as their official proceedings. Eastern European states believed that they had "won" at the Mexico City conference (1975), as they did not allow Western countries to separate women's issues from the broader context. The Americans wanted to focus specifically on "women's issues" such as

## a new perspective



ILLUSTRATION: KARIN SUNVISSON

sexism and equality and avoid any discussions about economic systems, American foreign policy, or the problems of capitalism. But socialist women gained an advantage in setting the topics and goals of the conference, which ultimately included these larger political issues. The strong voice of women from the Eastern Bloc manifested at the Copenhagen conference (1980) when the official conference document stated that centrally planned economies were at the forefront regarding women's rights. Finally, in Nairobi (1985), Bulgarian delegate Elena Lagadinova was elected General Rapporteur of the Conference, a major achievement for the country. In front of the world's media, Lagadinova could present socialist advantages for women. Bulgarian emancipation "from above" including, for example, liberalization of the divorce law, women's education and training, their participation in the labor force and social protection for single mothers.

Ghodsee argues that women from Eastern Europe actively participated in creating the UN Decade for Women that gave birth to the worldwide women's movement. Also, funding from both sides of the Iron Curtain for women's organizations in the Global South (Western countries contributed not only through state organizations, but also through nongovernmental ones), helped to create a global women's movement. This book revives

the experiences of socialist women whose past is so often erased because of prevalent stereotypes about socialist women as being puppets of male communist politicians. But it is not possible to evaluate socialist mass organizations from the viewpoint of Western feminism and its assumptions, expectations, and ideals of autonomous women's organizing, especially from the perspective of liberal feminism, which tends to be universalistic and not attentive to cultural variation. This approach ignores the successful women's activism that helped women pursue different interests in different contexts (such as increasing women's literacy and numeracy in Zambia, where young girls had virtually no educational opportunities). Socialist activists "fought for women's rights in their own way, using the rhetorical tools available to them within specific cultural and historical contexts." (p. 25) Using the language of the Party and citing Lenin, Marx, and Engels, organizations could, on the pages of their magazines and publications, discuss problematics otherwise considered "bourgeois" – sexuality, single motherhood, premarital sex, or changing masculinity.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST strengths of this book is also its weakness. First-person accounts are, on the one hand, impressive; on the other hand, they can be subjective and influenced by the vicissitudes of time. But Ghodsee is sensitive to these "perils of oral history" (p. 217), and wherever possible, she has verified information from the interviews in archives from around the world. Moreover, the author emphasizes the importance of these subjective accounts, and crucially, she has grasped the last opportunities to record the voices of this disappearing generation: "Although these women were not perfect, and we should be careful not to ignore the ways they might have been complicit with authoritarianism in their own countries, we must admit that women living in the state socialist countries benefited from progressive legislation and equal rights far earlier than women in the Western democracies." (p. 20)

Ghodsee reveals how profound historical research can help with contemporary women's issues, and not only in post-socialist countries. She demonstrates how telling the stories of socialist states and especially of their women activists allows us to reconsider the role of the

## Continued. The revision of Herstory

state in solving women's issues, challenging discrimination, and potentially rethinking contemporary feminism, its strategies and goals. During the Cold War, women from socialist countries saw international, political, and economic issues and matters of peace as being inseparable from women's rights and equality. In contrast, today's liberal feminists who concentrate on women's autonomy may unwittingly support the economic system that fuels the power and health of three elites, and, as Ghodsee states, become "handmaiden[s] to neoliberalism" (p. 27).

This book presents a valuable addition to the literature about the socialist past, the history of women's rights and activism, and the agency of socialist women. It should be required reading for any scholar or student interested in the reflection of current feminism. Traveling around three continents and gathering rich data, the author outlines directions for future research on state socialist women's activism and reflects on the goals and nature of the feminist project, as well as state interventions to reduce inequality. ✖

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Advisory Council*



election coverage

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## PIS IN POLAND PROMISES A WELFARE STATE

**ON OCTOBER 13**, parliamentary elections were held in Poland. As expected, the government party, national-conservative PiS became the biggest and retained its majority in the Lower House, Sejm. However, it lost its majority in the Upper House, Senate. In the Sejm elections, PiS got 43,6% (up from 37,6% in 2015), the second was market-liberal KO (Civic Coalition) lead by the biggest opposition party PO (Civic Platform) with 27,4% (up from 24,1% in 2015) and third came the Left with 12,6% votes. Prior to the elections, there was much talk that they would set the future course of Poland. Western media has been quick to celebrate the fact that PiS lost its hold over the Upper House, but let us face the fact that an incumbent party increased its support by 7 percentage points – and at the same time the turnout went up from 51% in 2015 to

almost 62%. This is a victory to be reckoned with.

Poland under the last PiS-led government has consolidated its fame as one of the trouble-children of the EU. PiS has taken control over the judiciary, public TV and radio, rejected EU's refugee policies but also embarked on drafting a new welfare state. Flagships in this process has been a generous child allowance and a comprehensive plan for "responsible development". The government promises dignity to the citizens, but human rights organizations worry that continuing PiS rule will continue to clamp down country's minorities.

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Note: Read the full comment on [www.balticworlds.com](http://www.balticworlds.com)



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## RESEARCH ON POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

*"New Developments in the Politics and International Relations of Post-Soviet Central Asia", symposium held September 20, 2019 at CBEES, Södertörn University.*

**T**he symposium on Post-Soviet Central Asia included a dozen leading specialists representing geography, economics, international relations, political science, anthropology, gender, education, language, and history of the Central Asian region. On the three panels, academics from different disciplines were mixed together in order to spark exchanges and debates.

In his talk, Professor Yang Cheng, Shanghai International Studies University, challenged the orthodox notion that there is a "division of labor" in Central Asia, in which Russia is the provider of security and China the main economic partner. In his opinion, competition between China and Russia exists in Central Eurasia under the close scrutiny and constant external strategic pressure from Western countries. Professor Sergei Abashin from the European University at St. Petersburg focused on the management of migrants from Central Eurasia. The economic crisis that hit Russia in 2014 resulted in a significant reduction in both the number of migrants and the volume of remittances. Russia's government formed a new migration policy in 2018, which emphasizes differentiated bilateral migration policies. On the same panel, Sophie Roche, Associate Professor at the University of Heidelberg, talked about the nuclear production sites in the city of Chkalovsk (present-day Buzton) in the Sughd (formerly Leninabad) region of the Republic of Tajikistan. During the Soviet era, the city was not shown on the world map and was cloaked in an aura of mystery. Chkalovsk was founded in 1945 as part of a Soviet nuclear project and was

a closed city. Roche claims that in Soviet Chkalovsk, it was possible to live "like people lived in Moscow", with all the amenities and privileges of Muscovites, while nearby Leninabad (now Khujand) was an ordinary model city of Soviet Tajikistan. For his part, Professor Konstantin Aksenov from St. Petersburg State University spoke about the growing role of the tools of "soft power", which are an integral feature of modern geopolitics. According to him, Russia had to look for new non-coercive means of maintaining and strengthening its influence in the Post-Soviet states of Central Asia and the Caspian region.

**ON THE SECOND** panel, Professor Christine Bichsel from the University of Fribourg examined past and modern scientific approaches to the interpretation of Central Asia. Professor Bichsel argued that there are two main narratives. In the narrative of "fixity", the continuity, stability and rootedness of Central Asia are all emphasized. In the narrative of "flow", academics focus on the mobility, flexibility, and unpredictability of the region. Professor Bichsel showed how the current understanding of modern Central Asia is determined by prevailing storylines, disciplinary concepts and agreements, as well as normative beliefs. Professor Edward Schatz from the University of Toronto presented the paper "China in Central Asian Imaginaries: Projecting Power through the Belt and Road". Senior lecturer Artemy Kalinovsky argued that there are similarities between the Rogun Dam in Tajikistan - with the government's emphasis on harnessing the power of nature and modernizing the nation - and the large infrastructure projects during the Soviet era.

On the final panel, Professor Bo Petersson of Malmö University emphasized that authoritarian regimes are rarely more fragile and vulnerable than during a change of leadership. Dr Paul Richardson from the



Participants of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in 2017.

University of Birmingham noted that more than a century ago, railways were viewed by many as being revolutionary; they would propel the powers commanding Eurasia to world domination by expanding access to world markets and control over resources. He believes that this vision has experienced a remarkable renaissance in recent years after the announcement by Chinese Premier, Xi Jinping, in 2013 of the creation of the Silk Road Economic Belt through Central Eurasia. Finally, Oleg Antonov, a visiting researcher at Södertörn University, compared the educational and academic landscape of rivalry in "soft power" between the two key states of the Eurasian region, China and Russia. He noted that the geopolitical strategy and interests of Russia and China in the context of "hard power" are best positioned and manifested in modern Tajikistan in the discourse of "cooperation" or "rivalry." All in all, the symposium gave several perspectives on methods and approaches to the study of Post-Soviet Central Asia, as well as created a platform for academics from different disciplines to exchange ideas and research results. ✖

**Oleg Antonov**

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