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Reading Silences, Entangling Histories

Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

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Dealing with the demons of the past

There are many aspects of the past that we talk little about, if at all. The dark past casts shadows and when silenced for a long time, it will not leave the bearer at peace. Nations, minorities, families, and individuals suffer the trauma of the past over generations. The untold doesn't go away and can even tear us apart if not dealt with. Those are the topics explored in this Special Issue of *Baltic Worlds* "Reading Silences, Entangling Histories", guest edited by Margaret Tali and Ieva Astahovska.

The ghosts of the dark past still haunt and hurt, and the silencing and taboos make the healing process more difficult. It's similar to the way individuals suffer following a traumatic event: Reactions and crisis are natural but if not dealt with, they may become persistent and lead to disaster and stress when encountering new difficulties. Unleashed sorrows can cause trouble for generations afterwards, even for the victims' descendants.

IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE the focus is set on the Baltic States and Eastern Europe that have experienced not only the occupation of the Nazi regime, the Holocaust and the World War II but also the communist take-over and the terror during the Stalin period, the *Holodomor* and the labor camps. How can we begin to talk about the past in a way that doesn't lead to re-opening wounds and stirring up hostile emotions?

In a series of articles contributing researchers and curators seek the answer in suggesting that art and cultural expression can communicate traumatic memories and awaken understanding and empathy for the victims, even after generations. An individual take is often the case, and the own family history is drawn into this exploring artistic process. By facing the demons of the past through art, we may be able to create new conversations and learn about our history with less fear and prejudice, runs the argument. Film-makers, artists and researchers share their understanding on how to work and approach sensitive subjects and the healing aspects for all involved in the process. The untold stories need to be made visible and to be given time and space in order for society to be able to accept and move forward.

ON THE LAST PAGE of this issue you find a presentation of *CBEES State of the Region Report 2020: Constructions and Instrumentalization of the Past. A Comparative Study on Memory Management in the Region*. It is dealing with memory politics and scrutinizing memory management and memory production in the region, presenting the situation for ten countries concerning the political history of the past. ☒

Ninna Mörner

Visual representation of the Holodomor

" When we were beginning to think about what we as artists and also the third generation of survivors can tell about the Holodomor we fully realized that visual representation of mass starvation in the arts is not easy. **Page 28**

The voices of women across the generations

" How do you find words that have been frozen for generations through fear and confusion? How do I interview a person who has been repeatedly interrogated and silenced during her life? **Page 80**

ILLUSTRATION: KARIN SUNVISSON

colophon

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Guest editors:
Margaret Tali & **Ieva Astahovska**

Introduction.

Exploring alternative ways of commemorating long-silenced traumas

This special issue dealing with memory focuses on the silences about WWII, its aftermath and the Soviet era in the Baltic and Eastern Europe. Untold histories and minorities' perspectives are placed in the spotlight, drawn out from the shadows and hidden corners of the collective and individual memories shared and yet contested in the region. By bringing the suppressions of traumatic events in the past into a conversation with each other the articles offer productive ways of understanding present social changes in the region. We see a special value in bringing together scholars conducting research in fields such as literature, histories of art and architecture and cinema, with curators and artists producing exhibitions, communicating learned trauma of the past or dealing with own expressions of memories.

THE IDEA GREW OUT of the international symposium "Prisms of Silence" that we organized in Tallinn in the Estonian Academy of Arts on February 21–22, 2020. The symposium constituted a part of the transdisciplinary project "Communicating Difficult Pasts".[1] We were lucky to be able to hold the symposium in real life very shortly before the lockdown and before public discussions moved online, because presence and a sense of being together enabled sensitive discussions that we could not have had from a distance.

Considering how relationships between communities and individuals in our region often escape easy descriptions, leading to scattered histories and memories that remain divided, proved to be productive fuel for the discussions in the symposium. There are important aspects in minority histories that have often not been included in the dominant history narratives of the Baltic Sea region. At the heart of the symposium were discussions of alternative ways of commemorating long-silenced traumas, examining repression of different minority histories as well as ethical ways of communicating trauma and experiences of violence in the work of artists, writers and filmmakers. There was a special focus on new methods for approaching long-silenced subjects in oral histories and vernacular memories, and we investigated how they are being employed both by researchers and artists. We were also interested in the impacts that the downplaying of past complexities has had on the rise of right-wing movements as well as on the repression of different minority communities and women nowadays.

In the context of shifting official narratives of history – of the Soviet repressions and the Holocaust, which continue to remain contested – we wanted to focus on the possibilities of bringing those two together. Furthermore, the symposium added to research on trauma by bringing together artists and researchers across disciplinary boundaries, thus giving a new nuance and reflexivity to the subjects discussed.

THE SELECTION OF ARTICLES in this Special Issue "Reading Silences, Entangling Histories" include the three Baltic States, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and through the fate of the Ingrian community, also Finland. We propose to see this as "region of memory"[2] which can help to understand the entangled histories of the 20th century

In memory of Zofia Szleyen, from Zuzanna Hertzberg series *Volunteers for Freedom*.

better. This region has been culturally and ethnically very diverse and geopolitically complex. Borders shifted multiple times during the 20th century; ethnic cleansings, deportations, atrocities by the Nazis, Soviet totalitarianism and repressions and all-encompassing silence about these violent past events have left unprocessed traumas and lead to the production of very selective narratives of the region's history. These processes are often difficult to grasp for people from more stable societies where state borders have not changed for longer periods and in which WWII was the last violent event. Several of our contributions bring nuances to the fore by integrating into the region's history intercommunity relations that have often remained undiscussed.

PAPERS IN THIS ISSUE contribute to the creation of transnational perspectives on trauma by connecting local and cross-border memories and shedding new light on the shared impact of these events in our region. By bringing together scholarly and artists' contributions, our aim was to reflect on them in a broader framework.

We believe that this issue productively adds artistic research to the existing discussions on history and helps to bring new nuance to several subjects discussed in transnational contexts. The art works discussed are telling stories through subtle gestures as well as through activist/performative ventures of a more prominent kind in public space. But they also show that an approach in-between these two is possible. We have also included essays about three exhibition projects by their curators Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Annika Toots, and Paulina Pukytė, enabling them to reach a broader context with new knowledge that would otherwise remain only locally accessible. A crucial background to this are the complex relations between the changing perceptions of history, past and memory, with the latter moving further to the fore. Reconstructions of history after the fall of the Soviet

regime have silenced many uncomfortable side stories and dissonances in narrations about the past in the contemporary political context. Several contributions in the issue discuss these aspects involving individual and public layers of memory and creating new connections between them. Several articles deal with untold memories, based on stories of minorities and women, that haven't become histories yet. They integrate questions about how to deal with remembering collaborators that requires a considerable nuancing of language and approach. Occasionally it has been difficult to find a language in which to address the ways different ethnic communities have cohabited local and transnational communities, since the coming of the Soviet era erased and actively "taught" people to forget about their ethnic background in order to protect themselves.

Connected to

"PAST EVENTS HAVE LEFT UNPROCESSED TRAUMAS AND LEAD TO THE PRODUCTION OF VERY SELECTIVE NARRATIVES OF THE REGION'S HISTORY."

this, another topic that rises to the fore can be summed up as the persistent neglect of Holocaust memory in the public realm of our region. Jewish cemeteries buried under parks or parking lots, or mass graves "accidentally" found when starting new housing projects, are a reality that have also created ghosted identities and histories born from this violent neglect. Elisabeth Kovtiak discusses this in the example of Belorusian cities, Jan Miklas-Frankowski through the example of Białystok and Paulina Pukytė brings complexities to the fore in her subtle ways of negotiating this memory in Kaunas. Miklas-Frankowski shows how amnesia of the Jewish past is part and parcel of the rising sentiments of xenophobia, anti-Semitism and fervent nationalism that connects groups and is increasingly present in politics.

ALONGSIDE THE DIFFICULT Holocaust memory, the contributions in this special issue also reflect on the contested Soviet legacy – the unarticulated traumas it has left and the dissonant perceptions of this recent past, the simultaneous wish to forget and to remember it. For instance, Lia Dostlieva and Andrii Dostliev deal with the complex memory of the Soviet famine in Ukraine, that lives on in ubiquitous habits such as the taboo on throwing away food; in her essay dealing with her grandmother's memory of World War II and Soviet forced displacements of the Ingrian community, Kati Roover connects a taboo with the colour red; the documentary film *Liebe Oma, Guten Tag* by Jūratė and Vilma Samulionyte also points to the subtle aspects of bodily trauma. Rasa Goštautaitė and Annika Toots both analyze the ambiguities of memory related to Soviet period through public spaces and institutions. While the memories of Holocaust and Soviet occupation have commonly been perceived as being incompatible, our wish in this Special Issue has been to move towards more integrated un-

Jan Miklas-Frankowski at the symposium "Prisms of Silence".
PHOTO: MARGARITA OGOĻCEVA, LCCA

derstandings of the past. In their edited book *Narratives of Exile and Identity: Soviet Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States* (2018) Violeta Davoliūtė and Tomas Balkelis brought together research in the Baltic region on deportation, population displacement and exile.[3] In the same publication Aro Velmet compared narratives of three Baltic Museums of Occupation showing how differently the three museums negotiated national identities based on the experiences of occupation in their displays.[4] Zanda Gūtmane has analysed totalitarian trauma in the prose of the three Baltic countries. Using dialogic and multidirectional approaches, she explores similarities and differences in authors ways of communicating deportation and Holocaust traumas in post-Soviet Baltic societies.[5] Eva-Clarita Pettai and Vello Pettai have analysed comparatively processes of transitional and retrospective justice in the Baltic States including research initiatives, public debates and legal changes[6], while Eva-Clarita Pettai has also further analysed the processes around the creation of the Holocaust memory in the Baltic States.[7] Imbi Paju and Sofi Oksanen have brought together local level research and thought from Estonia, Finland and Russia connecting it with the work of international scholars.[8] In visual art a pivotal book has been published by Giedrė Jankevičiūtė and Rasa Žukienė focusing on the

"THE GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE IS A RELEVANT THREAD IN DEALING WITH DIFFICULT HISTORICAL EVENTS AND TRAUMATIC MEMORIES."

period between the two world wars in Lithuania, but also extending to include Russia and the border shifts in Lithuania.[9] Histories of exile have recently also become considered by scholars, which requires an adoption of more transnational perspectives.

MOST OF OUR AUTHORS represent the third generation following the War and the generational perspective is a relevant thread in dealing with difficult historical events and traumatic memories. Memory studies scholars often emphasize that the third generation after disastrous events takes a more active stance to dealing with them – they are still bonded to these (post)memories, yet being more distanced from this past, they have the courage to ask questions or seek for reconciliation instead of avoiding or neglecting it. While analyzing the presence of the disturbing past, our contributors are looking for ways of interrupting it by creating more nuanced understandings and consciously changing both limited and limiting patterns of approach to their subjects.

RASA GOŠTAUTAITĖ ANALYSES how the shifts in public memory culture and historical revisionism are present in public monuments of the Soviet period in Lithuania. She examines two cases – the public discussions about whether to remove or to leave the Soviet-era sculptures on the Green Bridge and the monument to pro-Soviet writer Petras Cvirka in Vilnius. Both examples indicate how the contested Soviet legacy is being instrumentalised by the decommunization process in public discourse. Artistic interventions that involve interpretations of heritage value bring such dissonances and ambiguities to the fore and replace straightforward solutions by reminding one about more ambivalent meanings and values that these monuments embody. Even though these suggestions for reconceptualizing and reinterpreting such monuments often do not solve discursive clashes, they are crucial for re-

Poster for the film *Liebe Oma, Guten Tag!* by Jūratė and Vilma Samulionyte.

considering the complexities embedded in the Soviet-period legacy.

COMBINING ARCHIVAL WORK, family history and feminist/antifascist stances, Zuzanna Hertzberg's work offers counter-narratives to overcome historical erasures. She calls her artistic and performative work *artivism*. For instance, in her series *Volunteers for Freedom* (2016–20) she recovers the memory of International Brigades that participated in the Spanish Civil War in 1936–39 to defend the democratically elected government against Franco, and rightfully integrates women volunteers among them.

Lia Dostlieva and Andrii Dostliev discuss the difficulty of representing the Holodomor, a man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine in 1932–33, in the context of scarce documental images, Christian symbolism in commemoration sites and depiction of memory about this unerasable trauma in contemporary art. Ethical considerations and postmemory perspective to presenting this trauma are also at the core of authors' own project "I still feel sorry when I throw away food... Grandma used to tell me stories about the Holodomor" that they discuss. Their article is a poignant study of visual narrations of this Stalinist atrocity and its silencing

in Soviet memory politics that seeks to translate the Holodomor experience to today's audiences.

ARTISTIC RESEARCH has offered packed tools for approaching difficult histories by not only remembering and interpreting, but also in dealing with and healing past traumas. Although its methodologies sometimes overlap with academic research, they also allow access to more subtle dimensions that cannot be reached through analytic tools only. Oral history with its openness and ability to connect individual stories with broader layers of cultural memory defined by violent political regimes and their shifts is one of such powerful means for artists. Margaret Tali's interview with Jūratė and Vilma Samulionyte about their film *Liebe Oma, Guten Tag! What we leave behind* and artist Kati Roover's essay about her project *Red* deal with unspoken family histories, uncovering the unknown and deeply buried pain. Both contributions reveal the difficult processes that creative research has involved for the artists themselves and their family members. They share how their art practice has helped to interrupt the heavy silences that have been passed on to them transgenerationally. Both projects address women's experiences, hence involving a perspective that has often been marginalized. Seeking for ways to unknot the muted experiences, they pay attention to both mental and bodily dimensions, empathically connecting to hidden emotions and different non-verbal means of communication. Although more research on this would be needed, this may even set women in a position from which it is easier to mediate such affective sides of the past.

TWO ARTICLES involve curatorial insights to exhibitions that highlight the processes of reconstructing memory via spaces that art creates. Annika Toots focuses on the exhibition "Displaced time: 10 photographs from the Restricted Collections" she curated together with artist Aap Tepper at the Estonian National Archives. Seemingly innocent landscape photographs from the independent Republic of Estonia, that were censored and

classified in restricted collections during Soviet regime, reveal complex relationships between archives, images and repressions. Toots addresses the memory of the repressive Soviet system through the archives, 'the dark potential' in shaping our collective memory. Paulina Pukytė reflects on the 2017 Kaunas biennial titled "There and not there: (Im)possibility of a monument" that she curated. Its program that involved the creation of many new artworks throughout the city stood out for two things – for its call to radicalize the language of monuments in the dominantly conservative context of commissioning monuments, and for its search for novel ways to commemorate the locally neglected Jewish history. Pukyte used a curatorial approach that in her words chose to acknowledge this silence and engage with it by interrupting everyday rituals of the local people. Her approach of remaining subtle and ambiguous by leaving interpretation open for different understandings led to connecting to the memories of local people more strongly, namely due to capitalizing on the space between given interpretations and memories already defined.

BOTH ELISABETH KOVTIAK and Jan Miklas-Frankowski focus on the erasure of Holocaust memory within the borders of contemporary Belorus and Poland, respectively. While the latter is interested in the impacts of forgetting, the former focuses on activist projects that aim to overcome the erased histories in Belorus cityscapes. Miklas-Frankowski discusses recent Polish literature, focusing on Marcin Kącki's Białystok. *White Power, Black Memory* in order to address connections between these erasures and present antiSemitic attitudes among local politicians and other rightwing groups, whereas Kovtiak's focus is on two recent projects involving art and performance: "The Jewish Minsk Audio Guide" and "Brest Stories Guide" that she interprets as signs of a more diverse memory culture for future Belorus.

Giedrė Jankevičiūtė shares the research and methodological choices for her exhibition "Difficult Age: Vilnius, 1939–1949" at the MO Museum that will open the complexities of 20th century Vilnius, which caused many traumatic changes. She proposes viewing the city through the perspectives of different local identities, such as Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Jewish and Belarusian; the exhibition will shed new light on the presence of war and its later memories in the city that was radically transformed by it. Jankevičiūtė opens this by narrating the influences of these changes on artists who reflect on "traces of vanished hopes, losses, suffering, fear, anxiety, blood, betrayal and cruelty". In the context in which it is not common to share exhibition contents before the opening, we are particularly grateful for her willingness to contribute based on this research which is significant for the whole region. "Difficult Age" was initially planned for 2020 but has unfortunately been postponed due to COVID-19.

ONE OF THE SHARED positions that clearly unfolds from these essays by our authors – who write from different positions while remaining reflective about them – is that communicating the difficult and traumatic past is a responsibility that our authors have taken up and a work which is focused on changing the future along with the past, that we need to learn to value as such. ❌

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Dissonant Soviet monuments in post-Soviet Lithuania

THE APPLICATION OF ARTISTIC PRACTICES

by **Rasa Goštautaitė**

The statue of author Petras Cvirka is located in central Vilnius.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

I n the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, remnants of past regimes were quickly changed with markers of new systems in most post-communist Eastern and Central European states. This initial impetus of decommunization has been revived in the last decade as the debates over Soviet-era legacy have intensified. Political monuments and statues have been at the center of the decommunization debate, often causing mixed reactions from different society groups. For example, in 2007, a riot broke out over the relocation of the Bronze Soldier statue in Tallinn, Estonia.[1] In 2015, a set of four socialist realist statues were removed from the Green Bridge in Vilnius, Lithuania.[2] More recently, in spring 2020, a monument to Soviet Marshal Ivan Konev was removed in Prague, the Czech Republic.[3] Alongside the disputes that arose in relation to individual monuments, some countries adopted more systemic approaches to decommunization. In Ukraine, following the 2014 revolution,

abstract

This article theoretically overviews the disputes related to two heritage sites located in Vilnius, Lithuania – the Green Bridge statues and a monument to Petras Cvirka. The change in the culture of memory – from a Soviet to an independent Lithuania – has created the appropriate conditions for certain objects of such heritage to reveal dissonance. Common actions applied to mitigating the disputes that occur in relation to the Soviet-era legacy include the removal of such statues or monuments and/or their relocation. Meanwhile, alternative solutions such as memorial/information plaques and artistic interventions aimed at reinterpreting and decontextualizing the object in question are less widely endorsed.

KEYWORDS: Soviet monuments, the Green Bridge statues, monument to Petras Cvirka, Lithuania, dissonant heritage.

public spaces (streets, squares etc.) were renamed and communist monuments and symbols were dismantled. Within one year of the start of the revolution, 504 statues of Lenin were removed.[4] The legal grounds for decommunization in Ukraine were created in 2015 through the adoption of four decommunization laws that established the mandatory decommunization of public space.[5] In Poland, a memory law was passed by parliament in 2016 obliging local authorities to remove the names of public spaces that symbolized communism.[6]

While the removal or relocation of such contested/dissonant monuments are dominant strategies, the application of alternative measures such as the installation of memorial/information plaques or artistic interventions are employed less widely to address the dissonance of such sites. This theoretical article focuses on the political monuments and statues built in Lithuania during the Soviet period but which remained following the collapse of the system.[7] By discussing two case studies in Vilnius – the Green Bridge statues and a monument to Petras Cvirka – the article aims to examine the discord that emerged regarding their values, the strategies applied to mitigate the disputes related to them and the role of artistic practices in such processes.

THE ARTICLE SEEKS TO tackle the following questions: What kind of management practices are applied to mitigate the disputes that emerge in relation to political monuments and statues from the Soviet period? What is the role of artistic approaches in such processes? Why is the application of artistic practices a less-widely endorsed strategy in such disputes? To achieve this, the article first examines the theoretical grounds for analyzing the Soviet-era legacy in modern-day Lithuania by engaging with dissonant heritage and related theories. It discusses the official collective memory that was consolidated in different republics during the Soviet period, and the construction of a new culture of memory in independent Lithuania. By reflecting on the cases of the Green Bridge statues and the monument to Petras Cvirka, the article considers the common practices applied to mitigating the disputes that emerged in relation to the dissonance of these sites, including the role of artistic approaches.

Soviet-era legacy as dissonant heritage

Dissonant heritage, a term introduced by John E. Tunbridge and Gregory J. Ashworth, is "a discordance or a lack of agreement and consistency" between different interpretations of the same heritage site.[8] Tunbridge and Ashworth consider this dissonance to be a universal feature of heritage and a natural outcome of the process of making history to heritage.[9] Due to the selective nature of heritage creation, each heritage site can hold dissonance, which can be strengthened and unfolded through its use as a cultural, political or economic resource.

As a political resource, heritage often reflects the ideas proposed by state-supported historical narratives and cultural memory.[10] Heritage plays an important role in giving permanence to cultural memory and the narratives that it endorses.[11] Monuments, landscapes, museums or archives act as "sites of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*)[12] that are deliberately created to facilitate the process of remembering. Given this link between heritage and the construction of national identity[13], messages communicated by the heritage of past regimes may become irrelevant or conflicted in a new context.[14] In the case of Eastern and Central Europe, the changing geopolitical situation and the demise of the Soviet Union meant that the heritage created by the communist governments has been abandoned and misplaced. Such transmission of messages that no longer fit the needs of the dominant ideology is referred to by Tunbridge and Ashworth as a dissonance that is implicit in the messages of heritage,[15] and which can lead to the "obsolete transmission" of messages.[16]

The Soviet government relied on state-sanctioned historical narratives and collective memory to consolidate and legitimize its rule in occupied states. The hallmark of the official Soviet memory, as noted by different scholars, was the victory in the Great Patriotic War (a Soviet term for the Second World War).[17] In Soviet Lithuania (1945–1990), the representation of the official cultural memory in public space, like in other Soviet republics, encompassed large memorials and monuments related to the sacrifice and victory in the Great Patriotic War, as well as monuments to local party leaders and prominent communist figures.[18] Whereas the motif of the Great Patriotic War was to symbolize the unifying events of the different Soviet republics, the latter – local communist figures – had to support the narrative of a "legal" incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union.

"THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA IN 2014 TRIGGERED A REVISION OF SOVIET MONUMENTS IN OTHER POST-SOVIET AND POST-SOCIALIST COUNTRIES."

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the independent Lithuanian state formed a new official historical narrative and memory culture that emphasized the motif of victimhood and fight for independence. Characteristic of such memory culture have been events associated with Lithuania's occupation by the Soviet Union (e.g. the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Soviet deportations) or the anti-Soviet resistance movement (e.g. partisan warfare).[19] The legitimacy of a new state has also been grounded in the first Republic of Lithuania, which existed during the interwar period, as well as the Lithuanian Grand Duchy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

THE CHANGE IN THE CULTURE of memory – from a Soviet to an independent Lithuania – has created the appropriate conditions for some Soviet-era heritage and legacy to reveal dissonance. It was found that the circumstances of the creation of such heritage and the initial values communicated by it contradicted the narrative of the re-emerged new state, thereby leading to the misplacement of some Soviet-era heritage and its subsequent

A riot broke out in Tallinn following the relocation of the Bronze Soldier statue in 2007. Right: the removal of statues of Lenin in Ukraine 2014.

decommunization. A Lithuanian scholar, Rasa Baločkaitė, has separated this decommunization process into two waves of historical revisionism.[20] During the first wave, which took place in the 1990s, major ideological monuments and other communist insignia that explicitly transmitted the regime's message (such as monuments to Lenin and other party leaders) were immediately removed from the public space in Lithuania. However, not all Soviet legacy has been perceived as being equally dissonant. Some monuments and artefacts, which at the time had been recognized as being less ideological and had been left in place, have gradually gained contested meaning in the 21st century. R. Baločkaitė has linked this "second wave of revisionism" to factors such as physical deterioration, renovation needs, changing urban infrastructure, the political and cultural Westernization of former Eastern bloc countries and Russia's international politics.[21] In particular, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 triggered a revision of Soviet monuments in other post-Soviet and post-socialist countries.

The decommunization of public space accurately points to the discord that is intrinsic to the content of messages and the political use of heritage, as discussed by Tunbridge and Ashworth. It is worth emphasizing that the monuments that were disputed in light of the second wave of revisionism do not encompass the entire Soviet legacy. Monuments to artists, memorials, burial places of Soviet army troops, decorative elements and allegorical sculptures that have now attracted dispute, often embody ambivalent meanings and values. While holding both ideological/political and other (historical, aesthetic, etc.) values, this legacy is not interpreted in a straightforward way. Ambivalence remains regarding the values communicated by this heritage, its ties to the Soviet period and whether it continues to act as "sites of memory" of the former regime, or how such heritage sites should be managed and interpreted.

It is worth noting that although highly significant, ideology is not the only determinant to hamper the preservation of Soviet-era heritage, particularly its architectural legacy. Aesthetic and physical aspects also play a significant role.[22] Soviet-era buildings were constructed with poor-quality materials, impacting their posterity. To counter these difficulties, it has been suggested to separate from traditional ways of evaluating the architectural heritage from a specific period by focusing on the intangible dimension of the Soviet legacy. This includes understanding Soviet-era architectural heritage as a "cultural reference" system that can mark the development of certain past events and ideas (e.g. modernization).[23] Never-theless, there are significant differences between the Soviet-era architectural heritage and monuments or sculptures that carry more political connotations. Attributing intangible value to Soviet-era political monuments and artefacts (e.g. assigning value for being evidence of past events) can be more difficult to endorse.

While the memory cultures of the Soviet Union and the independent Lithuanian state, as well as the decommunization processes, have been researched more widely, this article focuses on the responses to the disputes arising in relation to dissonant Soviet-era monuments and statues.

Managing the disputes related to dissonant heritage

The dissonance of some heritage may be more trivial and spark less major public disputes over the course of their existence across generations. However, certain monuments can be particularly divisive and even cause disengagement with heritage or have the potential to hinder social cohesion. Tunbridge and Ashworth argue that there are more effective strategies for dealing with the dissonance of heritage than neglect, elimination or abandonment.[24] They distinguish three main strategies for how such sites or types of heritage could be managed in order to mitigate the disputes that arise in relation to them.[25] These include the "inclusivist", "minimalist" and "localization" approaches.

The "inclusivist" approach embraces multiculturalism by incorporating a multitude of interpretations, narratives, and heritages put forward by different groups. Due to the totalitarian nature of communist regimes, Soviet-era heritage does not qualify for the multiculturalism of the "inclusivist" strategy. Yet,

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The four sets of statues symbolize archetypical Soviet society groups: *Youth of education*, *Industry and construction*, *Guarding peace* and *Agriculture*. They were installed on the Green bridge in Vilnius in 1952, and removed in 2015.

the "inclusivist" approach may to some extent be adopted by incorporating the diverging viewpoints of different society groups regarding the same heritage object. However, the addition of new forms of heritage or the incorporation of multiple interpretations do not imply any balance of elements and an agreement, which is sometimes the end goal. An opposite strategy would be the "minimalist" approach, which focuses on those aspects of heritage and history that are common to most of the inhabitants (e.g. natural heritage, peacebuilding role). The "localization" approach involves bounding certain heritage objects to a geographic location where it is unlikely that the dissonance of such heritage objects will cause disputes. Communist statue and monument parks such as the *Grūtas Park* near Druskininkai, Lithuania or the *Memento Park* near Budapest, Hungary, could be examples of the latter – "localization" – strategy. Yet, the application of these strategies to the Lithuanian and the broader post-Soviet and post-socialist context is not straightforward. A large share of Soviet heritage is immovable, making it difficult, if not impossible, to apply the "localization" strategy.

However, as noted by different scholars, Tunbridge and Ashworth's theory may at times suggest that the management approaches proposed can eliminate dissonance, despite it being an integral part of heritage.[26] Some scholars point out that the concept of mitigating dissonance suggests that a state of ideal heritage that holds no contested meanings can be reached. Hence, the management approaches by Tunbridge and Ashworth should be perceived as responses to the consequences of dissonance and the mitigation of the disputes that arise from this discord rather than mitigation of the dissonance itself.

The goal of these management strategies could also be questioned as different authors have noted that not only is it difficult to reach a complete consensus, the process of discussing the dissonance may also yield positive outcomes. James E. Young, who coined the term "counter-monument", points out that the process of remembering and memorialization is often more important than its end result – monuments and memorials.[27] The works of Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper, who has conducted research into contested heritage sites in Germany and beyond, echo the latter thought. She notes that "a monument that is argued about becomes precious *because* it does not embody cultural and social consensus on historic or present events".[28] According to Dolff-Bonekämper, such disagreement is a natural part of heritage construction and all memory sites can embody arguments about present-day values, becoming "sites of disputes". She suggests that there is value in such disagreements as they play a role in coming to terms with the past.

As shown by recent developments in the region, dealing with dissonant monuments often entails them being dismantled or relocated. The monument built in 1980 to Soviet Marshall Ivan Konev in Prague in the Czech Republic is quite characteristic

of the fate of other communist-era statues. In 2018, the original plaque, describing the role that Ivan Konev played in liberating Prague from Nazi occupying forces in 1945 was removed from the monument.[29] A new plaque was installed, describing Konev's involvement in suppressing the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968. This resulted in a negative reaction from the Russian Embassy.[30] However, the installment of a new plaque has not resolved the ongoing dispute. The monument was eventually dismantled in April 2020 and there are plans to exhibit it at the future museum of the 20th century.[31] However, the Russian authorities have requested that the statue be moved to Russia.[32]

WHILE REMOVAL or relocation prevail as the dominant strategies, alternative approaches are also employed. Such monuments can be deprived of their ideological and almost sacral meaning by using their space for trivial, everyday activities. For example, skateboard ramps were installed next to the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, Bulgaria.[33] Monuments and statues are also decontextualized by applying artistic approaches and installations, which are often created against the background of the ongoing debates on heritage values and interpretation. As impermanent solutions, they can often act as communication tools that raise questions and facilitate debate. For example, the 2008 intervention project – *Carousel Slide Swing* – by Polish artist Kamila Szejnoch involved installing a swing on one of the communist memorials commemorating Warsaw's liberation by Soviet troops in the Second World War. The aim was to enable a debate and give the monument a contemporary function.[34] Public art can also be merged with more permanent installations such as the establishment of anti- or counter-monumental practices, combining art with memorialization.[35] One of the many examples of an anti-monument is a monument against Fascism (1986/1996) in Hamburg, Germany. It was designed by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz with the aim of provoking the local community to reflect on past events. A counter-monument, on the other hand, involves dialogic approaches, juxtaposing an old monument with a new monument.[36]

> **"THE REMOVAL OF THE STATUES ALSO RECEIVED SOME SUPPORT ON A POLITICAL LEVEL, SPARKING MORE DISCUSSIONS ON THE COMMUNIST LEGACY."**

To further reflect on dealing with dissonant Soviet monuments and statues, two case studies are discussed below. Notably, since the discussions relating to the Green Bridge statues and the Petras Cvirka monument are complex and span the course of several years, the overview below only provides some of their key moments.

The Green Bridge statues

The Green Bridge statues are four sets of socialist realist sculptures that were installed on the newly rebuilt bridge,[37] named after the Red Army General Ivan Chernyakhovsky, in 1952.[38] These sculptures portrayed archetypical Soviet society

The Lithuanian writer Petras Cvirka, to the right in the picture, actively supported Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union. A monument in his name was erected in 1959. Lately, demands that the statue should be removed has caused debate.

groups – students, workers, farmers and soldiers – and were designed by Lithuanian artists (Bronius Vyšniauskas, Napoleonas Petrulis, Petras Vaivada, Bernardas Bučas, Juozas Mikėnas, Juozas Kėdainis and Bronius Pundzius). Although the bridge with the four statues survived the first wave of revisionism and were inscribed on the Cultural Heritage List [lith. *Kultūros vertybių registra*s] in 1993,[39] these statues maintained some dissonance throughout the years, raising questions regarding their necessity. This dissonance was particularly strengthened in 2010 when Vilnius municipality and other authorities started discussing the issue of restoration, as the sculptures were in a poor condition and were rusting.[40] The Russian institutions also engaged in this discussion and offered the help of Russian specialists to restore the sculptures. This offer of help was declined by the Lithuanian authorities.[41] It has been argued that the elevation of this topic coincided with the 2011 election and the pro-Russian propaganda that had increased during the pre-election period.[42] These sculptures had received widespread media coverage, which contributed to the exploitation of the statues in the political rhetoric of the different parties.[43] In 2014, following Russia's incursion in Ukraine, the political aspect of the statues strengthened. A particular emphasis was placed on one of the four sets of sculptures, called *Guarding peace* [Taikos sargyboje]. It portrayed two Soviet soldiers and was associated with the Soviet victory in the Second World War which, for Lithuania, marked the beginning of the second Soviet occupation (1944–1990).

Regarding popular sentiment, there were calls for both the removal of the statues and for maintaining the *status quo*. For example, in 2014, a petition for the removal of the statues was launched and some civil society groups demanded that the statues be removed as they perceived them as being offensive and bearing strong ideological connotations.[44] In contrast, a number of academics and heritage/cultural professionals have stated that these statues are unique decorative elements of the bridge and the only remaining examples of such bridge sculptures in Lithuania.[45] The potential of these sculptures to fulfil an educational role and teach the younger generation about the Soviet period was also highlighted.

The removal of the statues also received some support on a political level, sparking more discussions on the communist legacy. For example, in 2014, the Minister of Culture passed legislation stipulating that objects featuring Soviet or Nazi symbols cannot be inscribed on the Cultural Heritage List.[46] In July 2015, following the decision by Vilnius municipality and supported by the Department of Cultural Heritage, the sculptures were removed from the bridge for restoration work, without removing their legal protection.[47] The sculptures were moved to a storage facility but have yet to be restored. In 2016, according to a decision by the Department of Cultural Heritage, the legal protection for the bridge and its sculptures was removed.[48] Part of the evaluation commission that made this decision agreed with a proposal that the sculptures could be exhibited in a museum at some point in the future.[49]

NOTABLY, ALTERNATIVE approaches to legal means were also applied to dealing with this issue. In 2013, an informational board was unveiled underneath the sculpture of two soldiers.[50] The board contained information on the Soviet occupation, including statistics on the number of people who were deported, murdered and repressed in Lithuania during this period. It subsequently transpired that the board was not sufficient to conclude the discussions.

Regarding artistic approaches,[51] after Lithuania regained its independence, Gitenis Umbrasas suggested surrounding the sculptures with soil beds and using them to grow vine-type plants that would climb up the sculptures.[52] In 1995, a temporary art intervention, created by Gediminas Urbonas and called *Coming or Going*, was installed on the bridge. It involved mirror cubes reflecting the sky, which were installed on the heads of one of the sets of sculptures (the male and female farmers).[53] In 2010, a new sculpture *The Chain*, designed by Kunotas Vildžiūnas and Martynas Lukošius, featuring a metal chain, was installed beneath the bridge. It was part of a series

of sculptures that were hung from the bridges in Vilnius and symbolized moments in Lithuanian history. The chain reflected the system's corruptness and oppressiveness.[54] It has been argued that this sculpture was a good attempt at resolving this issue without destroying the original statues, but providing an additional layer of meaning.[55] During the latter discussions that took place between 2010 and 2015, the endorsement of artistic ideas was less prevalent. For example, Audrius Ambrasas' project *Reduction of sculptures* (2014) suggested the temporary placement of metal cages onto the sculptures, thereby transforming them into museum artifacts.[56] The goal of this intervention was to neutralize the ideological pathos of the sculptures while still preserving the architectural integrity of the bridge, i.e. to transform these sculptures into a museum artefact of the city. The metal cages were intended to allude to containers, symbolizing that the sculptures were being prepared to be taken away. However, this idea did not receive any official endorsement.

IN 2018, THE MUNICIPALITY announced a contest for temporary artistic installations and projects to be placed on the Green Bridge during 2019. Two projects were selected – *Megareality goodness activator* by artist Saulius Paukštys and *Family* by artist Donatas Norušis – which decorated the bridge for six months each,[57] suggesting that there were no plans for the return of the sculptures to their original location in the near future. One of the projects submitted to this contest but not selected also tackled the question of the Green Bridge statues that had been removed ("They will try and act like victims", author Eglė Grėbliauskaitė). The project suggested that replicas of the removed statues could be hung under the bridge and that these replicas could shift their position upon activation.[58] The project aimed to activate historical memory and provide an opportunity to discuss it. Thus, the artistic installation could become an educational tool that could allow people to learn from the past, seeking to create conditions for rethinking history.

The monument to writer Petras Cvirka

The second case study is the monument to Lithuanian writer Petras Cvirka (1909–1947). When Soviet forces occupied Lithuania in 1940, Cvirka joined the Communist Party and actively supported Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union, representing the "will" of Lithuanian artists during the visit of the official delegation to Moscow.[59] After the second Soviet occupation in 1944, Cvirka was elected as chairman of the Union of Writers in Soviet Lithuania in 1945. He held this position until his death in 1947. After Cvirka's death, a monument was erected in his name in one of the central squares in Vilnius in 1959. It was designed by Lithuanian sculptor Juozas Mikėnas and architect Vladislovas Mikučianis.[60]

Like the Green Bridge statues, the monument was inscribed on the protected monuments list in Soviet Lithuania. After the demise of the Soviet Union, this monument was confirmed as being a part of national heritage as it was re-inscribed on the new Cultural Heritage List in 1992.[61] However, this did not guarantee a uniform interpretation as there had been discord. For example, there were demands to rename the bus stop and the street adjacent to P. Cvirka square that were also named after the writer, as well as some requests to remove the monument.[62] The discussion became particularly poignant after the removal of the Green Bridge statues and the elevation of this topic in the media by a number of civil society groups. There has also been increased discussion in recent years on the revisionism of historical figures who collaborated with the Nazi regime (e.g. Kazys Škirpa and Jonas Noreika-General Vėtra).[63] It has therefore become a highly contested subject.

In 2018, the Working Group for Memory Culture at Vilnius municipality proposed to the Mayor of Vilnius that the monument should be removed because of Cvirka's role in strengthening the Soviet occupation of Lithuania during the Second World War.[64] It was stressed that the working group tried to separate between Petras Cvirka the collaborator[65] and Petras Cvirka the author. The suggestion to remove the monument has further fueled a multifaceted discussion, some layers of which constitute his personality, the extent of his collaboration, the value of his writings, the educational potential of the monument to reflect on the role of intellectuals and cultural elites in consolidating the regime,[66] or the uncertainty of what might happen next to the public space in light of the urban development.[67] Currently, the future of the monument and the square in which it is located is still being discussed.

DURING THIS PERIOD, there were several attempts[68] by artists to challenge the prevalent opinions via public installations or exhibitions. For example, in 2018, Eglė Grėbliauskaitė created the public installation *A cold wall wake up hit* that aimed to rethink the personality of Salomėja Nėris a contested Lithuanian poet who glorified the Soviet regime in her poetry, also touching upon the memory of Petras Cvirka.[69] This installation included a portrait of Salomėja Nėris, placed on the balcony of the building facing the square that contains the Petras Cvirka monument, thereby juxtaposing images of the two artists. The project aimed to raise questions about the role of artists during the Soviet period and the complexities of the choices they had to make. According to the project description: "Art serves as a cache of memories of the times and can help to retreat from the preconceptions and partly become an educational tool to learn from the past."[70]

In spring 2019, a discussion was organized in MO – a modern art museum – where artists were invited to pitch their suggestions for reconceptualizing the Petras Cvirka monument.[71] In

> **"THE FUTURE OF THE MONUMENT AND THE SQUARE IN WHICH IT IS LOCATED IS STILL BEING DISCUSSED."**

November 2019, as an outcome of this discussion, an exhibition called "Monument and censorship: to remove or leave" opened in the Vitrina&Bench gallery in Vilnius.[72] The exhibition, which featured six ideas and a sound installation[73], was curated by Paulina Pukytė and Dainius Liškevičius. Using visual arts, it aimed to reconceptualize the Petras Cvirka monument by offering an alternative to the "populist" suggestions of leaving or removing the monument and allowing citizens to digest and understand the past themselves. Prior to the exhibition, some of the project's images were published in a cultural weekly. These images attracted the attention of a member of Cvirka's family, who found them disruptive to the writer's memory and demanded that they be removed, adding another layer to the contestation of this topic.[74]

IN 2020, THE Lithuanian Council for Culture awarded funding for a project called "Space for public discussions: conversations about P. Cvirka's square" proposed by the landscape architecture and public space design studio, *Studio Space/ Time*.[75] According to a statement released by the studio, the project has reacted to the ongoing discussion in society regarding the Soviet-era heritage of public space. It seeks to create a hybrid platform that would host discussions, lectures, surveys and other events on the topic of temporary design interventions and the post-Soviet regeneration of P. Cvirka's square.[76] The project's authors expect that such a platform could become a model for negotiating solutions for similar spaces. A particular emphasis has been placed on society engagement in negotiating the disputes that arise regarding public space. However, the awarding of funding has attracted some media attention, the main concern being the purpose of the discussions that had to be organized under this project, and the amount of funding dedicated to it.[77] The media focus on the funding of this project has highlighted the different narratives that are colliding, not only regarding this particular monument but other kinds of Soviet-era legacy and heritage in public spaces.

However, the proposals to remove the monument do not provide a clear solution regarding how a broader P. Cvirka legacy and the heritage associated with it should be evaluated. Unlike the Green Bridge statues, which are allegorical sculptures, this monument is an object that is tightly interwoven with the biography of a specific person. Although legal protection for another monument dedicated to Petras Cvirka in Kaunas had already been removed in 2016,[78] several streets named after him, as well as protection for his homeland or his grave remain. This further highlights the ambivalence of the disputed monuments of the above-mentioned "second wave of revisionism", as it remains unclear what role such disputes play in evaluating the broader Soviet legacy.

> **"THE SOVIET-ERA HERITAGE CAN BE PERCEIVED AS A MISPLACED HERITAGE, WITH A DISSONANCE THAT IS IMPLICIT IN THE CONTENT OF ITS MESSAGES."**

Conclusion

The Soviet-era heritage can be perceived as a misplaced heritage, with a dissonance that is implicit in the content of its messages. The political and ideological purposes that determined the creation of sites such as the Green Bridge statues or the monument to Petras Cvirka have now become dissonant in a new political setting and memory culture. For example, the program for nurturing Vilnius memory culture, which was introduced by Vilnius municipality in 2017, supports the narrative of a multicultural city that played a pivotal role in Lithuania's struggle for independence.[79] In such context, the messages communicated by the Soviet-era legacy do not fit the current political setting, leading to what Tunbridge and Ashworth refers to as an "obsolete transmission" of messages. Notably, not all Soviet-era heritage has been equally disputed, as there is often ambivalence regarding some monuments to artists, memorials, burial places of Soviet army troops, decorative elements and allegorical sculptures, etc. that can embody both ideological/political and other (historical, aesthetic etc.) values.

The dissonance of the two cases discussed in this article has been made urgent gradually. The dissonant quality of the Green Bridge statues, which at first was more silent, gained particular attention in 2010 when the need to define their values occurred in light of the questions surrounding their restoration. Meanwhile, the monument to Petras Cvirka has become a particularly urgent topic in recent years, following proposals to remove it. The two cases, although sharing contestation associated with their Soviet past, also bear some differences. Unlike the Green Bridge statues that are allegorical sculptures, the Petras Cvirka monument is dedicated to a specific historical figure, whose biography and writings face diverse evaluations. The subject of dispute is made more concrete and is not only focused on broader concepts of ideology but also on the evaluation of a specific person's actions. There is a lack of agreement as to whether such monuments and statues should be viewed as political or cultural objects.

ALTHOUGH THERE WERE attempts to re-interpret the meaning of the Green Bridge statues, these efforts were not successful and the statues were eventually dismantled. Ideology has surfaced as an important strand in these discussions. However, Skaidra Trilupaitytė points out that the ideological meaning of these statues has tended to be amplified. During the Soviet period, the statues had a representational value but were not as highly significant attributes of Soviet culture as portrayed by the media and the debates that took place prior to their removal in 2015.[80] Being in the height of media attention, these objects have become particularly poignant embodiments of a hostile system to the current memory culture. Although artistic approaches tended to offer ways of decontextualizing these statues, they

were not enough to limit their dissonance. Alternative solutions, such as the artistic approaches that were actually realized, have tended to comply with and reinforce the dominant memory culture (e.g. hanging a chain under the bridge).

Meanwhile, the debate about the Petras Cvirka monument is still ongoing with no final decision being made yet. The artistic reflections on the subject (e.g. installations, exhibitions) fall into a more ambivalent space in relation to the dominant memory culture by calling for discussions.[81] The values promoted by the artistic projects discussed here have tended to highlight memory as something to be engaged with by members of society. The educational potential of such monuments has also been highlighted as they can act as markers of past events and regimes (e.g. shedding light on artists' collaborations with an occupant state). Drawing upon Tunbridge and Ashworth's management approaches that were previously discussed, alternative solutions to removal may be perceived as promoting the "inclusivity" of different views. However, the addition of new forms of heritage or the incorporation of different interpretations into the narrative does not ensure balance of elements and a consensus (not to state that this should be the goal of the different interventions) resulting in some authorities opting for more common approaches such as dismantling or relocation. Nevertheless, the removal of such monuments and sculptures often does not offer answers to questions related to how the broader Soviet-era heritage should be evaluated and handled. ❌

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50 Vilniaus miesto savivaldybės administracijos direktoriaus pavaduotojas [Deputy director of Vilnius city municipality administration], *Įsakymas "Dėl leidimo įrengti informacinę lentą ant Žaliojo tilto"* [Order "Regarding permission to install an information board on the Green Bridge], August 13, 2013, No. A30-2158, Vilnius, accessed May 31, 2020, https://aktai.vilnius.lt/document/30228000.

51 The text discusses several examples of artistic practices that were well covered by the media. Other artistic installations or suggestions for interventions may exist but have not been covered here as they have not attracted as wide media coverage or received much critical or popular acclaim.

52 Lijana Natalevičienė, "Seniausias Vilniaus tiltas per Nerį [The oldest bridge over the Nėris in Vilnius]," *MO muziejus*, accessed May 1, 2020, http://www.mmcentras.lt/seniausias-vilniaus-tiltas-per-neri/79055.

53 Natalevičienė, "Seniausias Vilniaus tiltas per Nerį".

54 Violeta Grigaliūnaitė, "Vilniaus Žaliasis tiltas neteko dar vienos skulptūros – nukabinta apačioje kabėjusi 'Grandinė' [Vilnius Green Bridge has lost one more sculpture – the "Chain", which had been hanging underneath the bridge has been taken down]," *15min.lt*, August 5, 2019, accessed April 29, 2020, https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/vilniaus-zaliasis-tiltas-neteko-dar-vienos-skulpturos-nukabinta-apacioje-kabejusi-grandine-56-1183970#_.

55 Rasa Čepaitienė, "Kultūrinės atminties sovietizacija: Vilniaus ir Minsko atvejai [Sovietization of cultural memory: the cases of Vilnius and Minsk]," in *Atminties daugiasluoksniškumas: miestas, valstybė, regionas* [Multilayered memory: city, state, region], ed. Alvydas Nikžentaitis (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2013): 298.

56 "Audrius Ambrasas Architects," accessed April 29, 2020, https://www.ambrasas.lt/lt/works/green-bridge/info?show=selected.

57   While the "Megareality goodness activator" aimed to foster important societal values, the installation "Family" sought to consider the relationship between the family and the urban environment; see: "Pamatyk, kaip sausį atsinaujins Žaliasis tiltas! [See how the Green Bridge will be renewed in January!]," *Vilnius.lt*, September 27, 2018, accessed May 28, 2020, https://vilnius.lt/lt/2018/09/27/pamatyk-kaip-sausi-atsinaujins-zaliasis-tiltas/.

58   "Egle Grebliauskaite," accessed November 15, 2020, http://www.eglegrebliauskaite.com/Egle_Grebliauskaite/DESINFORMATION.html.

59   LGGRTC, "Petro Cvirkos veiklos 1940–1947 metais apžvalga. Istorinė-archyvinė pažyma [Review of Petras Cvirka's activity from 1940–1947. Historical archival certificate]," *Genocid*.lt, December 11, 2019, accessed May 1, 2020, http://genocid.lt/UserFiles/File/Titulinis/2019/20191211_cvirka_istorine_archyvine_pazyma.pdf, 2–4.

60   Zita Žemaitytė, *300 kultūros paminklų* [300 cultural monuments] (Vilnius: Mintis, 1980): 57.

61   "Petro Cvirkos paminklas [Petras Cvirka monument]", Kultūros paveldo registras [Cultural Heritage List], accessed April 27, 2020, https://kvr.kpd.lt/#/static-heritage-search.

62   The first reference to such demands that was found in the media dates back to 2003. See: https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/siuloma-pervadinti-petro-cvirkos-stotele.d?id=2802533.

63   Conflicts related to the memorialization of Nazi collaborators in Lithuania showed that a consistent stance regarding how figures who collaborated with totalitarian regimes should be evaluated is lacking.

64   Monika Gimbutaitė, "Rašytojų sąjungoje keltas klausimas – kodėl Petro Cvirkos paminklas sostinėje turėtų išlikti? [A question was raised at the Union of Writers – why should the Petras Cvirka monument in the capital remain?]," *15min.lt*, July 18, 2019, accessed August 18, 2019, https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/naujienos/rasytoju-sajungoje-keltas-klausimas-kodel-petro-cvirkos-paminklas-sostineje-turetu-islikti-1104-1175790?.

65   In 2019, the Committee for Memory Culture at Vilnius municipality consulted with the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania regarding Petras Cvirka's biography. The Centre has evaluated Petras Cvirka's activities and confirmed that he was a collaborator with the Soviet regime. See: LGGRTC, "Petro Cvirkos veiklos 1940–1947 metais apžvalga".

66   Gimbutaitė, "Rašytojų sąjungoje keltas klausimas – kodėl Petro Cvirkos paminklas sostinėje turėtų išlikti?".

67   The latter uncertainty is also tightly linked to current urban developments. There are plans to build a new concert hall in the vicinity of the monument. The concert hall is due to open in 2023. There are also plans to build a pedestrian bridge that will be connected to the both the hill on which the future concert hall will be located and the P. Cvirka square. See: Vilniaus planas, *Tauro kalno parko teritorijos tvarkymo projektas*, *Aiškinamasis raštas* [Project for the development of Tauras hill park territory, Explanatory note], accessed May 29, 2020, https://vilnius.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TAURO-KALNO-PARKAS_PP_1.pdf, 24.

68   Similar to the case of the Green Bridge statues, the text discusses a few examples of artistic practices that were well covered by the media or have received critical or popular acclaim. There may be other artistic installations or proposals for interventions that are not discussed here.

69   "Vilniaus gatvės prabilo Salomėjos Nėries eilėmis [Vilnius streets spoke in the verses of Salomėja Nėris]," *15min.lt*, November 16, 2018, accessed April 27, 2020, https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/vizualieji-menai/vilniaus-gatves-prabilo-salomejos-neries-eilemis-929-1060748.

70   "Egle Grebliauskaite," accessed November 15, 2020, http://www.eglegrebliauskaite.com/Egle_Grebliauskaite/DESINFORMATION.html.

71   Rūta Miškinytė, "Petro Cvirkos paminklo epopėja (II): 2019 m. diskusijos įkaito iki raudonumo [The opopee of the Petras Cvirka monument (II): in 2019 the debate became really heated]," *15min.lt*, November 12, 2019, accessed May 1, 2020, https://www.15min.lt/ar-zinai/naujiena/idomi-lietuva/petro-cvirkos-paminklo-epopeja-ii-2019-m-diskusijos-ikaito-iki-raudonumo-1162-1229036.

72   Monika Gimbutaitė, "Paroda 'Paminklas ir cenzūra. Pašalinti ar palikti': kaip į P. Cvirkos paminklą siūlo pažvelgti menininkai? [Exhibition "Monument and censorship. Remove or leave": how do artists suggest viewing the Petras Cvirka monument?]," *15min.lt*, November 13, 2019, accessed April 27, 2020, https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/vizualieji-menai/paroda-paminklas-ir-cenzura-pasalinti-ar-palikti-kaip-i-p-cvirkos-paminkla-kviecia-pazvelgti-meninkai-929-1231710.

73   The projects presented in the exhibition include proposals to install lasers in the statue's eyes that could follow the passersby (author Liudas Parulskis), covering the monument with a stand made of paintings by P. Cvirka's wife (author Marta Vosyliūtė), splitting the monument in two (author Dainius Dirgėla), lowering the monument below the ground that could be elevated above the surface upon payment (author Dainius Liškevičius), covering the monument in a white shroud (author Paulina Pukytė), as well as molding the monument in silicon representing a pillar of salt (author Paulina Pukytė). The exhibition also included a sound installation by Dainius Liškevičius and Mindaugas Mikeliūnas.

74   Paulina Pukytė, *Monument and Censorship (To Remove or Not To Remove)*, accessed May 29, 2020, http://www.pukyte.com/styled-23/styled-39/.

75   Lietuvos kultūros taryba [Lithuanian Council for Culture], "Sprendimas dėl kultūros rėmimo fondo lėšomis finansuojamos programos "Kultūros ir meno organizacijų naujų produktų ir (ar) paslaugų kūrimas" (tarpdisciplininio meno sritis) projektų dalinio finansavimo 2020 metais, 2020 m. liepos 28 d. Nr. 1LKT-77(1.2), Vilnius [Decision regarding co-financing of projects under the program "Development of new products and/or services by cultural and art organizations" (interdisciplinary art) financed by the Culture Support Fund in 2020, July 28, 2020, No. 1LKT-77(1.2), Vilnius]," accessed September 1, 2020, https://www.ltkt.lt/files/tarpdisciplininio-meno-sritis-kulturos-ir-meno-organizaciju-nauju-produktu-ir-ar-paslaugu-kurimas0700.pdf.

76   Studio_Space/Time, "Viešųjų diskusijų erdvė: pokalbiai apie P.Cvirkos skverą [Space for public discussions: conversations about P. Cvirka's square]," accessed September 1, 2020, https://space-time.studio/Viesuju-diskusiju-erdve-pokalbiai-apie-P-Cvirkos-skvera.

77   Augustas Stankevičius, "Šalies vadovai abejoja dėl diskusijų apie P. Cvirkos paminklą kainos [State leaders question the price of discussions about P. Cvirka's monument]," *15min.lt*, August 19, 2020, accessed November 2, 2020, https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/salies-vadovai-abejoja-del-diskusiju-apie-p-cvirkos-paminkla-kainos-56-1363596.

78   "Petro Cvirkos paminklas [Petras Cvirka monument]," Kultūros paveldo registras [Cultural Heritage List].

79   "Vilniaus miesto atminties kultūros puoselėjimo programa [Program for nurturing the memory culture of Vilnius city]," accessed May 4, 2020, https://atviras.vilnius.lt/viesinimas/vilniaus-atminties-kulturos-programos-pristatymas-visuomenei.'

80   Trilupaitytė, "Medijų kultūra ar 'atminties transformacijos'?", 93–94.

81   Notably, this article has covered several examples of artistic practices and proposals for interventions. There may be other artistic installations or proposals in relation to these two cases that have not been covered here.

NOMADIC MEMORY

ARTIVISM AS THE PRACTICE OF RECOVERING MEMORY

by **Zuzanna Hertzberg**

Memory can be retained and archived. You can, however, also manipulate it, obliterate its fragments and sometimes whole segments, using its stores as a tool in a political fight with minorities. Historical memory is only seemingly a domain of objective knowledge. In reality it constitutes a part of political discourse and social engineering tactics, aimed at erasing facts inconvenient for a one-track narrative. The monolithic character of the historical message is a strategy for domination and symbolic power. The purpose of this strategy is to seize and hold power, as well as to preserve a hierarchical and patriarchal social order based on fascist social practices. This power is set on pushing alternative and minority narratives to the sidelines.

The point of departure for my artivistic practice is always work with archival material. With time, my experiences led me to outline a specific understanding of historical memory as a process in which the most important role is played by the migration of ideas, a peculiar kind of nomadism. The perception of memory as an unchanging set of "objective" historical facts does not appeal to me. This is because such a notion of memory perpetuates the myth of a false, frozen identity, which confines a community in the belief of its uniqueness, leading it astray into the wilderness of regionalism and cutting it off from a universal message.

Nomadic memory, on the other hand, is like a vehicle, a process of crossing boundaries. Its main feature is extraterritoriality. In places distant from one another, geographically and culturally different, memory spreads, uniting various groups, showing

Zuzanna Hertzberg, *Nomadic Memory*, 2017, intervention in the public space, Defilad Square: Step Forward, 9th edition of the festival Warsaw under Construction, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

them common aspirations and emotions. Artivism attempts to transfer ideas from one territory to another, thus being a journey in time and space, over the divisions and pressure of majority narrations. Politically dominated historical interpretations are always about the so-called roots and the coherence of the story. From this vantage point, history is a tool for domination, the imposition of one-track messages, and a kind of social engineering, which strives after antagonizing social groups and glorifying tribal identity. It is crucial to understand that, moving from one place to another, we take our roots with us.

When, following the traces left in the chronicles of my family, I started to explore the maps of the journeys made by the *Dąbrowszczacy*,[1] Polish citizens fighting in Spain under the motto "For your freedom and ours", it could not escape my notice how closely their fate is bound up with the history of contemporary Poland, and how much the fight against blotting out male and female members of the International Brigades from memory unites various territories and cultures. And it struck me how much this is a story about what is happening now in Polish public institutions, offices and on Polish streets.

THE NOMADIC CHARACTER of memory is not only a fact, but also a call to action – an artistic action undertaken to actively recover blurred truths and restore non-normative historical messages in such a way that it creates a foundation for a new social order. To build this foundation is an everyday practice. Artivism is a tool for fighting, a tactic for self-defense against physical oppression and symbolic power. Nomadism is a means which activates

"THE MEMORY OF OUR ROOTS DOES NOT ATTACH US TO THE GROUND ON WHICH WE GREW UP, BUT MAKES US OVERSTEP BOUNDARIES AND SEEK GUIDELINES ON ACTION IN A DIFFERENT CULTURAL CONTEXT."

another memory, an account given from another perspective. A history researcher, an archivist and an artist are, in fact, nomads. The historical truth is like a rhizome – the memory of our roots does not attach us to the ground on which we grew up, but makes us overstep boundaries and seek guidelines on action in a different cultural context. Events in remote lands often open up a crevice of historical memory, in which we suddenly discern blurred or buried facts concerning us as well. That memory, in turn, also stirs ours.

The glorification of Polish "disavowed soldiers", whom I will talk about later in this text, is an attempt to erase this nomadism and push historical narration into regionalism, ahistoricism, falsely understood uniqueness of an alleged national community, and politically inspired manipulation of testimonies and facts. It is an attempt to sever the bonds that link us with the

In memory of Mirjam Gothelf/Maria Melchior and *In memory of Zofia Szleyen* (fragment of artwork), The cycle *Volunteers for Freedom*, 2016–2020, each box 57×49×7 cm (closed).

internationalism of ideas. To reduce everything to the Polish catalogue of myths and ignore the background of all-European phenomena, of which we formed a part.

The geopolitical context in which my works come into existence and function is essential. Due to this context, I define them as the practice of artivism. I presented the documentation of my actions at the symposium in Tallinn. I also refer to them in this essay in which they serve to illustrate my attitude as an artivist, performer and researcher.

In Poland, as in many so-called post-communist countries, if you refer to any historical event, you always actively take a stance on some option – either nationalist, environmental, ideological or cultural.Historiography, as well as the archiving and the distribution of historical sources, has a clear cultural subtext and gender-related connotations. It is important who comes into possession of this deposit and in what political circumstances, and who manages, protects and uses it. A very transparent model of historical narration has been adopted in Poland – dominated by the account of the heroism of heterosexual men and the secondary, auxiliary role of women. Obliteration and symbolic violence are basic tools which the monocultural historical narration has at its disposal in order to remove from social attention inconvenient truths which disrupt the ideological unification of events and processes. Uncertainty about their own cultural value drives many countries and societies to replace history with false national myths and follow the so-called politics of memory, which attacks otherness and the individualism of attitudes. In this model, the state, instead of assuming the role of a patron supporting free research and archival activity, takes the role of an agency which pays a lot of money to historians hired in order to propagate and promote (including abroad) a false image of history in the name of party loyalty. It is the state that holds a monopoly on the truth and knows best how to disseminate it.

My artistic practice aims at challenging this monopoly. As an artivist heavily involved in putting archival truths (read: myths) straight, I look for a germ of a new story in them, a minority story, *herstory*, a new kind of archive based on women's perspective and narrations.

"THE POLISH HISTORICAL NARRATIVE SHOWS HOW THE MYTH ABOUT POST-WAR HEROES IS FOISTED ON THE MAJORITY OF SOCIETY."

IN THE POLISH HISTORICAL and patriotic discourse, the term "disavowed soldiers" or "forgotten soldiers" (because as it is claimed they were forgotten in recent decades) has functioned for twenty years. The term "disavowed" achieved its popularity thanks to the French poet Paul Verlaine, who used it (in a book from 1884) to describe poets defying the bourgeois order of social conventions, and not avoiding alcohol and drugs. Since then, they have been called *Les poètes maudits* [cursed poets].

To be disavowed can, consequently, means to be excluded. It is a paradox that sometimes those excluded enter the school canon, and they do it in many fields. At other times, people are artificially portrayed as disavowed and excluded and, apart from being mentioned in handbooks, they are suddenly recognized as heralds of the political and historical mainstream. The Polish historical narrative shows how the myth about post-war heroes is foisted on the majority of society. It is for them that museums in Poland are built,[2] and squares and streets are named after them, blotting out the memory of real heroes, especially heroines, and real war victims.

Polish "disavowed soldiers" were a more or less consolidated association of military formations which fought with the mandate of the foreign authorities, imposed from the outside. Despite the order for demobilization issued by the Polish government-in-exile (based in London), they did not lay down their arms and did not join the rebuilding of a country after the ravages of World War II. Instead, they stayed in guerrilla groups stationed in forests.

According to the currently binding interpretation, the "disavowed" killed people and groups collaborating with the Soviet

PHOTO: MIKOŁAJ TYM

PHOTO: MIKOŁAJ TYM

In memory of Elżbieta Borensztejn/Bekier (fragment of artwork), *In memory of Wera Luftig* and *In memory of Anna and Adela Korn*, The cycle *Volunteers for Freedom*, 2016–2020, each box 57×49×7 cm (closed).

authorities. In reality, however, they were called "bands" by civilians (such an expression can be found in archival testimonies and accounts given by still living witnesses to those events). They plundered peasant cottages and slew not only representatives of movements and left-wing groups, but also – and primarily – members of national and ethnic minorities (also pregnant women and children), including Shoah survivors, Jewish Poles. Spontaneous folk anti-Semitism, supported by the Catholic tradition of excluding ethnic and cultural otherness, was their ally.

Pushed to the sidelines of historical narration by the communist regime for obvious reasons, the "disavowed soldiers" were revived in the Polish consciousness thanks to right-wing and protofascist movements and groups, as well as the actions of neoliberal governments, which noticed a convenient tool of political and social populism in their "message". The official version was about bringing back memory, but in actual fact the aim was to win the votes of the traditional, conservative electorate. It was a neoliberal government that established a public holiday on March 1– the Day of Remembrance of the Disavowed Soldiers.

To portray disavowed soldiers as heroes, and a new shining example, is not only an element of post-communist processes of constructing a new history, but also popularizing a new model of national identity – white, monoethnic, heteronormative, Catholic, and of course extremely patriarchal. A model with very clear lines of division: we – strangers, men – women.

The paradox of Polish historical awareness of the last 15 years is that the "disavowed" have suddenly become idols of unseemly worship, their apologists – priests, while the historical narrative has changed into a deceitful and false idolatry. The scale of commemoration has overstepped any rational boundaries. This indoctrination went hand in hand with a rapid change of course in describing Polish-Jewish relationships during the Nazi occupation in Poland. The main message is a belief in a genetic, inborn immunization of the Polish nation against any evil.

AS FAR AS LEGISLATION is concerned – apart from the establishment of the holiday in honor of the disavowed – there is the Decommunization Act. Its aim is to prevent the propagation of communism and other totalitarian ideologies by forbidding the naming of objects, places and streets in a way that alludes to these regimes. However, the law has been used to provoke divisions and erase the memory of inconvenient facts and people in Polish history.

Although communism was introduced in Poland after World War II, the invocation of the Decommunization Act has systematically obliterated en bloc any forms of commemorating anarchist, left-wing and anti-fascist movements from handbooks and public space (monuments, names of streets and squares). The process removes the traces of memory of those opposing Nazism and fascism during World War II as well as people found in the pages of an even more remote Polish history. It is a process observable – to different extents – in many former socialist countries. An analogous law has been enacted in Ukraine.

The International Brigades aroused my interest not only because of my personal family history. An event in the multicultural town of Zelów, where I was staging my performances in February 2015, was a direct reason behind starting work on the first action devoted to the *Volunteers for Freedom*. Just before March 1, the town was covered with posters by the National Radical Camp (ONR), which organized the celebrations of the Day of Remembrance of the Disavowed Soldiers using public – so also my own – money.

WHEN I STATED THAT the memory of the International Brigades had been blotted out and its members "disavowed", it turned out that nobody knew this story. Thus I started my endeavors to add the narration about the "forgotten soldiers" to the public discourse, to revive the memory of such people as my grandfather – the Dąbrowszczacy: Polish citizens fighting in the International Brigades in 1936–1939 to defend the democratically elected government of the Spanish Republic.

In my interventions and performances I always tried to combine artivism as everyday feminist, antifascist practice with research on political and social mechanisms of historical erasure. At the symposium "Prisms of Silence", I discussed some artistic

"THE PERFORMANCE SHOWED THAT THE MEMORIAL IS AN IDEOLOGICAL MATTER/OBJECT, SUSCEPTIBLE TO POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND (AB)USES."

interventions that addressed these issues, involving notions of nomadic memory and memory recovering practice as well.

The *Dąbrowszczacy – disavowed among the disavowed* (2016) was an artistic performance given during the official national commemoration ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It brought back the memory of interwar Poland's citizens serving in the International Brigades.

March 1 was the official Day of Remembrance of the Disavowed Soldiers; 2016 also marked the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain.[3]

Dąbrowszczacy were Polish citizens, members of the International Brigades in 1936–1939, defending the democratically elected government of the Spanish Republic.

In the 1990s, the plaques with the inscriptions commemorating the battles fought by Dąbrowszczacy in the Spanish Civil War were removed, supposedly for renovation. The places of the battles that vanished from the list on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were Madrid, November 7, 1936, Guadalajara, March 18, 1937, and Ebro, August 8, 1938. It's a significant lack, showing how one manipulates and divides a historical memory.

MY PERFORMANCE aimed at creating a narrative which would incorporate the Dąbrowszczacy, who are currently erased from history and gradually forgotten. I wanted to present them as the actual Disavowed Soldiers. They fought for the freedom of Europe during its first confrontation with fascism, and then for the independence of Poland on many fronts. I wanted to bring back the memory of those combatants fighting under the banner "For Your Freedom and Ours."

A Polish national hero, Tadeusz Kościuszko,[4] was the first to involve all the citizens of Poland, or rather all Poles, in the fight for freedom and put the slogan "For Your Freedom and Ours" on his banners. It was at his side that Jews, for the first time since biblical times, led by Berek Joselewicz[5], were allowed to fight as soldiers of a national army. This shows how ideas travel in time and how strongly our present is linked to the past.

This performance was meant as a symbolic dialogue between the canonized nationalistic history represented by the Tomb and the reality of actual anti-fascist organization in interwar Poland. It was also queering the tradition of official gestures based on ritualized commemoration.

I prepared a tricolor wreath, the flowers of which were composed into the symbol of the flag of the International Brigades. I also sewed replicas of the flags of the XIII International Brigade from Poland. The first banner, that of the Naftali Botwin Company of the Palafox Battalion,[6] was created on the basis of the original stored in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. The other – that of the Adam Mickiewicz Battalion – was recreated on the basis of the documentation from the times

of the Civil War in Spain. Similarly, a few antifascist flags were made, including one with the slogan "No Pasaran" – originating from World War I, and popularized by Dolores Ibarurri in her famous speech on July 18, 1936.

The choice of those two banners was not accidental: it was in the Naftali Botwin Company, comprising Jewish volunteers who spoke Yiddish, that my grandfather fought. The

Adam Mickiewicz battalion, on the other hand, comprised mostly members of ethnic and national minorities of Poland and bore the name of a famous poet, whose Jewish origins the majority of Polish people are completely ignorant of.

Together with friends invited to take part in the event, we marched from the monument of Marshal Józef Pilsudski – another "father" of Polish independence – to the Tomb of the Unknown Solider. We walked in two rows with me at the front carrying the wreath, and the other members carrying the banners and flags. We paid tribute to the Dąbrowszczacy, laying the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Solider, just as any other official delegation would. I announced: To the Volunteers for Freedom, members of the XIII International Brigade, Dąbrowszczacy. Next, an actress read a poem dedicated to these soldiers (the poem *Glory and Dynamite* by Władysław Broniewski).

The performance showed that the memorial is an ideological matter/object, susceptible to political transformations and (ab) uses. Through this performance, I was able to seize the public space and demonstrate that the Tomb of the Unknown Solider should be a memorial of collective history of the Polish citizens who fought for freedom and independence on different fronts, and remain independent despite the whims of current governments.

This artivist act was the first commemoration of the International Brigade in Poland after the fall of the Berlin Wall. As a result of that performance certain changes have been initiated. It started a broader campaign to restore the memory of the International Brigade in Poland, thus giving evidence that artivism may have real impact.

MY OTHER ARTWORK, a series of eight art objects (2016–2020) entitled *Volunteers for Freedom*, was a direct response to the co-option of the International Brigade's story into a masculinist narrative about heroism. The project aimed to challenge the erasure of women from stories of heroic anti-fascist opposition and show the diversity of antifascist activism that went beyond armed interventions. After the Dąbrowszczacy regained their own historical identity (they were the first reinstated "disavowed" in my account), I also recovered "disavowed" female combatants, expunged by a one-track narration. They became for me a distant echo of "damned of the Earth" from "The Internationale".

Zuzanna Hertzberg, *Nomadic Memory*, 2017, intervention in the public space, Defilad Square: Step Forward, 9th edition of the festival Warsaw under Construction, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

This work is about women who fought in defense of Republican Spain in the international anti-fascist uprising. When they were deprived of the opportunity to take part in direct combat, with weapons in their hands, they worked in hospitals, kitchens, and transport, editing texts and conducting educational activities.

The project takes the form of 3D collages series, presented in boxes, and is accompanied by a spoken word performance depicting their personal stories. Each box is dedicated to one particular woman. It consists of an abstract portrait of a participant in the Spanish Civil War (the heroines are: Mirjam Gothelf/Maria Melchior, sisters Anna and Adela Korn, Elżbieta Boresztejn/Bekier, Zofia Szleyen, Wera Luftig , Dora Goldszajder/Klein/Lorska, Miriam and Braina Rudina) and a collage created of elements from her biography which was reconstructed on the basis of archival documents and interviews conducted with their families and friends. I analyze archival resources in terms of women's strategies of changing reality, the functions that women chose and the environments they co-created.

The art pieces created by me are presented in the form of boxes. The format of a box – which can be closed, and we can choose if we want to look inside – was chosen as it resembles a space where certain family stories are kept and where traces of presence, such as old photos and documents, are stored. Boxes are also objects used by many women to keep and lock up their secrets and memories. When I met with the family members of military groups fighting "For Your Freedom and Ours", it was from various cases and boxes that they pulled out things that had belonged to their relatives; they examined boxes that they had never, or hardly ever, looked into.

THIS VISUAL TALE aims not only to bring out the participation of women in the International Brigades, but also to give them their rightful place in history, which, as women, they had been denied.

The origin and fate of the heroines I have chosen are very diverse, so that they can become a universal story of female fighters who decided to go to Spain to fight the military coup of General Franco. They went there overcoming many difficulties – it was not easy then. They crossed the borders illegally, dressed up as men, sometimes even walking for months. I tell about their later anti-fascist activities led by those imprisoned in concentration camps, and about their fight in anti-fascist guerilla groups in many places in Europe during World War II. All these activities

PHOTO: MIKOŁAJ TYM

Zuzanna Hertzberg, view from the exhibition "A Microcosm of Things: The Public and Private Lives of Collections", 2017–2018, Museum of Warsaw.

were subordinated to their dream of creating a better, equitable world for themselves and for others.

Their biographies are analyzed in terms of social conditions during the twenty years of the interwar period, the social solidarity in the name of which they acted and the type of struggle they undertook. In addition to individual stories of the participation of Jewish women in major events and social changes, I tried to restore stories of emancipation that concern many aspects of the lives of these heroines – as women and as the members of ethnic minorities and often class-disadvantaged strata of society.

ALL THESE ACTIONS and researches made me realize how memory migrates, pushing boundaries and crossing borders: And how closely this memory is connected with a notion of liberty. Gradually, I became aware of the fact that I also am the part of this "travelling" international mechanism of recovering memory.

This experience led me to my next artistic project called *Nomadic memory* (2017).

(Visibility and equality go hand in hand
– Hannah Arendt).

My intervention was meant as a gesture of overwriting, re-reading and introducing a new narrative.

In this piece my goal was to change relations, redistribute the political space. The project shows how memory works as a nomadic force, bringing back the historical facts which had been blotted out, and how much this "time-travelling" memory depends on our personal engagement.

Warsaw was greatly damaged during the war, thus the way it looks now is very different from how it looked in the 1920s and 30s. When, after World War II, there were no more traces of the old city tissue, an attempt was made to fill this lack by putting up a stone with a commemorative plaque. It was a reminder of the existence of the building, and about the fact that within its walls the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) was proclaimed in 1918. Now it is the corner of Defilad Square (the main square in the center of Warsaw).

"MONUMENTS ARE STRATEGIES; THEY ARE PART OF THE SOCIAL DISCOURSE."

In Warsaw's municipal register, we can still read about the stone that is placed at the corner of the streets that no longer exist. The plaque, which was probably put up there at the end of the 1940s, disappeared silently, one day, after the 1989 transformation.

The plaque was gone, yet for years the place where it was mounted was still visible. It became a monument to the lack of memory, a memorial of erasure. This lack was a sign. This stone became a scar of memory. On the scar left by the original plaque on this stone, I affixed a bandage of memory dedicated to the International Brigades.

Monuments are strategies; they are part of the social discourse. By this action I wanted to mobilize memory through the introduction of a new narrative and to transform the way in which this fragment of public space impacted its environment. It was also an attempt to stop the spread of this new false historical narrative, the policy of no memory which erases the memory of anti-fascist movements, excluding them from Polish history and public memory.

AS A PART OF the "de-communization" process, it is not only the Dąbrowszczacy who are being wiped out from social awareness, but also people like Lewartowski,[7] who was the leader of the Anti-Fascist Block in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he was killed.

A memorial, an object that is a physical manifestation of memory, serves as a reminder. Instilling a plaque in homage to the Dąbrowszczacy is also a warning: fascist and xenophobic attitudes are reviving today.

No pasaran! was a motto expressing rejection of fascism in Europe. The members of International Brigades were ready to die for social equality for everyone. It is also a contemporary message: Let's remember the political idealism represented by those

who went to Spain to fight against General Franco's military coup.

They went to fight "For Your Freedom and Ours". This means not only the fight for freedom as independence, but also as emancipation, social equality, the rights of women, minorities, and workers. "For Your Freedom and Ours" means defending other people and their own right to be different. Everybody is different from the point of view of somebody else. This is a beautiful example of social solidarity, that we miss so much today.

In Spain in 1936–1939, volunteers fought to defend a democratically elected government. It was a fight against a dictatorship which ruled until 1975.

Warsaw is inscribed in the history of the World War II with the most tragic uprisings: with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, then the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. It is impossible to delete antifascism from the history of Warsaw.

Having more than one historical narrative, and implementing different, diverging types of memory in the public space and discourse, always works towards anti-totalitarianism and the extension of the realm of freedom.

THE LAST ARTISTIC ACTION I talked about during Tallinn Symposium was my project realized as a part of the exhibition *A Microcosm Of Things: The Public and Private Lives of Collections* (2017/2018 Museum of Warsaw, curator Tomasz Fudala). I queered the museum space by prioritizing objects disregarded in conventional museum practice, and reinterpreted them via abstract art to discuss the travelling ideology represented under the slogan "For Your Freedom and Ours".

This project was a creative interpretation of objects found throughout 2015 in the area of the Warsaw Ghetto during the search of the Bund's Archive. I selected objects from the Museum of Warsaw's Archeology Department. In this project I used them as a starting point for a new body of works which derived its inspiration from the objects' appearance, condition, textures, and colors as well as the places in which they were found. In the exhibition space the archeological remains are juxtaposed with my own work as an attempt to tell their story from a contemporary perspective.

I tried to show the hidden history of objects, as well as the history of the persons they belonged to. Sewing machines, for example, some of whose owners I managed to identify, were a symbol of survival in the Warsaw Ghetto. Everybody desperately longed to get one as the Germans needed people who could sew and who had their own equipment. A sewing machine meant life.

I also created a glass case entitled *Migration of Ideas* where I placed materials from my own archives and the museum's collections, illustrating the functioning of the "For Your Freedom and Ours" slogan. This slogan had originated with the Thaddeus Kosciuszko's uprising of 1794 and continued throughout the works of Adam Mickiewicz. It was also used as a motto by the International Brigades fighting in the Spanish Civil War and the title of the Bund's newspaper, created, printed and issued in the Warsaw Ghetto and distributed to the other ghettos throughout the country. During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising 1943 three flags were visible among the flames: Polish, Zionist and this particular one with a slogan "For Your Freedom and Ours" – three emblems of the same battle. The last – chronologically – object in this glass-case was the sticker art with the inscription "For Your Freedom and Ours", an invitation to antifascist demonstration organized each year by my milieu on Independence Day (November 11th).

In the artwork *Migration of Ideas* I have shown how the idea "For Your Freedom and Ours" migrated and travelled in time. The guiding principle of the whole project was my attempt to show how strongly and paradoxically the objects, places, people and ideas are interlinked – and to demonstrate how abstract art can become the vehicle for conveying human emotions and experiences in difficult times. ☒

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1 Volunteer military unit (XIII International Brigade) founded in 1936 in Spain to fight against the military coup of General Franco (named after Jarosław Dąbrowski [1836–1871], a Polish officer in the Imperial Russian Army, involved in the preparation of the Polish anti-Russian January Uprising 1863, then a general and military commander of the Paris Commune in its final days).

2 See the website for the Muzeum Żołnierzy Wyklętych i Więźniów Politycznych PRL muzeumzolnierzywykletych.pl and also pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muzeum_Żołnierzy_Wyklętych_i_Więźniów_Politycznych_PRL.

3 One of the last living Brigades' fighters, Josep Almudever, whom I met during commemoration of the 80th anniversary of International Brigades (autumn 2016, Spain), has insisted on not using term Spanish Civil War. For him it was just a militant resistance against military coup of General Franco.

4 Andrzej Tadeusz Bonawentura Kościuszko (1746–1817) was a Polish military engineer, statesman, and military leader who became a national hero in Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and the United States. He fought in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's struggles against Russia and Prussia, and on the US side in the American Revolutionary War. As supreme commander of the Polish National Armed Forces, he led the 1794 Kościuszko Uprising. He fiercely opposed slavery of African Americans in the United States. In his will, Kościuszko left his American estate to be sold to buy the freedom of black slaves, including Thomas Jefferson's own, and to educate them for independent life and work.

5 Berek Joselewicz (1764–1809), a Polish merchant of Jewish origin and a colonel of the Polish Army during the Kościuszko Uprising, commanded the first Jewish military formation in modern history.

6 Naftali Botwin (1905–1925) was a Polish communist and labor activist who was executed for the murder of a police informer. In the Spanish Civil War, the Naftali Botwin Company was named after him. The Palafox Battalion was a volunteer unit composed of largely Polish and Spanish soldiers fighting in the ranks of the International Brigades.

7 Józef Lewartowski, birth name Aron Finkelstein (1895–1942), was a Polish communist politician of Jewish origin, revolutionary, member of the KPP (Communist Party of Poland) and PPR (Polish Worker's Party), one of the first organizers of the Jewish resistance in Nazi occupied Poland, cofounder of the Anti-Fascist Bloc in the Warsaw Ghetto.

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE HOLODOMOR

FROM COMMEMORATION PRACTICES TO CONTEMPORARY ART

by **Lia Dostlieva**
& **Andrii Dostliev**

Fig 1. Alexander Wienerberger.
Hungry girl from Kharkiv, 1933.

PHOTO: DIOCESAN ARCHIVE OF VIENNA (DIÖZESANARCHIV WIEN)/BA INNITZER. PUBLIC DOMAIN

"Why did you take a photo of a pauper in 1933?" – I'm looking through one of the numerous cases from the Soviet Great Purge of 1937[1] and suddenly this interrogator's question catches my eye. I cannot yet understand why he is suddenly asking about a photo taken four years previously but I do have my reasons for wanting to know the answer. The idea of the visual representation of what happened in Soviet Ukraine in 1932 and 1933 has been one of the focal points in my research for the past couple of years.

"I took a photo of this pauper to have a piece of documentary evidence of how hard life was in 1933." Life was hard indeed, to put it mildly. In 1932–1933 Soviet Ukraine had suffered from a man-made famine (later it was given the name *Holodomor* – derived from "to kill by starvation" in Ukrainian). The estimates of its death toll, the more reasonable of them varying between 3.3 and 4 million people, are still the subject of fierce discussion. The countryside took the biggest blow as food supplies were taken from rural areas by force and more or less successfully rationed in urban areas. By 1933 many villagers were trying to reach bigger cities in a desperate attempt to survive[2] – one of them was the "pauper" in the photo mentioned by the interrogator.

This act of documenting the atrocities of 1933 was not the main reason for the prosecution of the unfortunate photographer, though the Soviet government definitely did not approve of this (even the use of the word "hunger" to describe those events was shunned until the very end of the USSR). Accusations, real and invented by the investigators, piled up and eventually led to a death sentence. The photo in question was not among the case files and it's very unlikely that it survived at all. We cannot see now what exactly was on that photo, but we can extrapolate based on a few other pieces of photographic evidence of the Holodomor that exist – despite all the measures taken to cover everything up.

PROBABLY THE MOST famous existing photographic archive of the Holodomor is that of Alexander Wienerberger, an Austrian chemical engineer who spent many years working in the USSR. In 1933, he was working at a factory in Kharkiv (the same city where the "pauper's" photo was taken) where he secretly took about 100 photographs of starving people in the streets.[3] Later the negatives were also secretly transported to Austria where they were published.[4]

This particular image of a starving girl in rags circulated widely and is often considered the iconic photographic representation of the Holodomor. Some of Wienerberger's other photos show corpses of people who died of hunger lying in the streets in plain sight, often with passers-by who don't seem to be paying much attention to the dead bodies.

There were also a few Ukrainians who managed both to photograph the Holodomor and to preserve their pictures through the years. Hunger in the Donetsk region was documented on film by an amateur photographer, Marko Zhelizniak.[5] His photographs show groups of state "activists" posing with grain confiscated from peasants, and children in the fields digging out frozen potatoes bare-handed.

In addition, several years ago photographs by another amateur photographer, Mykola Bokan,[6] were discovered by chance among the archived cases of repressed people. Bokan had witnessed the Holodomor in the Chernihiv region. His photo documentation tells a very intimate tale, a sort of a visual diary from the life of a single family, members of which suffer and eventually die of hunger. The author has written inscriptions directly on the images, giving some additional context to the pictures. We see a family with children at the table: "300 days (three hundred!) without a slice of bread to add to the meager dinner, 2/VI 1933". In another picture we see the rear view of one of his sons sitting in a field: "The place where Kostia died. His brother sits to the left; two hours before his death they were both chatting here". This striking gap between seemingly peaceful images and the author's notes, full of pain and grief, creates a very powerful emotional statement, expressing anger and despair. While Wienerberger's depiction of the Holodomor gives the perspective of a bystander who pities the people suffering from hunger but sees them as personifications of the catastrophe unfolding around them rather than as personalities, Mykola Bokan photographs his own family, people from his closest and most intimate circle.

MYKOLA BOKAN WAS accused of counterrevolutionary activities and sentenced to imprisonment in labor camps where he eventually died. His son Borys who helped him print the photos shared the same fate.

In October 1932, when hunger was already ravaging neighboring villages, an opening ceremony was held for the gigantic Soviet industrial project – the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station – and a number of foreign journalists and photographers were invited. The project's opening was intended to show to the whole world the immense technical progress of the Soviet state. An American photographer, James E. Abbe, published a picture of the newly finished dam in his illustrated guide *I Photograph Russia* (1934). But there is more to this picture – the dam itself is shown far away in the background, to reveal the long queue for bread on the shore. This counterposition encourages the reader to consider the price of the Soviet accomplishments and achievements. Towards the end of his book, Abbe also lists the "photographs he didn't take" – moments important to the author that for some reason he couldn't film. Among others in this list there is a description of a death due to hunger: "The main street of this small Ukrainian village, some 8 kilometers from the lavish Dnieper dam. A hunched figure on the sidewalk rests – eternally. Was just too hungry."[7]

As the Soviet Union's politics of memory was suppression

> **"SOME OF WIENERBERGER'S OTHER PHOTOS SHOW CORPSES OF PEOPLE WHO DIED OF HUNGER LYING IN THE STREETS IN PLAIN SIGHT."**

Fig. 2 (left). Mykola Bokan. 300 days (three hundred!) without a slice of bread to add to the meager dinner, 2/VI 1933.

Fig. 3. Mykola Bokan. The place where Kostia died. His brother sits to the left; two hours before his death they were both chatting here.

and denial of the Holodomor, the first monuments dedicated to the famine appeared abroad. The world's first monument to the victims was unveiled in Edmonton, Canada at the initiative of the Ukrainian diaspora on the 50th anniversary of the famine in October 1983.[8] Later, such monuments were erected in Winnipeg, London, Los Angeles, and many other places.

In Ukraine, commemoration of the Holodomor began in the late 1980s after the process of identifying the burial places had started. The first monuments were inaugurated in the Kharkiv region in 1989.[9] One year later, a number of monuments and memorial signs in the Poltava region followed. Since then, numerous monuments have been built across the territory affected by the famine. In most cases, the initiative and the funding of these monuments and memorial signs came from local activists and communities.

The visual language of commemoration of the Holodomor widely uses Christian symbols such as crosses and bells which, apart from commemorating the victims, also refer to the Soviet ban on religion and the use of religious symbols. For example, one of the monuments to the victims of the Holodomor placed over a common grave in a village in the Dnipropetrovsk region was topped with a restored cross that was removed from a church demolished in Soviet times.[10] Similar cross-shaped monuments later were erected in Kharkiv, Kherson, Kyiv, and many other places all over Ukraine. Another widespread commemorative symbol is a bell – for example, in the Poltava region there is a monument in the shape of 30 bells under another huge, dome-like bell topped with a cross, in the Kirovograd region there is a memorial sign in the shape of a cross and a bell, and so on.

Other images widely used for commemorating the Holodomor are those of a hungry, exhausted child and of a mother either holding a dead child or lowering her hands in despair. This image of a *Berehynia* (protector) mother is used to symbolize Ukraine's tragic state, and is often a reference to the image of the Mother of God, her child in such cases being a symbol of baby Jesus.

ONE MORE GROUP of symbols in the Holodomor commemoration has a strong connection with bread and its production: ears of grain, quern-stones, etc.

These groups of symbols are also often mixed together. For example, in the Chernihiv region there is a monument to the victims in the shape of a cross of barbed wire with a sculpture of an exhausted mother holding a dead child. In Zaporizhia, a monument to the victims of the Holodomor was erected in 2007 in a shape of 6 m tall marble cross with the inscription: "To the victims of hunger and Stalinism". Somewhat later this sculptural composition was updated with a figure of a mother – a symbol of mother-Ukraine mourning her children.[11] In 1993, a memorial sign was installed in Kyiv next to St. Michael's Monastery, consisting of a granite slab with a cross-shaped opening and a stylized Mother of God sculpture with an opening in the shape of a child with outspread arms.

In general, visual codes of the Holodomor commemoration are deeply rooted in Christian symbolism. Thus, commemora-

> **"IN UKRAINE, COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLODOMOR BEGAN IN THE LATE 1980S AFTER THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING THE BURIAL PLACES HAD STARTED."**

Fig.4. Memorial for the Holodomor victims in Kyiv, Ukraine.

tion is equalized with religion and the return of the memory of the hunger's victims into public space is performed through the visualization of that specific part of their identity that relates to Eastern Orthodoxy (inadvertently excluding those victims with different religious beliefs).

Artists referring to the Holodomor issues also often used symbols originating in Christian iconography in their works. For example, Viktor Tsymbal's painting *Year 1933* depicts a starving mother with a child flying in the endless skies. The painting's composition draws on Renaissance paintings of the Ascension of Jesus or the Dormition of the Virgin by Italian masters. Aside from Christian motifs, Lida Bodnar-Balahutrak also uses photographs published in Robert Conquest's book *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. In her painting *The other crucifix* (1993) the artist copies the cross of the Italian master from Arezzo but replaces Jesus with photocopies of the photographs of actual hunger victims.[12]

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WHEN WE WERE beginning to think about what we as artists and also the third generation of survivors can tell about the Holodomor we fully realized that visual representation of mass starvation in the arts is not easy. Depiction of violent events and historical traumas is already hard enough because it demands from the artist not only talent but also a deep understanding of historical context and an ethical approach to the sensitive topic. Famine is an invisible enemy. How to show the total lack of something? How to visualize very slow death, extended in time?

What do you think of when someone says, "I am hungry"? Can you imagine the feeling of being hungry? Most likely, you can: your stomach growls and feels empty. Even if you are not sure how to describe this verbally, you know how a body reacts to hunger. Hunger, like physical pain, is a very basic feeling which can cross language or cultural barriers. We know how it feels and we can understand when someone else feels that way. The right to food is a human right and we can easily empathize with those who suffer from malnutrition and food insecurity. As Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman put it in *The Empire of Trauma,* because of the universal qualities of trauma, we as observers and witnesses are secure in our ability to know it when we see it and to feel empathy with those who suffer it in "a sort of communion in trauma".[13]

Unlike other contemporary artists who had worked with the Holodomor issues and referred to the direct experiences and feelings of those who had personally experienced the Holodomor (e.g., Roman Pyatkovka's photographic series *Phantoms of the 30's*[14] or Lesia Maruschak's project "Maria"[15]) we wanted to analyze the experiences of our contemporaries – the third generation of survivors that had no personal experience of hunger and grew up in more or less favorable conditions.

IN OUR PROJECT "I still feel sorry when I throw away food – Grandma used to tell me stories about the Holodomor" we turn to postmemory about trauma. According to Marianne Hirsch, "postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right, so the connection to the past that she defines as postmemory is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.[16] Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection, and creation – often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible.[17]

We mention the stories heard from grandmother in the project's title because these stories were one of the most important channels of experience transmission and transfer of memory about trauma and had an immense personal impact. However, we intentionally never tell those stories directly. Such stories bear particular significance, but it is also important to hear them from those people whose experience they belong to. In Ukraine there are several institutions working on collecting and recording testimonies of Holodomor witnesses, e.g. the Holodomor Museum in Kyiv and the Territory of Terror museum in Lviv. While the former focuses specifically on Holodomor related testimonies, the latter in their umbrella project #unheard (#непочуті) aims to preserve the testimonies of witnesses of both Nazi and Soviet violence in Lviv and the whole of Ukraine in the

Fig. 5. February 17th, 2018 – one big flaccid carrot.

Fig. 6. March 3rd, 2018 – dinner: brown rice with sausage.

Fig. 7. March 12th, 2018 – breakfast: lost appetite and didn't finish my omelet.

Fig.8. March 23rd, 2018 – old, dry rocket leaves.

Fig. 9. April 19th, 2018 – raw salmon fillet – didn't like the smell of it.

Fig. 10. April 21st, 2018 – stale bread.

"THE CONSEQUENCES OF HOLODOMOR MANIFEST THEMSELVES IN VIEWS, BELIEFS, BEHAVIOR, AND COGNITIVE DIRECTIVES OF THE SECOND AND THIRD GENERATION REPRESENTATIVES."

1930s–1950s.[18] The stories they have in their recorded collections might differ in details from the stories of our family members but the impression they produce is exactly the same.

The influence of the collective traumatic experience on behavioral strategies of subsequent generations was analyzed among others in the research project "Holodomor 33: to break the silence" by Vitalii Klymchuk and Victoriya Gorbunova.[19] The researchers have demonstrated how the consequences of Holodomor manifest themselves in views, beliefs, behavior, and cognitive directives of the second and third generation representatives. As they have shown, among these traumatic manifestations are popular statements "If the child is skinny it must be sick", "You need to store food supplies, you should always have a stock of food at home", "Do not throw away bread and other food", etc.

Or, as Cathy Caruth noted during the discussion on the effects of national traumas on the lives of contemporaries at the Holodomor Victims Memorial, the habit of elderly relatives to begin a telephone conversation with their children with the words: "Have you eaten?" is the first manifestation of trauma in the public consciousness since the Holodomor. This reaction is not always conscious, especially if it occurs in people who do not have a direct relationship to Holodomor.[20]

THE TABOOS RELATED to the throwing food away and the resulting behavioral changes that affect our generation to this day became the starting point for our project. It's obviously almost impossible to avoid throwing food away in our lives and we started to record it in a sort of a visual diary. We aimed to give material form to (and thus to highlight the presence of) our subconscious frustrations and psychological discomfort caused by the necessity to throw away even a small portion of potentially good food – meal remains on the plate, failed culinary experiments, or some slightly expired products. Each time, before taking this food to the waste bin we would cover it in black Indian ink and make a print of it on a sheet of gray paper, also noting the date and sometimes also the reason why we were throwing it away.

Fig. 5–10 Andrii Dostliev, Lia Dostlieva, from the project "I still feel sorry when I throw away food. Grandma used to tell me stories about Holodomor", 2018.

When we had accumulated almost 50 prints, we started to collage them with tiny fragments of landscapes cut out of old photographs bought at flea markets. These landscape fragments, devoid of people and man-made objects and too small for the landscape to be recognizable or even vaguely attributable, were there to symbolize the impossibility of representing landscape in the memory about the Holodomor. Because mass deaths by hunger leave no traces in the landscape – unlike many other massive collective traumas which have their exact geographic locations and the traces of which can still exist in the landscape in the form of 'places of memory'.

When we started to work on "I still feel sorry when I throw away food – Grandma used to tell me stories about the Holodomor" project, the key question for us as artists was finding a suitable contemporary language of visual representation which would be appropriate for working on such sensitive and important topic as the Holodomor mass trauma. In our project, we tried to work on a different visual language that could be used to speak about the Holodomor without employing traditional commemorative means and without using the most widespread images mentioned earlier. We believe that these symbols of commemoration are too emotionally saturated to use them when speaking about the experiences of the subsequent generations like ours. Therefore we went on a quest for other visual media suitable for expressing our personal experiences.

WE FINISHED WORKING on the project in 2018 and since that time had the opportunity to exhibit it in several places in Ukraine and Western Europe. Judging from the feedback we've received from the exhibition visitors we can tell now that the form of the visual representation that we had chosen really allows viewers to relate to our narrative. The visual language of our project speaks directly to their personal experiences as the subsequent generations of survivors. And in the case of those who do not have a direct familial relation to the Holodomor trauma, the visual language that we used – among other things, through its resonance with the ideas of responsible consumption – allows them to easily discover an entry point to the story that we tell. Altogether, the possibility to perceive the project's narrative without any pressure creates a shared space of understanding that allows empathy and can serve as a starting point for discussions. ❌

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Displaced time

10 PHOTOGRAPHS FROM RESTRICTED COLLECTIONS AS A MODEL FOR *remembrance*

by **Annika Toots**

abstract

This article focuses on the site-specific exhibition *"Displaced Time: 10 Photographs from Restricted Collections"* as a model of remembrance and an act against oblivion. The article analyses *"Displaced Time"* as part of ongoing memory work that aims to explain and understand the mechanisms of the Soviet period and its influence on contemporary society. In order to analyze the power relations between photographs and archives, this article also explores the power relations between the photographer and the subject – the photographic gaze – as well as the power relations between the photograph and the reader – the agency of images.

KEYWORDS: Memory work, totalitarian regimes, oblivion, photography, archives.

The exhibition "Displaced Time: 10 Photographs from Restricted Collections" by Aap Tepper at the Film Archives of the National Archives of Estonia was opened in May 2018 and re-opened in September 2019 during the Tallinn Photomonth Contemporary Art Biennial by curator Annika Toots. The exhibition is based on archival materials from restricted collections and analyses the processes of restricting and unrestricting materials during the Soviet occupation. "Displaced Time" brings out the uses and abuses of archives, as well as the power of archives to construct collective memory and identity. By using a specific visual language, this exhibition becomes a model of remembrance that engages with younger generations of Estonians and speaks across borders to an international audience who can relate to the issues of a traumatic totalitarian past.

Archives: the dark potential

We all suffer from *mal d'archive*, or the compulsion to collect and store, as pointed out by Ernst van Alphen.[1] Archives have a long history, which started with the need to keep track of produce and land and has become more and more digital in the present age. However, no archive is innocent.[2] Archives, in their several different forms, are not passive – they are active; through them, our past, our present and, in some ways, our future are constantly being reconstructed and re-negotiated. Archives are places of memory – *les lieux de mémoire*[3] – places where memory is constructed and contested, based on the preferences and views of present-day society. Since their very birth, archives have always

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Installation view of the exhibition "Displaced Time: 10 Photographs from Restricted Collections" by Aap Tepper.

Installation view by Aap Tepper.

been political tools for hegemonic powers. Every object obtains a new meaning and potency when placed between other objects into the collection of an archive.

In 2018, the young Estonian visual artist Aap Tepper started working on a project he had conceived while working at the Film Archives of the National Archives of Estonia. I had the chance to collaborate with him on this project as a curator. The main aim was to show how sublime landscape images can reveal repressive mechanisms of a totalitarian regime and to expose not only the way we see but how we look at the environment around us. The project focused on the restricted archive collections that had been kept secret during the Soviet regime and centered on 10 black and white landscape images that were in these collections. Aap Tepper's position as a young artist and an archive worker was crucial for this project for several reasons. First, in the midst of the archival data he had the gaze of a visual artist. Second, he had the time and opportunity to really delve into the materials in the archives – the time to conduct research, even when he didn't know what he was searching for. And third, he was born in 1991, which means that all the experience of the Soviet past was something mediated for him.

This project, which later became the site-specific exhibition "Displaced Time: 10 Photographs from Restricted Collections",[4] revolved around a selection of landscape views that had been captured during the Estonian War of Independence and in the interwar Republic of Estonia. As an archive worker, Aap Tepper had gone through enormous amounts of visual material, most of it digitized, and was attracted by a number of photographs that depicted landscapes and scenery, and which resembled amateur nature photography. However, surprisingly, these photographs had belonged to the Restricted Collections of the State Archives because of their ideologically unsuitable content from the perspective of the Soviet regime. For the exhibition project, these images were enlarged, printed on light boxes and placed in a former cell block of the Film Archives building in Tallinn (formerly a prison), along with the original albums in which they had been found, as well as vitrines with files from the archives that introduced the processes of restricting and unrestricting materials during the Soviet era. In this article I aim to analyze the ways in which it is possible to create narratives of the past through fragments and photographs, by exploring these 10 images that were chosen for this exhibition project in their various contexts.

THESE SEEMINGLY VERY innocent, scenic, even sublime, black and white photographs referred to the dark potential[5] of the archives – to the possibility of using archives to restrict or erase certain periods of time from the collective memory. Jacques Derrida has pointed out that violence is something inherent to archives, because when a selection is made of things that are stored in an archive, other possibilities, or other stories, are repressed.[6] In 1940, when Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union, archives became the tools for rewriting history, conducting power and erasing certain events, periods or even people.[7] The restricted collections, which contained hidden materials, were under the strictest surveillance, and special permission was needed to

enter them. These collections, which contained many kinds of documents and materials, including poetry and books from different time periods, were part of a totalitarian society and only started being opened up during the late 1980s.

The "Displaced Time" exhibition at the Film Archives sought to address this dark potential of the archive by creating a series of juxtapositions or contrasts, which together created space for a new temporality. It was a site-specific project in which the building itself played an important role. The building in Tallinn, at Ristiku 84, served as a detention facility during the Soviet period, in which soldiers who had been sentenced to short-term disciplinary punishment were held in small cells. In this space, and while weaving it into the narrative, the exhibition constructed a visual narrative comprising images, objects and documents that could be called a postmemory[8] – an attempt to reconstruct and understand something from the past with which subsequent generations have had no direct contact. Marianne Hirsch, who coined the term in 1992, has argued that postmemory is "a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation".[9] "Displaced Time" was based on historical documents, but it also allowed space for the imaginative, intertwined from the perspective of the present condition – different layers of the past and present collided, opening up opportunities for communicating and understanding the past, and making it more transparent.

SUPPRESSION AND RESTRICTION through archives is not something that is only inherent to the Soviet regime; it is quite a common practice in many countries throughout the world that have a totalitarian past. As archives in themselves are already violent, the naming and categorization of events, people, places and even landscapes are a mechanism of control. Paradoxically, archives are also the foundation of any nation and nation state; they are the materialized history, the very basis of identity. And as exemplified in this project, archives can be used in a way that is the most beneficial to hegemonic powers, but they can also be used against the state. Achille Mbembe has elaborated on this paradoxical function of archives, noting that although states need archives, the archives also present a continuous threat to the state's existence.[10]

Addressing the dark potential of these memory institutions that shape our collective memory has been a recurring practice among artists. Visual arts and literature have the capacity to reveal and communicate the past. By rejecting the narratives constructed by hegemonic powers, thereby contesting history, artists are brushing history against the grain, as Walter Benjamin suggested.[11] Dealing with the issues of the past has been a characteristic of social and conceptual art since the mid-20th century. The 20th century was full of violent and atrocious events that left scars on the societies of many countries around the world; these

scars have been passed on to subsequent generations.[12] This century has triggered the need to investigate even further down the timeline of history, revealing past violence and atrocities that have perhaps not been that well documented but have caused collective traumas and have shaped the world as we know it.[13]

For an artist such as Aap Tepper, going against the grain means digging deeper into the archives, looking into the grey areas beyond the conventional categories of "good" and "bad", and revealing the ways in which memory, history and identity are always in process and depend on the material documents – the archives which, however, are also very unstable, and can be used for their dark potential by the people who own them or have access to them. The importance of doing this, i.e. working with archives, digging up the past, rethinking the past – at this very moment, when almost 30 years have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union – will be discussed in the final chapter of this essay.

The photographic gaze

In order to analyze the power dynamics associated with photography, and their relation to archives and hegemonic powers in more detail, the starting point should be the photographer's gaze.[14] Photography is a way of seeing the world; a photograph is a collaboration between the photographer's subjective preferences and the camera's mechanical ways of capturing the visible (as well as the invisible). Although we have reached the age of non-human photography,[15] a conventional understanding of photography still involves the photographer's gaze through the viewfinder. In effect, this means that taking a photograph is in itself already an act of (taking) control, which enters the photograph as a representation of the world into a complex web of power relations that involve the photographer, the context, the reader, the unseen, the off-frame, etc.

The "Displaced Time" project is largely based on contrasts and, besides the obvious past-present dichotomy, these already begin within the landscape and scenery images that captured Aap Tepper's attention. To explain this, attention must first be drawn to the gaze of the photographer: these black and white images were created using analogue cameras, which at the time were heavy and required a lot of specific professional knowledge. Knowing this makes these 10 photographs even more alienated from their original context, since the photographer's task was most probably to take group photographs of certain events. However, the photographer's aesthetic preferences led him[16] to include these scenic captures on the pages of photo albums that depicted certain (historical) events.

These views may seem arbitrary, but as Liz Wells, a writer and lecturer on photographic practices, has written, "the content of images may seem natural, but representational and interpretive processes are cultural in that they are anchored in aesthetic conventions", adding that "visuality, that is, systems of seeing, operates through codes and conventionalised meanings".[17] No image is innocent, no photograph is innocent, and also, as will

> "VISUAL ARTS AND LITERATURE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO REVEAL AND COMMUNICATE THE PAST."

be discussed later, no landscape is innocent (since it is in itself a cultural construction).

Photographers turn space into place by exercising aesthetics, codes and conventions. Thus, photography has often been associated with hunting and shooting – the photographer with the camera being similar to a huntsman with a rifle, and a successfully taken photograph can often be called a "great shot". This might apply to genres of photography such as street photography, which require luck, patience and the photographer's aim in order to capture the decisive moment. When talking about landscape or topography photography,[18] the emphasis is instead on *longue durée* (longer projects that capture changes in space), metaphysics (spaces without humans) rhythms, patterns, and the sublime. However, the process of photographing a landscape can be associated with hunting because of its power relations. It is the photographer behind the camera who has the control and power over the construction of the scene, or the shot, which depends on the photographer's framing and timing.

Thus, what photography and landscape have in common is that they are both a form of subordinating and controlling something that is uncontrollable: time and nature. A photograph is an attempt to freeze a fleeting moment, to capture a slice of the passing of time, to gain immortality, and landscape is a form of controlling and appropriating nature – to subordinate the environment and space. Just like humans have been driven by the impulse to archive, they have also been driven by the need to conquer, control, capture and own. A photographer with a camera subordinates nature and the environment to their gaze and the framing of the shot through the viewfinder – this is why photography has been an important tool for historical and colonial expeditions, for documenting and capturing, and for creating typologies of spaces, places, species, and even humans.

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS behind these 10 aesthetic captures are mostly unknown, but it is most likely that they were all men, since women photographers were quite rare at the time. In this sense, we are probably being confronted with a male gaze. Philosophically and historically, nature has been associated with femininity and, in opposition, culture has been associated with masculinity. Nature, wilderness, landscape, etc., have always been seen by humans as something that has to be controlled, conquered, subordinated and tamed. This suggests that in these 10 photographs we are confronted with a male gaze that has been appropriating nature, from a safe distance. However, this does not apply to all kinds of landscape and scenery photography, as in many other cases the photographers are actually women.

This dichotomy – feminine or masculine – is important in this context in order to bring out the contrast or the binary categories that are present in the albums from which the photographs were taken. The albums depict certain historical events. They are meant to be historical documents of the *noeme* or the that-has-been,[19] and yet, they are accompanied by these picturesque landscape photographs that offer very vague clues regarding a certain time or geographical place. In the context of information, they are quite useless. All the information they give us is about the weather conditions or the seasons. In that way, as opposed to "cultural" photographs, they can be considered to be something "wild" and perhaps uncontrollable; as something – in line with the idea of binaries – feminine. To see how and why these "wild" and "useless" (in their original context) images capture the attention of the spectator, they should be further viewed in the context of agency, landscape and the sublime.

The image as an act

> An image is an act, not some thing.[20]
> *Jean-Paul Sartre*

The 10 photographs of "Displaced Time" belonged to a vast ocean of images from different events and periods of time, yet they all have something in common – their aesthetics drew the attention of the archive worker and visual artist Aap Tepper. Somehow, these images, the views that they depicted and the recognizable presence of the photographer's gaze communicated with the artist, making it possible to talk about the agency of an image. This was noted by Jean-Paul Sartre when he talked about an image being "an act, not some thing". The image itself is an archive comprising different layers of historical (and physical) records that act differently in various contexts and for different readers. Horst Bredekamp has described this as images that have a Medusa-like power over the spectator (instead of being just passive recipients of the aestheticizing gaze): "Images are not passive. They are begetters of every sort of experience and action relation to perception. This is the quintessence of the image act."[21]

"WHAT PHOTOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE HAVE IN COMMON IS THAT THEY ARE BOTH A FORM OF SUBORDINATING AND CONTROLLING SOMETHING THAT IS UNCONTROLLABLE: TIME AND NATURE."

This agency of the images is explained by Alfred Gell as something that is exclusively relational.[22] This makes it important to see images in the social context of their production, circulation (the readers of the albums) and reception, since it is the context(s) and the presence of a spectator that allow the image to gain agency. In the case of these 10 specific images, it is important to view them in three different scenarios: first, as independent landscape and scenery photographs in the historical context of landscape photography; second, as kind of "mood" photographs in their original context in the album, which mainly depicted historical (military) events from the first half of the 20th century; and third, as independent images taken from their original context and placed into the obscure space of a former Soviet prison cell block.

Installation view by Aap Tepper.

In the context of landscape photography, these 10 photographs not only refer to the agency of images but to the intricate layers and constructions behind the notion of landscape photography, and landscape as such. W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that we should see landscape not as a noun but as a verb, and we should not look at what it is, but instead, look at what it "does". Mitchell argues that we should "think of landscape, not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed".[23] In addition to looking at landscape as a verb and thinking about what it "does", Liz Well has also described landscape as a cultural practice and as a social product, which results from human intervention to shape or transform natural phenomena, of which we are simultaneously a part.[24]

However, even if we see landscape as a cultural practice and social product, it is still something very abstract if we examine it more closely. Looking at a view, a landscape, the sea, the mountains, the scenery – a dark cloud in an evening sky, big waves in a raging sea, forests, or just some trees in an empty field – can evoke certain emotions and interests, but only when we engage with them, i.e. when we let them attract our gaze and seduce us. W.J.T Mitchell has described the phenomena of looking at a landscape as an invitation to look at nothing, or to look at looking itself.[25] When viewing a landscape, the most seductive element can be the distance. As humans have become alienated from nature,[26] particularly as a result of modernization, nature has been perceived as something that is dark, dangerous and violent, with too many uncontrollable elements, death and decay. Looking at it from a distance seems safe and looking at it from a photograph leaves the impression of having gained control over it. This safer perspective, an aestheticizing distance,[27] is a way of dealing with the dark side of the landscape[28] but also a way for the sublimation of the landscape, since it is also this danger that makes a scene sublime.

THE WAYS OF LOOKING AT a landscape and its visual representations had already been constructed before the invention of photography, that is – in landscape paintings. It is the picturesque, the sublime, the controlled that we are used to seeing and what we expect to see. Depicting landscapes also has a long and independent history as a genre of photography, conceptual art and amateur photography. This is particularly apparent in travel photography, since we engage with the surroundings the most when we travel and assume the gaze of a conqueror – we become super tourists[29]. In the case of these 10 photographs from the restricted collections, the photographer has engaged with his surroundings, captured the scenes according to the pre-existing codes and norms of landscape photography and added these representations of nature – constructed pieces of aesthetic distance – to the otherwise quite pragmatic documentation of social events.

Thus, when looking at the photographs in their original context – in albums – what specific kind of narratives are these landscape and scenery images trying to describe? First, it must be pointed out that these albums are very physical – they seem rather strange objects of the past because today, everything is in clouds or phones, mediated by screens. These photo albums are enormous, heavy and, in this sense, not very practical. They were made to be paraded around and be leafed through with some physical effort involved. They were – and still are – the material embodiments of

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the fleeting past. They were also very carefully put together. The way in which the montage, or photo collages, were made in some of these albums is very curious, and rather playful.

These albums represent a variety of events that took place from 1919 to 1933, mainly associated with the Estonian War of Independence and military events, parades, visits, camps, etc. in the interwar Republic of Estonia. From the perspective of the Soviet regime, these materials were regarded as dangerous, belonging to the "bourgeois Estonia" and therefore had to be consigned to the special archives that had limited or no access. The albums were even renamed from the perspective of the Soviet regime.[30] History was being manipulated and silenced and an attempt was being made to erase an entire period from the collective memory.

In themselves these landscape images do not depict monuments, battlefields, historical sites or anything else that would anchor them to a specific event or time. It is only the context – the elaborate montage of several images on the heavy pages of these albums – that subordinates them to a certain historical category. On the one hand, they can be seen as aesthetic additions to these events by the photographer. However, on the other hand, they can be seen as a way of affirming a safe narrative of control over the time and space.

But what kind of narrative do they carry when they are taken from their original context and placed in a former Soviet prison cell block? Again, the possibility of communicating a distant time lies in the juxtaposition, comparison and contrasts. The sublime landscape views are placed in austere and obscure rooms which still carry the very obvious traces of the past – the colors, the scratches, the peeling paint on the walls and even the smell. This part of the building has remained virtually unchanged since it was given to the Film Archives, while the rest of the building had received additional makeovers in subsequent decade(s). The former prison cell block is a very obvious signifier of repression. This can be physically felt when walking in the corridor – a narrow space with hardly any light; and the tiny cells with a single source of daylight immediately make the spectator feel uneasy. It is not only a walk through the past; it is a walk into the acknowledgment of the possibility of one person's superiority over another, a nation's superiority over another and of one political view being superior to another. It is the feeling of the awareness of how ideological and political constructions can become physically and mentally repressing and violent.

THE SPECTATOR IS guided through the space in a kind of linear yet still ambiguous trajectory. At the beginning and end of the narrow and dark space, only illuminated by the light boxes, the spectator encounters vitrines that display files that mark the formation of these secret archives until the final stages of their opening in 1992. They give the spectator an idea of how the Soviet repressive machine functioned and an insight into the elaborate and carefully working machine of bureaucracy, which kept track of everything and everyone. The secret archives were used to erase certain memories but they were also used against people.

One of the files, dating from 1962, states why a photo album

from 1941 should be transferred to the secret archives. It declares that the committee has decided to change the status of these specific albums from "general storing" to "secret storing" because "these albums contain photographs that have been taken from the perspective of an incorrect or bourgeois propaganda".[31] All kinds of materials that somehow undermined the Soviet regime and were not part of Soviet propaganda – or materials with any traces of conflicting ideologies – were sent to the restricted collections, which were kept strictly in secret and away from the public. The people who handled these materials and had access to them were very loyal to the Soviet power and even had to give an oath to keep secrets just like that – secret.

The main source of light in the narrow and curved corridor of the prison cell block is the light boxes with the landscape views of the images that act and invite the spectator to engage and look at looking itself. Next to the light boxes are the prison cells – tiny spaces with one small window as a source of daylight. These cells still contain material layers of the past. The colors, the wallpaper, the drawings on the wall that enter the spectator's skin pores with their damp and dusty presence. The space is repressive. In this cramped and uncanny space, the spectator can view the massive photo albums, positioned on Soviet-era tables, from which the landscape views came. This montage contains the military events, the camps, the parades, the people who took part in them – and the landscape views. The wild and rogue images that refuse to give any specific information, and yet, are never innocent.

The exhibition space together with the light boxes and vitrines with documents create a different kind of temporality, a space of reflexive present,[32] where the present and the past intertwine, leaving room for interpretations and response. "We are there; history is present – but not quite,"[33] as van Alphen described these kinds of installations, which deal with certain events or periods from the past – this "not quite" being the reason why these installations are able to communicate intricate past occurrences to a wide range of audiences, from people who experienced these occurrences themselves, and more importantly – to people who have had no direct contact with them. The site-specificity of this project allows the spectator to engage with the images and texts mentally but yet physically experience a certain uncanniness or uneasiness in these small and dark spaces, which are illuminated by attention-seeking and active landscape views only.

Against the oblivion

> No matter how much we may be capable of learning from the past, it will not enable us to know the future.[34]
> *(Arendt 1967: xxii)*

As in the case of these restricted collections during the Soviet occupation of Estonia, other totalitarian regimes of the 20th century also included "organized oblivion"[35]. This was conducted through documents and archives, as well as through camps and executions. If there were no more witnesses, there was nothing to be witnessed. According to Arendt, in the case of the Holocaust concentration camps, this organized oblivion also applied to the families of those who were in the camps, as "grief and remembrance are forbidden". The extensive organized oblivion of the Holocaust (the Nazis were masters and fanatics at archiving; everything and everyone were counted and listed, and people were transformed into objects with a number[36]), which was conducted by archiving prisoners executed at the concentration camps, made their absence even more present and the Holocaust the central trauma in the memory studies discourse at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

> **"THE COLORS, THE WALLPAPER, THE DRAWINGS ON THE WALL THAT ENTER THE SPECTATOR'S SKIN PORES WITH THEIR DAMP AND DUSTY PRESENCE."**

To put it simply, trauma and traumatic experiences are experiences that have not been discussed or worked through; they are experiences that have been so atrocious or unfathomable that they have not been made sense of.[37] If any kind of working through is forbidden, for example, grief and remembrance, then this only deepens the trauma. In this aspect of working through, rethinking and negotiating the past, both art and literature are very powerful tools as they help people cope with the past and reveal its effects on the present day.[38] This also applies to the several occupations and deportations that took place in Estonia, as well as the Soviet regime with its elaborate system of fear and repression. In Estonia, both the Soviet regime and the independence that the country re-gained in 1991 are considered to be traumatic experiences[39] and are still being analyzed and addressed in the cultural field.[40]

IN THE CASE OF the project "Displaced Time", which succeeded in engaging both the younger and the older generations, it is important to focus on the visual language of this site-specific project. The large black and white images, the files and the albums with photographs refer to their original context – the archive. But the same archive also creates the Holocaust effect[41], a term coined by Ernst van Alphen when discussing works of art that deal with a traumatic past, particularly the Holocaust. This is present in the works of French artist Christian Boltanski, who has been working with the Holocaust past since the 1970s, and his visual language has been a significant influence on the visual arts associated with memory work. His practice includes using light boxes, archival documents and objects, as well as confronting viewers with absence instead of presence.[42]

Using archive as a method and this specific visual language for communicating past events should be seen from two different aspects: on the one hand, this visual language is already familiar; it creates the Holocaust effect, it tells the story of past events and yet it allows us to subjectively experience this space and temporal dimension. This allows for more dialogue, understanding and empathy across generations and borders. As Max Silverman

stated: "Connections between different events do not simply result in a bland fusion but open up memory and history to the complex, tense, and unresolved relationship between similarity and indifference, sometimes with disturbing effects."[43]

On the other hand, it also contributes to the competing of memories of traumatic pasts. In a globalized world, memory has been described as being transnational, transcultural and migratory. The Holocaust memory has provided strategies for dealing with the traumatic past that have been adapted to remembering other kinds of violence and terror. The danger lies in the generalizations and looking for similarities, since this produces hierarchies which, in turn, result in the desensitization of material and the competing of memory narratives. However, as Michael Rothberg pointed out with his term "multidirectional memory" – memory is "a subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing".[44] A certain framework has been developed in order to understand past events and it is largely based on comparison and relating to different experiences.

In Estonia, the democratization of society during the 1990s paved the way for the plurality of histories, which was not accepted by the previously existing totalitarian regime.[45] This openness resulted in the rather fanatical collecting of people's life stories in order fill in the gaps or the blank spaces left by the rupture of the Soviet regime[46] in the narrative of the Estonian nation. This was all conducted in terms of rather binary (and political) oppositions – the Soviet era being bad and the independent Estonian being good. There was a need for this sharp division at that time. However, over the last decade there has been a shift in this position that has allowed this time to speak for itself,[47] and this has permitted a more nuanced investigation of the period.[48] This kind of working through, which is also true of "Displaced Time", will not enable us to know the future, as Hannah Arendt has said, but it will reconcile the past with/in the present.

Conclusion

The exhibition project "Displaced Time" investigates certain aspects and mechanisms of the Soviet period in Estonia by using a specific visual language and strategies that allude to the representations of Holocaust memory. Its aim was not comparison, but rather to open up a wider and more nuanced discussion on the subject of archives, images and repression. The site-specific exhibition created a physical and temporal space for subjective experience, a reflexive present, through the stark contrast of sublime images and the dark prison cell block that they illuminate, and it managed to communicate a very specific aspect, the exploitation of the dark potential of the archives, something which characterizes totalitarian regimes.

The project centers around 10 landscape and scenery photographs that used to belong to the restricted collections of the archives. By taking these images out of their original context, it is possible to trace the complex dynamics of looking, seeing and capturing that are part of the photograph. When analyzing these images in different contexts, it is clear how the meaning of an image is dependent on the context. Images are active; they are archives in themselves. They have the power to captivate,

seduce and activate certain narratives of the past. These 10 images also turn attention to the way in which we are looking when we are looking at nothing – the way we look at nature, frame and conquer it, in order to make sense of it and control it. This dangerous and dark side of nature that is carefully framed in these photographs is also part of what makes them sublime.

The photographs do not differ much from the snapshots we take with our phones today, yet the narrative they unfold – the mechanisms of repression, the conflict of memories and the dark side of the archives – is quite unfamiliar to a generation that has been born into an independent and democratic country. Many of these details have been left without attention due to the long prevailing binary logic of good and bad when talking about the Soviet era. The shift in this approach has allowed for a more nuanced and open investigation. However, the present pasts, the ghosts and the remains that are present in contemporary literature and the arts, coincide with the current era of rethinking the past, in the hope of reconciling past terrors with a better future. ×

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4   The exhibition title refers to historian and theoretician Achille Mbembe's theory of chronophagy – the act of consuming or swallowing time by the power of the state, to abolish an archive and anaesthetise the past to make itself free from all debt. See Achille Mbembe, *The Power of the Archive – Archives and Disobedience. Changing the Tactics of Visual Culture in Eastern Europe.* Eds. Margaret Tali, Tanel Rander (Estonian Academy of Arts Press, 2016).

5   Ernst van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 17.

6   Jacques Derrida abd Eric Prenowitz, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression", *Diacritics*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995), 9–63.

7   At the beginning of the Soviet period, in the aftermath of World War II, the archives became part of the repressive state apparatus, as archivists were forced to uncover compromising information on people who were unsympathetic or disobedient to the new regime in any way. For more, see Priit Prisko, Eesti arhiivinduse sovetiseerimine 1940–1941, Eesti Ajalooarhiivi Toimetised, no. 15 (22). Eesti NSV aastatel 1940–1953: sovetiseerimise mehhanismid ja tagajärjed Nõukogude Liidu ja Ida-Euroopa arengute kontekstis. Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 2007. On access restrictions, see Birgit Kibal, Priit Prisko, Tõnu Tannberg, Jaak Valge, Juurdepääsupiirangud arhivaalidele Euroopas ja Venemaal: ajalooline kujunemine ja tänapäev, Eesti Ajalooarhiivi toimetised, no. 13 (20). Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 2005. The same kinds of processes took place in libraries, where many ideologically unsuitable books were destroyed or moved into restricted collections.

8   Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

9   Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Harvard University Press: 1997), 22.

10   Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits", *Archives and Disobedience. Changing the Tactics of Visual Culture in Eastern Europe*, Eds. Margaret Tali, Tanel Rander (Estonian Academy of Arts Press, 2016), 50.

11   Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations* (New York: Shocken Books, 1969).

12   Holocaust memory has become central in academic studies as well as in the arts. However, many artists work with local repression and trauma, such as artists who reflect on the dictatorships and violence in Latin America (e.g. Doris Salcedo, Marcelo Brodsky, Lucila Quieto, Inés Ulanovsky, Beatriz Sarlo), or photographers and artists who reconstruct the silenced past and the trauma of the executions and mass graves from the Spanish Civil War (e.g. Jorge Barbi, Bleda y Rosa).

13   For example, the colonial past and Western centrism, the addressing and discussing of which still creates considerable unease and discomfort among the former colonial countries, even though this colonial past has been shaping the world economy, ecology and much more since the 15th century, and is inevitably present.

14   The term "male gaze" was coined by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", a landmark in feminist theory, which addressed the tradition of objectifying women in visual culture. In the context of this text, the term "gaze" has been used to highlight the process of looking and seeing that is associated with photography.

15   For more on non-human photography, see, for example, Joanna Zylinska "The Creative Power of Nonhuman Photography", *Photographic Powers* (Helsinki: Photomedia, 2014), ART + DESIGN + ARCHITECTURE (Aalto University Publication Series: Helsinki, 2015). Also see *On the Verge of Photography. Imaging Beyond Representation*, Eds. Daniel Rubinstein Johnny Golding & Andy Fisher, (ARTicle Press: Birmingham, United Kingdom, 2013).

16   From these 10 albums from which the photographs were selected, only a few photographers are known: Hans Vilper and David Poska. The rest of the photographers are marked as unknown.

17   Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape, Photography, Culture and Identity* (I.B. Tauris, 2011), 6.

18   American landscape photography has a rich history in this genre, a key moment being the *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* exhibition that opened in 1975 and included photographers such as Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon and Stephen Shore.

19   Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, (Hill and Wang, New York, 2010) (1981), 76–77.

20   *Jean-Paul Sartre, Imagination*. F. Williams, Ann Arbor, (MI: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 142.

21   Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts – A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency* (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2017), 283.

22   Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 23.

23   W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

24   Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape, Photography, Culture and Identity*, 1–2.

25   Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, viii.

26   The separation of culture and nature can be traced back to the revolution of science in the 16th and 17th centuries. For further information, see Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

27   Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, viii.

28   Ibid., 6.

29   Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 41–42. "The photographer is supertourist, an extension of the anthropologist, visiting natives and bringing back news of their exotic doings and strange gear. The photographer is always trying to colonize new experiences or find new ways to look at familiar subjects – to fight against boredom."

30   For example, from "VI Rahvaväe regiment in the War of Independence" during the Republic of Estonia to "VI Rahvaväe regiment in bourgeois Estonia's war against Soviet Russia" during the Soviet occupation.

31   Protocol no. 7 of the Committee for Restricting Documentary Materials, November 29, 1962 (Dokumentaalsete materjalide salastamise komisjoni koosoleku protokoll nr 7. Koostatud 29. novembril 1962).

32   Luis Ignacio Garcia, *Políticas de la memoria y de la imagen. Ensayos sobre una actualidad político-cultural* (Santiago de Chile: Colección Teoría, 2011), 30.

33   Ernst Van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 11.

34   Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1973), xxii.

35   Ibid., 452.

36   Ernst van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 208–209. In comparison, the information from the Stalinist archives is quite contradictory and very little factual knowledge is available on Mao's communist dictatorship in China (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, xxiii–xxviii).

37   Aija Sakova, *Valu, mälu, kirjandus. Kirjanduskriitikat ja vestlusi aastatest 2004–2017*, (Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2017), 10.

38   Ibid., 21.

39   See Aili Aarelaid-Tart, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*, (University of Helsinki, Helsinki, 2006). And Ene Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad. Kollektiivne mälu ja autobiograafiline minevikutõlgendus eestlaste elulugudes*, (Eesti Rahvamuuseum, Tartu, 2005).

40   However, when talking about the role of visual arts (and literature) in memory work, it is also important to discuss the crisis of representation and the question of ethics. These traumatic experiences of the past are being reconstructed somewhere on a scale between forgetting and fetishizing. On the one side there is the silence and the void, while on the other is the exploitation of the traumatic past as something that is uncanny and exotic. The latter is the case with the Holocaust industry, but on some other level it is also the case in the use of Soviet aesthetics in the mass media by a subsequent generation that has had no direct experience of Soviet repression.

41   van Alphen. *Caught by History*, 10.

42   van Alphen. *Staging the Archive*, 207.

43   Max Silverman, "Staging Shared Memory. Je Veux voir and L'Empreinte de l'ange" in *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*, Eds. Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, and Pieter Vermeulen (New York: Berghahn, 2017), 38.

44   Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

45   Jüri Kivimäe, "Mnemosyne köidikud" *Vikerkaar* no. 10–11 (2003), 85–86.

46   Ene Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad. Kollektiivne mälu ja autobiograafiline minevikutõlgendus eestlaste elulugudes*, (Eesti Rahvamuuseum: Tartu, 2005), 107.

47   Johanna Ross, "Ideoloogia ei ole ainus, mis inimese kogemust loob. Vestlus Epp Annusega" in *Keel ja kirjandus* no. 8–9 (2019) 751.

48   Giorgio Agamben has also discussed the need to abandon this binary logic in his *State of Exception. Homo Sacer II, 1*.

A language to heal

Interview with Jūratė and Vilma Samulionytė

by **Margaret Tali**

The documentary film *Liebe Oma, Guten Tag! What we leave behind* (2017) by sisters Jūratė and Vilma Samulionytė tackles persistent silences within one family in Lithuania in a telling way for how sensitive the past is in the Baltic and East European context. Its' painful episodes are regularly left unspoken within families, real reasons and courses of events remain uncovered, sometimes to protect family member at other moments to make space for daily life to continue. Three generations later part of these stories seem to have disappeared, yet the untold haunt the family. The Samulionytė sisters show how unexpressed emotions and unshared feelings continued to have their own life – how affectively and sometimes unknowingly they continued to shape lives of people.

At the heart of Samulionytės' film lies the taboo of suicide and the filmmakers search for a language with which to brake the taboos and start talking about it honestly and transparently. Their quest unfolds to the viewer in the course of the film and gradually brings about new silences within the family, that involve the chaos and uncertainties of war, fleeing from deportations and the Soviet Occupation, a love story of their grandmother and braking down of communication within the family during the Cold War. It took 5 years to finalize the film. Their work is a fascinating example of how shared difficult and traumatic family stories can lead to important local discussions. We held this conversation online after having recently met each other for a dinner in Vilnius. Vilma and Jūratė shared with me how they unexpectedly came to the subject of suicide after already having started the film. We also talked about the difficulties they encountered opening the subject within their family, how their mother coped with making the film in which she was drawn in by her daughters, their choices negotiating the narrative both locally and transnationally and the responses that their film has received.

MARGARET TALI: **Can you tell me about the starting points for this documentary?**

VILMA SAMULIONYTĖ: In the village Bajoraičiai where our grandmother was born, there was a small German cemetery in the middle of the field on the border. When you go to this cemetery you are more or less followed by the border police. It's completely abandoned but not closed yet, because 25 years has to pass from the last burial for it to close. One far relative told us that probably our great grandfather is buried there. From time to time when passing we used to bring flowers there. One day when I was there with Jūratė I told it would be interesting to make a photography project and research into our family history, because we didn't know much about our grandmother's German heritage, nobody talks about that. But Jūratė was the one who took the first real step.

JŪRATĖ SAMULIONYTĖ: When I was thinking about a new project, one of the ideas was to write a screenplay based on our grandmother's story for a feature film. When presenting it to the producer, she was very interested. I even got support but in the course of writing the script, I understood that I knew very little. The information is based on small bits and it's impossible to put a story together – our relatives don't know enough, our mother cannot tell it properly... I also talked to Vilma, who is older and remembers more and the idea of doing a documentary came up. Since Vilma had this idea before, we decided that it could go together and during the documentary she can also make a photography project.

VS: We didn't plan that we would be in the film. When a very intense conversation with our mom started the cameraman didn't know where to put the camera and started to film us. There were many moments that we didn't plan and as they happened we went with the flow.

Jūratė Samulionytė and Vilma Samulionytė.

PHOTO: GYTIS SKUDZINSKAS.

JS: The film was at that point a lot of different topics but not at all about suicide. We knew that its difficult to our mom and we didn't want to go there.

MT: Something that your film brings to the fore very clearly is the way difficult and traumatic memories have been silenced within families. It speaks about a broader problem in the whole of Eastern Europe, because this silence makes these memories inaccessible in the long run. In your film you show how this makes them inaccessible to you when starting to ask questions about what exactly happened with your grandma during and after the war. Could you tell more about how this silencing works and what its effects are?

VS: In Danutė Gailienė's book *What did they do to us*[1] she talks that the amount of traumas in this area are directly related to the amount of suicides. In the Soviet Union including Lithuania nobody was counting suicides and she makes the connection that it was directly related to the experience of our area. When I came across her term 'pact of silence', I realized this is what is happening. When we asked our mother what happened to our grandmother and what did she tell about the war, she didn't want to tell and she never talked about it. As a child I remember grandmother told some things, but these are bits of memories and I could not rely on them. We came to the conclusion that our grandmother was not talking, our mom was not asking, they both were coping silently and we are the third generation daring to ask questions, but there is no one to answer ... Sometimes we just don't get into these kinds of conversations.

Film stills from documentary film *What We Leave Behind*, characters and authors Vilma Samulionytė and Jūratė Samulionytė.

JS: That was an important discovery for us, that oh my god, we are part of it as well! We were afraid to ask, we didn't know some things and nobody talked. Nobody asked and nobody answered. As we come from a different time, we started to break 'the pact of silence'.

VS: We were also insiders because there was suicides in our family too – our grandmother and our father – so somehow we were opening up. In the beginning when starting the film we were children of our mom, who could tell us: you don't understand things. And suddenly after experiencing our father's suicide and making the decision to talk, not to lie about it, we came on the same experience level with our mom. We were not children any more, but we had to make decisions in the same situation. Lots of discoveries!

MT: Generational differences in dealing with trauma are very well opened up in your film.

VS: We tried. With our mom we went from big shutdown and no, to okay maybe. And then to okay, we can talk about it and nobody is going to judge us and somehow the taboo disappeared. For mom it was a very painful experience and she had no one to share it with. With Jūratė we had each other – we are quite open with each other and, I think, that our therapy is to talk. We check with each other and often either disagree or agree, but we don't close to boil in our own juice. Mom had disagreements with our father, grandfather had his own opinions, we were small and it was very difficult for her. Just to calmly grieve is something that she couldn't have.

JS: Even with the closest relatives within the family, they didn't talk about it. They decided to tell everyone it [*grandmother's suicide* – MT] was a heartattack and it became a total taboo, closed somewhere deep. When we decided to do the film, our mother said yes, I'm happy that you're doing it, but not this topic, don't touch it! She was really scared that somebody can hurt her and open a secret that is sacred for her. When we started this opened a process of dealing with this topic for our mother too.

VS: When we were filming we had an excuse to talk. We have a camera, we have a story and we can talk easily. After a year we realized we didn't mention a word about suicide ourselves. So we had lots of barriers in ourselves also, which we really didn't recognize. After a while our editor was asking: what are you talking about, what is 'it'?

JS: This was because it wasn't used in our family either and although we were open, we also could not even articulate the word 'suicide'. When doing some shots we worked on it and agreed in advance, we have to say the word 'suicide' very clearly.

MT: Your search of a language that this example brings to the fore is something very interesting. You show that in fact we need a language first in order to start speaking... When I was in Lithuania recently I learned that the country has the highest suicide rates in whole Europe and although many people have personal experiences with it either through family or friends, it's still not acknowledged and openly discussed. So in this context your search of language also seems culturally very important. Why do you think its been so difficult to start talking about suicide?

VS: People imagine that talking is a casual talk, but it doesn't have to be. I think the topic is so stigmatized that, oh my god, suicide means an automatic shutdown. There is no relax. We showed our film to two very different groups of people, including psychiatrists who deal with difficult subjects in their work they said like this is amazing, this is

progress and so on. Then we showed it to the community of relatives who has experienced suicide. When we came there we just talked and talked and they were just looking at us and listening. There was not so much talking going on, except the girl who organized it.

JS: So it means its not so easy to talk. I think it's very much about the historical background. Because in the Soviet times officially suicide didn't exist and also in Christian religion suicide is the biggest sin, so all the families who experienced this felt guilt. As an outcome you needed to hide it because it was shameful. There was no information how to deal with it and talking about it was a bad shameful thing.

VS: I'm not so sure what the practice was during the Soviet time, but before the war if someone committed suicide they would be buried behind the fence of the cemetery, which is a big-big disgrace for the family and that's what happened with our great grandfather too as we see in the film. Our grandmother's father kind-of made a decision after getting ill and having problems with moving that he was a burden for the family. He killed himself leaving behind his wife with five children and big depts. Our mother says that life of the family changed completely because girls had to quit school and go to work in order to pay the debts back. This was a big shame for the family, that was given on to our mother.

JS: Our mother was herself afraid for what seemed like a chain of suicides in the family, since her grandfather committed suicide as well as her mother.

MT: There's an ethical side to opening someone's sensitive sides up in public too and lets be honest some scenes with your mother are very confrontational. You show in the film that you watch it first with your mother, how else did you deal with ethical issues?

JS: It was a matter of discussion with Vilma many times. Especially during the editing of the film. We tried to be "sharp" and honest in telling the story, but always ethical in our way of understanding.

MT: The topic of grieving already came up, but with the experience of having done this documentary I wonder what your thoughts are about the role of women in grieving?

VS: We thought about grieving as a must have. You have to grieve, otherwise you are not fully letting go. With the suicide there are the so-called triplets: silence, secret and shame. The three sisters that don't let one calmly grieve, you need to get rid of all of them in order to say good-bye to your relatives. In case of suicide it's harder because you might blame yourself in some things. Women are more emotional, open and tend to talk more ... In certain areas of Lithuania women would do a crying session ...

JS: In one Lithuanian area there are grieving songs (*raudos*), chanting very loud and long [imitates the singing], and this is done by women only in funerals. I think that this singing is also a way to grieve, because it's hard to give on to your emotions, but during this process it becomes easier. These old traditions have something deeper in them.

VS: In Samogitia the funeral lasts three days and they would sing this whole time. When you would get in there at

> ### "In Samogitia the funeral lasts three days and they would sing this whole time."
>
> Vilma Samulionytė

Film stills from documentary film *What We Leave Behind*, characters and authors Vilma Samulionytė and Jūratė Samulionytė.

that point you could not get out for three days [laughs] … When we were children it was very normal to have long funerals, now its done in one day. According to the old tradition it used to be one year in which people heal. You don't go to any festivities and wear black. Our mom kept that while she was grieving, but we didn't and I don't know people nowadays who would do that.

[We talk further about the taboo of seeing men cry in public and how this has changed somewhat too. Vilma promises to ask her partner about it later.]

MT: In your film, it seems to me, you deal with the memory of your grandmother in a way that is orientated to the future rather than the past. This has something to do with the atmosphere of your film as well, which despite the heavy subjects is light and the story itself gives hope in a way. Can you talk a little more about this atmosphere in relation to telling the story?

JS: From the very beginning on we didn't want to make a dark film. We had discussions with our producer that overall it should be light and fresh and the cinematographer was involved too. For instance, we were shooting a lot during the summer.

VS: We started to talk about the past in the film, but then the film turned out about us. The present and if we fix our thoughts, the way we want to live then we think about the future. It's in a way about clearing our system of all these old taboos and unspoken things and hidden grey areas, so in a way it is projecting on the future. All these discoveries are to make the future a little more light.

> "From the very beginning on we didn't want to make a dark film."
>
> Jūratė Samulionytė

JS: Actually we also have our little conversation in the film in which we agree to call each other when it's hard, its also kind of giving hope.

MT: What do you think was the influence of the fact that you had a German producer on the story itself?

VS: They have their own take on the Second World War. For us some facts were completely new. For instance, with refugee camps, they were like "oh come on this is so boring everybody knows that!"

JS: In Germany they had a lot of documentaries about it, but we didn't have that. At the same time it was the other way around too, because they didn't know much about what happened with Germans in Lithuania. That's why, for instance, we included a map, because otherwise it was too difficult for Germans to understand how people moved. They said that nobody knows much about Lithuania, so we had to be very clear. We also had a composer from Germany. And we had two editors – the last cut was made by the German editor. It was very powerful, because she went very deep into the story. She was pushing us a lot and the way the film looks like now was thanks to the input of this editor.

MT: Lets also talk about the response your film has received.

JS: We tried to participate in film screenings and have discussions because we felt it's important. We met many peo-

Scenes from the opening of Vilma Samulionytė's exhibition *Liebe Oma, Guten Tag or the Pact of Silence*. Film stills from documentary film *What We Leave Behind*.

ple who were moved or left after the film crying or they said thank you, or 'oh-my-god in my family there are similar stories too'… We felt a lot of solidarity and the fact that people felt thankful was nice and strange too, because its not after every film that people feel thankful.

VS: In Germany the audience was a little different, because they had all personal experiences with that. I would also like to mention how our mom reacted. Even before the premier she was like: But girls how will we go there right now and you will talk about the issues – what will all those people think! And we were like, but mom after 5 years you are still thinking about that! That's it, the film is done! After people watched the film they felt that they knew our mom and came to thank her and say: you are such a brave woman! They were congratulating us and also our mom… After the premier she slept in my house and in the morning she said: Vilma what a great premier it was! Those people who came to talk to us were so nice! It was completely the opposite reaction as she had expected.

JS: When the film was shown in our hometown, then she didn't come..

MT: What a brave decision though to hold it there!

VS: The cultural centre invited us, and when we told our mother, she said as we started with this lets do it until the end! Although she didn't come to that presentation, she still let us do it. So it might be brave, but its also a part of the process of healing. A sign of it.
Another thing is that although we hoped to present it in bigger documentary festivals too, it somehow didn't happen. In Germany it was received quite well in smaller festivals, like Lübeck and Kassel. We were a bit surprised, because in Lithuania we received a lot of good feedback even from very critical critics.

VS: Although the film didn't go to the traditional festivals, it had a different travelling story with smaller festivals, community screenings, scientists asked for copies to show it to students and we came to your summer school in Kūldiga ["Communicating Difficult Pasts" organized by Margaret Tali and Ieva Astahovska], so it travelled a bit different compared to a usual film.

MT: During the film you continue to work on this material in the format of photography too Vilma. Photos as opposed to film are silent, how did your exhibition "Pact of Silence" and artist book add to the film?

VS: I think in the exhibition people could come closer to this archival and visual material used in the film, read, look as long as they'd like. The editor and authors decided how long to show pictures or archival images in the film. The book "Pact of Silence" is a limited edition box set with memory maps, image book, letters, pictures and text book. It is like a small journey into a personal story from pre-war time till today. People who wanted to know more about the story would go and see the film. So there were some people, who went to the film after seeing the book or the exhibition. ☒

reference

1　Danutė Gailienė, *Ką jie mums padarė: Lietuvos gyvenimas traumų psichologijos* žvilgsniu [What Did they Do To Us: Life of Lithuania Through the Trauma Psychology Lens] (Vilnius: Tyto Alba, 2008).

BRINGING BACK THE SILENCED MEMORIES

(UN)OFFICIAL COMMEMORATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST IN BELARUS

by **Elisabeth Kovtiak**

abstract

This article addresses the problem of the underrepresentation of the traumatic past in the example of the official commemoration of the Holocaust in Belarus. The silenced memories hinder the process of reconciliation and have real consequences for urban planning and cultural life. Thus, in order to address the tragedy that has been excluded from the official commemoration in Belarus, artists and journalists have created projects to fill the void in remembrance. The article describes how art and media projects have resolved the problem of the underrepresentation of certain events in the official culture and make vernacular memory available to many people.

KEYWORDS: Belarus, collective trauma, haunting, the Holocaust, official commemoration, vernacular memory.

The key topic of the official history of Belarus is probably the Great Patriotic War – a period in the Second World War that lasted from June 22, 1944 to May 9, 1945. The term primarily refers to the conflict between the USSR and Nazi Germany. The Victory is national pride. The war itself and its victims have been well commemorated. However, not all of its chapters have been equally represented in the official memory culture. The Holocaust has been virtually excluded, even though this tragedy deeply affected the country. The Jewish population was a significant actor in urban life and the Holocaust destroyed its cultural connections, affected its identity and destroyed its cultural base. The mass murders of the local Jewry and the displacement of the Jewish legacy became a

collective trauma that has influenced people up to the present day. The primary way of curing the trauma is through articulation. Belarus has continued the Soviet tradition of silencing its difficult past. Even today, the Holocaust is not properly commemorated on an official level. The existing memorials were established under the initiative of the Jewish community and funded by foreign organizations. In Belarus, the official memory culture suppresses any discussions about the genocide and this part of its history is not properly depicted in schoolbooks and museums. There are monuments that commemorate the Holocaust in the public space. However, the narratives that would otherwise give meaning to them are silences. Thus, the realms of memory become (non) sites of memory. Even if a memorial might be present it cannot be fully understood by an uninformed citizen.

Following Avery Gordon, this article approaches the problem of underrepresentation of the traumatic past as being a problem of haunting. The insufficient level of information on the Holocaust in the school curriculum and the official media has transformed vast urban areas into non-sites of memory,[1] even though there might be a monument to the victims. In such situations, memorials do not serve as realms of memory. Local initiatives have attempted to improve the situation by creating digital projects that are capable of filling this void in the awareness of the traumatic past. This paper explores the ways of giving voices to the dead and excluded in order to help people reconcile with the past by bringing back the unheard stories and restoring the layer of remembrance. The main examples in this article are the "Jewish Minsk Audio Guide" and the "Brest Stories Guide". The projects merge oral history and performative practices in order to spread the stories of the Jewish communities in two Belarusian cities – Minsk and Brest. These two cities were chosen as examples for this study because local digital projects are currently being conducted that contribute to memory culture. The focus of this paper is on exploring the potential of these kinds of projects to bring back the silenced past. Digital tools allow vernacular memory to be transformed into a heritage that creates an additional layer to the official narratives of the past. As technology has become more affordable, art and media projects are able to resolve the problem of underrepresentation of certain events in the official memory culture and make vernacular memory available to many people.

On the importance of reconciliation with the traumatic past

Traumatic experiences can be passed down from one generation to the next. The trauma is inherited not as an actual recollection but rather as an "imaginative investment and projection".[2] People who have never experienced the catastrophe themselves remember it through narratives, stories and images – "these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right … These

> **"TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES CAN BE PASSED DOWN FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT."**

events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present".[3] It can be traced on an individual level among the offspring of the Holocaust survivors who struggle to reform their identities and establish lost connections with their late family members and homelands. Nazi crimes have not just damaged the lives of their victims; they have ruined the social fabric that existed in the urban settlements of today's Belarus. Individual trauma damages the psyche when defense mechanisms fail when they are faced by a manifestation of brutal force. Collective trauma is about the damaged tissues of social life. It undermines the ties between people and weakens the general sense of belonging to a community. The collective trauma leads to a "gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared".[4] It continues to influence not only the direct offspring of the survivors but entire communities that inhabit the territory in which the terror took place.

It is not only people who are carriers of memories. The environment also retains the dreadful recollections. Unmarked mass graves and places of execution are the *non-sites of memory*.[5] Polish scholar Roma Sendyka coined the term in opposition to *sites of memory* or *lieux de mémoire*.[6] These unmarked sites, as Sendyka argues, do not serve as 'a memory anchor' and could be called *non-sites of memory*. Although these realms are not revealed on the material level of culture, non-sites of memory still communicate the secrets they keep. When there are no ruins or monuments, or any other evidence of past traumatic events, it is almost impossible to explain what is odd about these places. However, certain people may feel the strangeness of the place.

Although it is not possible to read directly, the past can manifest itself, particularly if we are talking about mass burials. Sendyka argues that this could have an interesting non-anthropocentric explanation. Decomposition saturates "the environment with ions, bacteria, and chemical compounds, which enter into the water and the air". It may even influence the organisms that inhabit the area, chemically change the plants, influence "the psychic state of people and animals. Thus, at the cellular level, in a way that has not yet been fully understood, the terrain of non-sites of memory is occupied by extra-cognitive processes and somatic connections".[7] This explains why we may sometimes feel that a place is peculiar even if we are unaware of its background. But I believe there is more to it, and that urban planning, the appearance of facades and unexplainable gaps between houses also communicate that the urban scenery is covering a tragic secret. These places are haunted.

In her book *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon suggests that in order to achieve a complete understanding of social life, sociologists must explore the uncanny presence of something that appears not to be present. Recognizing haunting leads to understanding what has happened and how it continues to affect people. In order to understand the horrors of the Nazi terror and its aftermath we need to pay attention to the ghosts living

Jews in the Minsk ghetto, 1941. The ghetto was created in 1941, soon after the German invasion. It housed close to 100 000 people. and was the largest in the German-occupied part of the Soviet Union. The house on the right is the Historic workshop.

with us. "The ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life".[8] The silenced events manifest themselves and draw us "affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition".[9]

It is challenging to transform traumatic events into a coherent narrative. Some of these events are unspeakable while others do not support the official discourse of the past. The history is articulated via the lives of elite politicians and officants while the recollections of other groups are neglected as being 'unworthy'. The Jewish history and genocide do not fit the official Belarusian narrative that is centered around the sacrifice of the Belarusian folk and the victory in the Great Patriotic War. Thus, the losses of the Jewish people have been excluded as they are not considered valuable enough to be remembered. They have not been completely forgotten – they are lost between memory and representation.[10]

The problem with memory studies is that personal recollections are influenced by the discourse in which a person lives. Memories excluded from official narratives are harder to frame and remember on the individual level. Not compulsory, those memories should be traumatic (although in the described case they are), they can be ignored because they do not fit the official narrative or carriers of these recollections are neglected by historiography.[11] Official narratives of the past tend to focus on grand events, ignoring vernacular memory. Vernacular memory is a form of public memory that is based on the recollections of witnesses, rather than historians or political leaders. Vernacular memory is a non-institutionalized form of remembrance that includes creating vernacular shrines and narrations. As there are many vernacular cultures, numerous carriers of different vernacular versions of the past restate their views that were handed down from "firsthand experience in small-scale communities rather than the 'imagined' communities of a large nation".[12] While studying vernacular memory one has to take into consideration the complexity and ambiguity of the past, as there are collisions between the recollections of different social groups.

Unspoken traumatic events disturb people. Silencing the recollections hinders reconciliation with the past. Abraham and Torok write: "what returns to haunt, on the nature of the thing 'phantomized' during the preceding generation, phantomized because it was unspeakable in words because it had to be wrapped in silence."[13] Expressing these silenced memories orally and artistically is a primary way of dealing with trauma on a personal and a collective level. Communicating painful stories is more beneficial than silencing them, as it helps the next generations to reconcile with the past. As the Jewish legacy of Belarusian towns is still remembered – although scarcely – by the locals, there is a need to commemorate it and to transform it into heritage. Heritage is created via collective processes that happen in the realms of culture and social life. Assigning a value to objects, practices and places and transforming them into heritage is called *heritagization*.[14] Remembering is an active creation, rather than a mere passive inheritance. Due to the selective nature of memory, people assemble comprehensible stories from the fragments of the past.[15] The past is brought and made alive into the present "through historical contingency and strategic appropriations, deployments, redeployments, and creation of connections and reconnection".[16] The commemoration is a consequence of today's demands.[17] And this demand is to make the unheard stories available to the public. Luckily, new media and digital tools provide an opportunity to make the silenced narratives heard by sharing vernacular recollections.

The Holocaust and its silencing

Belarus suffered terrible losses during the Second World War and the number of victims of the Holocaust was also higher in Belarus than in any other European country. However, the exact number of victims is still unknown. It varies from 600,000 to 800,000, or up to 82% of the Jewish population.[18] The Holo-

The memorial *Jama* [The Pit] is hard to notice from the road because of the location in the landscape.

The Museum of the Great Patriotic War is a new memorial complex in Minsk, focused on the victory over Nazism.

caust primarily affected urban settlements, as a big share of the population was Jewish. This article is based on the history and commemoration practices in Minsk and Brest. Both cities had a significant share of the Jewish population. Almost one third of Minsk's population was Jewish.[19] In Brest, the figure was even higher. In 1940, around 40% of its inhabitants were Jewish.[20] Their engagement in commerce and economic life was prevalent. The Jewish community was not merely a minority, but rather one of the urban life basis. In both cities, ghettos were created. In the Minsk ghetto,100,000 Jews were confined. Also, in December, around 7,000 Jews were transported from Western Europe to a separate ghetto in Minsk. The Nazis liquidated both ghettos in 1943.[21] In autumn 1942, around 20,000 people from Brest and the area were extradited to Bronnaya Gora and executed.[22] However, there were also other mass shootings inside the Brest ghetto, in which 4,000 people were murdered.

Although the Great Patriotic War is a core of official memory culture in the Soviet public sphere, some categories of victims, including Jewish people, were neglected.[23] The Holocaust was not denied – it was just not mentioned. The genocide was not considered to be a separate phenomenon but just another example of Nazi crimes against civilians.[24] There are diverse reasons for silencing the past. The desire to maintain the myth that Slavs and communists were the primary targets of the Nazis is one of them. Also, admitting to the genocide could lead to the rise of a Jewish national identity.[25] In either event, Soviet propaganda has certainly avoided Judaizing the victory narrative.

Lukashenko made the most of the Great Patriotic War narrative in order to legitimize his regime and unambiguously placed the "Great Patriotic War" at the center of state ideology. Lukashenko described the war as "a significant point in our history", in which "the majestic spirit of the Belarusian people, its freedom-loving essence and historical wisdom were most clearly manifested". Consistently emphasizing the enormous contribution of Belarusians to the victory over Nazism – in this context, the three million victims of the republic's population are readily mentioned.[26] Also, talking about the Holocaust might open a discussion on the collaboration of Belarusians with the Nazis.[27]

After 1991, the Holocaust has no longer been silenced. It was eventually memorialized in the public space of Belarusian towns. The sites of memory that currently exist were created with the help of foreign foundations and private initiatives, not by the Belarusian state.[28] There are Holocaust memorial complexes near Minsk in Trascianec and Blagauschyna, in Bronnaya Gora in the Brest region and a monument to the victims at the cemetery in Brest. However, the focus of this paper is on commemoration in urban areas. Thus, these examples have been excluded from discussions as it is not possible to run across them unintentionally.

Memorials in Minsk and their meaning
THE PIT

This memorial started its existence as a post-war vernacular memorial in 1947. At the time, it was a black obelisk erected to commemorate a pogrom that had occurred on March 2, 1942 when Nazis and Nazi collaborators assassinated several few thousand Jews. Although the form of the commemoration is reminiscent of an official form of commemoration, the obelisk was funded by private donations from members of the Jewish community. It was erected with the support of those Jews who worked for the municipal authorities of Minsk.[29] The monument contains texts in Russian and Yiddish 'In the bright memory of five thousand Jews who perished at the hands of the fierce enemies of humanity – German-Fascist villains'. It is the only monument in Belarus that existed for several decades in Soviet times as other vernacular memorials were demolished.[30] This place became a site of

memory for the local Jewish community and a place for gatherings. It was a meeting point for March 2, Victory Day, as well as festive days. The locals dubbed the place *Jama*, which translates from Russian as *the Pit*, due to its characteristic landscape.

In 1992, after the disolution of the Soviet Union, renowned architect Leonid Levin proposed a reorganization of the monument. Levin is a crucial figure in Holocaust memorialization in Belarus as he was both respected by the Jewish community and honored by the government. This allowed him to promote the Jewish agenda and receive the agreement for the creation of the memorials, as well as to spread his ideas throughout the community.[31] Levin initiated the transformation of a lone obelisk into a memorial complex. After almost a decade of discussions and preparations in 2000, the monument was accompanied by a sculptural group that represented *Walking to Death* as bedraggled figures descending to the bottom of *The Pit*. Another element of the memorial complex is a granite menorah listing all the sponsors – local and foreign, private and state-owned institutions. Close by is the *Alley of the Righteous* – a range of trees with name plaques. The memorial is placed just a few meters away from a nine-story apartment building and, because of the landscape, it is hard to notice the memorial from the road. The locations of these monuments are historically accurate. They are almost hidden from passers-by, which decreases their accessibility to the general public. They do not communicate with random people about the traumatic past. However, the semi-visibility of this monument guaranteed its existence throughout the Soviet era and then in Lukashenko's Belarus, as the authorities would not permit greater exposure.

THE BROKEN HEARTH

The *Broken Hearth* is a monument to the victims of the Minsk ghetto. Leonid Levin created this memorial group on the site of a former Jewish cemetery within the ghetto's borders. The memorial, created in 2008 by architect Leonid Levin and sculptor Maxim Petrul, symbolizes a destroyed house. On a square plinth of red granite – the symbolic foundations of the house – is a broken bronze round table and a Viennese chair – representing a place at which a Jewish family used to gather. Another monument in this area is *The Pantheon of Memory* – a semi-circle comprising nine stones that commemorate the Jews who were deported to Minsk from Dusseldorf Bremen, Cologne, Bonn, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Austria, Konigsberg and Brno. The first stone was established in 1998 and the most recent stone in 2015.[32] This monument was funded by the above-mentioned cities, as well as Minsk municipality, the German and Israeli embassies, international organizations and the Union of Belarusian Jewish Public Associations and Communities.

This site is a former Jewish graveyard that had been demol-

ished together with the ghetto. Between these two objects is a lapidarium formed from the old Jewish tombstones that had risen from the ground during heavy rainfall. Several of these tombstones were unearthed during pipeline construction. Even though a memorial has been created, this location has not yet become a site of memory, as people rarely interact with the monuments. The monuments are located in a park quite remote from public transport routes. Only a few people are aware of the location and these people are mainly local residents. The park, which was created in the Soviet era, remains a place for walking the dog and meeting other people (sometimes the latter involves the consumption of alcohol). The Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences uses former ghetto land as a sports ground for jogging and physical activities. The ritualized activities close to the monuments only occur when an official delegation (usually from abroad) visits the site or when a guided tour about Jewish history is conducted. The monuments themselves influence people by making them keep the distance in order not to be disrespectful.

Memory institutions in Minsk

THE MUSEUM OF THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

The Museum of the Great Patriotic War is a large new memorial complex that serves the state's ideology. Its exposition communicates the idea of the atrocities of the Nazi occupation and genocide against Soviet Belarusians and does not specifically focus on Jewish people. Continuing the Soviet tradition, the term *Holocaust* is not mentioned. The Jewish victims are only referred to once on an explanatory plaque. Belarusian museumizing practices have continued the Soviet approach that blended the Holocaust with the narrative of the suffering of the Belarusian people.[33]

THE MUSEUM OF JEWISH HISTORY

This underrepresentation could be balanced by private museums but the existing cannot compete with state memorialization. There is a Museum of Jewish History and Culture in Minsk. It is a small institution that was opened by Belarusian Jewish community activists with support from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.[34] Its exposition includes information about Jewish history printed on walls and everyday items and photographs that were donated to the museum by Jewish families or by non-Jewish neighbors of those who vanished during the Holocaust. The problem is that this museum cannot be considered to be truly open to the general public. The only way of reaching the museum is to find out about it online or from other people, make an appointment via phone and access the museum through a guarded post. The museum has no facade so it cannot be identified at close quarters. It is hidden behind an unmarked fence along with various Jewish organizations. Thus, it does not significantly impact the city's memory landscape.

> "EVEN THOUGH A MEMORIAL HAS BEEN CREATED, THIS LOCATION HAS NOT YET BECOME A SITE OF MEMORY, AS PEOPLE RARELY INTERACT WITH THE MONUMENTS."

THE HISTORICAL WORKSHOP

Another important location for Holocaust studies and the Jewish community is the Historical Workshop. It is a research center located in a house that used to form part of the Minsk ghetto. The Historical Workshop studies previously unknown topics about the history of the Second World War, particularly events about the Minsk ghetto and the Trostenets extermination camp that have not been studied much in Germany and Belarus. The Historical Workshop publishes the results of its research and the personal memoirs of witnesses and scientific collections. It also collects archival materials and organizes seminars, conferences and science clubs. In addition, it works with the second and third-generations families of war victims, visits to memory forums in the regions are organized, and psychological support is provided to target groups.[35] There is no doubt about the impact that this organization has had on Jewish studies in Belarus. However, it is a research and education center, not a public site, Thus, it has been designed to support educators, professionals and members of the Jewish community.

Memoralization of the Holocaust in Brest
A MONUMENT IN BREST

Brest's public space contains only one monument to the victims of the Holocaust. In 1946, the people of Brest erected a monument with an inscription in Yiddish to commemorate the deaths of thousands of locals.[36] The post-war vernacular monument was demolished in 1974. It was restored in 1992 with the help of endowments from Jewish organizations from Israel, Argentina and the USA.[37] A small monument resembling a tombstone states the following in Belarusian, Hebrew, and Yiddish "In memory of 34,000 Jews, prisoners of the ghetto in Brest and its suburbs – the innocent victims of Nazism in the years of the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1942". The appearance and maintenance of this monument is a community business as input from the municipality is limited to a silent agreement that it is allowed to be sited in a public space.

The monument is in a central area but there are not so many passersby. One can understand it is a commemoration park but its dedication is not clear unless one closely approaches the monument. It serves as a site of memory on commemoration days. It is a meeting place and a place of rituals. However, the monument is usually ignored and people pass by without any interaction. The path is quite remote and there are no benches close by, making the monument virtually invisible. Due to its moderate design, it does not evoke any emotions and images. Thus, it provides only brief information about the tragedy all those years ago and does not serve as a site of memory for Brest's citizens, apart from the active members of the Jewish community.

> **"THE MAIN PROBLEM OF MEMORY CULTURE IS THE LOW LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF THE HOLOCAUST BECAUSE IT IS BARELY MENTIONED IN SCHOOLBOOKS."**

THE HOLOCAUST IN BREST'S MUSEUMS

On an official level, the Holocaust is present in the Museum of the Brest Fortress. A stand dedicated to the victims of the Brest ghetto does not include the words "Jews", "Holocaust" or "Antisemitism". The vitrine includes photos of Jewish people and families, ashes from Auschwitz and prisoners' clothing from Majdanek.[38] The narrative created in the museum is quite confusing. However, it is a big step for the official memory culture to approach to commemoration of the Holocaust. It is possible to observe a shift in the memory canon of the Soviet tradition in the state museum.[39] Thus, the state has only dedicated one uninformative stand in a vast museum complex.

An example of vernacular commemoration is the museum called the Jews of Brest. Most of the items that became exhibits in the museum were donated by Brest residents, as well as people from Brest and their relatives living in the USA, Argentina and Israel. It was opened in 2011 and still remains the first and only Jewish museum outside of Minsk.

The museum is dedicated to the history of the city's Jewish community since the 1920s and contains over 120 exhibits including Jewish subjects (Jewish household items, rare prayer books, textbooks, fragments of an old Torah scroll), as well as archival documents, photographs and books. A separate section is dedicated to famous natives of Brest.

The museum's exposition fits into one medium-sized room. Its walls are painted in three colors corresponding to the museum's various exhibits that are dedicated to the different phases of the Jewish history of the city. A pink wall symbolizes the pre-war life of the Jews of Brest. A gray wall with barbed wire represents the memory of the Holocaust. Light green represents the color of the revival of the Jewish community of Brest and the present exhibits at the stand called "People, Events, Life". The museum is located in the basement of a five-storey Soviet apartment building and it is necessary to know the location of the museum in order to find it – it is totally unnoticeable to passersby. However, it is an important shrine-like location for community members and people who are specifically interested in the subject. Unfortunately, the museum is poorly presented online. It has no website or social media account that could compensate for its invisibility in the public space.

Intangible memorialization: education and bottom-up digital projects

The main problem of memory culture is the low level of awareness of the Holocaust because it is barely mentioned in schoolbooks. The Great Patriotic War is a core topic for the history curriculum, as well as the basis of Belarusian ideology. High school students attend 19 classes dedicated to the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War. There are also extracurricular activities, dozens of events, scientific and practical conferences,

Employees of a Jewish owned factory in Brest (pre-war photograph). In 1940, around 40 percent of Brest's inhabitants were Jewish. Their engagement in commerce and economic life was prevalent. The Jewish community was not merely a minority, but rather one of the urban life basis.

The memorial monument in Brest reads: "In memory of 34,000 Jews, prisoners of the ghetto in Brest and its suburbs – the innocent victims of Nazism in the years of the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1942".

research, as well as creative competitions dedicated to the Great Patriotic War. Only a very small part of the school curriculum includes the history of the Holocaust and the Jewish population. This topic is condensed into three brief paragraphs. Even the word *Holocaust* does not appear in schoolbooks. The authors only use the words *ghetto* and *genocide*. For Belarus, a country that suffered immensely from the Holocaust, describing and reflecting on the complexity and depth of the tragedy of our compatriots in only three paragraphs is, of course, objectively insufficient.

Some teachers choose to talk more openly about the Holocaust with their students and seek the support of the Museum of Jewish History and the Historic Workshop. Adults sometimes also develop an interest as they feel something is missing from their vision of their country's history. Bottom-up initiatives aim to eliminate this underrepresentation by creating digital projects that make history more easily accessible. The following paragraphs describe the current projects in Minsk and Brest.

Oral history archive and independent mass media

Nasha Pamiac.org [Our Memory] is an oral history database comprising a Belarusian Oral History Archive containing video recordings of people sharing their recollections of 20th-century events. One of its sections is dedicated to the Minsk ghetto. This project aims to preserve the narratives and promote their use for research and educational purposes. The project is not sufficiently interesting to attract the general public as it primarily targets researchers. However, it is a step away from dry fact to the human side of the Holocaust. The Belarusian Oral History Archive preserves the voices of witnesses. However, the task of sharing these voices and making them easily accessible to a broader audience is the responsibility of the mass media, as the education system maintains ignorance. In the past years, the examina-

tion of the Jewish legacy has become a trendy topic for the new media. Independent online media such as Citydog and 34travel systemically inform their readers about the Jewish history of the country. Their articles contain information about sites and nonsites of memory and how the Soviets transformed former Jewish buildings. They share people's recollections of life in the ghetto and post-war memories. As these articles are published regularly and are aimed at a broad audience, these media publications diminish the void created by the silencing of the Holocaust in the official discourse. Up to autumn 2020, the digital expansion was limited to Nasha Pamiac and periodical online publications.

Jewish Minsk audio guide

In October 2020, the first Belarusian-Jewish Festival was held by the Belarusian-Jewish Cultural Heritage Center. This private non-commercial organization was established as recently as 2019. The idea behind the festival was to present the Jewish history and heritage in Belarus, which would not only focus on the Jewish community but on Belarusian society as a whole. The festival was supposed to open the way to the roots, to the search for national identity. The organization also emphasizes its incredible legacy – a product of the neighborhood of the Jewish and Belarusian people. The organizers stated that "the Belarusian-Jewish Festival demonstrates that the hidden and forgotten history is not only about the past, but to a much greater extent about our present day".[40] The release of the first route invites people to walk along one of the oldest streets in Minsk, plunge into the busy shopping area from the late 19th century, feel the multi-culturalism of the city and understand the role that Jews played in its life. The Jewish history of Minsk is not a separate history of the Jewish community; it is an integral part of the heritage of modern Belarus, the history of the development and formation of the city. It will allow people to better understand the national code of modern Belarusians.[41]

The tour focuses on the upper town – the old city center. This is an interesting starting point because the conventional tours focus on the former ghetto territory. Inviting people to explore the old town through the lens of Jewish culture helps to integrate Jews into the pre-war historical narrative. However, this tour is the first in the series and the next editions will cover other aspects of Jewish history. The audio guide is informative enough voids of information missing from the textbooks and museums and entertaining enough to attract the listeners.

Brest stories guide

An independent Brest-based theatre called Kryly Khalopa developed a project called "Brest Stories Guide" comprising a collection of documentary audio performances that intended to be listened to while walking around the city. The motivation for creating this project came from the fact that an important layer of history was underrepresented in museums, public spaces, tourist guides and the school history curriculum. Brest Stories Guide is a mobile app that allows the city to be navigated using a digital city map while listening to an audio commentary. Key places of Jewish heritage and historical events are marked on the map. The urban space is a stage upon which voices from the past become audible to today's inhabitants and tourists. It represents a plunge into the past that allows us to see and understand a part of history that has been erased from the city's landscape and avoided in the official commemoration. "Brest Stories Guide" is a project that combines art, journalism and cultural heritage preservation. The authors describe the project as "both an innovative tourist and art product, and a reliable source for studying the city history."[42]

The main focus of the project is antisemitism and the elimination of the Jewish community in Brest from 1941–1942. Their mission is to help people understand that the Holocaust is a problem of Jews from the past:

> Today we can state that the biggest catastrophe and trauma of city life is not present in its memory. With the Brest Stories Guide project, our theatre is conveying the idea that the Holocaust concerns not only Jews and the past but also the problem of people excluding in the modern world. Those who remain indifferent to these events will remain indifferent to the new crimes that allegedly *only concern only others*.[43]

The project is an attempt to recreate history using vernacular sources, books, photos and interviews with eyewitnesses and survivors, as well as Nazi officers' reports. It relies more on the voices of the inhabitants than on the official version of history presented in textbooks.

"DIGITAL TOOLS ALLOW US TO PRESENT THE SILENCED STORIES, LINK THEM TO URBAN LOCATIONS AND EVEN DEANONYMIZE THE VICTIMS."

On the importance of giving a voice to the past

The sites of memory of the Holocaust exist in a regime of semi-visibility. Memorialization is 'hidden in its exposure' because there are no signs that could indicate that they are nearby and give a hint to someone who is not intentionally looking for them. The locations of the official commemorations are out of sight of traffic, flaneurs and tourists. Moreover, the monument is a mere stone that requires informational support in order to be read and understood. The legacy of the Jewish community in Belarus and the commemoration of the Holocaust are underrepresented in the urban spaces of Minsk and Brest. This issue continues in the domain of education. The history of the Holocaust is under-represented in the public space of Belarusian towns, in contrast to the extensive memorialization of the Great Patriotic War. Because of historical peculiarities, revelations are only obvious to those people who are interested in the topic and are ready to search for the sites of memory and the information behind them. Minsk and Brest contain vast areas that are places of burials and non-sites of memory. As the commemorations are fragmental and lack additional information, people might feel a sense of strangeness and alienation, as major parts of the history are missing. According to Gordon, the cities are haunted. Thus, an elaboration of the past might help people make peace with the tormented history. Facing and admitting to the ghosts that live with us is crucial, as ignorance of ghostly matters may have some real outcomes.

In January 2019, builders uncovered one of the mass graves after a private developer had paid for the right to build an elite residential area in the very center of Brest. 1,214 human remains were unearthed. I have previously mentioned the mass murders that took place in the ghetto in 1942. Local residents were aware of the grave existence. Some people described the location as execution yards (*rasstrelnye dvory*) in their colloquial communication. Also, official information existed about the mass burials at this site, although the authorities subsequently denied it.[44] This is a remarkable example of a non-site of memory. The lack of commemoration resulted in an unpleasant outcome that became a re-traumatizing experience for the community and led to financial losses for the business. The scandal in Brest has demonstrated how important it is to consider the past while engaging in urban planning for the future. It is also a wonderful illustration of how silenced memory functions: being buried under the surface it only slightly alters the way of life, although paralyzing it to a certain extent. However, the memory is eventually unearthed and it becomes impossible to ignore it. This demonstrates that nothing can be covered and truly forgotten. We need to address the difficult past. It is not only the executions and horrors of war that have been silenced.

This underrepresentation entails the existence of non-sites of memory. The insufficiency of official commemoration resulted in the creation of an intangible system of memorialization that existed as oral history and has now taken a digital form. These narratives – retold by the locals and digitized – fill the voids of memory and understanding of Jewish history, creating another level of meaning. This additional layer serves as a navigational system that links sites of memories – and 'non-sites of memory' – to each other and with their cultural meaning. It creates a possibility for existing of the agonistic public sphere in which different meanings can exist without creating conflict, enrich the sphere and decrease the dominance of the official discourse.

The regime of semi-visibility created a challenge for those people who decided to talk about the Jewish history of Minsk. Through their work, journalists, public historians and tour guides are reproducing the narrative of the history of the Jewish community. The work they are doing to fill the voids of material commemorations is like creating an additional layer of remembrance. It serves as an intangible navigation system of meanings that bond memorials between each other and fill the voids in the understanding of past events. It had previously existed in vernacular forms but has now become more visible and usable, thanks to digital technology, and has gained popularity among the non-Jewish population.

Digital tools allow us to present the silenced stories, link them to urban locations and even deanonymize the victims. There is no need to build a coherent storyline, like in schoolbooks or the movies. Different versions can be recorded and presented simultaneously. Digitized data allows us to preserve recollections that have been untouched for a longer time and present and store an unlimited amount of narratives and versions of past events. Projects such as the "Brest Stories Guide" highlight a wider array of recollections and commemorate the experiences of neglected social groups. This is in line with the new turn in the humanities that intends to be more inclusive. The revival of past events is compulsory for overcoming the trauma. Such a process only becomes possible when someone interacts with the entries. The "Brest Stories Guide" makes this interaction possible for a broader audience and is also far more entertaining than a traditional archive. This accessibility and appeal to a broader public raises the likelihood of silenced traumas being heard, remembered and treated.

Silencing the memory of the Jewish population became the *modus operandi* of the local authorities. This part of history had been transmitted as oral narrations by the locals so the memory of the dreadful events survived. It is something that the locals are aware of, although a stranger would not be able to learn about the events from the urban space itself. The vernacular recollections and archive entries continued until the time when they were given an opportunity to be heard, thanks to the activists, artists and journalists who are providing this input. These artistic and media interventions are a step towards reconciling with the past and soothing its ghosts. Perhaps when the damage is so severe that there is little that can be restored, digital commemorations are a way of transforming the non-sites of memory into *lieux de mémoire*. Introducing a creative approach to memory studies provides the opportunity to relive the dreadful events and be liberated from them. Liberation from the ghosts that haunt urban spaces allows people to accept the damage that has been done to the community and restore the wrecked identity. This is vital for overcoming collective trauma and restoring communal bonds. Without making peace with the past it is impossible to move further.

Holocaust commemoration in post-Lukashenko's Belarus

This article discussed the memorialization of the Holocaust in post-Soviet Belarus under Lukashenko's regime. However, the ongoing protests make one think about how the country would change after the regime falls. Of course, there would be a complete reevaluation of the historical narratives – both in the public space and in education. Depending on the orientation of the next government, the history books would be rewritten to serve a far-right nationalist agenda, pro-European discourse, or even suggest another version of Belarusian-Russian unity.

Currently, Belarusians are facing mass political repression, torture, protesters been murdered by the police, as well as silencing on an official level. Some people in Belarus use the term *genocide* to describe the persecution of Belarusians who do not support Lukashenko – and the riot police are being compared to the Nazis during World War II. Although the term is not accurate for this case, these associations may provoke a wave of reassessment of the memory of the Holocaust regarding recent traumatic events.

The vernacular memorials that were created to mourn murdered people are being violently destroyed; people are being detained for attempting to maintain spontaneous memorials. This traumatic experience might trigger the development of a more sensitive political environment and an unapologetic approach to silencing the tragedies. Thus, the representation of the Holocaust in the official memory culture might receive a broader commemoration on an official level after a change in the political course. Thus, the dark events of 2020 may lead to the creation of a more diverse memory culture in the country that would pay more attention to the danger of authoritarian ideologies. ⊠

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German aerial photo of June 27, 1941 "aktion" against Białystok Jews. On lower right the Great Synagogue has caught fire, with more than 2,000 Jews locked inside and burnt alive. Upper left corner is Plonaska Synagogue and surroundings burning.

A city of amnesia

MARCIN KĄCKI'S *BIAŁYSTOK. WHITE POWER. BLACK MEMORY*

by **Jan Miklas-Frankowski**

Marie-Claire Lavabre pinpoints the paradigmatic nature of Ricoeur's memory work concept as a process of emerging out of the illness of the past. It characterizes postmodern societies severely affected by Communism, Nazism or colonialism. Memory functions as the grieving process through updating the vision of the past in the present.[1] Similarly, LaCapra believes that the loss associated with historical trauma should be recognized and worked through.[2] After 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe the past encountered different and multiple stories for the decomposition and recomposition of national myths.[3] In my opinion, part of the process of shaping memory can be observed in many examples of Polish contemporary literary reportage.

Literary reportage can be classified as a part of the broad genre of literary journalism[4] and has an established tradition in Poland. A relationship between collective memory and fiction or non-fiction literature is hard to define unambiguously. However, it can be proved by an exceptional number of high-quality books of reportage on this issue edited in Poland.

Ryszard Kapuściński claims that a literary reportage "is a recon into different cultures and civilizations. An attempt to understand the behavior and attitude of people with different values. People we have to get to know if we want to understand the world we live in."[5] Similarly, according to Waldenfels' phenomenology theory, a literary journalist is the Third, who speaks from the place of the Other; similar to "transitional figures such
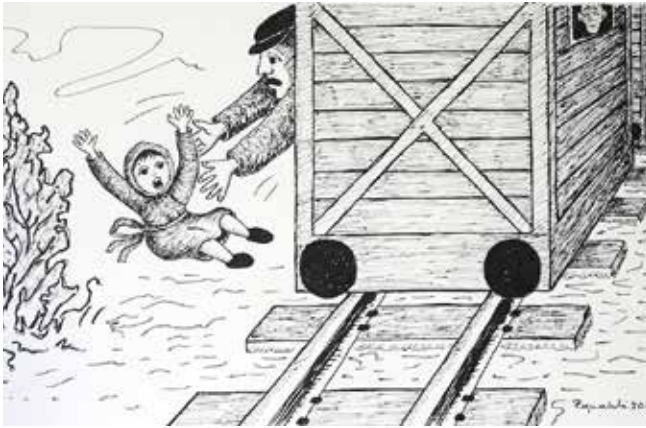
Reportedly, several dozen Jewish children were thrown off the wagons through small windows when the train slowed down in the small town Łapy in attempts to save them from death in the gas chambers of Treblinka. Images from the short film *Castaways*, by LOGTV, 2012.

as the advocate, the therapist, the translator, the witness or the field researcher; they all intervene from the position of a Third without closing the fissure which opens between ourselves and the Other, between the own and the alien".[6]

On the other hand, literary journalists' work can be a narrative exchange between different linguistic and cultural communities. They create discourse about the ethical principles involved in the 'exchange of memories' and in 'translation' between cultures.[7] That could guide action towards new forms of sociality and narratives of emancipation that implicitly rejects forms of oppression and violence. In fact, these books are an attempt to communicate and negotiate conflicting national memories. As a result, they extend Polish collective memory by making it multidirectional[8] and compatible with different memories.[9]

A lot of Polish literary reportage authors have worked on the memory of the Holocaust or of Polish Jews: Hanna Krall, Anna Bikont, Józef Mackiewicz, Lidia Ostałowska, and Anka Grupińska, to name a few. Against this background, Marcin Kącki's approach seems to be particularly interesting. His book of reportage: *Białystok. White Power, Black Memory*[10] on the one hand documents oblivion and denial of the memory of the former Jewish inhabitants of the city; paradoxically, on the other hand, it is a call for this memory to be restored.[11] In other words, we are dealing here with the two basic attitudes and forms of remembering historical trauma distinguished by LaCapra. The first results in the process of "working-through"; the other is based on denial and results in "acting-out".

THE IDEA OF WRITING a book of reportage on Białystok – that was nominated for the prestigious Nike award in 2016 – was born in the publishing house Czarne, one of the most important Polish literary journalism publishing houses**.** In one of his interviews Marcin Kącki reveals that the editors were curious whether "the media image of the Podlasie region, dominated by xenophobic attacks and swastikas that local prosecutors interpret as the Hindu symbols of happiness, is true".[12] In Podlasie, a region that boasts of its historical and contemporary multiculturalism**.** In

Białystok – the city of the birth of Esperanto. The city which according to *The Guardian* and a European Commission survey from 2014 was the best city to live in Poland, better than Vienna, Barcelona or Prague.[13]

When Kącki went to Białystok for the first time, he read *Tainted landscapes* by Martin Pollack on the train:

> Pollack broods in it about the places that have been erased from memory by architectural changes. He recalls places of execution that were intentionally masked by fields or forests. He asks an important question: whether such masking, covering, of memory affects the next generations. Can one be a good man without remembering history?[...] With the book in my head, I get off the bus somewhere in the center of Białystok at night, and I wander around the park and playground. Soon I will find out that under the park there are vertically buried matzevahs. The city erased them from memory, and I stood there with a question about Bailystok residents.[14]

At first, Kącki accepts Czarne's proposal reluctantly, but immediately after his arrival, he is fascinated by this place: its atmosphere, people, secrets. "With each arrival it was getting more and more difficult for me to leave Białystok because it is a fascinating city, full of secrets, understatements, 'metaphysics of the province' and those ghosts that led me. Many of them were capricious, did not want to reveal their history, I had riddles at every step, but I feed on riddles".[15] One of the first dark mysteries, the solving of which begins the volume, however, concerns not Białystok, but the nearby town of Łapy, located on the railway route from Warsaw.

BIAŁYSTOK OPENS WITH "Łapy", one of the most shocking reports of the collection and the most tragic episode in the history of the railway line Warsaw-Białystok, "whose embankment was reinforced in the 20th century with bodies of children."[16] When trains

going to the extermination camp at Treblinka slowed down in Łapy, desperate parents threw their children out of the cars. "There were only one or two windows in a car. Small, darned with barbed wire – you could stick out your head to take some fresh air, stick out your hand for water [...]. You could squeeze a child through."[17] Most of the "drop-outs" died right away, shot by German guards, who later forced Polish residents to bury the bodies in the railway embankment. "Today in Łapy no one can count how many children's graves the railway embankment conceals. It used to be easier to count because grass would grow more vigorously on them, green used to be greener."[18]

Today there is no trace of the Jewish children buried in the railway embankment; buried in nameless graves, they do not have even a symbolic tombstone. When one of the survivors from among Łapy's Jews wanted to establish a monument to commemorate his family murdered during the war, right-wing council members refused, claiming that "a monument for one Jewish family would be too much",[19] and that, after all, there already was an obelisk "dedicated to the tragically deceased children".[20]

One of the older residents of Łapy and an activist in the Łapy Regional Society takes Kącki to the monument which was supposed to commemorate Jewish children killed at the railway embankment, but after finding the monument located on the outskirts of the city, it turns out that it bears an inscription: "In memory of the Heroic Polish Children. 1968".[21] "The idea was to write 'to Jewish children', but the Party didn't agree. Maybe it's for the best because soon someone would probably vandalize it, and so it remained like this [...]",[22] the embarrassed tour guide explains.

IN ŁAPY THERE IS NO trace of the Jewish inhabitants of the city either. Only the oldest inhabitants remember them. Just lonely 70-year-old Zbigniew Siwiński remained, saved by his Polish foster mother, who raised him alone, avoiding any talk about his origin. Siwiński celebrates Jewish holidays, and he revealed his Jewishness in the local newspaper, but he wears a kippah only at home. After all, he lives a mere three hundred meters away from a priest who delivers anti-Semitic sermons. Kącki also manages to find the only survivor of the Łapy "dropouts" – a "beautiful" Jewish girl. The whole city has heard of her; Kącki's older interviewees say that they sometimes see her, but others think that she is only an unreal urban myth. Yet the survivor herself does not want to talk; she closes the door and leaves Kącki with unasked questions:

> After all this effort, I can't believe it went so easily because L. is veiled in some kind of mystery, but I'm going, I'm climbing the stairs, I'm knocking. The door

> is opened by a short, stout woman, looking around 60 years old. [...] Slightly slanted, brown, shiny eyes. She must have been a beautiful baby when they untangled her from the clothes which she was bundled up in. She must have been a beautiful woman when under an assumed name she was hiding to sing the verses of the Polish national anthem. Or maybe not, maybe she's very Jewish and, like Siwiński, she's just celebrating Tu BiShvat?
> – I have so many questions for you... I mean that train... during the war – I say excitedly. She cringes as if caught in a painful secret. Quietly but firmly she refuses and shuts the door.
> I walk down the stairs feeling downbeat. After all these talks and fudging, a Jewish girl saved by brave people just closes the door. And my questions? Did her parents hide her in the oven? When did they tell her the truth, because they must have if the whole town knew? Did she look for her real parents? Has she got any children? What do they feel? Does she invite a priest for an annual visit [...]?
> I walk out of the building. I want to go back upstairs once again. On the wall of a neighboring building, I see spray-painted swastikas, each a meter big. The little rescued Jewish girl also sees them every day. I'm leaving.[23]

KĄCKI'S BOOK IS a reporter's attempt to answer the question of what happened to make the media coverage from Podlasie "dominated by burning apartments, swastikas on walls, anti-Semitism, racism and football hooliganism".[24] He roams the whole of Podlasie with this question in mind: how was it possible in a place where Poles, Belarusians, Tatars and Jews had lived side by side for centuries? He visits Jedwabne, abandoned and repressing the memory of the neighbors' crime; he confronts an assessment of Bury's activity among Belarusians and nationalists from Hajnówka; he is interested in both the inside story of the first Polish *in vitro* birth and the Eucharistic miracle in Podlasie's Sokółka, but he gives the most space to the regional capital – Białystok.

According to Kącki, Bialystok is primarily a town which has "a problem with identity, because after the war it has written its history without a menorah and a mezuzah",[25] which is most conspicuously symbolized by Central Park – the city's landmark accessed by "the five most frequented streets connected with the largest roundabout in the city".[26] "Three hectares of high lime trees, maple trees, manicured paths, benches, a playground for children. In winter, the park is used as a sledding hill. A year-round attraction".[27] In 2014 Tomasz Wiśniewski made a short film to make the residents aware that under the park there is a Jewish

> "TODAY THERE IS NO TRACE OF THE JEWISH CHILDREN BURIED IN THE RAILWAY EMBANKMENT; BURIED IN NAMELESS GRAVES, THEY DO NOT HAVE EVEN A SYMBOLIC TOMBSTONE."

Central Park in Białystok – Monument to the Heroes of the Białystok Land.

Central Park in Białystok – view from the Opera and Puppet Theater. The park was established on the former Jewish cemetery.

cemetery. "Under tons of soil hundreds of Jewish matzevahs stand upright, and under them are human remains wrapped in shrouds."[28] All of this is the work of a city architect, Michał Bałasz, who didn't know what to do with the ruined cemetery: "Just the rubble, these goats, and even drunkards shat on these gravestones; nobody watched. To be honest, let me tell you, I felt sorry about the cemetery, but nobody thought about digging it up, or moving it somewhere. I came up with the idea of covering it".[29]

Kącki wonders whether the cemetery was covered with rubble from the Ghetto or "maybe from the burned down synagogue, in which about two thousand people were burnt alive".[30] In 1973, when the memory of the former purpose of the place was beginning to fade, a monument to the Heroes of the Bialystok Land "fallen in the struggle for people's Poland"[31] was erected on a park hill, opposite the seat of the Provincial Committee. After 1989, people became less and less keen on the relics of the old ideology. In 2007, the monument changed its name to "White Eagle". In 2011, a group of veterans attached meter-high letters to the monument to make the inscription: "God, Honor, Fatherland." Although they acted illegally, no one has the courage to take the inscription off, and each successive court dismisses the case. The Jewish cemetery begins exactly at that spot with a motto which, in the common mind, is not associated with patriotism or military tradition, but with Polish national right-wing circles, usually averse to other groups, especially ethnic minorities.

BEFORE THE WAR, Jews accounted for half of the inhabitants of Białystok and were the most important socio-cultural element of the city. The marketplace and the center were all Jewish. "It was Jews who built this town, who actually made it, involved it in the civilization machine."[32] "The Jews were Bialystok",[33] and now they are hardly present in the architectural space of the city or in the memory of its current inhabitants. This clearly follows from research by sociologist Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska, who states that "the aspects that are a memento of communities that lived in Bialystok in the past (mostly Jews, but also Germans or Russians) are now completely marginalized [...], and the awareness of the legacy of these groups among the contemporary inhabitants of Białystok is negligible".[34] It's domination, Sztop-Rutkowska writes, of "the symbolically largest group over minority ones",[35] domination whose eloquent symbol is written in the motto: "God, Honor, Fatherland" on the site of a Jewish cemetery.

For the present-day residents of Bialystok, the most internationally famous inhabitant of Białystok, Ludwik Zamenhof, is not a reason to be proud. Over the years, he was not commemorated except for a street name and a school (until 2001). Only in 1973 was a modest bust of the creator of Esperanto unveiled. When the World Esperanto Congress took place in Bialystok in 2009, the hostile atmosphere intensified, and anti-Semitic comments appeared on the Internet. Before the Congress, an empty tent for Esperantists was set on fire, then Zamenhof's old school, visited by Esperantists, was pelted with stones. Someone punctured the tires of the Czech delegation's bus parked outside the school. During the Congress Zamenhof's Center was set on fire, and a young boy poured pink paint on his bust under the very eyes of passers-by. Professor Andrzej Sadowski explains to Kącki that for Białystok inhabitants, Zamenhof is not a creator of a universal language which was supposed to bridge the gap between nations, but is simply a Jew. "The inhabitants of Podlasie are folk communities, who developed their identity in the countryside, where the concept of 'ours vs. alien' dominated, and a Jew from the town was alien – an innkeeper, a salesman, a banker".[36] Ludwik Zamenhof was and still is an alien in Białystok. In 2009, the Senate of the University in Bialystok failed to put to the vote a students' petition to name Zamenhof a patron of the Institute of Sociology.

But anti-Semitism does not exhaust all xenophobic behaviors listed in Białystok. One should mention the football hooligans described by Kącki in detail – skinheads who are responsible for many misdemeanors and crimes, racial assaults and arson,

that are usually dismissed, as well as drawing swastikas on walls, which a famous Podlasie prosecutor, Dawid Roszkowski, interpreted as Hindu symbols of happiness and prosperity. Kącki also tracks down relationships between Białystok business, the "Jagiellonia" football club and the city authorities.

In this ocean of xenophobia, nationalism and anti-Semitism, Kącki also finds people who resist the pervasive historical oblivion and void, who fight incomprehension and intolerance: community workers, scholars, cultural animators, defenders of old wooden architecture, LGBT activists, people who selflessly monitor racist and xenophobic graffiti on walls and on the Internet. Some of them were forced to leave Białystok and Podlasie; others are becoming more active against all odds.

KĄCKI HAS MADE Zamenhof's idea the composition arc of *Białystok*. The book begins with a condensed picture of his life:

> Ludwik Zamenhof, a sickly teenager, goes out to a bustling market in front of his home in Białystok. He sees Jews, Poles, Tatars, Belarusians, Germans, their bickering, fistfights. He listens to the language tumult which hinders understanding.
> In the little Ludwik's head an idea sprouts that all nations and faiths should be connected by a language. Common, accepted, neutral. A dozen years later he writes the first Esperanto textbook [...]. At the end of his life, when the cannons of World War I still thunder, he believes that people can still communicate, yet they need humanitarianism, freedom from "blind service to a nation, which turns into chauvinism, and blind obedience to the clergy, which turns into fanaticism".[37]

Zamenhof's last words are probably the main reasons why, also according to Kącki, the Black Memory and the White Power so heavily appropriated Białystok and Podlasie. Unfortunately, the ending of the entire book does not sound optimistic at all.

> Zamenhof's idea of people living in harmony, symbolically contained in Esperanto, was carved on a golden plate in 1977, and placed in the space probe Voyager with greetings for alien civilizations. The probe passed out of the Solar System; it is twenty billion kilometers away from Bialystok and is constantly receding [...][38]

BIALYSTOK AS DESCRIBED by Kącki is a city of collective amnesia and denial of the city's Jewish past, struggling with nationalism and xenophobia. However, *Białystok* is not only a book about Bialystok or the Podlasie region. From *Białystok* emerges not only an image of the city of oblivion and a multidimensional description of its community but it is here, in the capital of Podlasie, that Kącki managed to observe, as in a microscope lens, processes growing in all of Poland, Europe, the world.

> When the publishing house Czarne approached me in the summer of 2014 about writing a book on Białystok, I was not particularly convinced. I couldn't find external stimuli. Everywhere was calm, cool, with no sign of far-right nationalism. There was a party in power that did not hold slogans calling for violence, there was peace in Europe.
> And suddenly, while I was writing the book, something started to change. Not only in Podlasie and Bialystok, not even in Poland, but throughout Europe. People are panting with hatred. Perhaps Podlasie is just a drop, showing a close-up of what this ocean of hatred looks like because this region is extremely affected by history.[39]

Białystok is unique in its oblivion and at the same time, it is ordinary. It is unique because it was the only large city in today's Poland where Jews constituted almost half of the entire population, and at the same time were the main cultural and social fabric of the city. And it is not unique, because the same processes (of course with a complex social, political and historical background) took place on a smaller or larger scale in Radom, Kielce, Chełm and many other cities, towns, and villages in which Jews lived, and therefore most locations in Poland.

THIS OBLIVION, moreover, concerns our entire region, all of Central and Eastern Europe.

When Ellie Wesel returns to his birth town, to Sighet Maramures ("It was to take me back to where everything began, where the world lost its innocence and God lost His mask"[40]), he finds a different, alien city. The city which he remembers from childhood doesn't exist anymore. In its place, a new one has grown: "A city that has denied its past is condemned to live outside of time; it breathes only in the memory of those who have left it".[41] Monika Sznajderman visits Radom – the city of birth of her Jewish grandfather – with a similar experience. "There are many invisible cities in Poland, but Radom seems to be particularly saturated with invisibility. Nothing here resembles anything. Nothing fits"[42] writes Sznajderman in 'The Pepper Forgers'.

Radom, Białystok, Sighet, Łapy do not want to remember their Jewish past. Their former inhabitants are dead; the few who survived prefer to be silent. This is why Sznajderman writes about the imperative of remembering: "The silence is huge and spacious; you can sink in it. For that reason, I started to remem-

> **"RADOM, BIAŁYSTOK, SIGHET, ŁAPY DO NOT WANT TO REMEMBER THEIR JEWISH PAST. THEIR FORMER INHABITANTS ARE DEAD; THE FEW WHO SURVIVED PREFER TO BE SILENT."**

ber. Against the silence, against the oblivion, against the nothingness that wants to absorb everything".[43]

And against what Marcin Kącki calls 'black memory' or succumbing to 'white power' in the title of his book. Marcin Kącki managed to create not just an impressive multifaceted anthropological case study of the society of a contemporary Polish provincial city. On the one hand, from *Białystok* emerges the history of a city "without memory" and the shape of the whole Polish national community with xenophobia, nationalism and anti-Semitism, while on the other hand it shows dissent from the oblivion, repression and domination of one nationalistic paradigm of memory. ☒

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11 My first attempt at analyzing Kącki's book was a paper presented at the annual conference "Żydzi Wschodniej Polski" [Jews of Eastern Poland] at the University of Białystok June 8, 2017, published in the post-conference book as: Jan Miklas-Frankowski "Bez mezuzy i menory. 'Białystok. Biała siła, czarna pamięć'. Marcina Kąckiego" [Without mezuza or menorah: Białystok. White Power. Black Memory by Marcin Kącki], in: Żydzi

Białostoccy: Od początku do 1988, [Białystok Jews. From the beginning to 1988] ed. Jarosław Ławski, Kamil K. Pilichiewicz and Anna Wydrycka (Białystok: Prymat, 2018) 369–379. The present paper is an extended and modified version of an earlier analysis.

12 Jerzy Zawisiak, "Usłyszałem, *że* zniszczyłem wizerunek Białegostoku. Wywiad z Marcinem Kąckim" ["I've heard that I destroyed the image of Białystok". Interview with Marcin Kącki], Onet kultura, October 22, 2015, accessed June 26, 2020.https://kultura.onet.pl/wiadomosci/marcin-kacki-uslyszalem-ze-zniszczylem-wizerunek-bialegostoku-wywiad/xn5h27l

13 *The Guardian*. Białystok lepszy niż Wiedeń, Warszawa czy Praga [*The Guardian*. Białystok is better than Vienna, Warsaw and Prague], *Kurier Poranny*, July 30, 2014., accessed June 26, 2020.http://www.poranny.pl/wiadomosci/bialystok/art/4913165,the-guardian-bialystok-lepszy-niz-wieden-warszawa-czy-praga,id,t.html,

14 Zawisiak, Usłyszałem ...

15 Katarzyna Miłkowska, "*Białystok. Biała siła, czarna pamięć" – kolejny antysemicki obraz tego miasta? Nie chcę tego!* [Białystok. White Power, Black Memory – next anti-Semitic image of the city? I don't want it!], *Na temat*, September 22, 2015, http://natemat.pl/155465,bialystok-biala-sila-czarna-pamiec-kolejny-antysemicki-obraz-tego-miasta-nie-chce-tego", accessed June 26, 2020.

16 Kącki, *Białystok*, 11.

17 Ibid., 11.

18 Ibid., 13.

19 Ibid., 13.

20 Ibid., 13.

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25 Ibid., 59.

26 Ibid., 71.

27 Ibid., 59.

28 Ibid., 59.

29 Ibid., 63.

30 Ibid., 63.

31 Ibid., 64.

32 Ibid., 52.

33 Ibid., 46.

34 Ibid., 55.

35 Ibid., 55.

36 Ibid., 81.

37 Ibid., 7.

38 Ibid., 281.

39 Tomasz Pstrągowski, "Coś się stało. Ludzie mówią, *że* nienawidzą. Wywiad z Marcinem Kąckim" [Something has happened. People say that they hate] *Książki wp*, March 17, 2016, accessed June 26, 2020. https://ksiazki.wp.pl/cos-sie-stalo-ludzie-mowia-ze-nienawidza-wywiad-z-marcinem-kackim-6145959315068545a.

40 Elie Wiesel, *The Last Return* , *Commentary* March 1965, accessed June 26, 2020 https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/elie-wiesel/the-last-return/.

41 Wiesel, *The Last Return*.

42 Monika Sznajderman, *Fałszerze pieprzu* [Pepper Forgers], (Wołowiec, Czarne: 2016), 103.

43 Sznajderman, *Fałszerze pieprzu*, 113.

Reconstruction of contested history

VILNIUS, 1939–1949

Vilnius residents gather near an advertising column on Didžioji Street at the start of the first Soviet occupation in September 1939.

by **Giedrė Jankevičiūtė**

abstract

The narrative in this article is based on a reconstruction of my personal curatorial experience while working on the exhibition "A Difficult Age: Vilnius, 1939–1949". The exhibition's chronological framework – 1939 to 1949 – was established with a focus on historical realities and aimed to frame the narrative of the guest exhibition. The public knowledge of the history of multi-national Vilnius is full of conscious and unconscious omissions, in large part caused by oblivion, but no less by the unwillingness to remember, ignorance, and the refusal to know or even fear of finding out. The narrative based on the history of visual art and artists' lives is a way to bring up controversial topics and open new perspectives.
KEYWORDS: Communism, occupation, Vilnius, Holocaust, contested history, migration, art.

This article is framed in a context of the complex problem of the ways and possibilities to communicate difficult pasts through art, such as the trauma caused by World War II, particularly such related processes as massive deportation, expatriation and colonization, and their consequences. All those issues still belong to the grey zone in the histories of many Central and East European countries, including the Baltic States, Lithuania among them. Those issues were discussed in a productive and inspiring way at the symposium "Prisms of Silence", as explained in the introduction of this Special Issue.

The narrative in this article is based on a reconstruction of my personal curatorial experience while working on the exhibition called "A Difficult Age: Vilnius, 1939–1949". The exhibition, which was scheduled to open on August 2020, was postponed to January 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is devoted to an

Polish refugees at the Vilnius railway station, September 1939.

extremely complex historical period – the decade that radically changed life in Vilnius and the shape of the city itself. The aim was to re-create at least in part the image of the still unknown past through the works of artists who were active in that period in Vilnius. It might seem a very simple task, but it is not, as the notion of the events of this decade and their consequences still creates many controversies. In other words, public knowledge of the history of multi-national Vilnius, particularly that of the 20th century, is still full of conscious and unconscious omissions, in large part caused by oblivion, but no less by the unwillingness to remember, ignorance, and the refusal to know or even fear of finding out. It is not so simple to approach this minefield, where the same personalities are seen as national heroes by one group, and as cowards and traitors by others. Passions run high, but hopefully the narrative based on the history of visual art and artists' lives can be helpful, as it is more universal compared to that seen from the angle of political history. The actual state of collective memory of this period in Lithuania could be illustrated by the fact that there is no synthesis of the history of that period so far, except the chapters in the two-volume overview of Lithuanian history written by poet, translator and public intellectual Tomas Venclova.[1]

IT IS IMPORTANT to note that the exhibition was conceived and is planned to be displayed by the private MO Museum in Vilnius, that has been operating since 2018.[2] It is not a secondary circumstance, as none of the public museums in Lithuania has enough enthusiasm or probably even courage to deal with this sensitive and uncomfortable subject. The reason for this cautious behavior is not only the general controversial attitude towards mid-twentieth-century history, but also a possible rejection from a certain part of the audience based on the reluctance to see artworks that raise uneasy questions and represent an unacceptable historical reality. For example, some members of the older generation, who directly experienced Soviet repressions or heard about this experience from their family members, refused to visit the exhibition "Under the Red Star: Lithuanian Art 1940–1941", which I curated ten years ago, presenting propaganda works created by Lithuanian artists in the years of the Soviet occupation and Soviet visual production that circulated in Lithuania in that period.[3] The main visitors of that exhibition were people of my generation, i.e. born after 1960 and younger, who perceived the presented historical period as a dramatic past that had painful consequences but was already over.

The exhibition context

The baseline for the MO Museum's decision to hold the exhibition "A Difficult Age, Vilnius 1939–1949" is quite close to the position of the curators of the exhibition "Artige Kunst – Kunst und Politik im Nazionalsozialismus", held in Bochum, Rostock and Regensburg, as it stated in the exhibition catalogue summing up the idea of the show: "[…] museums, as places of cultural, (art) historical, and socio-political education, absolutely can and should encourage debate on controversial issues."[4] It was the aim of sharpening society's sensitivity to inconvenient themes and offer new material for their reflection, built on this particular understanding of the museum's mission, that encouraged the MO Museum to initiate an exhibition devoted to a fragmentarily familiar and mythologized period in the history of Vilnius. The exhibition that I curated represents a tendency that has become distinct in contemporary curatorial practices, testifying to the efforts to give some clarity to the perception and interpretations of a convoluted historical period, while at the same time rewriting the national canon of the history of art. This aim can hardly be achieved without cooperation with specialists in political history. For example, the exhibition "Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art, Life, Politics: Italia 1918–1943" (2018, curator Germano Celant), held at the Fondazione Prada in Milan, which corrected the canon of the mid-20th century history of Italian art, was heavily based on research on both art and political history, in particular, historian Emilio Gentile's research.[5] It is not by accident that the historical narrative accompanying the exhibition started with his text, which was published in the catalogue after the curator's statement.[6] The basis of my exhibition narrative is a timeline prepared by a well-recognized specialist in World War II, associate professor Nerijus Šepetys of Vilnius University.

Gediminas Avenue near the Chamber of Industry and Trade, where the Vilnius Field Command Office had been established during the Nazi occupation, after the entry of Soviet forces into the city, July 1944.

The exhibition curated by Celant became not only a significant cultural event of the year in Italy, but also one of the landmark events of contemporary curatorial practices devoted to rethinking the heritage of the era of European totalitarianisms. It will remain in the history of curatorship not only because of its conception, which basically generalizes the process taking place since the late 1970s,[7] but also because of an exceptionally successful and effective collaboration between the curator, the architects, the designers, the museum itself and the entire team of collaborators, which allowed the creation of a clear, powerful and historically valid narrative provoking lively interest from the local and international audience.

The case that I am presenting is, certainly, not comparable to the above-mentioned German and Italian exhibitions from the viewpoint of their scale, visibility or international impact. However, it undoubtedly is a fragment of the mosaic reconstructing the inconvenient European past, without which the big picture would remain incomplete.

> **"IT IS NOT SO SIMPLE TO APPROACH THIS MINEFIELD, WHERE THE SAME PERSONALITIES ARE SEEN AS NATIONAL HEROES BY ONE GROUP, AND AS COWARDS AND TRAITORS BY OTHERS."**

THE IDEA OF HOLDING an art exhibition devoted to Vilnius in the years of the occupation and terror in the MO Museum emerged after the museum decided to host the exhibition "Perspective of Adolescence: Szapocznikow, Wróblewski, Wajda" staged by the renowned Polish curator Anda Rottenberg, which was transferred from the Silesian Museum in Katowice.[8] Rottenberg's aim was to reveal how the war experiences determined or influenced the work by three "war-affected" Polish artists: sculptor Alina Szapocznikow (1926–1973), film director Andrzej Wajda (1926–

2017), and one of Poland's most prominent artists of the second half of the 20th century, painter Andrzej Wróblewski (1927–1957), who was born and raised in Vilnius, and took the first steps of his artistic career there. In 1945, the Soviets forced Wróblewski together with his mother and brother (his father died in 1941 under the Nazi occupation), as former Polish citizens, to move from Vilnius, which was annexed to the Soviet Union, to the Republic of Poland, which was under Communist rule, but somewhat freer. All three artists are well known not only in Poland, but also internationally. During her creatively most important years Szapocznikow lived in Paris, while Wajda's films, not once given an award at international film festivals, belong to the classics of European cinema, and are perceived and acclaimed in many countries as significant facts of reflection on culture and twentieth-century political history. Wróblewski's work passed beyond Poland's borders in 2010. In that year, an exhibition of his works was held at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. In 2015, a famous exhibition of his two-sided paintings *Recto-verso* took place at the Warsaw Contemporary Art Museum, and in 2016, it travelled to the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid.

However, bringing Rottenberg's exhibition to Vilnius without showing how the artists presented there are related to Vilnius would have been risky. For the exhibition to catch the interest of the Lithuanian audience and to be received in the way envisioned by the organizers, the life and works of its protagonists had to be placed in the field of attention of the local audience. On one hand, Polish art is quite well known and liked in Lithuania;

on the other, as a result of the historical mistrust between Lithuanians and Poles, largely stemming from the so-called "Vilnius issue", the same events of the past are still being viewed from two different perspectives – Lithuanian and Polish. Above all, it concerns the period between the two world wars, as well as the war and early postwar years. So, my task was to try to connect these two different viewpoints.

The main figures of Rottenberg's exhibition are three talented people, artists whose lives and work were marked by a traumatic experience in adolescence and early youth, leaving unhealed and painful scars and a gaping, unfulfillable void. The Vilnius exhibition recounts the irreversible changes that took place under dramatic circumstances in the city optimistically looking into the future, which radically transformed it, and about the traces of vanished hopes, losses, suffering, fear, anxiety, blood, betrayal and cruelty, still emerging in various forms, followed by a constant longing for normality and a realization that a fulfilment of this longing is hardly possible. For both exhibitions, a common title describing those aspects was chosen: "A Difficult Age". The subtitle for the Polish exhibition included the names of the three artists: Szapocznikow, Wajda, Wróblewski; and the subtitle of the Lithuanian exhibition pointed the place: "Vilnius" and the date: "1939–1949".

A Difficult Age is a literal translation of the title of the work *Trudny wiek* by Alina Szapocznikow. This figurative sculpture of a young nude girl is held at the Art Museum of Lodz. According to Anna Nawrot, a researcher and connoisseur of Szapocznikow's artistic heritage, "This is not a mere nude – *A Difficult Age* is also an affirmation of human dignity and power in the face of the grim reality of the post-war world."[9] Nawrot also noted that at the same time our attention is drawn to the awakening sexuality, and "the beauty of the figure is supplemented with a sense of rebellious self-confidence."[10] Thus, the title of the sculpture *A Difficult Age* points both to a complicated historical period and a complex stage in human life – transition from adolescence to youth. However, the history of a concrete artwork only provides an additional explanation to the title whose meaning is clear enough without this commentary.

Briefly about "The Vilnius issue"

Lithuania and Poland were part of the Russian Empire on the eve of World War I. Both proclaimed independence in 1918, and started to fight their own independence wars. However, Vilnius, or Wilno in Polish, became "an apple of discord": for Lithuania it was its historic capital, the city of Lithuanian rulers and the heyday of the Lithuanian state from the 14th to the 17th century, and for Poland – a center of Polish culture and part of the territory inhabited by the Polish majority. So military forces commanded by the Polish general Lucjan Żeligowski occupied Vilnius on October 9, 1920 after a successful military campaign. The city and the surrounding area called "Central Lithuania" was incorporated into the Republic of Poland in 1922. The annexation was recognized by the international community in 1923, with the exception of Lithuania and, with some reservations, the Soviet Union. According to the secret protocols of the bilateral Non-Aggression Pact signed on August 23, 1939 by the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and the Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, the Vilnius region was recognized as part of Lithuania, which in its turn was relegated to the German Reich's sphere of influence. After the Soviet invasion of Poland on September 17, 1939, Bolshevik forces took Vilnius. A Treaty on Friendship and Demarcation of Borders between the USSR and Germany signed on September 28, 1939 formalized the de facto partition of the Republic of Poland. A new secret protocol between the two powers redefined their spheres of influence, ceding Lithuania and the Vilnius region to the Soviets, who placed it under Lithuania's control in accordance with the Mutual Assistance Treaty with the USSR, by which the Soviet Union effectively transformed Lithuania into its protectorate and directly annexed a large portion of the former Vilnius region.

THROUGHOUT THE INTERWAR period, Lithuania fought a symbolic struggle for occupied Vilnius. Poles were the worst enemies of Lithuanians, and vice versa. Certainly, diplomatic relations were out of the question. The border was closed, and even trains to Vilnius took a huge detour via the Latvian city of Daugavpils, which was also the postal route. The relations between the two states started to get back on track after an ultimatum given by the Warsaw authorities in 1938, demanding to establish diplomatic relations. In October 1939, in exchange for military bases in the territory of Lithuania, Vilnius was returned to Lithuania by the Soviets who were Nazi allies at that time and who had occupied the eastern part of Poland. This marked the beginning of the most dramatic period in the last-century history of Vilnius: The Soviet occupation that lasted from June 1940 to June 1941, followed by the Nazi occupation. In July 1944, the Nazis were expelled from Vilnius by the Soviet army, and a new period of Soviet occupation started, this time lasting for several decades until 1990. The events of the war and postwar periods dramatically changed the fate of the larger majority of the residents of Vilnius – Lithuanians, Poles, Jews, Russians, Belarusians and Karaims alike. Among them was one of the characters of Anda Rottenberg's exhibition, Andrzej Wróblewski, and his family.

The challenges of the exhibition

Having received an offer from the MO Museum to curate an exhibition that would provide a local context to Anda Rottenberg's exhibition, in other words, to introduce to the Lithuanian audience the problematics addressed in the presented artists' work, I decided to create a related but at the same time separate narrative. To put it another way, I saw it as the first opportunity

> **"1939 MARKED THE END OF THE POLISH PERIOD OF VILNIUS AND THE START OF A NEW HISTORICAL ERA IN THE CITY."**

Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Vendor of Religious Gifts*, (1940), oil on wood, 104×119.5 cm, Museum of Warmia and Mazury, Olsztyn.

in the museum space of Lithuania to reveal painful and often neglected subjects to the local audience through visual artefacts: the drastic Lithuanization of Vilnius, the destruction of the city's Jewish and Polish communities,[11] and the early consequences of Sovietization. It was also a chance to introduce the artists who are known only to specialists and art history enthusiasts in Lithuania, and show their work whose larger part is held in the collections of Polish museums and other memory institutions. Finally, curating this exhibition also gave me a possibility to shatter some barriers of joint heritage research. For example, while looking for information on Andrzej Wróblewski's early biography and the beginning of his creative activity in Vilnius, I was lucky to find documentary sources and artefacts so far unknown either to Lithuanian or Polish researchers. The finds allowed me to correct the previously available information: to specify the artist's birth date, the addresses at which he lived, and the place and time of his studies.[12] For Lithuanian art historians, Wróblewski has been a Polish artist, not related in any way to the history of Lithuanian art and, thus, not a subject of special interest, while Polish art historians did not even try to look for these data in Lithuanian memory institutions, as psychological barriers that stand in the way of exploring the common past exist on both sides.

The exhibition's chronological framework – 1939 to 1949 – was established with a focus on historical realities and aimed to frame the narrative of the guest exhibition. As already mentioned above, 1939 marked the end of the Polish period of Vilnius and the start of a new historical era in the city, during which the brief Lithuanian administration was replaced by Soviet and Nazi regimes, and then, once again, by a resumed Soviet occupation.

In the exhibition context, emphasis was placed on the fact that these events are above all related to the beginning of WWII, which is dated back to the joint aggression of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany against Poland in September 1939. It was important to emphasize this fact, as many people in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, let alone other ex-Soviet states, still associate the beginning of WWII with the Nazi occupation, which started in June 1941; actually, they still use – many of them unconsciously – the narrative of the so called Great Patriotic War constructed by the Soviets.[13]

It was equally important to show that the tragic events of autumn 1939 forced Lithuanians and Poles at least in part to forget the "apple of discord" and look for the ways to live together. After the Soviet invasion in Poland, Lithuania was flooded with Polish refugees. Refugee camps were created all around the country. However, when Lithuanians entered Vilnius at the end of October 1939, the drastic Lithuanization of the city began, without paying much attention to the habits, desires and interests of the local inhabitants. Of course, the Poles were angry and tried to resist. However, in June 1940 everyone in Vilnius was hit by the same disaster: the Soviet occupation, which was replaced a year later by an even worse Nazi occupation. Lithuanians were marginalized, Poles were turned into second-class people, Jews were condemned to death. In July 1944 the city came back to the Soviets, this time for almost half a century. In December 1945, the expulsion of Poles from Vilnius to Poland began. On the one

Stanisław Rolicz, *I Build a New Europe*, (1942), woodcut, 18.7×11.5 cm, Nicolaus Copernicus University Library, Toruń.

Jerzy Hoppen, *Maiden of the Plague*, (1940), copper plate, 31.5×23 cm, Nicolaus Copernicus University Library, Toruń.

hand, expatriates hoped that in Poland the restrictions of the communist regime would be not so hard as in Lithuania; however, for those who were born in Vilnius and had spent their whole life there, it was a terrible drama, which caused a deep trauma.

1949 saw yet another significant shift in the history of Vilnius: the intensification of Sovietization, the end of the great Polish exodus, the restriction of Jewish activity resulting from state-sponsored anti-Semitism, the apogee of the Soviet regime's war on the Catholic Church,[14] the start of a systematic restructuring of the city's material framework through the demolition of war-ravaged buildings and even entire neighborhoods, and the building of a Soviet Lithuanian capital through not only political, administrative, and ideological means, but also through physical changes produced by new urban planning and architecture.[15] It was also the year of the massive flight of ethnic Lithuanians from the countryside to Vilnius, caused by two huge campaigns of deportation to the gulag, held on May 22–23, 1948 and March 25–28, 1949 (the total number of deportees exceeded 75,000, a third of whom died in deportation); the deportation was aimed to strengthen collectivization, which, in its turn, forced farmers deprived of their land and other property to flee to the city.

Despite all this mosaic of events pointing to the activization of Sovietization, in official historiography, the year 1953 is still considered to be a breakthrough year, which is related to the changes that took place after Stalin's death. Nerijus Šepetys and I have no illusions that the timeline presented in the exhibition will encourage historians to change the established chronology, but we do hope that it will at least ignite a discussion on this subject.

THE EMOTIONAL BACKGROUND for the brief descriptions of historical events presented in the timeline is created by documentary photographs, postcards and postal envelopes. Views of Vilnius captured by Soviet war correspondents are published for the first time; the photographs are printed from negatives held in the collection of the National Museum of Lithuania, which have not been published so far. Previously unseen photographs sharpen the viewer's gaze and thus help to bring the past time of others closer to the present, at least partly feel it as one's own, all the more in that it represents familiar locations in the city. The philately exhibits are courtesy of the collector Vygintas Bubnys. Resisting the destructive force of the time, the laconic and clear forms of postal ephemera – envelopes, stamps, and postcards – testify to the political turning points of history. The exhibition's timeline installation also includes a copy of the unfinished film *Vilniaus miesto paminklai* [Monuments of Vilnius] by filmmaker Alfonsas Žibas, returned from the Krasnogorsk Film Archives to the Lithuanian Central State Archives several years ago. Originally commissioned by the Vilnius Art Museum, Žibas began filming in 1944 after obtaining permission from German censors, a fact confirmed by recently discovered documents. The film romantically captures Old Town neighborhoods destroyed after the war, such as the Great Synagogue and its surroundings. It is likely that Žibas was allowed to film this part of the city, which had been turned into the ghetto territory, because in the winter

of 1944, the Vilnius ghetto was already emptied: those ghetto inmates who were not killed in the mass shooting in Ponary near Vilnius were taken to Treblinka and Auschwitz, the Kaiserwald concentration camp in Latvia, or the Kloga concentration camp in Estonia.

The exhibition structure and content

The timeline leads to the main part of the exhibition – a display of prints, drawings, and paintings, which consists of five sections: "The Colourful Youth of the City", "The Illusion of Noble Persistence", "Facing the Catastrophe", "Loss: Trauma, Nightmares, Nostalgia", and "Migrating Identities: Who Are We, Where Is Our Home?"

Having assembled the primary body of artworks, I came up with several reference points for a possible narrative. I chose five: 1–2) Vilnius in the presence of war, and its vision in art both as a young modern city and as an ideal place frozen in time; 3) the traces of war in artworks created during the war; 4) war memory in artworks of the late 1940s and following years, and consequences of post-war Sovietization for the city's physical body and the state of mind of its residents; 5) two cases of "migrating identity", embodied by Krystyna and Andrzej Wróblewski and Lili Janina Paszkowska/Paškauskaitė.

The vision of Vilnius at the end of the Polish period was dual: Vilnius was imagined and represented both as a young city with a bright future full of optimism, and as an immovable historical island. The last vision was cherished by the older generation, primarily intellectuals and visual artists. It was also quite popular among young artists and newcomers, i.e. Lithuanians. Vilnius residents, regardless of nationality, shared those two attitudes, which means that they saw their city with the same eyes.[16]

1) "COLOURFUL YOUTH OF THE CITY"

Young Polish, Lithuanian, Jewish, and Belarusian artists: All of them depicted modern buildings, bars, cafés, cinemas, a real or imaginary daily life, developing a vision of a growing metropolitan place. Of course, peaceful rustic suburbs with wooden houses and gardens was a favorite motif as well. Baroque church towers in this image of Vilnius are overshadowed by factory chimneys. For the students at the University's Faculty of Fine Arts, they embodied a new era, desirable changes, and energy. It is possible to distinguish the figures of workers in the colorful and variegated crowd: elegant ladies in outdoor cafés under umbrellas or in the textile department of a luxury shop, athletic swimmers on the riverbanks, a group of fun-lovers in the city garden. Even in 1941, already under the Soviet occupation, optimism and hope continued to flow. For instance, in the spring of this terrible year, the young Polish painter Placyda Bukowska depicted a naive and cozy market scene, although such a world had already collapsed.

2) "THE ILLUSION OF NOBLE PERSISTENCE"

This section shows artworks by Polish and Lithuanian artists based on historical views of Vilnius – paintings and etchings, as well as photographs by the most distinct representative of Polish pictorialism, photographer Jan Bułhak. Bułhak's romantic and extremely powerful vision of Vilnius was equally popular both in Poland and interwar Lithuania. Artists who represented Vilnius used his photographs not only as prototypes, but also even as direct sketches. It was particularly relevant for Lithuanians in Kaunas, who yearned for the historical capital and fought a symbolic battle to regain it, but who had often never seen Vilnius in reality.

> **"THE WAR CATASTROPHE WAS SO HORRIBLE THAT ONLY THE DISPASSIONATE EYE OF A PHOTOGRAPHIC OR FILM CAMERA COULD TRULY DOCUMENT IT."**

However, the central work of the section is the painting *Sprzedawczyni dewocjonaliów* [Vendor of Religious Gifts], a 1940 composition by Ludomir Sleńdziński, a third-generation Vilnius painter, professor and dean of Stefan Báthory University's Art Faculty. At the time, the fifty-one-year-old Sleńdziński was unemployed: the Lithuanian-run government had closed "the Polish University" and its Art Faculty in December 1939. However, Sleńdziński's painting is a tranquil, peaceful and therefore simply joyous view of Palm Sunday in Vilnius, seemingly commemorating enduring, centuries-old city icons: the red-brick walls of Gothic-style St. Anne's Church and the Bernadine Monastery, cobblestones locally known as "cat heads" (*kocie łby* in Polish), and a woman wearing a typical plaid kerchief over her shoulders, knitting a woolen sock while selling prayer books, wax candles, rosaries and, obviously, small color prints of Catholic saints. In the lower left corner of the painting we see a portrait of the artist's family purchasing traditional Vilnius palms: Sleńdziński with his daughter, his wife Irena and her sister Helena Dobrowolska. An elegant group of city dwellers connects the historical image of Vilnius created by Sleńdziński with the era of the painter himself and his characters, even if the stylishly dressed artist's family is the only sign of modernity in the painting. Viewed from today's perspective, this painting is not so much a testimonial to the reality of a city already living in the shadow of war (even if the magnitude of that fact was not yet fully comprehended), but rather a nostalgic farewell to a wonderful, historical city belonging to a world on the verge of oblivion.

The painting was created to be just that: a vision meant to evoke the feeling of longing. It was painted as a memoir and thus resembles a film still – a frozen image clipped from a longer movie reel. We know that it was not based on nature study not only from the unnatural lighting, but also from the uncomfortable postures of its subjects and their clothing: pilgrims walking to church clad only in shirts, Irena Sleńdzińska wearing a summer coat, and her sister and daughter clad in short sleeves and light summer skirts. This doesn't exactly coincide with reality: Palm Sunday in 1940 fell on March 17, and it is never warm enough in mid-March in Vilnius to stop wearing coats, scarves and gloves.

In other words, Sleńdziński's work is a multifaceted source speaking about the history of a crumbling Vilnius.

3) "FACING THE CATASTROPHE"

The Lithuanian period in Vilnius ended in June 1940, when Lithuania was occupied by Soviets together with Latvia and Estonia. All residents of Vilnius, regardless of their nationality, became stateless people and partially lost their civil rights. The process was completed by the Nazis who occupied Vilnius in June 1941. Poles were declared inferior, *untermenschen*, and Jews were deprived of all rights, including the right to live.

The war catastrophe was so horrible that only the dispassionate eye of a photographic or film camera could truly document it. For artists, the encounter with reality was almost insufferable, and most sought creative inspiration not in reality, but in an imaginary Vilnius they or others had conjured. The seemingly real but simultaneously semi-fictional city of graceful, skyward-reaching Baroque church steeples, tree-covered hills, winding Old Town streets and cobblestoned courtyards depicted in prints or oil paintings on canvas and cardboard helped artists and their audiences turn their eyes away from the reality of poverty, dirt, despair, suffering, death, refugees, ruins, and the sight of soldiers and officers in foreign uniforms. The powerlessness of individuals trapped in the whirlwind of war and their simultaneous drive for survival, confronting the destructive chaos with a belief in the reality of order and values capable of ensuring normal human coexistence, was impressively embodied in a series of colored linocut prints by Vladas Drėma, a Vilnius artist and an alumnus of Stefan Báthory University's Art Faculty. From one etching to the next, Drėma created a monotone variation of the same medieval Upper Castle on the hill scattered with trees, changing only an odd detail or color pattern. The Lithuanian Art Museum collection contains 78 prints from this series. However, it is difficult to say how many there could be in total, as some prints from the series are held in other collections. Drėma's series is a special, unique and, in its scope, monumental testament to self-therapy through art.

There was virtually no critical perspective in wartime or occupation-period art. There was also practically no direct reflection of war or depiction of war scenes. Clearly, the image of an occupied city only served to suppress, rather than stimulate, creativity. Artists lived with the same tension and paralyzing uncertainty as everyone else. In order to convincingly portray contempt, arrests, torture, hunger and death – a reality which had no developed iconography and whose depiction had to be invented – demanded extraordinary strength. Such strength did not exist – it had to be conserved in order to live and survive. The fingers on two hands would suffice to count the exceptions to this general rule.

At the very start of the war, Jerzy Hoppen, a long-time resident of Vilnius, graphic artist, painter, restorer, and lecturer at Stepan Báthory University, created an allegoric copper plate etching titled *Dziewica Moru* (Maiden of the Plague, 1940). The image was inspired by a mythological character featured in the epic poem *Pan Tadeusz* by poet Adam Mickiewicz, the most famous representative of Romanticism both for Poles and Lithuanians. According to the legends circulating in Vilnius area, the Maiden of the Plague would appear as a harbinger and bearer of great misfortune, wandering through villages, sowing death with a wave of her bloody kerchief. She could only be stopped by someone determined to sacrifice his own life and that of his loved ones. In the legend, a brave nobleman appears and, brandishing a sword engraved with the names of Mary and Jesus, severs the murderous woman's head, vanquishing evil but condemning himself and his family to death. Hoppen also placed various cultural treasures at the feet of the Maiden of the Plague, in an expectation that the recently started war would spare the artistic heritage so cherished by Hoppen and his colleagues.

Hoppen turned fifty just before the war, so he was no longer a young man and had considerable life experience. He chose the allegory genre and ancient symbols not only out of love for the classics and respect for the cultural heritage of the past eras, but also because he understood that a direct visual language, sarcasm, or irony could be just as dangerous as working for an underground printing house, which he successfully did in the years of the Nazi occupation, producing fake documents for members of the underground resistance.[17]

Hoppen's student, the young graphic artist Stanisław Rolicz, experienced the war drama in a different way – with greater sensitivity and intensity. Rolicz resorted to Renaissance and Baroque iconography to create his allegory *Wojna* [War], (1941) and classic mythology for his diptych *Porwanie Europy* [The Rape of Europa], (1944). In this diptych, Rolicz presents a contrasting comparison of Europa's rape "yesterday" and "today". The earlier rape takes the form of the usual interpretation of this mythological story: An attractive, young nude woman with wavy blonde hair is carried across the warm waves of the seas by a bull. The tranquil, idyllic scene is accentuated by garlands of flowers cascading around Europa and Zeus transformed into a bull, as well as by flying fish cavorting in the water and air around the two main characters. The Europa of "today" is conceived by Rolicz as a naked, unconscious young woman, frozen in a crucified pose. She is held firmly by Hitler, the new Zeus, partially emerging from an airplane bearing the insignia of the Luftwaffe. By depicting the Führer in this way, Rolicz ran the risk of arrest and condemnation. The second half of the Europa diptych was not the only anti-Nazi artwork by Rolicz. He dedicated his composition *Buduję nową Europą* [I Am Building a New Europe], (1942) to the same subject. At the center of the piece we see the Grim Reaper with Hitler's face, embracing a bomb dropped from a passing airplane before it explodes over a city – an apocalyptic scene conveying a civilizational rupture in the language of caricature. Rolicz's self-ironic, even brutal self-portrait *Chimera XX wieku* [20th Century Chime-

> **"ART CREATED IN SUCH DEHUMANIZING CIRCUMSTANCES HAS A PARTICULARLY STRONG IMPACT."**

ra], (1943) is also a fruit of the existential exploration of the wartime reality. This disturbing image paraphrases the iconography of the mythological gorgon creature Medusa, with her head crowned in snakes and her face deformed by suffering, fury and disgust. Other self-portraits by Rolicz are simpler, based on realistic visualization strategies. Like the absolute majority of wartime portraits and self-portraits, they convey an atmosphere of nightmares, uncertainty, anxiety, and despair, often including signs of oppressive poverty. The same mood and the same facial expressions can be found in works by Lithuanian, Polish and Jewish artists who captured the authentic state of individuals living through extreme circumstances. If we consider the fate of the subjects and artists of such portraits, the most moving are the images created in the Jewish ghetto.

THE VILNIUS GHETTO was established on September 6, 1941 and liquidated on September 23–24, 1943. The period from January 1942 to the autumn of 1943, when mass killings were temporarily halted and the ghetto had relatively few inhabitants – mostly young and healthy, and those who were able to work – came to be known as the "stabilization period". During this time, the ghetto saw the founding of the Writers' and Artists' Society and the opening of a theatre whose first production premiered on January 18, 1942. The theatre hall also hosted art shows as well as lectures on art and more practical matters such as personal hygiene, diseases, etc. Ghetto residents had different views on the artistic activity taking place there. Some were angered by entertainment taking place in the shadow of death, but the majority saw it as a way to forget the grim reality, so audiences flooded in to see performances and concerts. The overall mood is also evidenced by the statistics about the reading habits: Among the most popular authors requested at the ghetto's library were Edgar Wallace, Margaret Mitchell, Vicki Baum, Jules Verne, Karl May, and Thomas Mayne Reid – authors of historical, romance and adventure novels.[18]

Everything was in shorty supply in the ghetto: food, clothing, medication, not to mention art supplies. Thus, drawing paper and watercolors were used only for the most important artworks – first and foremost, portraits of ghetto prisoners. We don't know how many such portraits were created, but the greatest number of surviving works were those by Rosa Sutzkever. During the "prosperous" times, Sutzkever painted portraits in watercolor, but in the "lean" times she had to settle for pencils and sepia. Her portraits were shown at exhibitions organized at the ghetto theatre, and her portrait of the deceased Jakob Gersztein was related to one of the most memorable events in the life of the community. Gersztein was a well-known music teacher, composer, choir director, and respected member of the community, beloved by parents and children alike. His death was reported by many of the ghetto's newspapers. At a *shiva* held at the ghetto's theatre one week after Gersztein's death, on October 4, 1942, fourteen-year-old Isaac Rudashevsky, while listening to solemn speeches, Gersztein's favorite songs sung by the talented Lyuba Levicka, and a new poem by Abraham Sutzkever written in memory of the late Gersztein, contemplated Rosa

A portrait of Jacob Gersztein among artefacts found hidden in the Vilnius ghetto, drawn by Roza Suckever, (1944). Owned by the Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History.

Roza Suckever, *The Deceased, a Portrait of Jacob Gersztein*, (1942), sepia drawing on paper, 34×41.2 cm, Owned by the Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History.

Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Wilno (Oratorium)*, (1944), oil on paper glued to cardboard, 41×35 cm, Sleńdziński Gallery, Białystok Museum, repro by Tadeusz Nieścier.

Sutzkever's image of Gersztein. "A violinist performed several pieces. I looked at a portrait of the deceased. It looked as if he were sleeping, lulled by the melody…"[19], wrote Rudashevsky in his diary. Sutzkever also drew (or repeated) Gersztein's portrait at his *sloshim,* held to mark the end of thirty days of mourning on October 27, 1942. In all likelihood, the artist based her portrait on a sketch of her subject. What she created is an authentic visual document addressed to contemporaries who could not directly participate in the event, as well as to the future generations – to us. Both then and now, viewers are impacted by the similarity between the portrait and its subject, between image and model – something that the renowned specialist of image theory Hans Belting has analyzed as "likeness and presence". In 1942, there was so much death around that it often ceased to appear unique or even significant. A work of art encouraged and helped viewers to understand the importance and uniqueness of the depicted event, transporting daily life to another level – imbuing it with meaning and nobility.

The Lithuanian Central State Archives' collection of announcements of the ghetto's cultural events also includes a notice for Gersztein's *shloshim* commemoration. The text of the notice was written by a skilled professional hand, clearly one of the ghetto's artists, perhaps Rosa Sutzkever herself. In its form, the poster's elegant calligraphy sends a message about the respect for the deceased and his accomplishments held by the organizers of the event. Music, lofty and meaningful speeches, and the sense of unity radiating from a gathering graced by such details as an artistic depiction of the deceased and a beautiful invitation announcement helped the attendees feel human again, if only for a moment, in such a dehumanizing reality.

Gersztein's portrait affirms that images created by artists are like time capsules, bringing us closer to the reality that inspired and lived behind that image. Images or groups of related imagery can easily be transformed into a personalized history or its origins. That is why images have the power to awaken imagination, without which it would be impossible to make the time of "others" relevant. Photographs are not enough. Art created in such dehumanizing circumstances has a particularly strong impact. We see such works as an attempt to withstand the pressure of the environment and to preserve personal dignity and identity.

### ‹4) "LOSS: TRAUMA, NIGHTMARES, NOSTALGIA"

The fourth part of the exhibition about Vilnius and its art of 1939–1949 is devoted to art born from efforts to escape nightmarish memories, which, strangely enough, also emerged from a nostalgia for a past which had left incurable spiritual scars. Alongside portrayals of ruins by the Jewish artist Rafael Chwoles and the Lithuanian Mečislovas Bulaka, there are also two paintings by the Holocaust survivor Samuel Bak. Those pictures born from a deeply traumatized imagination represent attempts to survive under the unbearable weight of trauma. Bak's vision witnesses a disrupted order, an inverted, distorted, disfigured world. There are no people in his cities – only empty houses and things without owners lying around in the streets and courtyards. *Vilner Hoyf* (2000) displayed in the exhibition represents an empty courtyard of the Old Town of Vilnius. Blind windows forming a closed courtyard open to a pile of myriads of useless keys to the doors that nobody needs to unlock anymore, as neither those who have the right to open them nor those from whom they were meant to protect exist anymore. An image of an object left without its owner or, more precisely, a multitude of similar objects, is no less powerful than the piles of shoes, glasses and bowls in the museums of concentration camps. Most probably that is where Bak drew these images from; it is an aptly chosen prototype. In the composition *Mark of Identity* (2007), the second of Bak's works presented in the exhibition, the artist appropriated one of the most reproduced images of the Holocaust – a photo of a little boy, captured by Nazis together with the other Jews who took part in the Warsaw Ghetto's uprising in 1943. The boy's identity is unknown, but the photo became an icon of children murdered during the Holocaust. Samuel Bak turned the boy with his back to the viewers and placed him in front of the wall with an enlarged Star of David. For the painter who was forced to leave his home and move to the Vilnius ghetto when he was only eight years old, the image of this child from Warsaw became his *alter ego*, the embodiment of his family, the destiny of his people.

Another important work in the fourth part of the exhibition is Ludomir Sleńdziński's composition *Wilno. Oratorium* [Vilnius. Oratory], *(*1944). The panoramic view painted by Sleńdziński clearly represents Vilnius, but the outlines of the baroque towers stretching vertically into the clouds, as if through billowing steam, are more reminiscent of a mirage or an optical illusion than a real scene. The painting includes a dedication: "Poświęcam córce" [For my daughter]. It is a father's testament, left to his daughter as his most precious possession in the face of exodus: a romantic vision of the city each of them could claim as their birthplace, captured by a brush and paint, a heart-wrenching painting of an irrevocably lost past. The world-renowned poet and Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz, once a pupil of Sleńdziński at the Sigismund Augustus Secondary School in Vilnius, called this piece "both a glorious hymn to Vilnius' beautiful architecture and a song of pain." Miłosz remembered the painting and its author at a gathering of Nobel prize winners in Vilnius on October 2, 2000, also attended by the Polish poet Wisława Szymborska and the German novelist Günter Grass. According to Miłosz, Sleńdziński was one of the most prominent painters of interwar Vilnius and a prominent public figure. "For a time, he taught painting at my school," Miłosz recalled, "then he had his own studio at the university. He was a true citizen of Vilnius and a descendant of a painters' dynasty – both his father and grandfather had been painters. As he was leaving Vilnius in 1945, Sleńdziński painted a dreamy portrait of the city as a feast of church steeples and clouds. He called it *Oratory*."[20] Within the context of this exhibition, Miłosz's concluding remarks take on a new meaning: "And this lament of an exile will remain part of the city's history forever; even after no one remembers the division into winners and losers."[21]

5) "MIGRATING IDENTITY: WHO ARE WE, WHERE IS OUR HOME?"

Sleńdziński's *Oratory* gives the key for a better understanding of the message of the final part of the exhibition, which presents, as was already mentioned, two case studies: works and biographical documents of print artist Krystyna Wróblewska and her son Andrzej, and the Polish-Lithuanian artist Lili Janina Paszkowska/Paškauskaitė.

A separate narrative about the Vilnius period in Andrzej Wróblewski's biography, which has not received enough research attention in Poland, definitely had to become a connecting link to the Anda's Rottenberg exhibition. Having started the work, I didn't know if I would manage to find anything new and interesting in Lithuanian memory institutions. Yet I didn't doubt that at least I would tell the family's history, which is very important for learning about Vilnius' cultural heritage. Andrzej's parents were typical figures of the modern Polish Vilnius of interwar period – young specialists who had moved to the city liberated after long years of the Russian imperial administration to build Polish science and culture there: He was a lawyer, and she was an artist. Having started a family and a home, they gradually put down roots in Vilnius, but soon lost everything due to the catastrophe that befell all Europe. The first blow to Wróblewski's
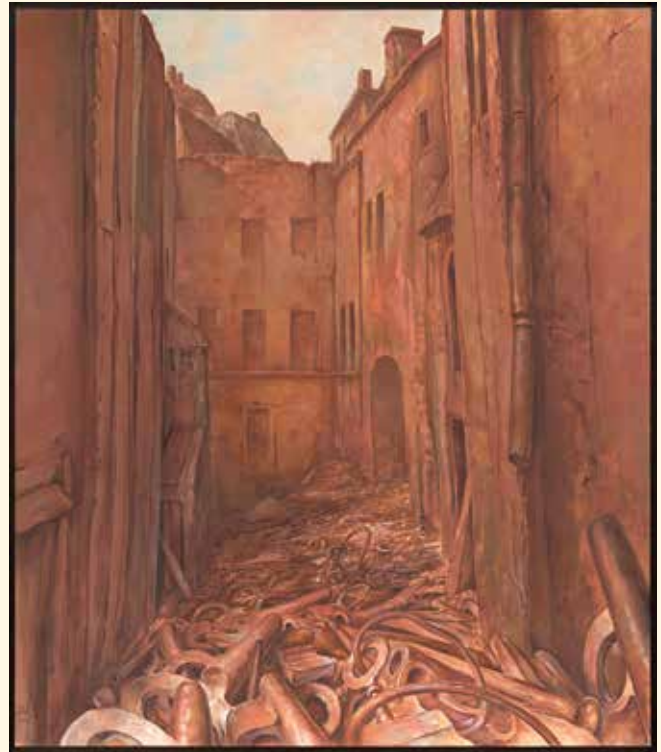
Samuel Bak, *Vilner Hoyf* [Vilnius Courtyard]*,* (2000), oil on canvas, 177×157.5 cm. ©Samuel Bak. Owned by the Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History.

happy and carefree life was delivered by Lithuanians, who closed down the university and fired Polish professors. The Soviet occupation was equally devastating to all residents of Vilnius. Having replaced the Soviets, the Nazis deprived Polish artists, Krystyna Wróblewska among them, of the possibility of public activity in their professional field, and her children could no longer legally study at the gymnasium: Poles were entitled only to primary education. The great tragedy struck the Wróblewski family on 26 August 1941, when the Nazis broke in to search their house on Rožių Alėja [Alley of Roses], and Bronisław Wróblewski collapsed with a stroke and died in front of his wife and his fourteen-year-old son Andrzej. A visit to the storage of the Lithuanian National Museum of Art helped me to discover prints by Krystyna Wróblewska and Andrzej Wróblewski never previously reproduced or exhibited, and work in the Lithuanian State Archives allowed me to supplement the biographies of all the family members. The great discovery was the documents found in the Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Art, testifying that in January 1945 Andrzej Wróblewski was accepted as an external student at the Graphic Studio of the Vilnius Academy of Arts.[22]

A separate micro research project addressed not only the case of the mother and son Krystyna and Andrzej Wróblewski; if I wanted to reveal the variety of the phenomenon of migrating identity, I had to find a Polish artist, male or female, who remained in Vilnius and successfully integrated in the Lithuanian

art scene of the Soviet period. I am happy that this necessity allowed me to draw fresh attention to revive the personality and work of the excellent graphic artist Lili Janina Paszkowska/Paškauskaitė (1925–2012), who was famous in the Soviet period, but has been almost forgotten for the last twenty years. Born to a Polish family in Vilnius, in her birth records and youth documents she was identified as Paszkowska-Węckowicz. Her life is a romantic and simultaneously deeply dramatic story worthy of a film or a novel, which cannot be told in a few sentences – a separate text would be needed. Here I will only note that the exhibition and its catalogue will present the life of this artist through the prism of the political and cultural history of Vilnius, differently than it has been done in historiography to date. Until now, the artist's work has been analyzed in the aspects of content, genre and technique, but it has not been related to her biography, her links to Vilnius, her Polish origin and the traumas that it entailed. Besides, Paškauskaitė's revival encouraged the founders and owners of the MO Museum to acquire some of her works of different periods for the museum's collection, in which this artist was not previously represented.

"A PART OF LITHUANIAN SOCIETY STILL REMAINS ATTACHED TO THE NARROWED-DOWN VIEW OF HISTORICAL EVENTS OF THE MIDDLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY, BASED ON A PURELY LITHUANIAN NARRATIVE."

In the place of conclusion

The size of the exhibition "A Difficult Age. Vilnius, 1939–1949" does not allow the reflection of a wider panorama of artistic life of Vilnius in the mid-20th century. This inability is partly compensated by the catalogue or, to be more precise, the book, which will accompany the exhibition. The articles by curators of both exhibitions in the catalogue are supplemented by essays by specialists from various fields – a psychologist (Danutė Gailienė), who explains the concept of psychological trauma, a philosopher (Viktoras Bachmetjevas), who discusses identity, a political scientist (Andrzej Pukszto), who overviews the political situation of the time and its memory in our days, an architectural historian (Marija Drėmaitė), a feminist art critic (Laima Kreivytė), a Jewish art researcher (Laima Laučkaitė), and a film historian (Anna Mikonis-Railienė). The genre of the exhibition catalogue allowed them to disregard the requirements of an academic text; their articles are aimed at a wider audience, and it is quite likely that having found itself next to artworks, a textual narrative itself will acquire the power of an artwork, provoking the viewers' empathy alongside their interest and wish to find out more about the controversial historical period and finally get to understand it.

A PART OF LITHUANIAN SOCIETY still remains attached to the narrowed-down view of historical events of the middle of the 20th century, based on a purely Lithuanian narrative. Without getting into wider considerations on the subject, it would be enough to mention the exhibition "Vilnius in Art: 1939–1956" (curator Rima Rutkauskienė), held in the summer of 2019 by the Lithuanian National Museum of Art. The extremely dramatic period of Vilnius history was shown as a collection of monotonous urban landscapes, mostly from the summer season, almost devoid of any marks of the war, occupations and Sovietization. The exhibition presented almost exclusively the works of Lithuanian artists and their idealized view of Vilnius.[23] Of course, one can always say that the curators' aim was merely showing an image of the city in a specific period, represented by the traditional means of painting, graphic art and sculpture. It would undoubtedly justify distancing oneself from the political, social and even cultural contexts, but would leave an unanswered question: What message did that exhibition carry? Whom was it addressed to? The exhibition thus constructed, rather than bringing closer the past that the viewer is interested in, once again cast a veil of illusion over this past, placing the aesthetic reality and the reality of life in opposition. In a certain sense, the exhibition was ideological. It is not by accident that this ostensible decontextualization as a theoretical problem has been singled out and discussed by contemporary museum criticism.[24] I made this point in my review, criticizing the exhibition organizers' attempt to present the art of the period of Nazi occupation and postwar Sovietization solely as artists' attempts to withstand the all-consuming tragedy.[25] It was also a part of the background or context in which I assessed and reflected on the invitation of the MO Museum to offer my own take on the image of the controversial history of Vilnius in the art of WWII and early postwar years. ⊠

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references

1   Tomas Venclova, *Lietuvos istorija visiems* [Lithuanian History for Everyone], vol. 1–2 (Vilnius: R. Paknio leidykla, 2018–2019).

2   The article was finished in June 2020; the opening of the exhibition was scheduled for August 2020, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was postponed to January 2021. The MO Museum's activity is focused on the dissemination and revival of Lithuanian visual arts of the second half of the 20ᵗʰ century and the 21st century, both giving a wider dimension to these works from the viewpoint of cultural geography and broadening their perception in the political, social and anthropological contexts. The museum does not have a permanent exhibition; it holds temporary exhibitions every several months in its two halls – big (1,099 m²) and small (174 m²). For more, see: *MO muziejus / Vilnius, Lietuva: vadovas. MO Museum / Vilnius, Lithuania: Official Guide* (Vilnius: MO muziejus, 2018); also, the museum's website: https://mo.lt/en/.

3   The exhibition was held from June 15, 2010 until July 15, 2011 in Kaunas, at the former Presidential Palace converted to the History Museum, which is a branch of M. K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum; cf. the Lithuanian-English book based on the material of this display: Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, *Po raudonąja žvaigžde: Lietuvos dailė 1940–1941. Under the Red Star: Lithuanian Art in 1940–1941* (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2011).

4   Editors' Foreword, *"Artige Kunst": Kunst und Politik im Nationalsozialismus / "Compliant Art": Art and Politics in the National Socialist Era*, ed. by Silke von Berswordt-Wallrabe, Jörg-Uwe Neumann, Agnes Tieze (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, [2016]), 195.

5   His book, Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo di pietra* [Fascism in Stone] (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2007), is particularly important for the history of visual culture.

6   Emilio Gentile, Italy 1918–1943, *Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art, Life, Politics: Italia 1918–1943*, ed. by Germano Celant (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2018), 46–61.

7   In the exhibitions illustrating a breakthrough in research in the first half of the 20ᵗʰ century, the exhibition and catalogue *Les Realismes entre Révolution et Reaction, 1919–1939* curated by Jean Clair at the Pompidou Centre in Paris (1980) is traditionally considered a landmark. However, when e.g., outlining the genesis of the exhibitions that helped to rethink the artistic heritage of the fascist era and integrate it specifically in the history of 20ᵗʰ century Italian art, the exhibition and catalogue *Gli anni Trenta. Arte e cultura in Italia*, ed. by Nadine Bortolotti (Milan: Mazzotta, 1982) should be mentioned among the earliest examples, and among later examples – the exhibition and catalogue *Anni '30. Art in Italia oltre il fascismo*, ed. by Antonello Negri a. o. (Florence: Giunti Editore, 2012). Along with several dozen other survey and monograph exhibitions, they built the basis for Celant's panoramic exhibition.

8   *Perspektywa wieku dojrzewania: Szapocznikow, Wróblewski, Wajda / Perspective of Adolescence: Szapocznikow, Wróblewski, Wajda*: catalogue, ed. Anda Rottenberg (Katowice: Muzeum Śląskie, 2018).

9   Quote from Anna Nawrot's text from: *Correspondences. Modern Art and Universalism*, ed. Jarosław Lubiak, Małgorzata Ludwisiak (Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2012), 542. The website of the Art Museum of Lodz: https://zasoby.msl.org.pl/arts/view/323 [accessed on May 28, 2020].

10 *Ibid.*

11 Vilnius as a place of contested history is often compared to Lviv in Galicia or Trieste, which is probably the best-known city of this kind. Literary essays, among them the books by Italian writer Claudio Magris, which were translated into various languages, made Trieste famous on the international scale as a border city. Besides his magnum opus *Danubio* (1986), see the book: Angelo Ara, Claudio Magris, *Trieste. Un'identità di frontiera* [Trieste. A Border Identity] (Turin: Einaudi, 1982). One of important issues under discussion is the question of who were the genuine residents of the place, or whom Vilnius belonged to: the Poles who

constituted 48% of its residents (the city and its area was included in the territory of the Republic of Poland in 1922 after the Polish-Lithuanian war and a two-year period of negotiations), the Lithuanians, who were a rather small minority in the city at the time, but claimed their right to the historic capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, or the Jews, who were the second largest group of the residents (around 30%), and imagined Vilnius, or Vilne in Yiddish, as the Jerusalem of Lithuania, underlining the extraordinary significance of the place to the Eastern European Jewish community.

12 See the exhibition catalogue: *A Difficult Age*, ed. Giedrė Jankevičiūtė (Vilnius: MO muziejus, 2021), 53, 147–159.

13 For more, see: Nerijus Šepetys, *Molotovo-Ribbentropo paktas ir Lietuva* [The Pact of Molotov-Ribbentrop and Lithuania] (Vilnius: Aidai, 2006); Sigitas Jegelevičius, "SSRS-Vokietijos karas: Sovietinės istoriografijos klišės" [The War Between the Soviet Union and Germany: Clichés of Soviet Historiography], in: *Lietuvos sovietinė istoriografija*, ed. Alfredas Bumblauskas and Nerijus Šepetys (Vilnius: Aidai, 1999), 77–100.

14 The intensification of an anti-religious and "anti-cosmopolitan" policy resulted, in addition to other events of similar nature, in the closure of Vilnius Cathedral and the destruction of the State Jewish Museum, opened by ghetto survivors in 1944; its exhibits were divided among the LSSR Museum of the Revolution, Lithuanian Art Museums, the State Archive and the National Library; besides, criticism against the monument commemorating Holocaust victims built by Vilnius' Jewish community in 1948 in Paneriai – a massacre site – was initiated, and ended in 1952 with its demolition.

15 Crucial changes in the physical body of Vilnius began after the resolution "Regarding the Measures to Rebuild the City of Vilnius", approved by Stalin, and published by the Soviet Council of Ministers on April 1, 1948; the clearance of ruins and implementation of new construction projects were accompanied by the systematic destruction of undesirable landmarks and parts of the city, mainly the Jewish quarters, including the Old Synagogue and its surroundings, and the creation of symbols promoting the Soviet regime.

16 This presentation is based on the articles by Giedrė Jankevičiūtė and Laima Laučkaitė in the exhibition catalogue: *A Difficult Age*, ed. Giedrė Jankevičiūtė (Vilnius: MO muziejus, 2021), 101–169.

17 See: Romuald Warakomski, *Wileńskie dramaty w czasie wojny i PRL* [Vilnius' dramas during the war and in People's Republic of Poland], Kszeszowice: Kubajak, 2006.

18 David E. Fishman, *The Book Smugglers: Partisans, Poets, and the Race to Save Jewish Treasures from the Nazis* (ForeEdge, 2017), 45.

19 Icchokas Rudaševskis, *Vilniaus geto dienoraštis. Togbukh fun Vilner geto. 1941–1943* [The Diary of the Vilna Ghetto, 1941–1943], ed. and trans. Mindaugas Kvietkauskas (Vilnius: Lietuvos žydų bendruomenė, 2018), 109.

20 Czesław Miłosz, "Wyrosłem w tym mieście" [I Grew Up in this City], *Lithuania* (Warszawa) 1 (38) (2001): 155.

21 Ibid.

22 Personal file of the student Vrublevskis Andriejus, Bronislavo (started January 10, 1945), Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Art, f. 266, ap. 4, b. 958, l. 1–3ap.

23 *Vilnius dailėje / Vilnius in Art 1939–1956*: catalogue, ed. Rima Rutkauskienė (Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2019).

24 Cf.: the articles by Debora J. Meijers, Mari Carmen Ramirez, Walter Grasskamp in the volume *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson & Sandy Nairne, London & New York: Routledge, (1996) 2000.

25 Cf.: Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Vilniaus paveikslas 1939–1956 metais: tamsūs laikai, šviesūs vaizdai [The Image of Vilnius in 1939–1956: Dark Times, Bright Pictures], *Naujasis židinys-Aidai*, 2019, no. 5, 42–47; https://nzidinys.lt/giedre-jankeviciute-vilniaus-paveikslas-1939-1956-m-daileje-tamsus-laikai-sviesus-vaizdai-nz-a-nr-5/ [accessed on June 17, 2020].

The voices of women across the generations

The one who wins the war, he writes history.

In this article I reflect on the process of making the video project *Red*, 2015, (21:45 min.) and a sound installation *The White Wall*, 2015 (9:30 min.) about post-Soviet times and transgenerational silence about experiences with the Soviet Union.

by **Kati Roover**

On a sunny day in 1989, I stood amongst others, with my family, in a 600-kilometer-long human chain. We had to drive for a long while until we found a suitable place where we stopped. Thousands of people had already formed a line for a long continuous stretch. I remember that we stood there for a long time, waiting for something. People stood hand in hand along the road. We sang. I had never seen so many crying and happy people simultaneously. Everyone with the hope of freedom in their minds. Freedom.[1]

The film *Red* was finished in 2015 and installed in a room with bright red walls. Later in the same year I also finished the sound installation *The White Wall* about the silence/unspeakable and fear in my family and the post-Soviet time. It was a ten channel/speaker sound installation hidden inside the white wooden wall.

The color red from the red flag of Soviet Union was the initial starting point for my film. I tried to remember the right shade of the Soviet flag and I was interested if my memory about the color was correct. Later I learned that there were many shades of red flags like the many faces of the Soviet Union; there were warmer and colder shades of red. The color is also reminiscent of spilled blood and the racial and familial bloodline. The red color also has the function to mark certain chapters in the film and bind it together. The color anchored the film in the room and made the viewer entirely submerge in an installation that conveys an ambivalent bodily sensation. The affect could be described as attraction and repulsion: simultaneously attracted whilst overpowered, overwhelmed by an underlying uncanny feeling.

The film *Red* is based on my own family's history and develops as I interview three generations of women I am related to. My family background is Estonian and Finnish-Ingrian. Both of my grandmothers Estonian and Ingrian lost their families and homes early in their lives, because of their family roots and the Soviet repressions. My Ingrian grandmother was transported to the Klooga concentration camp from Ingria, and some years after that she was taken to the Siberian forced labor camp. My Estonian grandmother was escaping from a similar destiny, living in constant fear for many years of her life.

The film is divided into three sections, in accordance with the three generations I interviewed. It progresses chronologically, starting from the repressions in Estonia during the Soviet era. Each section has its own distinctive visual aesthetic, and a new section is marked by a longer fade to a red color. Within the sections, archival footage is mixed with testimonies of women of the same generation to form an experimental collage of many layers. In some of the sections, the persons of the same generation are bound and blended together, merging into each other and forming new virtual subjects. Expression is given to this wedge

There, I said it all...

of hostility that authority inserted between neighbors and tribal brethren, a strategy which has repeatedly deepened alienation, culminating in a selfish possessiveness when Communist authority finally collapsed.

The subject is difficult and serious; tragic fates, traumas affecting a whole family, a nation, and perhaps half a continent. A persistent suppression leading to untreated traumas stacked from one generation to the next. Life stories filled with anxiety and repressed raw emotions that slowly rise to the surface, as the film advances. Grief, fear and anger. The previously unspoken, difficult feelings are expressed and transmitted by the pauses between the words, in the small gestures of the witnesses' bodies, in the timbre of their voices and sighs.

Ground zero

In his article *Tell What You Remember*, Jyri Reinvere describes the process of liberation from trauma: In order for the process of liberation from the trauma of the past to begin, two events are needed, both collectively and individually. In addition to being able to remember the time when there was no trauma, the events of the trauma must be clearly identifiable: when, where, under what circumstances. In other words, trauma has a ground zero. The event can be clearly defined and tied to the moment of understanding. And most of the time it is impossible to achieve. The German word *Erkenntnis* means a series of complex insights: a central understanding of facing and encountering a past event and taking responsibility for the traces of the event. The way the trauma continues to control the causative agent, the target, or a combination thereof, is also identified. In a broader sense, *Erkenntnis* is also a recognition. There are no ineffective traumas. Only the target or the cause itself is responsible for how strongly untreated trauma dominates.[2]

I chose the moving image as a tool for this project because it is capable of capturing the language of the body, and may reach for something of a human experience that cannot be expressed by any other means. According to Ilona Reiners, "The camera can record unintentional gestures and expressions that carry with them signs of the past. The film's ability to create physical and physiological perspectives on the surrounding reality makes it an accurate observer of history. Not only does the film capture unintentional signs of the times, it also makes it possible to visually examine the traces left by the past as well as their presence in the present."[3]

Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985) was one of my cinematic examples when I decided to film and interview women in my family separately, at different seasons and in as different ways as possible. The impossibility of describing, vocalizing, and remembering traumatic personal and historical events is repeatedly present in the Shoah. The various stages of the film were born without a script, as a result of improvisation. I let people be who they were, and I only influenced where and how the situation was filmed. I did all the vocal interviews separately from the shooting situation, in different seasons during 2014–2015. At the time of the interviews, I also shared what other interviewees had said about the same things and we also discussed it.

The saddest thing for my family has been that open grieving has not been possible so far. It has been impossible because there are fears that something with consequences would be revealed. I tried to discuss it with the women of my family, and it was very diffi-

"TRAGIC FATES, TRAUMAS AFFECTING A WHOLE FAMILY, A NATION, AND PERHAPS HALF A CONTINENT."

The girl didn't understand the matter at all.

cult to bring it up, to show directly how much untreated grief has been passed down from generation to generation to be carried and unloaded. At first, I was interested in making my family's grief present, facing it, not actually translating it into cinematic form.

For me, grieving and the experience of loss is a process with no goal or end point.

In the Soviet era people developed two simultaneous self-images, one of which felt and thought as not officially accepted, and another that met official requirements. Richard Pipes, professor of history at Harvard University, has found that people's adaptation to two existing realities had a high cost, a disintegration of spirit and personality, leading to a schizophrenic state where their own true thoughts were mostly rejected and sometimes rarely shared with family and friends closest to them. At the same time, people pretended to believe every word of official propaganda. "It caused tension, which made life in the Soviet Union impossible to take. It also left a psychic mark that will last longer than communism itself."[4]

DURING THE INTERVIEWS, I asked about the memories of the Soviet era and modern times and the relationship between them. Soon, the Soviet Union began to take shape: its beginning, its center and the time of its disintegration, the first years after Estonian independence, and the events of 2014 in Europe. While making the video piece, I became interested in the thoughts of Grant Kester, Professor of Art History, about ideas related to community art, where meaning formation takes place together with the group.

In this case, the group involved in the artwork were women of my family. Grant Kester's dialogical aesthetics provide a space where the artist has the opportunity to accept their own dependence and vulnerability in relation to the viewer or audience. This is made possible through openness and listening. In his text, Kester presents his notion of an aesthetic in which the greatest value of a work of art or artwork lies in the process of discussion that seeks change before it. Internalizing the model presented by Kester requires thinking from a new perspective and understanding the meaning of communication in a more multidimensional way. In dialogic aesthetics, an open-minded interaction that values the individuality of the interlocutors is important. The opposite can be seen as an object-oriented way

of discussing, which lacks reciprocity. According to him, a work of art should be understood as the communication process related to the work, not so much the physical object created as a result of the communication. Kester considers works like this to be performative, because according to him, the identities of both the artist and his collaborators are built in such encounters.[5]

I chose a female perspective for my work because I had a good connection with the women of my family and was able to interpret their physical means of expression more easily. I am also interested in the female body as a place which gives birth to something new. During the process, I thought of the body of the women of my family as a place where there is a lot of the unknown and where a lot of troubling and even painful things are buried. Thinking of the body as a kind of meeting place for different experiences also brought the distance I needed to be able to receive so much emotional information. At some point I decided that I would leave some of the stories out of the video piece just because they were too harsh on an emotional level. I only left some sentences because there are so many sad stories to share. For me, part of the artwork was an experience already completed during the interview phase, a work of community art.

The conversation between different generations united people in a new way because they talked about something that hadn't been talked about before. Awareness of the existence of a common past and present increased. The interviews also raised some unresolved issues between generations and between mothers and daughters.

WHILE I WAS WORKING with this project I was interested in the following questions:

How is the past present in the present time?

How is history interpreted, edited, remembered?

How do the specificity of the object of remembrance and the changing historical context change the conditions of remembrance?

Where are the limits of presenting suffering and forced silence?

How to find the visual language of displacement and transgenerational silence about difficult issues?

How to recognize and make visible the violent energies that are hidden in the present?

Think about what life was like then.

It was colder, more like the colour of blood.

How do you find words that have been frozen for generations through fear and confusion?

How do I interview a person who has been repeatedly interrogated and silenced during her life?

I started by interviewing my grandmothers, who had experienced the early days of the Soviet Union including the loss of family as well as home. The interview with my grandmother living in Estonia was the most difficult. Most of the events and things she told were formed into words for the first time. Interviews with both grandmothers lasted several hours. I also paid attention to bodily expression and how things were expressed linguistically, how difficult it was to find the right words. At times, it looked like a physical struggle. In his book *Memory of Art*, Reiners mentions Jean Francois Lyotard, "who names the infallibility of communication with the concepts of strife and injustice.

The realm of controversy – or unspoken suffering – is characterized by an experience of linguistics that requires the search for new forms of expression in order to be expressed.

According to Reiners, such suffering is characterized by the intertwining of perceived injustice and languagelessness, the silence of the victims, which stems from the impossibility of proving the wrong done to them. The most demanding task of a philosopher, historian, and artist is to describe such escaping areas of language. For Lyotard, this means focusing on "what cannot be described by the rules of knowledge."[6]

The human chain

The actual *Red* as artwork was more of an encounter and being present with this subject.

What I recorded and presented in the exhibition space was no longer an evident fragment of what the whole artistic process meant to me and the interviewees.

With the making of *Red*, I learned that what has happened in the past can also happen in the present. Someone is experiencing deprivation of liberty, mental and physical pain and suffering right now, somewhere. In that sense, humanity has not learned much from the past. I believe, therefore, that a repetition of the past in some way is also possible in the future, both for humans and other living beings. In some other form or in another place – for similar or completely different reasons – the same difficult circumstances can happen again. I wanted to make a work that would increase my own understanding of the history of humanity and my immediate surroundings; I tried to find answers to my questions, but was left with new questions that I will probably never find definitive answers to.

However, my understanding increased, and I believe that maintaining human conditions is paramount so that the atrocities of the past towards humanity do not recur. However, I take it for granted that the responsibility for preserving humanity lies primarily with the state and not with art or artists.

"HOW DO I INTERVIEW A PERSON WHO HAS BEEN REPEATEDLY INTERROGATED AND SILENCED DURING HER LIFE?"

At the end of his book *Black Earth*, historian Timothy Snyder states:

> **The purpose of the state is to maintain human conditions so that its citizens do not have to experience personal survival as their sole goal. The state exists for the recognition, promotion and protection of rights, which means creating the conditions in which rights can be recognized and supported and protected. The state stays upright to create a sense of resilience. Thus, ultimate pluralism is related to time. If we lack a sense of the past and the future, the present seems to be a shaky platform, an uncertain basis for action. Defending states and rights becomes impossible if no one learns from the past or believes in the future. Historical awareness makes it possible to identify ideological traps and teaches us to doubt the demands of immediate action presented on the basis of sudden change. Confidence in the future can make the world look more than, in Hitler's words, a "precise area". Time, the fourth dimension, can make three-dimensional space feel less claustrophobic. Confidence in continuity is the antidote to escape horror and the tonic for demagoguery. In the present, one must create a sense of the future from what is known about the past, build the fourth of the three dimensions of everyday life.[7]**

In between words

Together with the color red, sound had a great influence on how I experienced Soviet Estonia. Sometimes there was silence, a powerless tone of voice, sighs in between words, interrupted sentences, nervous laughter etc. Also I had a lot of non-visual memories that I couldn't really relate to, but that I still felt were important. For this reason, I composed a piece of work that was solely related to audio. I started out with a compilation of The White Wall, an installation, a collage of sounds, locations, times, and memories mixed together during the working process on *Red*. The concept came from the idea: What if walls could speak of what they have seen and heard? It consists of audio material that I searched for and edited to describe the feelings and thoughts that came to my mind from my childhood atmosphere and in the present time, then 2014.

The ten channel/speaker sound installation The White Wall is a composition of found footage, archival sound material and selected audio material from footage in which I interviewed my grandmothers. I asked them to tell me what it was like to start their lives in a society that had taken away all their property and their loved ones, in a society where life was overshadowed by the constant tension of uncertainty and fear. Something was conveyed especially between words, sighs and pauses.

It is at moments when we struggle with memory, when language fails us or our voice breaks, when our bodies are affected by inhibitions or prohibitions, that it becomes critical what values we attach to memory, voice and the body, and what roles they have in shaping our sense of self and our relation to the world. Such suspension or habitual abilities may occur through a range of different experiences, including migration, trauma, or physical inhibitions like aphasia, aphonia or stuttering. It has become common to understand memory, voice and even bodily sensation and knowledge as something we don't simply have, but something we do, whether consciously or unconsciously. But when the ability to remember, feel or speak gets disrupted, exactly this sense that we are engaged in doing – in interacting with and acting in the world – becomes a question.[8]

The model for the sound compositions to *Red* and *The White Wall* were Marguerite Duras' films, in which sound rises to an important position so that the works seem in places to be imagined. The function of sound is not to act as a commentary track that reinforces the importance of images, but rather to subtly tint what remains in the mind of the listener-viewer, above all on the basis of the soundtrack. Although on the soundtrack, the story is clearer than in the pictures, the space and being in it creates its own visual rhythm for the film. Where sound and image form their own spaces, the variation in interior and exterior images also reflects a contradiction.

For me, working with the project *Red* was emotionally overwhelming process, dealing with difficult memories about Soviet repression and the marks it left on me and the women I am related to. While working with the project, my main aim was to give voice to the women of different generations and their thoughts about political/historical events that have affected their lives intergenerationally. With my project *Red*, my aim was to connect the different historical happenings, stories, experiences, knowledges and memories by sharing verbal and visual knowledge through one family. ❌

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Juozas Laivys. *Dot – Full Stop*. 2012–2017. Site-specific intervention, Vytautas Avenue, Kaunas.

PHOTO: SVETLANA BATURA

REPETITION OF SILENCE

MONUMENTS FOR A NEW TIME

by **Paulina Pukytė**

A traditional monument that is always and so obviously present with its rigid didactic form could be likened to an uninterrupted sound that, after a while, becomes unperceivable because of the lack of silence. To become a message, sound needs to be interrupted with repetition of silence. What does a monument need to become a message, a keeper and transmitter of living memory that "returns the burden of memory to those who come looking for it" (James E. Young)? Perhaps it needs an interruption of presence or repetition of absence.

One way to regard the state of a nation is through its monuments. After restoring its independence, Lithuania rebuilt all the monuments that the Soviets had destroyed, and erected many new ones, but of the same pre-World War II form and content. However, after "putting things right" in this sense, do we find ourselves back at square one? We had hopes for new monuments to become more relevant and diverse, and for the remaining ideologically dated or controversial public sculptures

to be re-contextualized and given new meanings. But, with rare exceptions, in three decades of independence this didn't really happen. On the contrary, commemoration discourse in Lithuania seems to be experiencing a regression – we witness a growing urge to erect more and more traditionally figurative bronze national heroes, and there are calls to memorialize freedom by directly adopting imperial and totalitarian tradition, while the darkest events of our 20th century history and their victims in many cases still remain without acknowledgement and adequate commemorative markers. Furthermore, in recent years we have seen a sharp rise in demands to get rid of the few remaining specimens of the Soviet sculptural heritage.

In 2017 I curated a public space exhibition "There And Not There: (Im)possibility of a monument" in Kaunas. The exhibition questioned traditional monuments and their ability to speak to us today, as well as the populist practice of removing/erecting prevalent in the memory discourse of public space in Lithuania; it asked how to remember what is not there, how not to forget

what is there, how to forget, how to commemorate something we wish had not been, and, in the face of over-saturation, what monuments do we need today and why do we need them at all? And, in certain cases, are monuments even possible?

The project sought to encourage and legitimize radically new, relevant, contemporary, conceptual ideas and strategies of commemoration: monument as an intervention into the rituals of everyday life; monument that exists only when there is someone to create and perceive it at the same time; monument as a process and a constant effort; monument that exists by its absence; an unerectable and therefore indestructible monument; monument that is there and not there at the same time. *Absence versus presence* was its main paradigm.

When we look at our monuments, why is there so much presence and, at the same time, so much absence? Or is there not enough presence and not enough absence? Or is there too much presence and not enough absence? Or is there not enough presence and too much absence?

And what can we do about this (dis)balance?

For the exhibition I invited 15 international and local artists to explore Kaunas (the second largest city in Lithuania), together with me, through *presence* and *absence* of its monuments. We created 23 site-specific installations and interventions in public spaces of the city: we looked back at the removed monuments, reconsidered the existing ones, searched for the missing ones, and imagined future monuments.

LITHUANIAN ARTIST Juozas Laivys placed his *Dot – Full Stop* in the spot where a monument to a Lithuanian Soviet leader once stood (and was removed in 1990). The former presence of a monument here is still implied by the architecture of this public space, even if the memory of which leader of the bygone era stood here is fading. Such an obvious absence today becomes a magnet for new "monumental" ideas for bronze national heroes (either on horseback or on foot) or kitschy, municipality generated public "art". By drawing his *Dot* (originally created for Minsk, but not accepted there) in this place, and thus creating an artwork that is present and absent at the same time, Juozas Laivys attempted to put a full stop in a never-ending sentence of re-moving-re-erecting of monuments. Thus, at least for a while, this public space was "taken" and therefore free of propaganda, ideological and physical clutter.

JAPANESE ARTIST Tatzu Nishi employed an opposite strategy. Reinterpreting perhaps the most present of all monuments in Kaunas – the Freedom Statue – he made it temporarily absent. He teleported it from a public to a private space and from the present to the past, by building a Soviet-time kitchen around it: in the years of Soviet occupation freedom was talked about only in private, around the kitchen table. The *Freedom Monument* in Kaunas – a symbol of independent Lithuania and one of the first monumental sculptures of the nation state – was erected in 1928 (sculptor Juozas Zikaras) and demolished in 1950 by the order of the Soviet government (the bronze angel survived, hidden in a museum). In 1989, with the independence movement, the
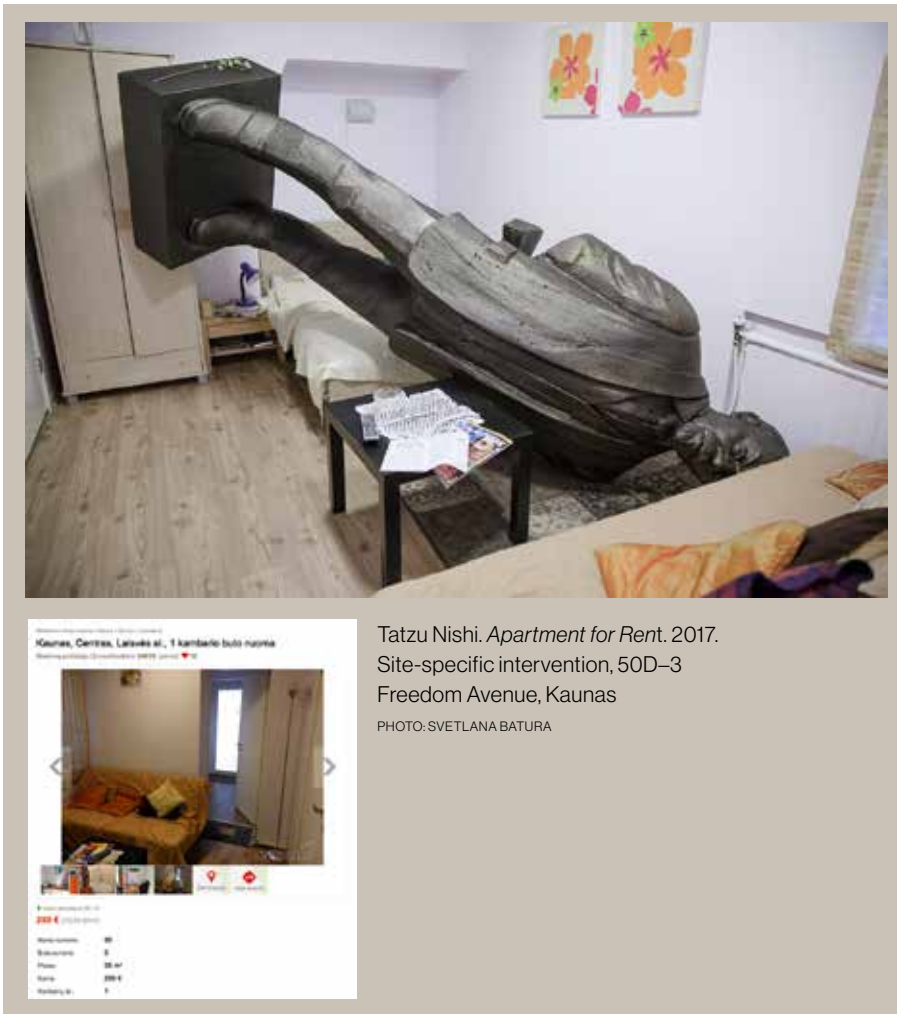

Tatzu Nishi.
Freedom. 2017.
Site-specific installation.
Vienybės a., War Museum Garden, Kaunas.

PHOTO: REMIS SCERBAUSKAS   PHOTO: SVETLANA BATURA

monument was restored in its original location. The repetition of its absence (disappearance) again in 2017 became very controversial and upsetting for part of the Kaunas community. We received complaints about "desecration of our national values", "mockery of Lithuanian freedom", "destruction of everything that is dear and sacred to us" and ultimatums to dismantle the artwork. However, by interrupting its presence, the artist gave the public a different perspective of the monument, both literally and metaphorically. Those who came and saw it up close, in a painfully recognizable everyday setting on a kitchen table, will have a very different, personal connection with the Angel of Freedom now, when it has been elevated back to its unreachable glory.

AS A MIRROR PROJECT of his *Freedom* Tatzu Nishi created another installation – *Apartment For Rent*. A defunct (fallen) monument that had overwhelming presence for many years of communist rule in every town of the Soviet Union and disappeared from our squares with Independence, was returned, albeit in a com-

Tatzu Nishi. *Apartment for Rent*. 2017.
Site-specific intervention, 50D–3
Freedom Avenue, Kaunas

PHOTO: SVETLANA BATURA
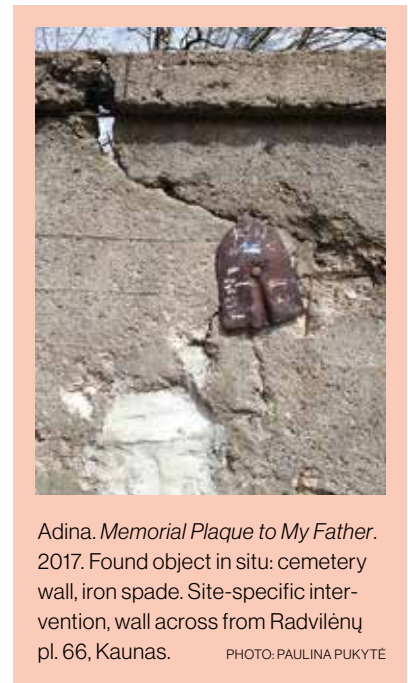
Adina. *Memorial Plaque to My Father*.
2017. Found object in situ: cemetery
wall, iron spade. Site-specific inter-
vention, wall across from Radvilėnų
pl. 66, Kaunas.   PHOTO: PAULINA PUKYTĖ

pletely different context. Tatzu Nishi placed the statue of Lenin that stood in the center of Kaunas during the Soviet period in a small one-room apartment not far from the monument's original location. So, again, the presence of a history marker was transferred from a public to a private space, but this time in the opposite direction: from the past to the present. (This case is even more complicated, as the statue has already been moved from a public-public space in the center of the city to a private-public space, i.e. a privately owned Grūtas Park.) In addition, I decided to advertise the flat with the artwork for rent. A typical real estate advertisement was placed on the internet for the duration of the show, but the installation was not visible in the offered property photos. Only upon arriving to view the flat did potential tenants see that its only room was almost completely overtaken by a statue of Lenin. Some of them asked whether it would be possible to remove "this thing", and, after receiving a negative response, no longer wanted the apartment, while some others where not too bothered by the prospect of a fallen monument in their home and planned to "store clothes on it". After a viewing,

every potential tenant was told that the property had just been taken by someone else (so that the installation could continue as "available for rent" for the duration of the show), but they were not told that they had stumbled into an artwork. Interestingly, none of them thought this was art, or at least none of them expressed such suspicion or enquired about such possibility.

These installations spoke of the inertia in our minds, reminded us of our inability to detach ourselves from our traumatic past of the 20th century, and, at the same time, to accept it as our own. Not to dissociate from it or to ignore it – that we often do – but to step aside from it and regard it from today's perspective in order to be able to deal with it and to move on.

ANOTHER PART OF the exhibition pointed out the absence of Jewish life in Kaunas, where 34,000 Jews lived before the war and 30,000 of them perished in the Holocaust, and the absence of specific knowledge about many of their fates, as well as the absence of commemoration markers for them. To emphasize this absence I made up an artist, Adina. For this "unknown artist"

Paulina Pukytė. *29 = 42. Refusal of the Afterimage. A Monument to Jan Zwartendijk.*
2017. Site-specific intervention; sign on pavement, press release.   PHOTO: SVETLANA BATURA

PHOTO: PAULINA PUKYTĖ

I used my mother's life story and borrowed her absent name. My mother's Jewish father disappeared somewhere in Kaunas during the Holocaust, and her name was changed to save her. She never really recovered from that. I think she wanted to be an artist, but never became one. Perhaps only Adina could have been an artist. I attributed to this absent artist an object I found *in situ* on a Jewish cemetery wall in Kaunas: a spade with which a hole in the wall had been repaired a long time ago. I thus turned it into a memorial to all the persons whose burial place or death circumstances we do not know, to those with absent gravestones, absent names, and absent histories.

MY OTHER SITE-SPECIFIC piece to mark the absence of a monument was inspired by a strange fact that a commemorative plaque to the Righteous Among The Nations Jan Zwartendijk, a Dutch Consul in wartime Kaunas, had been installed on No. 42 Laisvės Avenue, instead of No. 29, where he actually worked saving the Jews from the Nazis by issuing them visas to Curaçao. I learned that it was because the current owner of No. 29 refused the Municipality's request to have on his building a plaque that had anything to do with Jews. Therefore 29 was substituted by 42. To show the absence of commemoration on No. 29 I put a plaque on the pavement in front of it, to where private ownership does not extend, with a number 42 and an instruction to look at it for 42 seconds and then to look up. After doing this you would normally see, for a few seconds, an afterimage of a 42 on the front wall in front of you. But in this case, you didn't: shiny iridescent tiles of the wall rejected the afterimage, echoing the rejection of the plaque by the owner of the building. A press release accompanied this piece, announcing the unveiling of a

memorial to Jan Zwartendijk on the façade of 29 Laisvės Avenue, Kaunas, Lithuania, "that will remain on this building forever as a refusal" – the absent memorial. And, when people stood in front of the building following the instruction on the pavement, they in fact performed "a minute of silence" honoring the savior of Jews.

> In Kabbalistic tradition 42 is the number with which God creates the Universe.
> If the Jews, running away from death, were able to dig a tunnel straight through the Earth, gravity would have taken them from Kaunas to Curaçao, a Dutch island in the Caribbean on the other side of the world, in just 42 minutes (a "gravity train effect").
> "42" is the answer "to life, the universe and everything", given to the hitchhikers through the galaxy by a computer called Deep Thought after seven and a half million years' calculation.
> In the Egyptian Book of the Dead there are 42 questions asked of persons making their journey through Death. If they are able to give answers to all 42 questions, they can reach the ultimate goal of becoming a star that gives light to the Universe.
> 42 is the angle at which we see a rainbow.

THE "SQUARE" formerly known as Demokratų Square is in the territory of the former Kaunas Ghetto, in the Vilijampole suburb where all the Jews from Kaunas were forced to live from July 1941 until its complete destruction in 1944. On October 28, 1941 a mass selection of the Ghetto inhabitants took place there, that

Paulina Pukytė. *At Noon In Democrats Square*. 2017. Recurring site-specific performance, duration 7 min, daily at 12 noon, for 70 days. Vilijampolė, Kaunas.

PHOTO: REMIS SCERBAUSKAS

became known as The Big Action and resulted in the extermination of 9200 Jewish men, women and children in a single day. There is no monument nor any sign there to mark this event or its victims. I decided to intervene in this disadvantaged neighborhood with something out of the ordinary, out of place, to create a monument there that is temporary yet recurring, present and absent at the same time. I wanted to reveal the great absence there – not only the absence of any commemorative marker and the absence of knowledge of what happened there, but also the absence of people who lived there – of Jews and of their language that nobody there understands anymore. So, for 10 weeks every day at noon I had a young opera singer come and sing two songs in Yiddish to the emptiness of Democrats Square. The singing was unannounced and unexplained, it just happened, every day, always at the same time. At first the local residents met this strange phenomenon with hostility: drunks outside the local supermarket mocked the singing with shouting, old ladies berated the singer for "disturbance". But, hearing the beautiful yet incomprehensible singing for many days, the passers-by started considering it, inquiring about it. Upon learning that it was to commemorate the Jews who perished, the old people often became tearful and shared their memories of what happened there: memories that had been buried deep inside and never brought up, never spoken about. We know that also because another project that I curated for this location, by British artist Jenny Kagan, involved communication with local schoolchildren, and none of them knew they were living in a former ghetto. Eventually the drunks stopped mocking the singing and even started making the sign of the cross when passing by the singer. Someone lit Catholic candles in the place where the singer usually stood. A man with a dog came up to the singer one day and said: "I'm a drunk, but I know what happened here, and my dog now perks up his ears every day just before noon."

I believe that my artistic decision to avoid specific in-your-face explanation of this artwork (apart from the information in the special booklet for the exhibition visitors) made the local people (many of whom usually steer away from contemporary art) more curious, made them want to know, and allowed for a more intuitive, personal, emotional connection with the artwork's message. I also believe that when, after 70 days, the singing finally stopped recurring and there was silence again, there were at least some who felt that something was now missing.

> **The sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence. And though admittedly such a thing has never happened, still it is conceivable that someone might possibly have escaped from their singing; but from their silence certainly never.**
> **Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*** ⊠

Paulina Pukytė is a Lithuanian artist, writer, and curator based in London and Vilnius

1991–2021: THIRTY YEARS AFTER

This year it is 30 years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when the prefix post-, came to dominate the social realities in our region, as well as scholarship about it.

In December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist and new circumstances became relevant, the post-Soviet, post-socialist, and post-communist ones. 2021 mark the end of the region's third decade under the sign of "afterness".

What came after seems to have almost entirely coincided with what was left after: the USSR's legacy and heritage; its accursed or blessed memories; the private nostalgic longing for it and the retrotopian public policies; political restoration and the remnants of the past in the present-day historical revisionisms.

DURING 2021 CBEES invites friends and colleagues to join us in a critical reflection on this thirty-year long durée; we are proposing a series of roundtables to think through the meaningful transformation of the cultures and societies, to follow the substantial change that maybe slips our attention as we focus on repetitions and returns. ⊠

Irina Sandomirskaja

Note: The roundtables will be announced and covered during the year at *Baltic Worlds*' website, see: http://balticworlds.com/tags/ussr-30-years/.

ILLUSTRATION:
MOA THELANDER

New Age spirituality in socialist societies

The recent studies on the history of religions in Eastern Europe's socialist period have continued to explore new, partly bizarre pieces in the large and still obscure picture of how the secular, the religion-suppressing environment was reproducing religious forms.

Undoubtedly, Eastern Europe can be seen as one of the most generating places of global *New Age* creativity. Scholars' future responses to the following questions will certainly impact both a general theory of *New Age* spirituality and regional interdisciplinary studies: What have been material manifestations, local dynamics, transfers of new forms of privatized religiosity inside socialist Eastern Europe? How could needs and ways of *New Age* spiritual belonging in the aftermath of the collapse be explained? How have politics, culture, and *New Age* spirituality been intertwined with each other? How should we interpret these socially relevant connections from the perspective of the thirty years-post-socialist research and a range of theories of new religious movements, *New Age*, and esotericism?

BALTIC WORLDS' **INVITES** the scholars to address the following topics which can be placed in a broader context: the growth of new religious beliefs and groups in Eastern Europe and Baltic countries during the socialist period and afterwards; re-awakening of old religious and esoteric teachings and practices; gurus, their invented/real biographies; (dis)continuities of fluid forms and genres of (post-)socialist *New Age*; Eastern European *New Age* networks and transfers; the appearance and distribution of popular esoteric and parascientific literature; political events and conflicts with symbolic responses of new religious movements and *New Age* groups in the late Socialism; the memory of religious underground and reinvention of the past; discourses of a "new age" and their instrumentalization; sacred places, both geographical and constructed by the mass media and fiction; *New Age* spiritual market and consumption in the region. ⊠

Cfp: Special Section: New Age Spirituality in Socialist Societies
Guest editor: Anna Tessmann, University of Mainz
Deadline submit abstract (max 200 words):
20 February 2021.
Submit to atessman@uni-mainz.de
Notice of acceptance: 1 March 2021.
See: http://balticworlds.com/tags/new-age/

Coming Special Section in *Baltic Worlds*
2021: **Dietary Reform in the Baltic and East Central Europe, 1850–1950**,
Guest editor Julia Malitska

Ieva Astahovska

Art scholar, critic and curator. She works at the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, where she leads research projects related to art from the socialist and post-socialist period.

Lia Dostlieva

Ukrainian artist, essayist, cultural anthropologist and researcher at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. Focusing on trauma, postmemory, commemorative practices, and agency and visibility of vulnerable groups and how to process "difficult knowledge" and "difficult past".

Andrii Dostliev

Independent Ukrainian artist, curator, and photography researcher currently based in Poland. His primary areas of interest are memory, trauma, identity – both personal and collective, and various aspects of queerness. Works in various media.

Rasa Goštautaitė

PhD student at Faculty of History, Vilnius University. Her dissertation focuses on the contested nature of the Soviet-era heritage in Lithuania and other post-communist states, looking into the politics and management practices related to the legacy of this type.

Zuzanna Hertzberg

Interdisciplinary artist, artivist, and researcher with a PhD degree from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. Her art includes painting, performance, textiles, and collages using archival materials. She is interested in the search for identity in minority heritage, especially women's.

Giedrė Jankevičiūtė

Senior research fellow at the Art History and Visual Culture Department of the Lithuanian Institute for Culture Research and she also teaches at the Vilnius Academy of Arts. Her current field of interest lies in the artistic culture of occupied countries, which she explores by focusing on the situation of Lithuania in the middle of the 20th century.

Elisabeth Kovtiak

Belarusian researcher and curator, a PhD candidate at the Charles University, Prague. Academic interests include collective memory and its manifestations in art and in public space, the role of art in political activism, national identity in transitional post-socialist societies.

Jan Miklas-Frankowski

Assistant professor at the Institute of Media, Journalism and Communication at the University of Gdansk. Focusing on; work of Czesław Miłosz; contemporary Polish reportage, particularly Polish-Jewish relations; and, memory of Polish Jews and the Holocaust.

Paulina Pukytė

Interdisciplinary artist, writer and curator based in London and Vilnius. She writes critical and satirical articles on art and cultural issues, as well as experimental literature, poetry and plays. She makes site-specific interventions, still and moving image and conceptual projects using found artefacts, questioning human perception, memory, habits and cliche.

Kati Roover

Multidisciplinary artist living and working in Helsinki. In her works she approaches environmental changes through poetic imagination, creating works that combine her research with a broad range of perspectives. She works with moving image, sound, photography, text and installations.

Margaret Tali

Mobilitas plus postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Art History and Visual Culture at the Estonian Academy of Arts. Current research deals with the complex memories of WWII in the Baltic States in practices of contemporary art and documentary film.

Annika Toots

PhD candidate at the Institute of Art History and Visual Culture of the Estonian Academy of Arts. Research interest: contemporary art that deals with the materialization of time and representations of the landscape, focusing mainly on photography.

The print journal is distributed in 50 countries. It is also published open access on the web.

BALTIC WORLDS

THE WARS OF MEMORY

The *CBEES State of the Region Report 2020: Constructions and Instrumentalization of the Past. A Comparative Study on Memory Management in the Region* is the first in a series of annual reports presenting and reflecting on social and political developments in the Baltic Sea Region and Central and Eastern Europe. The overall purpose with this initiative is to offer a publication that will be of great interest to fellow researchers, policy makers, stakeholders, and the general public. The report 2020 can give input for further dialogues, studies and also a wider understanding of the situation today in the field of memory, past and history. As declared in the introduction to the report:

> Memory is not a thing, but rather is a relationship between the person/institution/collective/state ministry thinking about how to use the past in a way beneficial to it, thus deeming it necessary. The use of memory is multi-faceted and multi-levelled. It is very important to identify the persons/ groups/political parties that are making the representations.

In their introduction, David Gaunt and Tora Lane describe what they call ongoing wars of memory in the region, and how the past of political history has become the object of political struggles over the past: it is used as a weapon to legitimize positions and actions of power players of today. "Region of memory" is a concept Barbara Törnquist Plewa applies in her background essay, exploring the major memory nodes and clashes that stand out as particular for the region of the Baltic, East and Central Europe and the Post-Soviet countries. While the double experience of Nazism and Communism is unique to Eastern and Central Europe, other experiences of peripheral status and semi-colonial development as well as belated modernization and state-building is shared with other regions.

IN THE FIVE FOLLOWING essays the topic is further examined from different angles. Irina Sandomirskaja focuses on communist visuality in three films, discussing images, afterimage and counter-image of Communism, seen out of the communist context. In her essay Florence Fröhlig explores how "forced memorialization", which does not recognize past suffering, can cause trauma, also for subsequent generations, and yet how this shared victimhood serves as the denominator of their identity. The toxic memory politics in the post-Soviet Caucasus is examined by Thomas de Waal. He specifically looks into the Georgian catastrophe when the Soviet police killed protesters in Tbilisi in April 1989 and how the way they were remembered perpetuated hatred between the countries, finally leading to renewed warfare between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020. The violent events in 2020 in Belarus are also brought up in Andrej Kotljarchuk's essay where he reveals how the use of seemingly innocent symbols such as flags can visualize deeply antipathetic politicized forms of remembrance of the history of that country's national symbols now playing out in the streets. Finally, Per Anders Rudling compares the "institution of trauma-production" in the borderland of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. He refers to what he calls the new trend across Europe of introducing "memory laws", and setting up of institutes of national memory, aimed at regulating the writing of history. He further discusses concepts such as "use and abuse of history" and notes that academic historians have organized themselves in order to

Constructions and Instrumentalization of the Past
A Comparative Study on Memory Management in the Region

COVER AND DESIGN: LENA FREDIKSSON

speak up against the legislation of history. Those essays give insightful perspectives of the dynamic and sensitivity around memory, images of the past and history writing in the region 2020.

FURTHER WE HAVE conducted a minor multidisciplinary comparative study on memory politics and memory production in the region. As an editor I have collected contributions from: Germany (Jenny Wüstenberg), Lithuania (Violeta Davoliūtė), Belarus (Aliaksei Lastouski), Ukraine (Yuliya Yurchuk), Czech Republic (Muriel Blaive), Poland (Joanna Beata Michlic), Hungary (János M. Rainer), Romania (Lavinia Stan), Bulgaria (Evelina Kelbecheva), and Turkey (Talin Suciyan). Those country reports indicate that there is an escalating trend to use remembrance as a political weapon, which risk to undermining trust in scientific and humanities research and further polarizing society. Furthermore, the report discusses how silencing is the modus operandi for some governments in the region. ⊠

Ninna Mörner