

Memory and Place

issue editor

JUSTYNA TABASZEWSKA

ANDRZEJ SZPOCIŃSKI Sites of Memory

WOJCIECH KALAGA Memory, Interpretation, Identity

RYSZARD NYCZ The Other Like Me

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Communism and the Perpetrators

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and the Spirit of Transgression

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Memory and Place

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Foreword

Justyna Tabaszewska

On Polish Memory Studies

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Ever since cultural memory studies experienced rapid growth in the 1990s they have become an unquestionable part of the humanities, broadly conceived, even though the twenty-year expansion of memory studies has lately receded, and questions are being raised concerning the limits, boundaries and inconsistencies of its discourse. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is still a valid and interesting theoretical perspective. It is not implausible to assert that with time, and accumulation of doubts and new questions, it will become an even more intellectually fertile field of study, the more intriguing, the more aware it becomes of its own limitations and specificity.

The aforementioned process of growing sophistication of memory studies can be clearly seen also on Polish grounds, where the first years of the discipline's development were marked by references to the theories of classical researchers such as Jan Assmann or Pierre Nora, and only subsequently some of the more complex matters of European memory were introduced (especially that of German collective memory, investigated among others by Aleida Assmann) to finally allow for a complete opening of research onto deliberations concerning Polish cultural, social, and collective memory. Characteristic traits of this epoch are found on the one hand in articles and books concerning new possibilities of theoretical studies of memory, original concepts and interpretative cat-

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egories, and on the other, in a steadily growing library of texts concerning various forms of memory and commemoration, problems of traumatic memory of The Second World War, complex and often repressed memory of The Holocaust, and finally in the troublesome memory of the interwar period, the time of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) and the time of political transformation.¹

These two lines of development in memory studies, directed, roughly speaking, one towards theory, the other towards practice, strictly converge with one another with the result that the most interesting research proposals come from those projects where theory is extracted from practice or practice can be expanded through novel theoretical categories. Both strategies enable us to see in particular endeavors – texts, theories, or institutions – things that were previously either indiscernible or incomprehensible.

Such a significant expansion of memory research was without doubt assisted by their inter-, or rather trans-disciplinarity. Theories utilizing the notions of cultural and collective memory have quickly become a starting point for a lively discussion on the role and function of memory in the humanities as a whole. Particular disciplines of knowledge, by adapting and transforming observations derived from the study of issues raised by collective and cultural memory, managed to broaden not only the field of memory studies, but also the spectrum of their own inquiry. Therefore, ideas that can be traced to, among others, literary studies, cultural studies, visual studies, history, and the social sciences, have all contributed in a significant way to the study of memory.

The openness of memory studies to the influence of other disciplines of knowledge, essential to their expansion in the early 2000s, has nevertheless also contributed to their silent crisis that manifested – as in the earlier case of trauma studies – in an imperceptible incorporation into other discourses, and therefore to a subtle loss of their identity. The notion of “memory” became a kind of keyword, summoning various contexts: from the psychological and biological (with the question of the possibility of inheriting memory²), through social, cultural, artistic, to the political.

1 It is impossible to name each Polish scholar working in the area of memory studies in such a brief introduction. Nevertheless, I will at least attempt to mention some of those whose work is not published in the current volume: Agata Bielik-Robson, Michał Bilewicz, Katarzyna Bojarska, Przemysław Czapliński, Agnieszka Dauksza, Dorota Głowacka, Maria Kobielska, Joanna Kurczewska, Andrzej Leder, Jacek Leociak, Grzegorz Niziołek, Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Roma Sendyka, Bożena Shallcross, Joanna Tokirska-Bakir, Marek Zaleski, Marcin Zaremba.

2 The notion of bio-hereditary memory – from the viewpoint of the humanities – traces to Marianne Hirsch's remarks on the workings of post-memory of the second (and subsequent) generation. Ernst van Alphen, among others, voiced criticism of these views. See Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), Ernst van Alphen, “Second-Generation Testimony, Transmission of Trauma, and Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 27/2 (2006).

The unprecedented proliferation of research fostered diverse systematizations and definitions of memory. Alongside the well-known cultural memory and communicative memory, defined by Jan Assmann (also foundational and biographical memory, both much less recognized), social memory and collective memory, described by Maurice Halbwachs, and Pierre Nora's rather separate but no less important notion of places of memory; there have rapidly emerged notions of collected memory (Jeffrey Olick, Astrid Erll), functional memory and stored memory (Aleida Assmann), or finally memory working as *ars* and as *vis* (again A. Assmann). Particular definitions of memory were complicated even further by the modes, functions, and objectives of memory introduced by these authors, which it would be impossible to relate. At the end of the 1990s and the onset of the 2000s the issue of ways of functioning of various politics of memory – highly controversial, especially in Poland – that shape not only the manner in which we remember the past, but primarily define our present circumstances, came to the forefront of scholarly interest.

Concurrently, with a certain inflation of the memory discourse another, this time rather beneficial for the discipline, development was underway. It was a growing self-awareness of the research, which started to take on previously neglected issues with a growing confidence. Without doubt, one of the most important among these issues, was the question of research matter. At the start of the memory boom, the category of memory and remembering almost organically filled a certain niche, of which the historical disciplines seemed unaware; at least until the time of new historicism which questioned the previous view of history as an objective discipline of knowledge. Memory research enabled ways of seeing and analyzing various memory sources in ways previously impossible. Even though the methodology of studying the oral tradition, testimonials, memoirs, archives, material inheritance of memory and so forth, has been established quite quickly and painlessly, the methods of studying more complex media of memory have remained a subject of an ongoing debate.

Particular forms and types of memory media required different methodological tools, and their study was rather more complex than that of standard historical material; as media of memory encompass literature, broadly conceived art, cultural practices, landscapes, and places (though conceived somewhat differently from Pierre Nora's meaning). Each of these media – and there are others, unnamed here – is also the object of study for some other discipline of knowledge. This required memory studies to determine what kind of relationship would they have with other methodologies, to what extent would they become incorporated, and to what extent would they remain independent.

A most interesting example of such a relationship – from the point of view of the current volume – is found at the intersection of literature and memory studies. It turned out rather quickly that this issue is perceived differently by literary scholars, who utilize some of the basic ideas relating to memory in their study of literature,

and differently by those studying memory, for whom literature is just a basis of further work. The former oftentimes consider theories of memory to be a convenient tool that enables us to perform interesting interpretations focused on specific themes or problems.

Meanwhile for those scholars who are more focused on memory studies literature most often constitutes a medium, metaphor and model of memory³ (Aleida Assmann), means of storage⁴ (Aleida Assmann, Brigit Neumann⁵), it can be considered culture's memory (Renate Lachmann⁶), or at least a specific, paradoxical medium of memory – according to those researchers who underscore the equality of both disciplines (Astrid Erll⁷).

The last of these theories meaningfully discerns a specific class of texts, which in a more or less deliberate way address the forms of memory's functioning, whether collective, cultural, or individual. Even though, these are not books 'about' memory, but texts which address specific needs and expectations associated with remembering, storing, or recollecting memories. Erll points out that they are tasked with performing certain functions within cultural memory, as schemata for the coding of versions of the past, as frameworks of memory that enable and shape the remembering and interpreting of experience, as a circulation medium for images of history, negotiation of memory conflicts, as reflection on the problems and processes occurring within collective memory.⁸ Consequently – according to this viewpoint – literature works within the field of memory, performing various roles and functions, and the study of literature as a medium of cultural memory can be an effective source of knowledge about the current state of society, and a kind of gauge that facilitates tracking of ongoing societal change.⁹ The ability to discern from the rich

3 Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization. Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 174.

4 Ibid., 201.

5 Brigit Neumann, "What Makes Literature Valuable: Fictions of Meta-Memory and the Ethics of Remembering," in *Ethics in Culture. The Dissemination of Values Through Literature and Other Media*, ed. Astrid Erll, Herbert Grabes, et al. (Berlin - New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 131.

6 Renate Lachmann, "Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature," in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning et al. (Berlin - New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 301.

Also see Renate Lachmann, *Memory and Literature: Intertextuality in Russian Modernism (Theory and History of Literature)*, trans. Roy Sellars, Anthony Wall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

7 See Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

8 Erll, *Memory*, 229.

9 Ibid., 229.

literary trope of what “re-presents” cultural memory is a precondition of studying the rhetoric of memory expressed in literature. Literature’s special status as a medium of memory is therefore founded on equipoise between the fictional and that which relates to extra-textual reality. The inability to strictly discern the relationship between those two elements is not a hindrance to the study of the interrelations of literature and cultural memory, but it does determine the distinct influence of memory created through literature.

Erll identifies three general mechanisms which enable literary re-presentations of memory to organize and synthesize certain forms of cultural memory. These mechanisms are condensation, narration, and the use of genres as culturally available formats to represent past events and experience. Each of these mechanisms facilitates the reconciliation of two seemingly opposed approaches to memory. The first involves re-creating, or molding, within the literary text of certain forms of memory, the second involves creating forms and structures of collective memory. As Erll points out the working of literature as a specific medium of memory depends directly on its ability to be read simultaneously as both fictional and real.¹⁰

I have dedicated so much attention to Erll’s theory because it describes, in a condensed manner, the starting point of most analyses of literary works conducted in the articles published in the current volume. In many of them, literature is perceived as a paradoxical medium, one that simultaneously creates and recreates certain iterations of the past, influencing both individual memory as well as collective and cultural memory.

A work of literature, as a space of representation of memory, is not just solely a medium of memory, it is also not mere space that permits a credible fictionalization of memories. It is rather an autonomous, multidimensional entity, which, to be able to tell us something of interest not just about memory, but about any subject, must be considered in all its complexity. This means that – from the viewpoint of memory studies – literature must be considered with regard to its rhetorical and poetical dimension. This need, lately perceived much more clearly, necessitates the introduction, alongside the already well-established category of politics of memory, of notions such as rhetoric of memory and poetics of memory that make it easier – as in the case of the roughly reiterated argument of Astrid Erll – to combine the discourse of cultural and social memory with that of literature or, in general, art.

Nevertheless, the discourse of memory combines not only with the methodologies of traditional and well-established disciplines within the humanities; it also develops interesting ties with other, relatively young disciplines. Three of them are worthy of special attention in the current context: the study of trauma, affect, and geopoetics; although links between memory research and other areas, such as eco-

10 Ibid., 165.

criticism, posthumanism, animal studies, to name just those currently experiencing rapid growth, are becoming stronger. These bonds are strengthened when researchers take on particular subjects which require a transdisciplinary approach. In the case of Polish memory studies a joining of the first three of the aforementioned discourses is of great significance. Only in conjunction do they allow us to analyze phenomena which were previously faintly perceived and scantily interpreted, as for example various forms of traumatic memory associated with particular places. To recall examples from the current volume: the specific memory of the Recovered Territories (that is relating to territories previously belonging to Germany, and adjoined to Poland after the end of The Second World War as a certain form of compensation for the loss of Eastern Borderlands to The Soviet Union), as well as borderland memory (that is relating to the lands lost after the war), requires the application of both affective and geopoetic contexts.

This explains why the notion of "place" constitutes an equally important point of reference in this volume as memory does. The category of place is understood by authors published in this volume in many different ways: besides references to the classical category of places of memory (*lieux de mémoire*, P. Nora), we also come across references to the notion of non-places (*non-lieux*, M. Augé), interplaces, and finally to ideas traceable straight back to discussions in the geopoetic field. Space, place, and point are therefore – akin to literature – considered as media of memory, the reading of which requires not only knowledge of the workings of memory, but also certain familiarity with the geopoetic and geopolitical discourse.

Articles included in the current volume touch upon all of the aforementioned matters. Their selection and arrangement, from a vast trove of texts on Polish memory, was determined by two fundamental objectives: to present the discipline's development on Polish soil, and to introduce articles that tackle issues specific to this, and not some other, part of Europe and deal with the traumatic, affective memory of Poland's past. Therefore, there are no articles among their number that merely graft foreign theories onto the Polish context, or simply apply well-known ideas to the analysis of Polish matters. Each article is an attempt at creating a distinct and individual language that can be used to talk about events quite distant as well as quite recent, which constitute a significant point of reference for Polish memory. Their author's search for particularly tender spots, vulnerable and uncomfortable moments for Polish memory, or at last instances of a certain looping of memory, which influence the contemporary process of constructing the identity of Polish society.

Articles presented in the current volume come eye to eye with several intricate issues related to the Polish study of cultural and social memory. The first of these concerns the relationship between memory, history and its interpretation, and identity. This issue is discussed in articles of the first section of the volume, which explore aspects of the aforementioned questions of identity, highly important in the Polish

context. Wojciech Kalaga presents in his – primarily theoretical – article the status of interpretation in the relationship between memory and identity. This theme is also present in Robert Traba's text, though in this case it receives a slightly different formulation: the author describes controversies surrounding the new historical policy, and scrutinizes the answers to the question of what history and memory do Poles require. The third article devoted to this subject is concerned with the creation of self-identity through the confrontation with the problem of Otherness. In it Ryszard Nycz advances the thesis that our image in the eyes of others constitutes an inherent part of our self-knowledge. Confrontation with that image indicates a capacity to adopt an externalized point of view, and therefore enables us to confront our own internal image of ourselves.

The second part of the volume is dedicated to a particular, disputed matter in Polish memory. This is the matter of the PRL period that provokes both historians and sociologists to posit extreme, oftentimes contradictory judgements. This section consists of four articles relating to previously scarcely debated problems of PRL memory. Anna Artwińska considers negative memory that is the form of memory dealing with the role of perpetrators of the PRL period, and Katarzyna Chmielewska explores the topic of how contemporary historical discourse of Polish communism functions from the perspective of narratology. The other two articles in this section confront issues associated with the creation and functioning of biography: Agnieszka Mroziak interprets the persona of Wanda Wasilewska as an actor of social life, deeply embedded in the historical context; Grzegorz Wołowicz, in turn, analyses the representations of PRL in biographies.

The third section of the volume consists of articles on geopoetics, and the politics and poetics of place. The first article of this section by Elżbieta Rybicka explores the topographical turn in literary studies, with a focus on the transition from poetics of space to a politics of place. Another – also theoretical – text by Elżbieta Konończuk deals with the development of ideas and research on geopoetics in the Polish perspective. The subsequent three articles in this largest part of the volume delve into more detailed matters: memory discourse of the Western Borderlands after 1989 (Kinga Siewior), discourse of the borderlands centered on the Chełm Land (Jan P. Hudzik), or finally the question of memory set against the background of urban space (Sylwia Chutnik).

In the final section of the volume we will find three articles on the categories of places, non-places, and interplaces of memory. This part begins with a somewhat theoretical text by Andrzej Szpociński, who explores Pierre Nora's category of places of memory – *lieux de mémoire*. Two subsequent texts display a purely interpretative character; Agnieszka Karpowicz analyses the functioning of interplaces in the context of the anthropology of the city, and Aleksandra Szczepan performs an interesting interpretation of the modes of functioning of landscapes of postmemory.

The current volume starts with the analysis of categories of memory and identity and finishes with an examination of particular types of places of memory, which unites the issues of memory and geopoetics, previously introduced in the middle section of the volume. This way of structuring does not attempt to exhaust all trends in the prolific area of memory studies in Poland, but to recount its main currents and directions of development.

Translation: Rafał Pawluk

Memory, Identity and Politics of Memory

Ryszard Nycz

The Other Like Me. Three-and-a-Half Voices to the Theoretically and Practically Valid Problem

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1.

Cognizing the other, us *vs* others or our own *vs* someone else's within a divided group, along with processes of diffusional intercultural permeation, hybridizing and fusing the heterogeneous (thus conditioning not only the imitative and dependent, but also the original and specific) – undoubtedly, these were the most fundamental problems for the humanities and culture of the previous century. It is not without reason that they have given rise to a wide range of studies, commentaries, philosophical and theoretical conceptualizations. It has long been obvious that debate over these matters has not been restricted to academia, but first and foremost in the cultural arena with all its conflicting historical, political and social issues. One could say that they constitute one of the few domains in which the humanities, broadly understood, can carry out research which is not only cognitively and substantially valuable, but also potentially good and socially useful, depending on the effects of implementing programmes which are (socially) corrective, formational and educational in nature.

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The trouble, as we know, is that the two main approaches developed in this field came to a deadlock. The first approach was the classically modern programme of cognizing the other in the culturally universal categories established by Euro-American anthropology of the first half of the 20th century. The indisputable greatness of its achievements cannot conceal the fact that the anthropologist, playing here the role of an observer, translated specific forms and texts of local culture into the “universal” descriptive glossary which was in fact the glossary of Euro-American anthropology and its historical cognition. In the course of time, this Eurocentric version of universal and objective cognition started to reveal clearer features of knowledge-power, resulting in the domination and subordination of the other. Understanding by “leaning over” and observing the distinctiveness of the Other, disregarding the noble art of persuasion in favour of the knowledge-gaining value of cognizing the other also disclosed the superior, patronizing perspective which inherently creates a hierarchy while taking away the other’s voice to speak on their own behalf; it stigmatized and marginalized the other.

In the second half of the 20th century, the critique of the crypto-Eurocentric cognitive universalism stimulated the development of another influential model: multiculturalism which also had its time of fame and success; the time which already belongs to the past. If the former announced that “everyone is almost the same, but not quite” (paraphrasing the well-known formula by H. Bhabha), the latter proposed a programme based on the tolerant-pluralistic (and relativistic) approach that – simply – ‘people are different’ because there are different cultures in which they participate and different role models and experiences defining their identity. As a result, the program of multiculturalism was planned to support practices which were to strengthen and develop the identity of individuals and communities (no matter how they were understood) and not those considered “universally” valuable and worth promoting from an external perspective. Whereas universalistic claims to learn the truth generated cognitive disputes and ideological conflicts in the former Eurocentric approach, the latter model was aimed at suppressing these conflicts by replacing disputes about beliefs with disparities between subjective positions and disagreements between different viewpoints.¹

1 I am inspired here by observations of Walter Benn Michaels, *Kształt znaczącego*, trans. Jan Burzyński (Kraków: Korporacja ha!art, 2011) – especially chapter *Posthistoryzm* and Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) – esp. chapter *Shame Now*.

2.

I simplify – maybe too radically – both approaches and I disregard their numerous important consequences in order to expose only one aspect common to both: understanding the other. The first approach leads to deforming the other's image in the categories of dominant culture. The second one, in practice, desists from attempting to understand the other at all by eliminating ideological discord, suppressing cognitive interest itself. According to these assumptions, cultures – similar to human experiences – are equal because they are incomparable, incommensurable. Furthermore, as identities are not beliefs – you cannot change them or argue with them – it's necessary to learn how to tolerate (bear with) them. As long as normative (cultural, political, state) systems controlling human behaviour effectively fulfil their functions, there is no need to go beyond the requirement of formally integrating federated enclaves of ethnic groups or to make an effort to understand their aspirations, motivations and peculiarities. In effect, the cognitive task is limited to recording personal and cultural differences, omitting challenges related to both the processes of cognitive understanding and ethical engagement or responsibility. What is worth noting is that recording differences does not have to have an affirmative character only – negation, rejection, refusal to understand 'others' problems' are also part of the equation. The reverse of affirming cultural differences in multiculturalism would be refusing to be interested in the other exactly because they are the other – not mine, not ours, but strange – a refusal adequately expressed in the following reaction: 'it's not my problem.'

SEP (somebody else's problem) is a category of the psychosocial analysis of behaviour and attitudes (rich in specialist literature) which has been popularized in the Polish humanities mainly thanks to an excellent work *Cudze problemy. O ważności tego, co nieważne. Analiza dyskursu publicznego w Polsce* [*Others' Problems and the Importance of What is Unimportant: An Analysis of Public Discourse in Poland*], edited by Marek Czyżewski, Kinga Dunin and Andrzej Piotrowski.² This volume, initially published 25 years ago, is still very much relevant, and it has been recently referred to in numerous posts online under such headlines as: "Immigrants are not my problem." SEP practices functioning in everyday life and in political discourses – identified and shown by the authors – are stimulated by three main affective motives: fear, shame and guilt which may result in xenophobic attitudes manifested nowadays through different kinds

2 *Cudze problemy. O ważności tego, co nieważne. Analiza dyskursu publicznego w Polsce*, ed. Marek Czyżewski, Kinga Dunin, Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2010). If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the respective article.

of mentality and (anti)social behaviour. Merely referring to the subject taken up by today's humanities and social sciences is not unusual. Here are the first two stanzas from Fisz's³ song entitled *To nie mój problem* [*It's Not My Problem*]⁴ in which both highly humanistic models of cognition (quasi-universalistic and identity-related) are filtered through ideas and notions related to popular culture portraying – very convincingly – the 'habitus' of its typical representative:

There's no truth, only interpretations
 My space has four faces
 From atoms to molecules
 The space keeps shrinking
 Two quarters on the left
 Two quarters on the right
 You've got to decide
 But it's not my problem
 But it's not my problem

Every aspect is correlated
 You need to be black or white
 You need to be Batman or Zorro
 You've got to have pride and honour
 You've got to have the right opinion
 But it's not my problem
 But it's not my problem

3.

In view of the deadlock as well as negative consequences of these two approaches, let us observe that maybe we need to look for other inspirations and solutions consistently based on the dualistic thinking about the relation between I and the Other as separate, autonomous monads. Generally speaking, I believe that it is necessary to re-orient this argumentation to admit that a crucial and inherent part of our self-knowledge, mature self-consciousness, as well as critical self-cognition, while belonging to a community, is also our image in the eyes of others and the ability to adopt the external point of view, to confront it with our cultivated internal image of ourselves.

3 Fisz is the stage name used by Polish musician and composer Bartosz Waglewski.

4 Fisz, „To nie mój problem,” in *Zwierzę bez nogi*, Emade, DJ Epron 2011, accessed February 28, 2017, <http://teksty.org/fisz-emade,to-nie-moj-problem,tekst-piosenki>.

I am certain that only this simple action, although perhaps uneasy to carry out, can make development of intercultural relations, encounters and dialogues indispensable on a daily basis, and in the interest of communities and individuals.

Mikhail Bakhtin, who is surely one of the most original and relevant scholars of 20th century literature and culture, offers us a very useful category which could help us reach this objective. What I have in mind here is “wnienachodimost” (“outsidedness”) – one of the key concepts in Bakhtin’s glossary. In his work about Bakhtin, Tzvetan Todorov suggests that this hardly translatable term should be “internationalized” (by reaching out to Greek sources) and called “exotopy,” while a Polish translator Danuta Ulicka translated it as “niewspółobecność” (“noncopresence”). Bakhtin introduced this term in his works (probably inspired by Johannes Cohn’s “transgradience”) as early as in the 1920s, then frequently used it, systematically expanding the spectrum of its application. This technical term describing ‘intra-literary’ relations between author and character eventually turned into a universal category of historical cultural anthropology. It occupies a well-deserved position in contemporary interpretations of Bakhtin’s theory (as well as in the theory of interpretation and post-colonial/post-dependence studies), which allows me to pass over examining its primary meanings, that is to treat it – outside its historical and Bakhtinian context – as a valid proposition for the transition period, a type of bridge or ramp over the abyss of today’s history, politics and mental-and-social attitudes and behaviour.

In the most general terms, exotopy is about identifying the “shifted” position of the experiencing cognizant subject always situated – temporally, spatially, nationally, and culturally – outside the object of perception (whether it is another object, subject, community, culture, or him/herself). However, what is most important is that one should not see this as a weakness or an obstacle to overcome (for example, by participation or empathy), but an inherent feature of human (self-)cognition, a condition of authentic understanding and a marker of inventiveness (creative exploration).

“In understanding,” wrote Bakhtin, “the most significant matter is the (temporal, spatial, and cultural) *n o n c o p r e s e n c e* of the cognizing subject in relation to what he/she wants to creatively comprehend. Yet, a person is not able to truly see even their own appearance or to grasp it fully. No mirror or photograph will help him/her with that. Only other people are capable of grasping and understanding his/her real appearance, due to both their spatial noncopresence and the fact that they are *t h e o t h e r s*. [...] Someone else’s culture is only revealed in the eyes of another culture. [...] We ask the other culture new questions which it wouldn’t have posed itself, and we search

through it for answers, and the other culture responds, unveiling its new aspects and new layers of meaning.”

One could say that this view, though originally formulated, is in fact a classically modern outlook on the value of the external point of view, on looking at oneself or confronting the image of oneself with that image reflected in the eyes of the other, which is part of that European tradition already initiated by “the strategy of the Other” in de Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*. What is more interesting (and less often noticed), however, is that Bakhtin associates it with a truly innovative conviction. It leads the scholar to rejecting the idea of the individual as well as a national culture as a kind of a closed container (a view we owe to romanticists, such as Schelling, and von Herder’s concepts of culture as a sphere or an island). As far as the subject is concerned, Bakhtin argues that “one is not given any internal area of independence, [but] one is always on the verge, and delving into oneself, one looks into the other’s eyes or sees oneself with the eyes of the other.” The same concerns culture: “We should not [...] imagine the field of culture as a certain spatial entity with boundaries, but also possessing its internal territory. The field of culture does not have an internal territory: it is entirely located on the boundaries. They run everywhere, intersect at its every point.”⁵

Let us notice that from this point of view, boundaries between what is internal and external do not distinguish any longer an autonomous identity of the individual or communal wholeness, but on the contrary, they run within it, or more to the point, they gather in (and sometimes create) its centre. This is because, as wholeness originates on the verge, it has the status of being a border territory where the external gets internalized, whereas the part considered to be most interior exposes its external genealogy. I believe that this latter identity concept – as exotopy, as a self-diversifying self, as the internalized Other – not only anticipates key observations of contemporary thought, but it may also constitute the legitimately shared assumption concerning inter-cultural dialogues. It somehow elicits (in the interest of the one who understands with effective, critical self-cognition) the necessity of self-definition, attention, and respect – towards the Other. The Other who is both within and without.

5 Characterizing this thread of Bakhtin’s thought I partly used my own description contained in “Polish Post-Colonial and/or Post-Dependence Studies,” *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2014), special issue: *Postcolonial or Postdependence Studies?*, accessed February 28, 2017, http://tekstydrugie.pl/file/fm/Dokumenty/tzen_2014_1webCOMB.pdf
Further quotations from Bakhtin’s works: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Estetyka twórczości słownej*, trans. Danuta Ulicka, ed. Eugeniusz Czaplewicz (Warszawa: PIW, 1986), 474; *Ibid.*, 444; Bakhtin, *Problemy literatury i estetyki*, trans. Wincenty Grajewski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1982), 26.

4.

I realize that my reasoning can be criticized as being unsophisticated, prudential, or even dull... But even if this is so, I still believe that when we realize or think, in short, about "the other" that he/she is "just like me," the barriers of untranslatability of perspectives, points of view and experiences disappear or are suspended – the same can be said about the politically odd, ideologically 'twisted' ladder of hierarchization, domination and subordination, and centre-peripheral dichotomies. Coming from the same source, what can be managed further is the syndrome of xenophobia and the feeling of one's "deficiency" which generates reactions: a refusal to offer interest based on fear, or open hostility towards otherness, but also shame (of who I am) and guilt (for what I did).

The other is like me – an exotopical identity of the Bakhtinian individual – and culture shows the way because our identity, being oneself, means being outside of oneself. In a sense, such a dynamic represents the primary socialization, or broader communalization; in the meaning of interactive and reflective dependence on others; in a dimension of transcending, of going "beyond oneself" in eccentric fashion... If the specificity of modern cognition takes the form of cognizing the other, it is because the real unveils itself to us as the radically other whom we are as well (as perhaps Bahktin would say). Therefore, when we think that we cognize with the cognized, in fact we cognize with ourselves. Literature and art have always known about this – this is why they have the effect of the transgressive-retroactive nature of artistic invention: going beyond oneself which gives access to what we have participated in from the very beginning.

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Memory, Interpretation, Identity

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The three terms foregrounded in the title of this essay refer to questions so fundamental for contemporary culture that they have become almost clichés. Much critical writing has been devoted to each of those terms individually and – notably in the case of memory and identity – to the relations between their pairs. In my opinion, however, not enough attention has been paid – especially in theoretical terms – to the interrelationships amongst all three of them, and particularly to the role of interpretation with respect to the relation of memory and identity. It is on those co-dependencies that I wish to focus on in the following discussion. In order to narrow the subject down, I will consider the sphere of identity as an area where the remaining two protagonists of this essay – memory and interpretation – meet and cooperate.

I am aware, of course, that by evoking the category of identity, I simultaneously evoke wide-ranging modernist and postmodernist debates concerning questions of the subject and subjectivity. However, we do not need to enter these debates here because, irrespective of our stance, the heart of the matter remains the same: whether we understand identity as an independently existing core (Cartesian subject), or as a coherent, chronologically and plot-wise ordered narrative (Paul Ricoeur), or – as

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Bergson would have it – as a snowball, which grows bigger and bigger and changes its shape while tumbling down, building up new layers of itself, or as a nebula, or a cracked, fragmentary conglomerate of heterogeneous and sometimes even contradictory tendencies and moments, we can agree that memory and interpretation – in their various senses – continue to partake in identity. Of course, a certain concept of the subject will emerge in effect of this discussion of the involvement of memory and interpretation in the construction of identity, but rather as an end result than as a preliminary assumption.

Interpretation

I will begin with a statement which constitutes the fundamental premise of this argument: interpretation is a mode of our existence. However, I do not mean someone else's interpretation, where we – as a discursive construct, or a product of different technologies of power, knowledge and discourse – are interpreted from the outside by people surrounding us, or by a system of culture "interpreting" our place, role and meaning. Obviously, such interpretation grants us social existence, but it does not constitute – at least not directly – our internal self. When talking about interpretation as a mode of human existence, I mean what Charles Taylor expressed by calling man, maybe in a slightly oxymoronic way, a self-interpreting animal:¹ what sets human existence apart from other modes of being is the continuous interpretation of oneself and of our involvement in what surrounds us. It is interpretation construed in this way that constitutes the essence of our existence.

We could support and justify the above statement by referring to Martin Heidegger, who – beginning with the ontico-ontological difference – situates understanding, and hence also interpretation,² among the so-called *existentials*, or the conditions of authentic existence of *Dasein*. Understanding and interpretation, next to attunement (or rather state-of-mind, *Befindlichkeit*) and speech (*Rede*), constitute the fundamental ontological conditions for human existence in the world. "To exist," claims Heidegger, "is essentially, even if not only, to understand,"³ and hence also to interpret. The interpreting

1 Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45.

2 "In it [interpretation, *Auslegung*] understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 188.

3 Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 276. See also "Understanding is the Existential Being of *Dasein*'s own Potentiality-for-Being [...]" Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 184.

understanding is the foundation for the existential constitution of the human being: any structure of meaning “is rooted in the existential constitution of *Dasein* – that is, in the understanding which interprets.”⁴

One could also follow somewhat similar, yet less travelled paths of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, each of whom – in his own way – expands the ontological dimension of interpretation by supplementing it with the epistemological dimension, or rather, after the radical Heideggerian turn, restores that epistemological dimension to the realm of interpretation, simultaneously subduing it to ontology: the interpretation of not only what is internal and closest to us, but also of what is external – especially interpretation of cultural texts – becomes a road to self-consciousness. Gadamer historicizes interpretation and links it with the hermeneutics of texts, while Ricoeur proposes a “detour” through methodology and the practice of interpretation in order to eventually reach the final *telos* which is self-understanding.⁵ For both of them, however, interpretation ultimately remains a mode of existence.

We could also follow an entirely different path, that of Charles Peirce, who identifies man with the signs man employs to learn about the world and himself: “the word or sign which the man uses is the man himself” – “my language is the sum total of myself.”⁶ And since all thought and cognition can exist only in signs, the human mind for Peirce, as well as human beings themselves, are complex signs. He expressed that conviction *verbatim*: “mind is a sign developing according to the laws of inference,”⁷ and “man is a sign.”⁸ And since

4 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 195.

5 “To understand oneself is to understand oneself as one confronts the text and to receive from it the conditions for a self other than that which first undertakes the reading” (Paul Ricoeur “On Interpretation,” in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, ed. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge Mass., London: MIT Press, 1989), 376); “[...] interpretation in the technical sense of the interpretation of texts, is but the development, the making explicit of this ontological understanding, an understanding always inseparable from a being that has initially been thrown into the world” (*ibid.*, 373); “There is a short path [chosen by Heidegger], and a longer one, which I propose. [...] The longer path [...] has ambitions of placing reflections on the level of ontology.” Paul Ricoeur “Egzystencja i hermeneutyka,” trans. Karol Tarnowski, in *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka. Rozprawy o metodzie*, ed. Stanisław Cichowicz (Warszawa: Pax, 1985), 185.

6 Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. 1-6, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss; vol. 7-8, ed. Arthur W. Burks, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958). In all of the quotes from *Collected Papers* by Charles Peirce (CP) first digit stands for the volume, the second digit for the paragraph; CP 5.314.

7 CP 5.313.

8 CP 5.314.

we consider man as a multidimensional sign, interpretation, structurally as it were and necessarily, inscribes itself into his or her being as a mode of existence of every sign, including that of human person. I will return to this question later on.

Regardless of the source we choose, and what we would like to stress, interpretation emerges as a builder of our identity. At the same time, however, as mode of existence, it cannot be an empty process – a pure ontological category; on the contrary, it is always filled with cognitive as well as axiological content – while granting us existence, it simultaneously fills it with sense and meaningful value. The awareness of oneself, of who one is, of what one absorbs from the surrounding world and from others, ethical choices, hierarchies of values – all these result from interpretation constituting an ontological condition for human existence.

Identity and Interpretation

What we have said about interpretation, however – that it is a mode of our existence – can also be said about memory: it is in an equal measure a condition of our identity. Barbara Skarga, referring to Heidegger, affirms that the past cannot be tossed away like any old coat.⁹ Every present moment of our identity is rooted in the matter of memory: “Memory is a mode of my existence, it belongs to its structure;”¹⁰ “My past is myself.”¹¹ Noticeably, the key role of memory as a fundamental component of identity is also used, with remarkable intuition, by popular culture: loss or lack of memory means, in truth, a loss of identity, or even negation of one’s humanity; let it suffice to recall a few movies: *Total Recall* by Paul Verhoeven, *Bourne’s Identity* by Doug Liman, or *Blade Runner* by Ridley Scott.

However, there is a fundamental difference between the ontological role of interpretation and the role played by memory. If, as we have affirmed, ongoing interpretation and self-interpretation are builders of identity, then memory is its building material – both the realm of memory that reaches far back into our childhood, teenage years and the entirety of our life, and those most recent memories from just few days, minutes, or seconds ago. It is so because, seemingly, we interpret every present moment of the surrounding world as well as ourselves in that world, but in fact those moments are merely an illusory present, as Bergson would say, since they become

9 Barbara Skarga, *Tożsamość i różnica. Eseje metafizyczne* (Kraków: Znak, 1997), 222.

10 Ibid., 223.

11 Ibid., 222.

past already at the moment of their instantiation and move into the sphere of memory. It is not the present that is an essence of identity – the present is merely a flash of experience; it is the past and memory that constitute the matter of our “I.” Heidegger, once again, put it aptly when he wrote: “*Dasein*, in existing, can never establish itself as a fact which is present-at-hand [...] it constantly is as having been. The primary existential meaning of facticity lies in the character of having been.”¹²

We should also add – and here things become a little complicated – that this building material of memory is not only a matter of our individual self, not simply a result of our actions. As unique individuals, we are also a part of society, in many ways participating in collective memory: local and national memory as well as the memory of civilization. This heterogeneity, however, is not limited only to memory. Just as memory, as building material, is a result of collective and individual experience, interpretation is our personal activity, conditioned, however, by rules of the interpretative universe in which we function. A discussion concerned with the relations between memory and interpretation, therefore, has to take into account both the individual and the collective.

Let us, however, go back to the main question: the relationship between interpretation and memory, between the builder and the building material, brings to mind at least one obvious conclusion, which I will – for now – pose as a hypothesis, namely, that there is nothing like objective memory, a recollection fossilized into an ideal, objective form. Memory always wears the clothes of interpretation. Regardless of whether we recall something deliberately – bringing up a remembrance on purpose – or if recollections come to our mind by themselves, they always enter our consciousness as already interpreted and – with the passing of time and the gradual growth of the “snowball” of identity – as reinterpreted over and over again. “Each moment of time,” writes Skarga, “brings something new that merges with my existence, causing a change to occur within it,”¹³ reinterpreting in this way old meanings within memory and creating new ones, we should add.

At this point, however, we encounter a significant problem: the way memory is construed or metaphorized in our culture causes difficulties in establishing a relation between memory and interpretation or, to put it in a more radical way: the concept of memory dominant in the Western culture in fact excludes interpretation.

¹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 376.

¹³ Skarga, *Tożsamość i różnica*, 219.

Archive

The model of memory generally recognized and accepted in the West is based on the metaphor of an archive as a storage space for remembrances. This model takes on two forms: either – more literally – that of an archival space in which past events are placed and stored, or that of an immaculate surface on which our memories are impressed.

If we look at writings concerned with memory – from Plato, through Aristotle and Locke to the present day – we notice that, in its essence, this archival model remains unchanged. In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates speaks of the wax tablet in our soul – a gift from goddess Mnemosyne – onto which our reflections and thoughts are impressed like a seal.¹⁴ Likewise, Aristotle (in *De memoria et reminescentia*),¹⁵ Cicero and Quintilianus write about memory as a wax tablet. In *Institutio oratoria*, the latter claims that the “mind accepts certain impressions, analogous to those made by a seal pressed against wax.”¹⁶ While conversing with the spirit of his father, Shakespeare's Hamlet assures the ghost that he will wipe all the crude notes off of the table of his memory.¹⁷ And if we look into the poem entitled *Memory* by William Butler Yeats, we will find the same metaphor as used by the ancients, with the exception that the impression in wax is replaced by an impression left in grass.

John Locke, on the other hand, pictures memory as an empty cabinet where we store our ideas which, later on, can be taken out and “perceived”:

The senses at first let in particular ideas and furnish the yet empty cabinet; and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory...if there be any ideas, any ideas

¹⁴ “Socrates: Assume, for the sake of our debate, that there is a wax tablet in our souls. Some have it bigger, others smaller, some have it clean, while that of others might be thicker, or greasy, and some have it just about right. Theaetetus: I do.”

Platon, *Parmenides. Teajtet*, trans. Władysław Witwicki (Kęty: Antyk, 2002), accessed July 19, 2016, <http://pracownicy.uwm.edu.pl/jstrzelecki/biblio/platon.pdf>

¹⁵ “The process of movement (sensory stimulation) involved in the act of perception stamps in, as it were, a sort of impression of the percept, just as persons do who make an impression with a seal.” Aristotle, *On Memory and Reminiscence*, trans. John I. Beare, eBooks@Adelaide 2007, accessed November 30, 2011, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/memory/>

¹⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, see also Amelia F. Yates, *Sztuka pamięci* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1977), 48.

¹⁷ „Yea, from the table of my memory/ I'll wipe away all trivial fond records” William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act I, scene V, 98-99, in *The Tragedies of Shakespeare* (London: 1931), 650.

in the mind which the mind does not actually think on, they must be lodged in the memory and from thence must be brought into view by remembrance.¹⁸

Remembering appears here as a form of perception of something that has been stored in an archive (in the cabinet). Prior to Locke, St. Augustine portrayed memory with a closed-space metaphor – a palace – a storage space for memories: “And I come to the fields and spacious palaces of my memory, where are the treasures of innumerable images, brought into it from things of all sorts perceived by the senses. There is stored up, whatsoever besides we think [...] and whatever else hath been committed and laid up.”¹⁹ St. Augustine completes the image with an important metaphor of reaching to the archive and retrieving memories: “All these doth that great harbour of the memory receive in her numberless secret and inexpressible windings, to be forthcoming, and brought out at need; each entering in by his own gate, and there laid up.”²⁰ Cabinet, or the palace, could be replaced with a library, with an archive containing cimeliums,²¹ or with a filing cabinet,²² but the concept of an archival space remains intact.

I will now quote two short fragments which very well grasp the idea of memory as archive: the former tells us that „memory is the firm retention in the mind of the matter, words, and arrangement,”²³ while the latter says that “memory encompasses acquisition, storing and preserving information.”²⁴ Both quotations carry almost exactly the same idea, and there is nothing extraordinary about them, except for the fact that they are separated by two thousand years. The former comes from an anonymous Latin text *Ad*

18 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Dent, 1976) (1690), 11, 27.

19 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey (Edward Bouverie), accessed March 15, 2016, www.gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm#link2H_4_0001

20 Ibid.

21 Skarga, *Tożsamość i różnica*, 231.

22 See Steven Rose, *The Making of Memory. From Molecules to Mind* (London: Bantam Books, 1992), 78.

23 [Cicero] *Ad C. Herennium de ratione dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium)*, with an English translation by Harry Caplan (London: Heinemann, 1964), 7; „Memoria est firma animi rerum et verborum et dispositionis perceptio.” 6. Cicero appears as a supposed author; currently the author is considered to remain anonymous.

24 Rom Harre and Roger Lamb, *The Dictionary of Ethology and Animal Learning* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 99.

Herennium from the eighties of the 1st century B.C. (86–82 B.C.), and the latter comes from a contemporary *Dictionary of Ethology and Animal Learning*, also published in the eighties, but in the 20th century. It would be difficult to find a better confirmation of the hegemony and persistence of the archival model of memory in our (Western) culture; also, most likely for the majority of readers this model of the archive and of recollection as retrieval from the archive will sound familiar and natural.

As I have already mentioned, however, the concept of memory as an archive creates a problem because it does not leave any room for interpretation as an integral moment of remembering; at best, it pushes interpretation outside itself – outside the archive – thus constituting it as an activity external to memory (first, we retrieve a recollection, and only then perhaps interpret it). Things might fade away a little in the archive, they might get old and somewhat faint, but they will still remain unchanged in their character. The text of memory retrieved from the archive, a text impressed with the seal of an event – even if a little covered in dust – remains the same, petrified text. This unchanging sameness is in fact the reason why the archival model of memory, even though prevalent, is entirely useless for a discussion of the collaboration and interdependence between memory and interpretation.

Bergson/Deleuze

At the opposite end from the archival model stands Henri Bergson's concept of memory presented in *Matière et mémoire* (1896), and developed in an inspiring way by Gilles Deleuze in his little book *Le Bergsonisme* (1966). This conception is worth recalling at this juncture not only because it is fascinating in itself, but also because it overcomes some of the difficulties posed by the idea of archival memory.

Bergson based his theory on a surprising assumption which undermines the concept of memory as an archive, naturalized in the Western consciousness. He believes that – to begin with – the question about where memories are stored is fundamentally ill-posed, since it assumes that memories are stored somewhere at all (for example, in a kind of archive or on a wax tablet). Instead, Bergson proposes an equally surprising thesis: according to him, recollections – as something that belongs to the past – are stored in themselves.²⁵ But how is that possible?

²⁵ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 87. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlison, Barbara Harberiam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 54: "Recollection is preserved in itself," as belonging to the past, the essence of which is to last in itself. Deleuze explains the ontological char-

Without going into all the complex details of Bergson's theory, but following his path, we have to reformulate the generally accepted ideas about the relationship between the present and the past. According to Bergson, what really exists (and what is equal to being) is the past, while what in fact does not exist is the present: "Nothing is less than the present moment, if you understand by it that indivisible limit which divides the past from the future. When we think this present as going to be, it exists not yet; and when we think it as existing, it is already past."²⁶ That relation of the past to the present – or what Deleuze calls "the most profound paradox of memory" – is based on the fact that "the past is 'contemporaneous' with the present that it has been."²⁷ Unlike in common understanding, the past does not follow the present – it is not a relationship of succession – but, on the contrary, the past coexists with every moment of the present, and is temporally parallel with it. More specifically, all the moments of the present pass through a continuously existing past:

The past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist. One is the present, which does not cease to pass, and the other is the past, which does not cease to be but through which all presents pass... The past does not follow the present, but on the contrary, is presupposed by it as the pure condition without which it would not pass.²⁸

This all-embracing past, "the past in general," as Bergson calls it, is precisely the virtual space of memory – eternal and ontological Memory, where

acter of the past in the following way: "We have great difficulty in understanding a survival of the past in itself because we believe that the past is no longer, that it has ceased to be. We have thus confused Being with being-present. Nevertheless, the present is not; rather, it is pure becoming, always outside itself. It is not, but it acts. Its proper element is not being but the active or the useful. The past, on the other hand, has ceased to act or to be useful. But it has not ceased to be. Useless and inactive, impassive, it IS, in the full sense of the word: It is identical with being in itself. [...] of the present we must say at every instant that it 'was,' and of the past, that it 'is,' that it is eternally, for all time." Ibid., 55.

26 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy M. Paul, W. Scott Palmer (London: G. Allen & Co., 1929), 193. Further Bergson continues: "[...] every perception is already memory. Practically we perceive only the past, the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future." (194).

27 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 58.

28 Ibid., 59.

all the moments of the passed present, and all the “recollections” virtually co-exist; it is “a past that is eternal and for all time, the condition of the ‘passage’ of every particular present. It is the past in general that makes possible all pasts.”²⁹ It is a truly virtual space, having nothing in common with psychology or individual consciousness – it exists outside of any singular mind. It is only our immersion into that virtual space that is an act of our psyche – Bergson calls it a “leap into ontology,” a leap into being itself – and only then does the recollection pass “from the virtual state [...] into the actual.”³⁰ Our personal remembrance, a specific individual recollection, is an actualization of that omnipresent virtuality.

Even that brilliant and fascinating model of memory proposed by Bergson, however, does not leave room for interpretation. Even though there is an interpretative moment within that model, it pertains only to the density of virtual memory that we actualize. To be precise, Bergson presents virtual memory in the shape of a cone, in which all the moments of the past coexist.³¹ Whenever we enter that virtuality, we always enter into its totality, into the past as an existing, passive globality. At the same time, however, we always enter it on some specific level of particularity: depending on whether we “leap into ontology,” or “enter” the cone closer to its broader or sharper end, we can actualize that same moment of virtual memory in an extensive, detailed way, or even expand the time of remembering with respect to the time of the event (as does the protagonist in Marcel Proust’s novel), or we can condense a long-lasting event into a single, compact fact.³² As I have mentioned before, however, this kind of actualization relates to the density of a recollection, and not to its semantic interpretation.

Still, the Bergsonian model has one vital advantage over the archival model. While the concept of memory as an archive, or imprint, concerns individual memory only, the concept of memory as a virtual space makes it possible to theoretically justify the existence of collective memory: we reach into the common, virtual space and only after being granted access – to use the contemporary jargon – we actualize a recollection as an individual experience. But here too, when we remember (or actualize a virtual entity), we arrive at something that is already there, in its unchangeable virtual state.

29 Ibid., 56–57.

30 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 171.

31 Ibid., 211; See Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 60.

32 Bergson calls it expansion and contraction.

Peirce

Neither of these models of memory – whether the archival model or Bergsonian virtual space – allow for a theoretical explanation of the close relation between memory and interpretation. I would like to propose another model, related to Bergson's, but referring back to the pan-semiotic vision of Charles Sanders Peirce, the father of pragmatism and American semiotics. Peirce himself wrote very little about memory and did not have any developed conception of it, but his idea of semiosis – a process that incessantly occurs between signs and among signs – provides a foundation for a productive reconsideration of the relationship between memory and interpretation.

Let us begin with the prerequisite theoretical background by recapitulating the essence of Peirce's semiotic vision. From our perspective, the most important element of that vision is the very way in which the sign exists. A sign does not necessarily have to exist in a material way, since it can be an idea, a thought, a fiction, a quality or a feeling; so it is not the properties of the vehicle of meaning that are decisive of the mode of sign's existence – on the whole, they are irrelevant. To clarify this and make it more accessible, it will be useful to recall the basic structure of Peirce's sign: it is composed of three codependent and necessarily connected correlates: the representamen (the sign vehicle), the object (called the immediate object) which is a representation within the sign of the external reality which the sign represents (the so-called dynamical object), and the interpretant which is the meaning of the sign – the element most crucial to our discussion. The interpretant not only explains the sign, it is not only the meaning of the sign, but it is also a sign in its own right, and as such it has its own interpretant which, being a sign, has its own interpretant, "the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*."³³

The sign, therefore, exists not because someone is actually using or decoding it, but because it is interpreted by other signs; and it is in that interpretation that the sign's existence is rooted: "No sign can function as such except so far as it is interpreted in another sign... What I mean is that when there is a sign there will be an interpretation in another sign."³⁴ "A sign is not a sign unless it translates itself into another sign."³⁵ The ontological domain of the sign, therefore, is thought construed in a non-mentalistic way through the category of *Thir d n e s s*, and the fundamental mode of existence of the sign is its interpretation in and through other signs, with the important

33 CP 2.303.

34 CP 8.225, footnote.

35 CP 5.594.

reservation again that interpretation is not understood here as an activity of a subject performed on signs, but as an activity of the signs themselves.³⁶ In other words, signs are not separate entities, but on the contrary, they are anchored in one another precisely because one interprets the other, and so on into infinity. Interpretation – which will be important for our subsequent discussion of memory and identity – appears here as a category which is both ontological and epistemological: it simultaneously warrants cognition and existence: “c o g n i z a b i l i t y (in its widest sense) and b e i n g are not merely metaphysically the same, but are synonymous terms.”³⁷

What is important – and here we find a certain analogy with Bergsonian eternal memory – is that the process of mutual interpretation among signs does not occur in any individual mind, or any particular act of thought; it takes place among signs themselves, in the entire universe of signs, the universe of a “potential Mind.”³⁸ We might imagine that universe – even though it is a simplifying analogy – as a vast, spatial and all-encompassing dictionary, in which every word is interpreted (i. e., explained) by words from that same dictionary, and these in turn are explained by yet different words from the same dictionary, and so on without end.

Of course, we too participate in that process of sign interpretation whenever we think, read, speak, observe reality or, more generally, whenever our consciousness is active. This, however, is only secondary and incidental with respect to the virtual interpretation occurring amongst signs outside our minds.³⁹ Our specific interpretative activity is merely a realization of virtual possibilities, a choice and subsequent following of one among many possible virtual interpretative paths (although, when I use the word “choice,” I do not necessarily mean a conscious choice, but rather an intuitive activity of our consciousness). To pursue the analogy with the dictionary further: such a confluence of endless interpretations of signs by other signs continues

36 See Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz, “Sign and continuity,” in *Ars Semeiotica* 2 (1978): 3-15.

37 CP 2.57.

38 A sign “determines some actual or potential mind, the determination whereof I term the Interpretant created by the Sign.” (CP 8.177)

39 In terms of technical categories of Peirce’s semiotics, I have explained that difference before, in *Mgławice dyskursu* [*Nebulae of Discourse*]: “The relation between actuality and possibility (or more broadly speaking, potentiality) could be compared to the relation between Peirce’s *dynamic interpretant* and *immediate interpretant*: the former occurs in a particular cognitive act in the mind of a particular person, while the latter is a bundle of meaningful relations (a sign) in the so-called *quasi-mind*, or in other words, in the semiotic universe not related directly to any particular mind or brain, in the semiotic cosmos.” (Kraków: Universitas, 2001) 225-226, footnote 47.

independently of whether we actually browse through the dictionary or not. And when we do, we actualize only a fraction of the options offered by the dictionary. We should note a Nietzschean moment at this juncture, even though derived from semiotics: because the sign always represents and interprets reality from a certain perspective, exposing some of its qualities and omitting others, our perception of the world through signs is by necessity perspectival – there is no such thing as an objective interpretation of reality.

Let us now refer this pan-semiotic image of the universe to the question of memory, both individual and collective. Like in Bergson's theory, we are presented with a virtual space of "general memory" but now already filled with signs and an infinitely dense network of interpretive relations or "interpretive paths." Each event, having had its present occurrence – whether a personal experience or a socially experienced fact – enters the virtual space as a sign of the past, links up with a network of signs already present within it, subjects itself to their interpretation, while simultaneously, to a certain degree, modifying the network itself.

Niches and Portals: Memory and Interpretation

This general, *pan-universum* of memory is not, of course, accessible to everyone in its entirety: it encompasses local universes, i.e., niches characteristic of specific communities and cultures in which tradition has shaped hierarchies and corresponding interpretations in their collective memory. And likewise, in the case of individual, personal memory, the accessibility of past experiences is limited to the experiencing subject. Just like any local community, every one of us has carved out in that general space his or her own niche of virtual memories. Individual memory, therefore, is in an obvious way heterogeneous: every one of us participates in that fragment of the *pan-universum* which constitutes a collective memory of his or her community, as well as in one which is limited to our private realm, inaccessible to others.

So how does one reach those niches of virtual memory? One could simply answer: through signs or, more poetically, through "traces of memory."⁴⁰ Personally, however, I would prefer to use the metaphor of a portal, which grants access to the virtual space, and which instigates its actualization. In other words, a portal is a threshold between the virtuality of memory and the actuality of our recollections.⁴¹ Any object can become

40 Paul Ricoeur, *O sobie samym jako innym*, trans. Bogdan Chelstowski (Warszawa: PWN, 2003), 221.

41 Let us add as a side note that from the ontological perspective, a portal is an extremely interesting object, since it combines materiality with virtuality.

such a sign-portal: a cookie, as in Proust's work, a photograph, a monument, a tombstone, a dried flower, an old toy, but also a scent, a piece of melody, and often a single thought that opens gates to the past. All of us surely experience sometimes a condition, when an unexpected sign, which we stumble upon – a portal that tells us to go down memory lane – recalls something seemingly forgotten. Let us note, however, that the same sign-portal can open different interpretive paths at different moments in our lives as it reappears in constantly reinterpreted contexts of new events and experiences.

In the model of memory as a virtual space perfused with signs, which I propose here, remembering is no longer a simple act of reaching into the archive and retrieving from it a piece of permanent and unchangeable text. It is not a "leap into ontology," or immersing into the uninterpreted space of Bergsonian eternal memory. Here, the act of remembering is simultaneously an act of interpretation – a choice of this rather than another interpretative path, this rather than another perspective – while simultaneously it is also a form of forgetting, of omitting other perspectives and other potential interpretations. Of course, we should not assume that following interpretive paths is of the nature of a logical inference. On the contrary, as logicians would say, it is enthymematic, i.e., fragmentary, containing gaps, fissures, and omissions. However, this fragmentary nature of reading signs of memory does not in any way change its interpretive character.

Remembering and interpreting, therefore, are in fact two inseparable aspects of the same activity. There is no memory without interpretation, and, likewise, there is no history without interpretation, which Hayden White expounded several decades ago. Here, however, an ethical reflection imposes itself: while history could be deceitful, it would appear that memory escapes an ethical judgment. At this point, however, we have to differentiate between individual and collective memory.

In the case of individual memory, following paths of memory is not, in fact, a "choice," although I did employ this word for convenience; it is not a choice made consciously between interpretations, but rather a process affected by multiple factors independent of our decisions: personality, experience, cultural conditioning, psychological state, physiology. After all, we do not say: I will remember this, but I will forget that (even a wish like "I want to forget all about it" proves to be an unsuccessful interpretation of memory). Because of this involuntary character of individual memory, it does not in principle fall under ethical qualifications. In the case of collective memory, the situation looks different, since it can be an easy realm of interpretative manipulation. It is easy to foreground and impose interpretive paths here, it is also easy to forget. Collective forgetting is oftentimes a conscious effort to wipe out or to push into oblivion those interpretations which, within the local universe,

should constitute an important element of identity, but which may turn out to be painful or destructive to that very identity. In his famous essay, Ernest Renan observes that forgetting is a condition for the identity of a nation,⁴² and we can add: of a nation, of a local community, or a group. Such forgetting is nothing but an interpretation subject to moral judgment, the kind of interpretation whose main mechanism is silencing.

Identity

Let us finally return to the question with which we started, i. e., to the relationship between memory, interpretation and identity. Collaboration between memory and interpretation resolves, in my opinion, the contradiction between remaining the same while at the same time being subject to change. If we were to treat identity in the way Hume did – as something unchangeable, or as an ongoing “being the same” – then, as Paul Ricoeur observes, we would fall into an *aporia*, or a conviction that a person’s identity is an illusion. It is this kind of identity that is implied in the archival model of memory,⁴³ a model which does not comprise interpretation. One could risk a thesis, which however I will not develop here, that this model has its deeper underpinning in the distinction between the cognized object and the cognizing subject, which is deeply rooted in the Western thought.

Only by establishing an indissoluble connection between memory and interpretation in terms of Peirce’s theory of signs (which overcomes, by the way, the above mentioned split) can we elaborate a consistent, theoretically grounded explanation of identity based on the dialectic of the same and of the changing. One could formulate that dialectic as a paradox: “what’s identical is changeable,” which, however, would merely be a seeming paradox. Identity is contained within a network of interrelated, unbreakable connections and traces of the signs of memory, inherently containing interpretations, reinterpretations and reinterpretations of those reinterpretations. Rather than perceiving identity as the Bergsonian “snowball,” one should see it as an ongoing process of semiosis, or an extremely complex sign, subject to permanent changes. Hence, if we were to treat memory as a text – as it is done

42 “Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.” Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?,” trans. Martin Thom, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 11.

43 This needs a certain clarification: this kind of identity is changeable to the degree in which it grows with new experiences-memories. However, whatever is already in the “memory container” – that building material of identity – remains unchangeable since it is no longer subject to interpretation.

sometimes⁴⁴ – then it would have to be a text immersed in incessant activity, an unstable text, accessible only through interpretation and devoid of any essence that would be independent from interpretation.

Let us finally return to our original metaphor: if memory is the building substance of identity and interpretation is the builder, then they do not appear as, on the one hand, prearranged material – memory – and, on the other hand, the subject which shapes it (our interpretation), but as indissoluble and simultaneous molding of that material in the always already interpreted form. The outcome of that process of building – and here is where the concept of the subject construed as a result of collaboration of memory and interpretation emerges – is not a stable edifice, but a constantly shifting labyrinth, a labyrinth where some paths switch places, others disappear, and still others make room for the new ones.

Translation: Jan Pytalski

44 For example Barbara Skarga, *Tożsamość i różnica*, 229.

Robert Traba

Two Dimensions of History: An Opening Sketch¹

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"National traditions [...] eternal, handed down from one generation to the next, sometimes prophetic in nature; they are, in large part, a freer and truer expression of national sentiments than attained facts and written history."

Cezary Biernacki, *Encyklopedia Olgerbranda* (1867)²

"Tradition is the illusion of permanence"

From Woody Allen's film, *Deconstructing Harry* (1997)

Opening

Looking back at the two-decade history of the Polish Second Republic (1919–1939), we are able to describe an era of great hope and transformation. Looking back at the last quarter-century of post-communist transformation (1989 – present) – that is, at the history of the Third Republic – we are choked by the proximity of events, by a surplus of emotion, and by partisan political conflict. In effect, we are not describing a transformative epoch;

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1 The article was also published as a chapter of the book Robert Traba, *The Past in the Present. The Construction of Polish History* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015).

2 From Janusz Tazbir, "Tradycja i rwanie ciągłości," in *Przyszłość tradycji*, ed. Sław Krzemiński-Ojak (Białystok: Libra, 2008), 22.

rather, we are entangling history with politics. This is, on the one hand, the inevitable consequence of the unity of space and time, in which the author/historian is – whether he likes it or not – an actor in the theater of public events. On the other hand, it is the result of a continuing insensitivity among Poles to the modernization of the historian's craft; if embraced, such modernization would allow us to build a new research instrumentarium, by which we could, in turn, gain some distance from still "hot" events. Or is it simply a fact that the historian's research instrumentarium is doomed to fail when describing recent phenomena, in which "history" is not so much an academic discipline as it is one of the main actors (subjects) in current political disputes?

I do not intend to provide simple answers to such questions, in part because I do not have simple answers. In any case, now that the boom in the so-called "new politics of the past" [*polityka historyczna*] in Poland from the years 2004–2007 has passed, it is worth returning to the topic in order to prevent us from once again falling into the trap where politics appropriates history. Aside from that threat, one of the clear merits of the "new politics of the past" is the fact that – in the public debate – the question of what place history "should and should not take" in the social discourse has been given increased weight. Until recently, the subject was either treated marginally, or was politely avoided as something not quite worthy of serious discussion, and this is because Poles, general speaking, oppose using history for political purposes in light of our experiences with how the communists manipulated it for decades. Paweł Śpiewak summarized the debate over history in the first decade of the Third Republic by writing that – against the background of the "dispute over Poland" – issues of identity (with history as the foundation) were so prominent that it was not so much intense as it was "obsessive."³

Several issues – the conflict over former President Lech Wałęsa's biography (not just its political aspects); ongoing disputes about the foundation myth of the Third Republic; the continuing "historical initiation" of the Fourth Republic (today, through the back door); and finally, the return to irrationality in the debate "with" and "about" the Germans and the Russians – indicate that we are still at the center of not so much a dispute among historians, but an ideological struggle that reflects a question that Polish historian Jerzy Jedlicki once posed: what kind of civilization do Poles need? Narrowing down Professor Jedlicki's question, I would ask today: what history, and what memory, do Poles need?

3 Mainly, the debate revolved around the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and nationalism: Paweł Śpiewak, "Wyjaśnienie zamiast wstępu," in *Spór o Polskę 1989–99*, ed. Paweł Śpiewak (Warszawa: PWN, 2000), 15.

Sociologist Marek Czyżewski, in an analysis from the year 2006 (that is, at the height of the dispute over the “politics of the past,” or – to use another term – the “politics of memory”), distinguished two axes in that public debate: eccentricism versus ethnocentrism, and social criticism versus moralism.⁴ While eccentricism (understood as programmatic avoidance of prejudice against others) and social criticism (understood as behavior explaining problems by objective circumstances) are – according to Czyżewski – characteristic of the discourse carried out in the “historiography of the Third Republic,” ethnocentrism and moralism are at the core of the historical message of those demanding the establishment of a Fourth Republic. Czyżewski defined ethnocentrism not as national chauvinism, but as a “return to respect for so-called common sense” – that is, for the principle that each ethnic group is ostensibly guided by the requirements of group loyalty and, hence, a “measure of understanding” for one’s own transgressions and a “measure of incrimination” for the transgressions of others. Moralism is the application of the same model on an internal foundation, signifying – as it does – a division between a “history of shame” (e.g. communist rule in Poland) and a “heroic history of glory” (heroic feats).

I would argue that the categories employed in the “discourses of the Third and Fourth Republics” are relevant in relation to wider ideological divisions in Poland at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is justified to conclude that the dynamics and philosophy of the dispute have led to a hardening of argumentative strategies. Instead of polyphony in the public sphere, and instead of methodological-conceptual diversity in the academic sphere, an attempt at political exclusion and self-ennoblement has been put on stage, all of which has been fostered by – to employ a concept used by the American sociologist Anselm L. Strauss – a shortage of “arenas” for dispute – that is, for example, of those public media that would make possible a direct, matter-of-fact confrontation among adversaries. Today, that role is still being played by the Catholic weekly magazine *Tygodnik Powszechny* and, to a lesser extent, by *Przegląd Polityczny*. To a certain degree, it has also been played by publications put out by one of the main players in the “discourse of the Fourth Republic,” namely the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [The Institute of National Remembrance, IPN], from which the above-cited Czyżewski article comes. The use of antagonistic discourses [“The Third Republic *versus* the Fourth Republic”] is deceptive when defining historiographical debate. While I – as a participant

4 Marek Czyżewski, “Debata na temat Jedwabnego oraz spór o ‘politykę historyczną’ z punktu widzenia analizy dyskursu publicznego,” in *Pamięć i polityka historyczna. Doświadczenia Polski i jej sąsiadów*, ed. Sławomir M. Nowinowski, Jan Pomorski and Rafał Stobiecki (Łódź: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008), 135–139.

in these debates in the public sphere – would without hesitation categorize myself as a representative of the “discourse of the Third Republic,” I would argue that Poles – in the academic sphere – need to carry out an extensive search for new, more accurate categories to define various trends in Polish historiography.

Dimension One: History as *Politikum*, or On the Need to Choose

1. “Construction” and Choice

The two epigraphs with which I began this work are divided vertically by 130 years and horizontally by transatlantic space. But it seems to me that even today, despite the passage of time and the great distance involved, they make up the qualitative framework, indeed the axiological framework, of the Polish (not only) public debate about tradition, memory and history. I consider both, for different reasons, to be broad indicators of this debate.

Biernacki’s definition of national traditions, typical of the era in which the ideology of nation-states was being created, tries to convince us – using other words – of the existence of the “soul of a nation,” of the perpetuity of tradition, which is “a more free and true expression of national sentiments than attained facts and written history.” In effect, this is a call for the creation of a national myth, and for that myth to be passed on from one generation to the next. By chance, Biernacki reveals for us the two dimensions of the “real” function of historical fact identified over the last hundred years by those working in cultural sociology, and a bit later by those in modern historiography: as a specific event, and as an idea or image, which – because it gives meaning to our thoughts and attitudes – becomes itself a real, social fact. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Polish sociologist Florian Znaniecki defined and developed this duality of fact into a humanistic indicator.⁵ In the 1970s, French historian Pierre Nora introduced into the study of history the concept of “history of the second degree,” or that which happens in our minds and defines our individual and collective identity. The dominance of historical myth in the public space is characteristic of each national ideology.

Harry Block, the main character of Woody Allen’s *Deconstructing Harry*, is a neurotic writer from Manhattan with a complex psychology and a Jewish family background. He rejects tradition entirely. In an argument with his half-sister, an orthodox, fanatical Jewess with a weakness for the perverse, he declares that “tradition is an illusion.” In the individual dimension, in an

5 Florian Znaniecki, *Współczesne narody* (Warszawa: PWN, 1990); Florian Znaniecki, *Nauki o kulturze*, trans. Jerzy Szacki, with introduction Jan Szczepański (Warszawa: PWN, 1992).

attempt to build a distinct identity, many people try to free themselves from the family ballast; some actually manage to make such a break. But in the collective dimension, the mechanism for an abrupt “break with tradition” is an illusion, and when it does happen, it is with the help of authoritarian (totalitarian) state structures.

Anthony Giddens, a towering figure in modern sociology, formulated concisely the quintessence of what occupies the space marked out by these two epigraphs:

Most nations refer to historical myths, and those myths are based neither on the past, nor on a reconstruction of that past. The creation of nations is the extraction of those values which may be useful now. [...] The past can be constructed from various points of view. Nations usually shape their sense of identity by focusing on certain issues and ignoring others.⁶

I make only brief mention of this passage because, in a previous book, I wrote extensively on the theory of the construction of collective memory,⁷ and with this in mind, I would like to highlight my basic thesis, which is that identity, memory, tradition, and finally the study of history itself (more on this a bit later), are – in fact – constructions. Let me add that my approach has nothing to do with yielding to outdated fashions in the Western social sciences and humanities; rather, it is about inspecting – in the processes by which nations are created – both the traditionally load-bearing elements of tradition and language, and the roles played by choice and randomness in the formation of nations, in the perception of the nation as an imagined community, which was created both through a conscious selection of shared symbols and characters, and through a consensus among the elites who selected them.

In the last few years, disputes in Poland over history's place in the public sphere have apparently calmed; it is sometimes said that we have ended our fascination with the “new politics of the past” only to fall into a vacuum, in which the “discourse of the Fourth Republic” drifts along the margins. But this is only apparently true. I believe that we find ourselves in a dangerous stage of transition, in which ideological-national interpretations of history, politically promoted at the beginning of the twenty-first century, are strengthening and spreading. Basil Kerski reflected accurately on this phenomenon in his recent book *Homer na Placu Poczdamskim* (2008, Homer at Potsdamer Platz).

6 “Historia i jej rekonstrukcje,” [Teresa Stylińska talks with Anthony Giddens] *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 46 (2006). Supplement: “Historia w Tygodniku,” ed. Wojciech Pięciak,

7 Robert Traba, *Historia – przestrzeń dialogu* (Warszawa: ISP PAN, 2006).

His views are particularly interesting in that, in light of his own biography, they are rooted with varying degrees in four cultures (Polish, German, Iraqi and Jewish). The selection and construction of his own self-identity is an inherent part of his life-experience and personality.

Self-critical debates on the subject of identity have in fact not yet ended, though I have the impression today that many people, feeling a certain level of fatigue and exhaustion, yearn for a clear vision of history, for positive myths. Critics of self-critical patriotism and intercultural dialogue are currently experiencing their heyday. One could clearly feel this climate in the campaign leading up to the most recent parliamentary and presidential elections [2005], in which a central role was played by the issue of corruption and socio-political issues, but also in which competing visions of history and different concepts of the Polish nation and its relationship to neighboring countries became important elements in the political struggle. [...] Today's critics of the culture of self-critical patriotism are connected by an old-fashioned view of international politics as a Darwinian struggle of nations; it is a perspective that excludes the existence of pluralistic societies.

It is alarming that critics of self-critical patriotism are found not only among former communist activists or extreme nationalists, but also among young, liberal-conservative intellectuals. [...] Only answers to critical questions about the history of Poland can form the basis for a new national strategy - a strategy with chances of success.⁸

"Confrontational-national" views are promoted and reinforced above all by decision-makers (not all of whom are historians) at the IPN and by its politics-oriented educational strategy. Another large Polish institution of public education, the Museum of Polish History (which concentrates its activities more on public history events like exhibitions than on a deepened sense of the historical record) accepts this state of affairs by avoiding controversial debates that could foster new perspectives.

The IPN's activity is a history in itself. In 1999, the act to establish the institute came into force. Various hopes were tied to the institute at its creation. It was built on the basis of the decades-old Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu [Main Commission for the Research into Crimes Against the Polish Nation], which investigated and prosecuted crimes

8 From Basil Kerski, "Samokrytyczny patriotyzm i kultura dialogu," in Basil Kerski, *Homer na placu Poczdamskim. Szkice polsko-niemieckie* (Lublin: UMCS, 2008), 260–262.

from the Second World War (until 1990, it was called the Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich, or the Main Commission for Research into Hitlerite Crimes). The IPN inherited the Commission's archives, its excellent library, and several of its prosecutors. In the 1990s, the Main Commission took up the investigation and prosecution of Stalinist crimes. The eventual transfer of such responsibilities to the IPN was natural.

The IPN was originally intended to solve problems related to the archives of intelligence services of the communist Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (People's Republic of Poland, PRL) by taking their contents out of the hands of free Poland's intelligence agencies, and thus eliminating the temptation to use the document "folders" (in Polish: *teczki*) as a tool in wider political games. Much more than that, politicians were not to have access to these records. The archives were supposed to be the subject of research for historians, the goal being to gain knowledge about the PRL, about the mechanisms used to govern communist Poland, and about the Polish people's struggle for freedom and their repression. It was about gaining an understanding of the past in all its various dimensions. For this purpose, the Biuro Edukacji Publicznej [Public Education Office] was established within the IPN, where dozens of historians with outstanding capabilities found employment; recruitment focused mainly on graduates from distinguished Polish universities.

The act establishing the IPN was to bring redress to victims of the communist system and to people who had struggled against it in the name of liberty and an independent Poland. The category of "aggrieved" was thus introduced – that is, a person who had been the subject of surveillance and repression. For several years, the IPN issued certificates to those aggrieved, which gave them the privilege to access records collected against them and to obtain copies. The act was also to serve to stigmatize the Urząd Bezpieczeństwa [Office of Public Security, UB], which had been responsible for repression directed against Polish citizens, along with its successor, the Służba Bezpieczeństwa [Security Service, SB]. The key institution within the IPN was its president, whose method of appointment and powers were set in such a way that he would not be susceptible to pressure from politicians, including heads of government; he would also not be subject to pressure from the intelligence services, including those established after 1989. Appointment to the position of president was a complicated procedure, giving him a powerful position within state organs. The 11-member IPN Council was intended to be a pluralistic body; nine of its members were appointed by the Sejm (Polish parliament) from among candidates submitted by the various political parties. The Krajowa Rada Sądownictwa [National Council of the Judiciary of Poland] appointed two members, who were to be approved by the Sejm.

At least this was the theory. After a short period when an open formula was being shaped under the presidency of Leon Kieres (2000–2005), actual practice succumbed to the pressures of politicians and historians with clear national-conservative views:

Prosecutors, firmly convinced of their own exceptionality and fenced off by their official duties, avoided contact with historians, who in turn were struck by the prosecutors' stiffness and weak knowledge of the past.⁹

The archive (which contains documents that would stretch to around 90 kilometers) has a closed structure guided by bewildering procedures. These procedures have led to massive slowdowns in responding to requests for access to files. The IPN was formed around three separate organizational structures, which are united only by the person of the President: The Chief Commission, the archive, and the Public Education Office. Contacts between them are formalistic and rather weak.¹⁰

According to Andrzej Friszke (who was a member of the IPN Council for six years), after Janusz Kurtyka took office as President and Jan Żaryn took over the Public Education Office in 2005 and early 2006, there followed an era of politicization and "political exclusion." The prelude came in 2004, when journalist Bronisław Wildstein published the names of UB and SB "secret collaborators" (the so-called "Wildstein list").¹¹ In this new era, the meaning and content of the terms "nation" and "community of memory" were off-limits to public debate, as if they represented inviolable values, as if to challenge them would be dangerous. Under the very name (and along with that name, the practices) of the IPN, tasks related to the "national politics of memory" were – unfortunately – merged with the mission of independent academic research. In the public mind, there could be only one message flowing from the institute's name: *m e m o r y a n d h i s t o r y a s a s c i e n c e a r e o n e*. The problem is that nothing could be further from the truth, and nothing could be more misleading. What the IPN's message presents, in fact, is the danger that Polish history will be grossly over-simplified.

9 Andrzej Friszke, "Jak hartował się radykalizm Kurtyki," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 7, 2009, 18

10 This section on the IPN is based primarily on Jan Żaryn, "Przykrywanie prawdy kłamstwem," *Rzeczpospolita*, April 29, 2009; Andrzej Friszke, "Kto kogo wyklucza?," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 4, 2009; *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 1 (2005); see also statements by Friszke in "IPN robi z historii tabloid," *Polska the Times*, April 6, 2009, and "Jak hartował się radykalizm Kurtyki," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 7, 2009; for the official IPN response to Friszke's accusations, see "Komunikaty, Odpowiedzi na zarzuty prof. Andrzeja Friszkego," Andrzej Arseniak, IPN press spokesman (April 9, 2009), on the official IPN web site.

11 Friszke "Jak hartował się radykalizm Kurtyki."

Due to political pressure applied by the governing national-populist coalition of 2005-2007 led by *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS, or "Law and Justice," under Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński), moral-political criteria of purity were introduced into IPN activities:

The so-called ideology of "moral intensification" corresponded well with the change of personnel. The President [Lech Kaczyński] was a supporter of broad lustration and de-communization. Close ties [between the IPN and] the new parliamentary coalition developed quickly, as illustrated by changes made to the act by which the IPN had been created. The Institute took over the functions of lustration, which then dominated its activities. The status of "aggrieved" was deleted, which inevitably shifted the emphasis from relief for victims toward an interest in [investigating] the intelligence agents.¹²

A new and central actor on the stage in the dispute over the politics of memory (or, using the German term, *Erinnerungspolitik*) was born in late 2008, namely the Museum of the Second World War, which is to open its doors in 2014. And soon, a Polish-German history textbook will be completed, a project coordinated by the Joint Polish-German Textbook Commission (JP-GTC; Polsko-Niemiecka Komisja Podręcznikowa, or Deutsch-polnische Schulbuchkommission).

2. "Construction" in a Museum

The line of confrontation today crosses through the vision of the Museum of the Second World War and the selection of central, common political holidays that would represent – in the collective memory of Poles – the end of "real socialism" and the beginning of the post-1989 democratic development. Politicians are present in debates about history in a new way, which is significant. Bogdan Zdrojewski, the Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage (2007-2014), summarized his attitude toward the "politics of memory" as follows:

¹² Ibid. An editorial note in the periodical *Glaukopis* illustrates the kind of language used by some IPN historians: "We live in an age in which moral relativism is attacking various spheres of our life. The historical sciences have not remained free of this scourge. [...] Few people realize that authors of such publications, eggheads [wykształciuchy] shaped in the stifling atmosphere of the PRL kolkhoz, pathetic plagiarists and proponents of deconstructivist theory. [...] However, their rotting stench poisons the minds of people everywhere where attempts to purify the Academy of the ghosts of the past have failed..."

For twenty years we have witnessed a dispute which has weakened authority and distorted the image of Polish history in our eyes and in the eyes of the world. Who is satisfied by this dispute over the politics of the past or, if you will, the politics of memory? [...] What is dominant here is the instrumental treatment of history, the propensity to appropriate the right to dates, events or characters ... One thing that strikes me is a lack of humility among politicians issuing unequivocal moral judgments, who elevate some to the altar, and sentence others to damnation. For values and symbols to function, neither our anointment nor regulation of rights is needed. [...] Our mission is to protect and cherish the national memory and symbols associated with it, and to learn how to tell the history of Poland in a language that is modern and attractive. Let us finally be understood by Europe and the world!¹³

To be sure, Zdrojewski's statement includes a central (governmental) determination to create a politics of memory, but the fact is that it also includes a spirit of openness and a rejection of the instrumentalisation of history by current politics. Though it employs such terms as "national pride" and "national policy," which continue the language of the "new politics of the past" (at least on the surface), and though it lacks sufficient emphasis on polyphony in the mainstream narrative and support for minority discourses, the statement has neither the tone of exclusion, nor of programmatic indoctrination from above.

By contrast, the "politics of memory" from the years 2005-2007 was burdened by one-sidedness.¹⁴ At its heart was the belief that pluralism in the memory narrative is a threat not only to the state, but also to the Polish nation, understood in exclusive terms (as a kind of hypostasis),¹⁵ all of which is only one step short of defining "other views" as a "threat to the

13 Bogdan Zdrojewski, "Dajmy Polakom być dumnymi ze swojej historii," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 14, 2008.

14 Kazimierz M. Ujazdowski argues against this interpretation in "Polityka pamięci ma sens," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 2, 2008. In his matter-of-fact defense of the "new politics of the past" strategy from the years 2005-2007, Ujazdowski – a former minister of culture – ignores one important aspect: the atmosphere of pressure and command associated with the implementation of a single model of "remembering history" to the exclusion of any other; Paweł Machcewicz, "Dwa mity twórców polityki historycznej w IV RP," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 29, 2008.

15 See Adam Komorowski, "Trumny w zaprzęgu," *Nowe Książki* 12 (2008): 31–32. This is a review of a book by Lech Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2008).

raison d'État," a "betrayal of national interests," a "danger of loss of national identity."

Echoes of such views can be found in statements made by certain journalists and historians in reaction to the initial concept of the Museum of the Second World War.¹⁶ The authors of this concept, Paweł Machcewicz and Piotr Majewski, decided to move away from the traditional, national narrative, a fact that caused alarm among those who feared that the museum could threaten a value that remains untouchable for a large part of Polish society, a value that places the experience of the Polish nation at the epicenter of thinking about Europe, indeed the world. But the facts are quite the opposite: Machcewicz and Majewski have not negated this value at all; indeed, they have tried to emphasize the Polish contribution to the history of the Second World War. It is just that they want to do this through comparative discourse; their intent is to present the history of Poland in the context of parallel events in Europe and the broader world. Even more surprising than the above reactions have been allegations appearing in some media about the purported anti-Polish nature, and poorly conceived universality, of the project. But the fact is that a comparative approach will allow the museum to present "Polish suffering and martyrdom" without relativizing them. Machcewicz and Majewski express their intentions in a rational way:

We will not convince tourists from London, or from Vienna, to accept our argument – something about which [Polish journalist] Piotr Semka is so concerned – by creating another exposition exclusively on the martyrdom of the Polish nation or to the glory of Polish arms. Students from Germany, Holland and France will come to see the museum in Gdańsk, and they will take something permanent from the experience, only when Polish issues are united for them with European issues, known by them through their school, cinema, and television.¹⁷

16 See, for example, Piotr Semka, "Dziwaczny pomysł na muzeum II wojny światowej," *Rzeczpospolita*, October 28, 2008; "Polska wyjątkowość [Cezary Gmyz talks with Jan Żaryn]," *Rzeczpospolita*, November 4, 2008; Cezary Gmyz, Piotr Semka, "Przypomnijmy światu polską historię," *Rzeczpospolita*, November 3, 2008.

17 Piotr Majewski, Paweł Machcewicz, fragments of the "Zarys koncepcji programowej muzeum II wojny światowej," ["Outline of the program concept of the Museum of the Second World War"], *Rzeczpospolita*, October 31, 2008. For a full record of the first discussion regarding the museum, see "Wojna i jej muzeum," *Przegląd Polityczny* 91–92 (2008): 46–65. For voices supporting Machcewicz and Majewski's ideas, see expansive articles in *Gazeta Wyborcza* by, among others, Anna Wolff-Powęska, Jerzy Kochanowski, Grzegorz Motyka and Dariusz Libionka.

None of my comments so far means that the Museum's concept should not be criticized. Indeed, it must be criticized, because it should fulfill not only its primary mission, which is to build a framework for a modern museum exhibition; it should also serve as a vehicle for alternative methods of conducting public dialogue about history. From my personal experience with the project, it seems that the museum's initial program-concept points too weakly to a concrete narrator and does not adequately define its audience groups. The presentation of the history of World War II in the European context does not have to mean seeking a universal, default narrator. The facility was established in Gdańsk, in Poland, and its visitors will be predominantly Poles. Both the authors of the concept and their critics have repeatedly referred to a foreign audience, but the profile of this audience is unclear, since tourists from London, Berlin and Lwów have different perspectives and expectations that cannot be reconciled in one museum. Tourists visit museums in foreign countries to become acquainted with the local view of history, even if the topic is a global phenomenon. For this reason, the museum should show the war from the Polish perspective, though without pathos, without trying to consolidate national or patriotic thinking by highlighting Polish martyrdom. A museum aimed at Polish society has a greater chance of offering an understandable narrative about World War II, and would be more legible than an exhibition that tries to send a universal message with as many topics covered as possible.

Since a museum narrative must focus on essential topics, the guiding notion here could be "Polish fortunes," and the greatest challenge involves how to build a meta-narrative directed at a Polish audience that is, at the same time, affective for "other" audiences as well. From the program it is clear that the authors have seriously considered this question. However, they have not yet found a clear answer.

The history of World War II should also be presented more from the perspective of individual experiences. This is no great discovery; such perspectives are used effectively in major museums and historical exhibitions around the world without losing the wider context. At this point, there is no reference in the museum's design plans to provide a guide-book or catalogue – highlighting, for example, "witnesses to history" – that would lead visitors through the exposition. Eyewitness narratives to history help the visitor identify with the fate of various groups. The fate of an individual Pole can be understood even by the foreign visitor, and can bring him/her closer to the wartime Polish experience. In this way, it can be shown how human stories are entangled, in the larger dimension of the tragedy, with a diversity of fates. Stories of heroic individuals can, in a natural way, be about someone from Danzig, but also someone from Silesia, who as a *volksdeutscher* fought in the Wehrmacht and

later on the Polish side at Monte Cassino. Of course, the fate of Polish Jews must be included. As the tragedy of a large part of pre-war Polish society, their fate should be part of the narrative of the war as well. The presence of Jewish issues in other museums – at Auschwitz, at Yad Vashem, or in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw – does not mean that the Museum of the Second World War cannot embed this topic into a comprehensive picture of the tragedy of war.¹⁸ These are all open questions. The way Paweł Machcewicz and Piotr Majewski are leading the discussion indicates that we are dealing with a new quality of historical debate. I would like to see this become a permanent standard in the shaping of policy towards history.

This brief discussion about the Museum of the Second World War signals a clearly broader, permanent part of the debate on the politics of memory, one that is represented by the question: what function should it play in the wider European discourse?¹⁹ The dilemma, simply put, boils down to two alternatives: to glorify history, or to present it critically. Surprisingly, the topicality of this dilemma reminds me of the correspondence between two prominent Polish writers, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Konstanty A. Jeleński, from the year 1957. Iwaszkiewicz criticized an article that Czesław Miłosz had published in *Preuves*, viewing it as an attack on Polish literature. In response, Jeleński wrote:

Milosz's article, in my opinion, gives foreigners the key to understanding Polish literature. [...] Oddly, people (writers) who write "negatively" about their own nation bring the greatest prestige not only to their own literature, but to their own people. Who in the West today would know about the vitality of Romanian literature – if not for Cioran and Ionesco bad-mouthing their countrymen?

Does it seem to you that, as "ambassadors of France," it is Sartre, Mauriac and Genet – or Romains, Duhamel and Guéhenno – who contribute most to the prestige of France?²⁰

To this day, I remember the sugar-coated, fabricated achievements of the PRL, and of Poland in general, that accompanied my schooling in the 1970s.

18 In part, these considerations are based on discussions that took place in a doctoral seminar at the Center for Historical Research (CBH PAN) in Berlin, 15 December 2008.

19 Three publications, among others, put out by the Fundacja Stefana Batorego are devoted to this topic: *Pamięć i polityka zagraniczna* (2000), *Jaka Polska? Czyja Polska? Diagnozy i dyskusje* (2006) and *Pamięć jako przedmiot władzy* (2008).

20 "Nie gardź nami, emigracjo. Listy Iwaszkiewicza i Jeleńskiego," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 10–11, 2009.

"We were a power, we were great, we were heroic, we were victims and romantic warriors at the same time." As a youngster, I swallowed it all whole, not knowing how many of the "greats" had been removed, for political reasons, from the gallery of "national saints." Later I distanced myself from this propaganda to the point where I completely rejected the Sienkiewiczian model of the heroic Pole. But strangely, many of Poland's greatest "opponents of communism" speak today in the same appropriating, monophonic language. *Déjà vu*? No, not really. Despite everything, we now live in a democratic system that protects against monopolization of thought, though the mechanism and basic idea remain much the same, a fact which has been expounded upon – in the context of the Polish "politics of memory" – by the Warsaw historian Maciej Janowski.²¹ Drago Jančar, the Slovenian prose writer and playwright, dubbed this phenomenon "the philosophy of the province," and described it based on the example of today's Slovenia:

For the philosophy of the province, what is especially characteristic is the fact that its world is the only world, and that world alone is interesting. Once this condition is met, a wide range of possible conspiracy theories, connections, and examples of perfidious defamation and slander develop. Above all, no one represents a sufficiently large value, and his works are not worth much, because one need not call anything by name. The deeper the province, the less valuable is anything created locally, in the eyes of its people; the more people are petty, the more serious are the conflicts and quarrels.²²

3. "Construction" in School

The Polish-German history textbook project, which was started in May 2008, is another test of how the "politics of memory" is created. From the very beginning, the bilateral nature of the project imposed a new form of cooperation on the parties involved. At the same time, the fact that the project was initiated by the Polish and German governments has raised concerns about the borders of independence between scholarship and politics. The JP-GTC is expecting support from both governments and does not foresee political pressure coming from them. But if such pressures were to appear, the project would make no sense. The structure of the project calls for the formation of

21 Maciej Janowski, "Polityka historyczna: Między edukacją historyczną a propagandą," *Pamięć i polityka historyczna*, 229–245.

22 Drago Jančar, "Filozofia prowincji," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 3–4, 2009.

a Governing Board: on the Polish side, there are representatives of the Ministries of Education, Culture and Foreign Affairs; on the German side, representatives of the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder), the Brandenburg Minister of Education, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Polish and German JP-GTC chairmen are also members of the board. At this point in time, there is a thick line separating politics from specific projects. The Governing Board defines the space in which a project operates, secures financial resources, and supports the introduction of the textbook into schools. Other works are managed by the Council of Experts, which determines the substantive criteria. Its members are scholars and educators appointed by the JP-GTC. The Council decides what issues should be addressed in the textbook, and selects the authors.

As the project is implemented, I do not fear arguments over the interpretation of any historical event. A much greater problem will come as a result of differing educational traditions. But this is precisely where the project presents great opportunity. From confrontation (taken constructively) will emerge not some sort of artificial, politically correct "common denominator" of historical processes, but a true common narrative. Certainly, the definition of controversial events will not be easy. But I can imagine that modern teaching techniques offer creative possibilities for the description of historical phenomena that cannot be found even in the best journalism and most popular history books. The dichotomy in our historical experiences is an excellent point to exploit. Poles and Germans have variously defined events, two different lived experiences, and – through that didactic element that inspires questions – we can show "both sides." We can say: "They understand it that way, and we understand it this way." Is it always the case that only one side is right?

When we talk about our own history, Henryk Sienkiewicz's "Kali formula" often appears: "If Kali steal a cow, it is good; if someone steal cow from Kali, it is wrong." In another context: "We conquered, we were larger and stronger, and that is good. When we were attacked, we of course defended ourselves, and the conquerors were bad." But the point here is that we have a chance to widen our perspective. The German cultural sociologist Wolf Lepenies, one of the finest representatives of European sociology of culture, discussed this issue in an address praising the French-German textbook. Interpreting the value of the Franco-German work, he stated that the real challenge – not only for Poland and Germany, but also for Europe – is the Polish-German textbook, precisely because once Germany receives Poland and its historical experience, it will receive much of the rest of Eastern Europe as well; today, the Eastern European historical experiences are practically absent in the German

discourse. We have a chance to put into general circulation an exceptionally interesting narrative on such topics as asymmetrical processes of nation development and the Second World War. The Polish experience has taken place on the periphery; we are not the center. But we bring to the table an entirely different perspective on history. The German and Soviet occupations – to take just two examples – function often beyond the imagination of our western neighbors. With this in mind, the role of the textbook gains greater universal potential, as a general European experience.

If one compares the task that authors of the French-German textbook faced with the task facing authors of the Polish-German textbook, then one could say that we have bad luck; from the very start, each project had a different potential, a fact that stems from the very nature of the roles played by France and Germany in European history. Both countries were (and are) major centers of European politics. German and French historians are aware that this fact raises difficulties, and – with varying degrees of success – they have avoided telling the story from the perspective of Germany or France. The “plus and minus” that I see confronting Polish and German authors stems from the fact that, through most of history, German and Polish roles have been asymmetrical: the center – Germany; and the periphery – Poland. This reality applies especially to the nineteenth century, when the Polish state did not exist at all, and Germany was rising to the rank of great power. That having been said, we define the term “periphery” neutrally; it does not have to be the case that the center and periphery are “something better or worse.” Indeed, a new catalogue of questions must be created, the result of which will be the kind of textbook that reflects certain wider phenomena and processes, not just the politics of those at the center of power.²³

4. The “Construction” of Cultural Memory and Individual Identity

I would like to return to the initial metaphor regarding the construction of memory, to the argument that the community of a modern nation is a *construction*. Although such a term sounds technical in everyday use, the idea is that national elites create certain signs, symbols and annual rituals (anniversaries), which they then seek to introduce into general circulation, and around which they try to build a sense of communal cohesion. With this in mind, we can say that anniversaries are “invented,” though at the same time it is important that the people feel an emotional connection with such dates

23 See “Dwie tradycje, jeden podręcznik, z Robertem Trabą, przewodniczącym Wspólnej Polsko-Niemieckiej Komisji Podręcznikowej rozmawia Bogdan Borucki,” in *Mówią Wieki*, 10/08 (586): 41.

that are fixed, over time, through systematic celebration. I know of no country that has not tried to mobilize its society around anniversaries – that is, with a positive message, a values system, of which the anniversary is a fragment. It is a natural form of communication within the community, which needs an indicative sign for one to be able to say, “I am a Pole, because ...” (here, you can insert the symbolic dates and events that allow us to understand one another, and to border ourselves off from the external “other”). The anniversary is part of the “foundational myth” for any society that wants to establish a sense of itself as community.

Take, for example, the monument and how it functions: it is built to commemorate someone or something, to initiate something around itself, and then to ritualize a symbolic anniversary that is important for the nation. But a monument lives only so long as political manifestations are ritualized around it, as long as it communicates an idea. Sometimes – and this is apparent in our immediate surroundings – a monument “dies,” becoming little more than a dead element on the landscape, to which collective emotions are no longer tied.

It is quite natural that certain anniversaries are created based on current day needs. When collective memory is “written,” it is the reflection not of any record of events from the past but of a particular set of political and social circumstances. From the great reservoir of events, such as battles, those that are, at any particular moment, most communicative to the public are a matter of selection. Parenthetically, I might add that, in Poland today, anniversaries are not mass events. As national holidays, they are widely viewed simply as days off work; social participation in their observance is moderate, with the reason for this relative apathy perhaps being their schematic form. To what extent does that form correspond to people’s real expectations? Is it possible that the Polish people’s moderate social commitment to national anniversaries reflects their attitude toward state holidays in general, and/or to the fact that these holidays are celebrated largely from the top down?

Controversy over the “selection of an anniversary” is inevitable, given that anniversaries are often, if not always, forged in the context of political dispute; decisions come down to choosing one interpretation of history over another. Such a process happens in a variety of dimensions. In the case of the French Revolution, it took the form of a collision of two world views. In Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was a long and intense debate about the appropriate national holiday before the date was finally set at 3 October – that is, the date the former East Germany was attached to the Federal Republic; the holiday was given the name “Tag der Deutschen Einheit” (Day of German Unity). Earlier, two dates had been in the running: 3 October and 9 November.

The latter date, as it turned out, is connected to too many anniversaries and contains enormous potential for controversy: it was on 9 November that the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, but other important events are also associated with 9 November, including a pogrom in the Third Reich (in 1938, so-called Kristallnacht); Hitler's failed coup (1923); and the outbreak of the leftist revolution and the announcement of the first German Republic (1918). The historic significance of "9 November" was thus huge. At the time, as an observer of the German process, I thought it would be interesting if Germany would chose just such a date as its most important, but in the end the Germans set the holiday at 3 October, which carries a positive message: "Germans are once again united." Debate concluded with a top-down decision which, although criticized, has become widely accepted; today, no one boycotts 3 October as a national holiday in Germany.

This holiday contains within itself a certain strategy to build German identity, and in its shared celebration, Germans are supposed to gain a sense of universality and have an emotional relationship towards the event. After all, emotion is a condition on which the living anniversary depends, so that it is not reduced to a mere military parade decreed from above, but rather remains something in which society/the nation wants to participate. Bastille Day (14 July) in France does not end with the parade on the Champs-Élysées; festivities take place in every town, even the smallest ones, where people enjoy themselves. Of course, the starting point is the parade, but what follows amounts to a folk festival. Thus, identification with the holiday is increased. Marek Beylin, like British historian Eric Hobsbawm, recognizes two models – the German and French – as the best in constructing "national unity," though my impression is that both models are outdated and diverge from the reality of the twenty-first century.²⁴

After World War I, the "founding myth" of the new Poland was the victorious war against the Bolsheviks in 1920; it united the nation, previously broken into three partitions for over 100 years. But after the fall of communism in 1989 we also had great dates to choose from, which we probably continue to have: 31 August 1980 and 4 June 1989. These are, in my opinion, two key dates. The question remains, which one of them to choose. The fact that we have not already made this choice represents a loss for all Poles, and now the issue has become part of a debate that is no longer so much political as it is a matter of stubborn, inter-party rivalry. No one has a vision of how to build that "something" for the community of Polish citizens (including those Poles too young to have experienced the breakthrough events of 1989), that "something" that would provide a positive message for the future. We do not really

24 Marek Beylin, "Polski świr większościowy," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 21-22, 2009.

argue whether or not 4 June 1989 (the date on which elections took place paving the way for the creation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's non-communist government), or the August Agreements of 31 August 1980 (between workers in Gdańsk and the PRL leadership), or the Round Table Talks (between the communists and Lech Wałęsa's Solidarity, which led to the 4 June elections), are foundational civic dates for the Polish nation, and there is no dispute over the strategy for building such an anniversary. The dramatic question is: do we really want to celebrate the rebirth of a sovereign Poland after 1989? The alternative is to completely reject these anniversaries and build a negative message about the Third Republic (which is largely what advocates of a Fourth Republic do). It is sad that, after the fall of communism in Poland, there has not been the political will – or perhaps the political imagination – to build not only a new, free market society, but also a foundation myth that establishes a new social identity in the wake of the great transformations of 1989. No political force has made the effort, and that is too bad, because the emotional connection with the breakthrough events of 1989 has loosened, and its universal dimension has been lost. Today, one must begin the construction of a “living date” anniversary practically from scratch. Perhaps only the grandchildren of this peaceful revolution will make such a “communal” choice.

Post-communist Poland's main holidays fall on 11 November (marking Poland's regained independence in 1918) and on 3 May (May 3rd Constitution Day), but at the beginning of the interwar Second Republic, “11 November” did not exist as a holiday. It was celebrated for the first time in 1937, and its existence was not an easy one. After the First World War, various political groups, with differing ideologies, were involved in building the new Poland: There were the generally leftist followers of Józef Piłsudski; the conservative-Catholic National Democrats (known in Poland as the “*endecja*” and led by Piłsudski's rival, Roman Dmowski); the radical left (soldiers and workers soviets), which had “its” holiday; and the Polish Socialist Party-Left (PPS-L), which had “its” holiday, namely 7 November, when in 1918 the government of Ignacy Daszyński was created in Lublin. Each political party was looking for “its” own holiday, and each of them expected that “its” symbolic date would become a universal celebration. The dispute continued until 1937.²⁵

Regarding identity construction on the individual level, I present in subsequent chapters one sketch on Marcel Reich-Ranicki and one on Peter/Piotr Lachmann. Here, I will mention a third name that is perhaps the most

25 See “Rocznice nasze i wasze” [Patrycja Bukalska talks with Robert Traba], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, May 31, 2009. Special supplement “Polska rocznicowa,” ed. Wojciech Pięciak and Patrycja Bukalska.

spectacular, namely Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the chief ideologue of nineteenth-century racism and anti-Semitism. Born in England, raised partly in France and educated by a Prussian tutor, he could have become – according to the Dutch writer and lecturer, Ian Buruma – the perfect cosmopolitan, but he despised France, Great Britain and the United States because citizenship there was a question of rights, not blood. He married the daughter of Richard Wagner and “became not only German, but also a herald of the lofty virtues of the German nation.”²⁶ It is difficult to find a more perverse – and, at the same time, convincing – example of the construction of individual identity. In schools, and as part of the broader public education, it might be worth referring to – instead of complicated theories – precisely such examples to explain the intricate processes of identity and memory construction.

Dimension Two: History as Method, or On the Need for Imagination and Interdisciplinarity

1. Historiography

The “discourse on the historiography of the Third and Fourth Republics” called forth by Marek Czyżewski is, in my opinion, a metaphorical misappropriation that is attractive, but superficial. It blurs the real transformations taking place in modern Polish historiography,²⁷ and condemns historiography to a role that is secondary to politics, one in which history becomes an object in the game of politics – that is, in a dimension where politics determines history. A more natural process, on the other hand, is one in which historians from each generation research, describe and interpret history in their own way (of course, this applies not just to historians, but also to scholars in the humanities and social sciences in general). Given the way Polish historiography has developed over the last two decades, it is difficult – if not impossible – to place many distinguished Polish historians (who have been, at the same time, active participants in public debates about the past) into either one of the two camps: Wiktoria Śliwowska,²⁸ Henryk Samsonowicz,²⁹ Krzysztof

26 Ian Buruma, “Kosmopolici,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 20–21, 2008.

27 Czyżewski, “Debata na temat Jedwabnego,” 135–136.

28 See the recent publication written in cooperation with Renè Śliwowski, *Rosja – nasza miłość* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2008), which won the “KLIO” prize.

29 Henryk Samsonowicz, *O “historii prawdziwej.” Mity, legendy i podania jako źródło historyczne* (Gdańsk: Novus Orbis, 1997); see also Andrzej Sowa, *Henryk Samsonowicz – świadek epoki. Wywiad rzeka* (Warszawa: Bellona, 2009).

Pomian,³⁰ Jerzy Jedlicki,³¹ Janusz Tazbir,³² Jerzy Borejsza,³³ Jerzy Holzer,³⁴ Roman Wapiński, Karol Modzelewski³⁵ and Tomasz Szarota,³⁶ along with (from the younger generation) Marcin Kula and Anna Wolff-Powęska.³⁷ It is difficult to apply the proposed dichotomy to such middle-generation researchers as Andrzej Chwalba,³⁸ Włodzimierz Borodziej, Rafał Stobiecki, Dariusz Stola, Paweł Machcewicz, Grzegorz Motyka, Jan M. Piskorski,³⁹ Dariusz Libionka and Rafał Wnuk. It is true that, in the public debate, more or less all of them have criticized the “new politics of the past,” but their research horizons and imaginations reach well beyond the scope of the “Third Republic discourse;” they have been shaped not so much by that discourse as by their various areas of research, by their mentors (who sometimes have completely different frames of reference than their students), and by their differing methodologies.

I think a more appropriate way to describe the lines of dispute in today's historiography would be to use the terms “national homogeneity” and

30 Krzysztof Pomian, *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci* (Lublin: UMCS, 2006).

31 Jerzy Jedlicki, *Świat zwyrodniał. Lęki i wyroki krytyków nowoczesności* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2000).

32 See Janusz Tazbir, *Polska na zakrętach dziejów* (Warszawa: Sic!, 1997) and, by the same author, *W pogoni za Europą* (Warszawa: Sic!, 1998).

33 From all his works, I mention just one: Jerzy W. Borejsza, *Śmieszne sto milionów Słowian...*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Nerito, Instytut Historii PAN, 2006).

34 For one of the most interesting historical essays of recent years, see Jerzy Holzer, *Polska i Europa. “W Polsce czyli nigdzie?”* (Warszawa: Wydawca Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 2008); see also Holzer's *Europejska tragedia XX wieku. II wojna światowa* (Warszawa: Wydawca Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 2005) and his study *Europa wojen 1914–1945* (Warszawa: Świat książki, 2008).

35 Karol Modzelewski, *Barbarzyńska Europa* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2004).

36 See Tomasz Szarota, *Karuzela na placu Krasińskich* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 2007). Against the backdrop of research on the Second World War, this study is exceptional: Szarota, *U progu Zagłady. Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2000).

37 For example, Anna Wolff-Powęska, *Oswojona rewolucja: Europa Środkowo – Wschodnia w procesie demokracji* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1998), and another by the same author, *A bliźniego swego: Kościoły w Niemczech wobec “problemu żydowskiego”* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2003).

38 Andrzej Chwalba, *III Rzeczpospolita – raport specjalny* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie Miejsce, 2005).

39 Jan M. Piskorski, *Polacy i Niemcy. Czy przeszłość musi być przeszkodą* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2004), 32

"heroization of history" versus "re-negotiation" and "broadened perspectives." I will leave it to historians of historiography to decide how much these terms represent continuation, or how much they represent something new, in the long tradition of Polish debates over history (personally, I see both continuity and discontinuity). In any case, at the heart of debate today is a confrontation between those who support traditional methods and categories of research and those who support newly defined methods and categories (and new ways of applying them in research). It is about the re-negotiation and introduction of new meanings for such concepts as "nation," "identity," "cultural gender," "cultural memory," etc. Broadening the research perspective means the enrichment of the historian's instrumentarium in the extended search for trans-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary contexts. We see these new trends represented far too seldom in Polish historical discussions, in both public and classroom settings. They are, however, becoming more pronounced in the academic community, though it would be a mistake to thoughtlessly place them into the category of postmodern historiography. I would argue that, at the level where historical research is being conducted in Poland today, there is no well-developed "postmodern historiography," let alone one that is "dogmatic,"⁴⁰ unless we regard such works as postmodern: Jacek Banaszkiewicz's studies demythologizing the origins of the Polish state,⁴¹ or works from the field of methodology of history developed mainly in Poznań, Łódź and Lublin by such historians as Jan Pomorski, Ewa Domańska and Wojciech Wrzosek. Somehow, I doubt that any of these scholars would view themselves as being in the mainstream of "dogmatic postmodernism."

At the center of research trends in Poland today, there remains a solid, workshop-oriented, traditional, and positivist historiography (mainly event history), which defends itself by the integrity of its analysis and its diversified source base; the latter virtue allows the research instrumentarium to modernize and to avoid the trap of narrating only "how it was in fact." The work of "IPN historians," promoted so widely by the media, fits nicely into this traditional vein, broadly defined. In the opinion of many of its representatives, "access to the files" designates the only correct way to learn about the past. The mindless promotion of the "folder/*teczka*" fetish leads to a simplified claim that only "secret" sources, not accessible to ordinary mortals, mark off the paradigm of "objective truth." The difference between serious study of event history and the falsely conceived mission to find "objective truth" was presented in an

40 Ibid., 139.

41 See, among others, Jacek Banaszkiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście i Popielu* (Warszawa: PWN, 1986) and, by the same author, *Polskie dzieje bajeczne Mistrza Wincentego Kadłubka* (Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 2002), second edition.

insightful article by a doyen of Polish historiography, Wiktoria Śliwowska, who reminds us of the rudiments of the historian's research instrumentarium, and highlights - against that background - the tendencies set forth (fortunately not always realized!) by the standards of the IPN:

The historian must strive not only to reconstruct a given reality, but also to understand the background of events, the circumstances in which people acted. It is easy to condemn, but difficult to understand a complicated past. [... Meanwhile, in the IPN] thick volumes are being produced, into which are being thrown, with no real consideration, further evidence incriminating various persons now deceased (and therefore not able to defend themselves), and elderly people still alive – known and unknown. The impression is created that the entire PRL – not only in the early Stalinist years, but throughout the entire period – was a UB kingdom, which no one was able to resist.⁴²

Jerzy Jedlicki and two younger researchers, Magdalena Micińska and Maciej Janowski, recently set a standard for historical research in a three-volume publication entitled *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej do roku 1918* (History of the Polish Intelligentsia to 1918). Historiographically, it is located precisely at the intersection of disputes between various research models. Its narrative axis is established in the title's "intelligentsia," a term which needed to be defined in order to achieve the work's clear and consistent narrative. Based on the analysis of the virtues and dangers of modern methodological tendencies, Jedlicki, Micińska and Janowski made a clear choice, which was to establish a coherent narrative axis that does not lose the individuality of each volume's author. Jedlicki gave expression to the meaning of this choice:

We must reconcile ourselves with the ambiguity that comes with this collective of names and work with it, maybe even discern its benefits, since a blur of semantic distinctions reflects the chronologically indistinct nature of actual divisions, hierarchies and roles. A living society [...] is not made up, after all, of separate compartments, to which we attach plates with the names of species. Such is the fate of the social historian that he is condemned to using concepts that are not air-tight. [...] Nonetheless, we were concerned that giving in too readily to suggestions of methodologists-narrativists would devalue what are, after all, massive achievements in solidifying the field of social history. [...] In the debate between social

42 Wiktoria Śliwowska, "Dr Jekyll i Mr IPN. Historia i teczki," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 13-14, 2009.

history and the history of “discourses,” we thus took a compromise position or – if one prefers – an eclectic one, recognizing the advantages, but also disadvantages, of each research strategy rigorously treated.⁴³

The quintessence of this statement can be reduced to what is not so much yet another dimension as it is a postulate in the debate over the shape of modern Polish historiography: Beyond the dispute between traditionalism and modernity, there exists (and has always existed) an indisputable need (or lack thereof) for research imagination. Without it, the practice of our academic discipline becomes just “chronicle writing,” which – admittedly – is not always without valuable.

The central motif around which the entire range of methodological disputes revolves is a chain of variations, derivative concepts-categories regarding “nation”: The “Polish nation,” “nationalism,” “national conflict,” “national identity.” The centrality of this issue in the Polish academic and public discourse has been thoroughly analyzed by Tomasz Kizwalter in his study *O nowoczesności narodu. Przypadek Polski* [*The Modern Nation: The Case of Poland*], published in Warsaw in 1999. Often, in the heat of debate over the “meaning” of nation, we forget to actually define what national history really is. Marcin Kula pointed to this problem recently in a lecture entitled “Historia narodowa w ponadnarodowej perspektywie” [“National History in a Transnational Perspective”].⁴⁴ Twentieth-century transformations, which were mainly the result of massive migration processes and decolonization, meant that the traditional understanding of national history became blurred, or even misleading. Millions of residents of the former colonies became French and British, and it is difficult to require of them that they identify with *The Song of Roland* or the “victorious” conquests of the colonial era. The new dimension (or non-dimensionality) of nations in the twentieth century tells us that, though national history cannot be ignored, it must be told differently. Kula proposes:

The approach I advocate does not mean the depreciation or invalidation of anything. On the contrary, sometimes it is precisely a wider background that allows for a better view of particular phenomena. In any case, the proposed approach does not prevent anyone from worshipping

43 Jerzy Jedlicki, Foreword to Maciej Janowski, „Narodziny inteligencji 1750–1831,” vol.1, in *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej do roku 1918* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2008), 9–10.34

44 A paper delivered at a session of the Wspólna Polsko-Niemiecka Komisja Podręcznikowa Historyków i Geografów entitled “Historia i sąsiedztwo. Historia ponadnarodowa jako wyzwanie dla badań historycznych i dydaktyki historii” (Łódź, June 4–6, 2009).

any heroes he wants. Certainly no one and nothing will prevent viewers from bowing their heads in tribute to heroes as they exit the future Museum of the Second World War, and as a result of their tour through the museum – judging from the project design – they will better understand this fragment of history than would be the case if the museum were only a memorial to national glory.⁴⁵

Kula describes four conditions by which we can avoid the “weaknesses that may result from sinking up to our ears in national history.” They form the basis for the development of transnational history. I would summarize Kula’s thoughts, whose goal is to widen the field of both research and narrative, this way: 1. deepened perspective (i. e. “avoid the danger of the backwoods”); 2. comparative analysis; 3. the dominance of the investigation of phenomena over research of the individual facts of national history; and 4. trans-border analysis, or placing things into the perspective of the broader civilizational expanse. Kula illustrates each of these conditions for transnational history using central events in Polish history, which is a more malleable and eloquent way of justifying the need for a “transnational turn” than using hermetic references to methodology.

Kula cites three examples to illustrate deepened perspective: Poland’s regained independence in 1918, the Soviet massacre of Polish officers (and others) in the Katyn Forest in 1940, and the collapse of communism throughout Europe in 1989. We have commonly described and commented on all three of these events to emphasize their Polish uniqueness against the backdrop of the fates of other European nations. But Kula, without neglecting their national significance, proposes revealing deeper layers of these same events:

The Katyn massacre is most often considered a Stalinist crime against the Poles. There is no doubt that it was a crime against Poles. And one can even add that Stalin was probably particularly allergic to the Poles. “In the same breath,” we must note, however, that Stalin treated more than one nation criminally. And that, even in that tragic forest where the NKWD executions took place, remains of people of various nationalities are buried. [...]

The collapse of communism is presented as having been achieved by the Poles. Often, even the theme returns that the Berlin Wall fell to pieces in Gdańsk, etc. In fact, this is only part of the truth. The crisis was one that

45 Ibid., 35

affected the entire “world communist system.” Communism was not only broken by, and perhaps not so much by, an explosion of human anger, as it was destroyed in a system-wide implosion. In Poland, in 1989, there was no longer any exploding mass of people. Other than in Romania and with the ill-fated coup in Moscow, the communists were hardly able to put up a serious defense. This does not mean that we have to diminish the importance of the attitudes and actions of people – but the issues were simply more complicated. The words “We battle for freedom with crosses and strikes” were an understandable expression of Polish dreams. But they cannot substitute for historical analysis, including transnational.⁴⁶

Another example that applies to the description of national history in the context of universal processes and phenomena:

Mass expulsions can, of course, be viewed as part of the national history of the peoples they have affected. However, they can also be viewed as a much broader phenomenon, known in many eras, and – unfortunately – typical of the twentieth century. The displacement of entire peoples in the Soviet Union can be explained within the framework of Stalin’s crimes and paranoia. The expulsion of Germans from the Western and Northern Territories can and should be linked to the war launched by Hitler.[...] But the fact remains that it is impossible to speak of the twentieth century without considering the phenomenon of mass expulsion. Consideration of this issue would, in turn, be incomplete without taking into account earlier great waves of migration – including those that were spontaneous – of the nineteenth century. Migration is, after all, a classic theme, in which case it is impossible to separate national history from transnational history. They are part of the fabric of the history of the emigrant country, part of the history of the immigrant country, and part of universal history.⁴⁷

Drawing on the principle of transnational history, scholars are able to not only give expression to a wealth of specific experiences, but also highlight their importance against a properly expanded background. At the same time, one need not build a monument to national glory. Indirectly, the value of expanding the national perspective in the form of synthesis at the civilizational

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

level was presented, several years ago, by Jan Kieniewicz in his book *Wprowadzeniu do historii cywilizacji Wschodu i Zachodu* (2003). One can, in this new way, analyze the most difficult phenomena, such as the Holocaust, revolutionary expansionism, war crimes, etc.

For several years in the Polish-German context, Klaus Zernack⁴⁸ has successfully implemented a kind of transnational history, as have a generation of his successors, including Michael Müller,⁴⁹ Andreas Lawaty, Martin Schulze-Wessel and Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg. The cultivation of *Beziehungsgeschichte* – “history of mutual interactions” – has become a kind of standard in the study of the history of national relations.⁵⁰ But despite its attractive methodologies and the interesting topics its proponents confront, *Beziehungsgeschichte* is not yet one of the central topics of debate in the context of Polish history. I am under the impression that – from the considerable number of foreign publications on Poland – books that fit into the traditional canon of national memorials, that re-create the heroic fates of Poles, are gaining the interest of the media, not just academic circles. It seems to be a fact that Poles do not want to hear critical voices, and when those voices are published – as in the case of Jan Tomasz Gross (*Neighbors*, 2001; *Fear*, 2006) – critics often turn them into examples of “tendentious, anti-Polish” historiography. Norman Davies has become the most popular historian of Polish history not because of his still inspiring *God's Playground* or his story of Wrocław (*Microcosmos*) along with many others, but because of his vividly written monograph on the Warsaw Uprising, which *nolens volens* responded to a certain kind of social demand in Poland. Recently, Timothy Snyder has managed to break “beyond divisions” into the wider public based on his work on Henryk Józewski, which was awarded the Pro Historia

48 See, among other works, Klaus Zernack, *Niemcy-Polska: z dziejów trudnego dialogu historyograficznego*, ed. Henryk Olszewski, trans. Łukasz Musiał (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2006), from the series “Poznańska Biblioteka Niemiecka,” ed. Hubert Orłowski, Christoph Kleßmann.

49 So far, only Müller’s innovative sketch analyzing the Polish partitions has appeared in Polish. For this, see Michael G. Müller, *Rozbiory Polski. Historia Polski i Europy XVIII wieku* (Poznań: PTPN, 2005).

50 See Michael G. Müller, “Dzieje Polski w najnowszej historiografii niemieckiej,” in “*O nas bez nas.*” *Historia Polski w historiografiach obcojęzycznych*, ed. Witold Molik and Henryk Żaliński, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2007), 79–100. This volume includes some highly interesting and instructive texts on Polish history as viewed from the perspective of non-Polish historiography. For the French perspective, see Daniel Beauvois, “Dzieje Polski w badaniach historyków francuskich XIX wieku,” 49–68. For the American perspective, see John John J. Kulczycki, “Dzieje Polski w amerykańskiej historiografii Europy. Królestwo Nigdzie,” 19–47.

Polonorum prize (the first ever awarded) for best foreign-language book of the previous five years at the International Congress of Polish History.⁵¹ Daniel Beauvois⁵² has secured a permanent place for himself in Polish historiography, but middle-generation historians are still not visible enough, such as Delphine Bechtel from the Sorbonne IV in Paris,⁵³ who deals with Jewish and Central and Eastern Europe issues, and Catherine Gusev. It is regrettable that the work of young and middle-generation German historians, who often have a Polish-German cultural background, still arouses little interest in Poland, such as the above-mentioned Andreas Lawaty,⁵⁴ Markus Krzoska,⁵⁵ and Robert Żurek of the Center for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Centrum Badań Historycznych - Polska Akademia Nauk, hereafter referred to as CBH PAN) in Berlin; Peter Oliver Loew, a researcher of the cultural history of Gdańsk at the Deutsches Polen Institut in Darmstadt;⁵⁶ Katrin Steffen, an expert on issues of Polish Jews from the Nord-Ost Institute; and John Böhler of the Deutsches Historisches

51 Timothy Snyder, *Tajna wojna. Henryk Józewski i polsko-sowiecka rozgrywka o Ukrainę*, trans. Kazimierz Pietrzyk (Kraków: Znak, 2008); See also another work, which produced a somewhat smaller echo, but which is of great significance: Timothy Snyder, *Rekonstrukcja narodów. Polska, Ukraina, Litwa, Białoruś 1569-1999*, trans. Magda Pietrzak-Merta (Sejny: Wydawnictwo: Fundacja Pogranicze, 2007).

52 Mainly based on his *magnum opus*: Daniel Beauvois, *Trójkąt ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793-1914* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2005), second edition 2011.

53 See Delphine Bechtel, "Żydzi w miastach pogranicza: stereotypy określające ich złożoną tożsamość w latach 1897-1939," in *Stereotypy i pamięć*, vol. I, *Akulturacyja/asymilacja na pograniczach kulturowych Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w XIX i XX wieku*, ed. Robert Traba (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Niemiecki Instytut Historyczny, 2009), 100-115. Fortunately, a young generation is coming along, which – in inspiring ways – is helping to transform the Polish-French scholarly landscape, which includes Odile Bour, Damien Thiriet and Emmanuel Droit.

54 His foundational study on the history of Prussia and Polish-German relations has still not appeared in Polish: Andreas Lawaty, *Das Ende Preußens in polnischer Sicht. Zur Kontinuität negativer Wirkungen der preußischen Geschichte auf die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1986).

55 Markus Krzoska, *Für ein Polen an Oder und Ostsee. Zygmunt Wojciechowski (1900-1955) als Historiker und Publizist* (Osnabrück: fibre Verlag, 2003).

56 Peter Oliver Loew, *Danzig und seine Vergangenheit, 1793-1997. Die Geschichtskultur einer Stadt zwischen Deutschland und Polen* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2003). Only a selection of his essays has appeared in Polish on this subject: Peter Olive Loew, *Gdańsk. Między mitami* (Olsztyn: Borussia, 2007).

Institut [German Historical Institute, DHI] in Warsaw.⁵⁷ Their works touch upon problems at the center of the history of Poland and Polish-German relations, representing not so much the so-called German point of view as a generally expanded research perspective.

A valuable contribution to reflections on the nation has been made by Polish Germanists, an inspiring example of which is the collection of articles edited by Izabela Surynt and Marek Zybura: *Opowiedziany naród. Literatura polska i niemiecka wobec nacjonalizmów XIX wieku* (Wrocław: 2006),⁵⁸ along with studies and theses by Leszek Żyliński, Wojciech Kunicki and Joanna Jabłkowska. With international and Polish-German inspiration, multidisciplinary projects by art historians have appeared, focused around such scholars as Jerzy Tomaszewski and Adam Labuda, Jacek Purchla and the Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury (International Cultural Center) in Kraków that he directs,⁵⁹ and Małgorzata Omilanowska, the longtime director of the Instytut Sztuki PAN (Institute of Art).

Non-historians have also described the dangers presented by the national paradigm, including Maria Janion and Hubert Orłowski. Orłowski has explored this topic through national stereotypes,⁶⁰ and he recently formulated his main theses based on the example of the German *Sonderweg* – the German “special path.”⁶¹ In the concluding section of his introduction to the topic,

57 Jochen Böhrer, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg. Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2006). The highly valuable, but unfortunately niche series “Klio w Niemczech” (also “Klio in Polen”) is the creation of the DHI; its first editor was Robert Traba, who was followed by Jerzy Kochanowski and Igor Kąkolewski.

58 From a literary and transdisciplinary (post-colonial) perspective, see Krzysztof Zajas, *Nieobecna kultura. Przypadek Infant Polских* (Kraków: Universitas, 2008).

59 The list of publications, often initiated through international conferences, that are multi- and trans-disciplinary in nature, is long. Here are three examples that mark out three ways of building dialog in various disciplines: *Naród – styl – modernizm*, ed. Jacek Purchla, Wolf Tagethoff, (Kraków-Monachium: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury - Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, 2006); the innovative Polish-English monograph by Monika A. Murzyn, Kazimierz. *Środkowoeuropejskie doświadczenie rewitalizacji/The Central European Experience of Urban Regeneration* (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2006); and *Dziedzictwo kresów-nasze wspólne dziedzictwo?*, ed. Jacek Purchla (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2006).

60 Hubert Orłowski, *Polnische Wirtschaft. Nowoczesny niemiecki dyskurs o Polsce*, trans. Izabela and Sven Sellmer (Olsztyn: Wspólnota Kulturowa Borussia, 1998).

61 Hubert Orłowski, “Spory o *Sonderweg*, o niemiecką ‘drogę odrębną,’” in *Sonderweg. Spory o „niemiecką drogę odrębną,”* selected, developed and introduced by Hubert Orłowski (Poznań: Poznańska, Biblioteka Niemiecka, 2008), 7-50.

Orłowski – a literary scholar by training who is based in Poznań – carried the paradigm by which German national identity was constructed, namely through references to its exceptionality, over to broader universal considerations, and to Polish history. Indirectly, therefore, he has emphasized the need for comparative studies as a condition for the kind of transnational historiography that Marcin Kula talks about. At the same time, Polish historiography has not shied away from discussion of “the peculiarity of our history.” Andrzej Wierzbicki pointed out the presence – in nineteenth-century disputes between the Warsaw and Kraków schools – of the notion of “Polish distinctiveness,” and found them in the thinking of “Polish advocates of historical materialism.”⁶² This thesis is confirmed by Anna Sosnowska’s findings presented in her source-based study *Zrozumieć zacofanie*,⁶³ and – “under the skin,” according to Orłowski – by Maciej Górný’s latest monograph on Polish, Czech and German histories and their interpretation in East German historiography.⁶⁴ Orłowski sees the broadest historical “Sonderweg paradigm” regarding Central Europe in the works of Krzysztof Brzechczyn.⁶⁵

Orłowski finds references to Poland’s peculiar development not only in traditional historiography, but also in constructivist historical-literary reflections. The traditional formulas *Polonia semper fidelis* and *ante murale* are joined by the icon of the “religion of patriotism” – that is, Poland as the “Christ of nations” – corroboration for which can be found in the words of Maria Janon:

A sort of messianic-patriotic heresy spreads, which treats the fatherland as an absolute. [Czesław] Miłosz, protesting against it, made himself vulnerable to those who found it quite natural that Poland was in the position of being a martyr at God’s will. Krasiński, after all, believed that nations are derived from the will of God – the Polish nation in particular was especially chosen.⁶⁶

62 See Andrzej Wierzbicki, *Wschód–Zachód w koncepcjach dziejów Polski. Z dziejów polskiej myśli historycznej w dobie porzeczności* (Warszawa: PIW, 1984), 293 ff.

63 See Anna Sosnowska, *Zrozumieć zacofanie. Spory historyków o Europę Wschodnią (1947–1994)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2004).

64 See Maciej Górný, *Przede wszystkim ma być naród. Marksistowskie historiografie w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2007).

65 See Krzysztof Brzechczyn, *Odrębność historyczna Europy Środkowej. Studium metodologiczne* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, 1998); Orłowski, “Spory o Sonderweg.”

66 For my anti-national heresy, see “Rozmowa z Marią Janon,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 27–28, 2006.

Searching for Polish roots in the *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna*, Janion constructs – according to Orłowski – a theorem about the Poles as being “foreign unto themselves.”⁶⁷ If one sets aside hagiographic aspects of Polish history as a tangle of heroic deeds and sufferings, then probably the most-often encountered determinant of “*polskość*”⁶⁸ is the symbolic sense of belonging to a Polish community of romantic provenance.⁶⁹

In her most recent work, Janion went much further in the deconstruction of the romantic myth of Polish culture.⁷⁰ Into the classic triad of Polish patriotism (the romantic hero, independence conspiracy, death on the field of honor) she inscribed Jewish experiences: the Jewish hero, the Jewish conspiracy, the Holocaust. Based on a detailed literary inquiry, she convincingly showed how inextricably intertwined the Jewish presence was in the mainstream of Polish national history, breaking the paradigm of national homogeneity.⁷¹ In her research Professor Janion has realized the postulate put forward in the work of Maria Czapska in 1957, who wrote in the Parisian *Kultura* (a prominent Polish-émigré literary-political magazine) that, in the wake of the Holocaust, a bond was established between Poland and the Jewish people “that is not within our power to break.” From an entirely different perspective, analyzing monographs on cities and towns in Podlasie and Mazovia, I pointed to a false national paradigm and how deeply rooted it is in our culture. Despite the fact that, in each of these towns, Jews made up – until the Holocaust – 40-80% of the population, the Jewish presence was presented under the banner of “the role of national minorities.” Instead of the history of a city, what was created was a fragment of Polish national history within the city.⁷²

67 See Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006).

68 Translator's note: *Polskość* is a loaded term in the Polish language, one that is difficult to translate smoothly into English. It refers to all that which is Polish, that which distinguishes Poles and Polish culture from other peoples and cultures. It is most often translated as “Polishness,” but given the complexity of the term, we will use throughout this book the original “*polskość*.”

69 Orłowski, “Spory o Sonderweg,” 42.

70 Maria Janion, *Hero, Conspiracy, and Death: The Jewish Lectures*, trans. Alex Shannon (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014); see also Jerzy Jedlicki, “Bezradność. Polacy wobec Żydów,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 27-28, 2009.

71 See Kazimiera Szczuka, “Żydzi Marii Janion,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 13-14, 2009.

72 Robert Traba, “Ciągłość i historia przerywana: miasto w długim trwaniu,” ed. Krzysztof Markowski, *O nowy model historycznych badań regionalnych* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2007); French version: “Continuité et histoire interrompue: la ville

2. Imagination and Interdisciplinarity

Polish historiography is not threatened by crisis, contrary to what some may complain today.⁷³ In fact, Polish “historical studies are alive” and well.⁷⁴ There is, however, a need for genuine debate that does not revolve around *teczki* in the IPN archives, “lustration,” or short-term and politically inspired discussions designed to establish the “only real” truth about, for example, the PRL. The key to opening a new quality of debate may be this postulate: We must look at “our own past” through the prism of transnational histories (in the spirit of re-negotiation). I see another key in the promotion of debate about diversity in methodological strategies (in the spirit of an expanded perspective). Such a debate has been taking place for many years, though in the background, and the results have never been fully realized. None of this means that I want to create out of interdisciplinarity a canon of modern historical research; I am an advocate of a polyphonic narrative about the past, whose overriding feature is not some hermetic method, but rather imagination, close in spirit to the message put forth by Jerzy Jedlicki.

Historical imagination is distinct from fantasy, and it is something different than intuition. It is distinct from fantasy in that – because it is rooted in the scenario of real events – it recognizes alternative histories and is accompanied by an awareness of multidisciplinary. As opposed to intuition, imagination is not something that one has (or does not have), but it is something that one can learn. Thus, awareness of its presence is not a dead postulate. The starting point of “teaching (and learning) imagination” is to draw attention to narrative polyphony and to a diversified body of sources and methods of analyzing them. Mastering the skill of exploiting these potentials can also influence the style of the narrative, determining how truly communicative it is.

We live in a *f u s i o n* world, in which everything is mixed up with everything else. The building of boundaries and deepening of one’s own research instrumentarium is indeed desirable. But I would like to see interdisciplinarity in Polish historiography take its rightful place, that it not be pushed into the role of contrived postulate that has to be, at best, tolerated. Paradoxically, in this state of affairs, a great (potential) flywheel modernizing not only the study of history, but also humanistic studies more broadly, is – among

dans la ‘longue durée’ dans l’historiographie polonaise, considérations méthodologiques,” in *Multiculturalité Urbaine en Europe Centrale. Villes moyennes et bourgades en Europe Centrale*, ed. Delphine Bechtel (Paris: Xavier Galmiche, 2008), 19–32. See also Traba, *Historia – przestrzeń dialogu*, 109–122.

73 See Jacek Żakowski’s diagnosis, “Bajarze piszą nam historię,” *Polityka* 15 (2009).

74 Śliwowska, “Dr Jekyll i Mr IPN. Historia i teczki,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 13–14, 2009.

other things – three major projects-book series, whose output has already amounted to 110 (!) volumes, with more just waiting to be printed. *Spiriti movens* and *spiriti rector* of these inter- and transdisciplinary projects are three scholars with recognized international achievements as researchers and authors: Marcin Kula, a historian with a sociology background, and his series “W krainie PRL” [“In the Land of the PRL”]; Hubert Orłowski in literature, but with a background in cultural history and historical semantics, and his series “Poznańska Biblioteka Niemiecka” (the German Library of Poznań); and Andrzej Mencwel in cultural studies, who has a literature background, but is also defined as a historian, and the series “Communicare.”

DIGRESSION. The claim that concepts at the heart of memory (and remembrance) analysis move about in the space of inter- and multi-disciplinary research is not merely a needless obscuration of the image in the name of theoretical contemplation. A common experience in recent years has been the abuse of “interdisciplinarity” in a way that both simplifies and formalizes it. In some environments, it is expedient to refer to new trends in scholarship. Indeed, it is too often the case that interdisciplinarity ends at some point in an eclectic introduction, after which the main narrative is confined to monodisciplinary lecturing. One of the first comparative discussions in Poland of different ways to pursue historical analysis – published in 1996 as part of a series I edited (“Klio w Niemczech”) – passed with little interest, and little response.⁷⁵ In 2007, over the course of an online discussion – which was conducted on a forum of the Międzywydziałowe Indywidualne Studia Humanistyczne (Inter-faculty Individual Studies in the Humanities, MISH), and which addressed the distinction between inter- and trans-disciplinarity in the context of Michał P. Markowski and Ryszard Nycz’s *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy* (Universitas, 2012)⁷⁶ – the wave of attitudes toward the issue shifted from surprise and rejection to understanding and acceptance.⁷⁷ Subtle distinctions between multi-, trans- and interdisciplinarity

75 *Historia społeczna, historia codzienności, mikrohistoria*, trans. Andrzej Kopacki, ed. Winfried Schulze, et al., (Warszawa: Volumen-Niemiecki Instytut Historyczny, 1996), 67 (in the series “Klio w Niemczech,” Robert Traba, ed.).

76 The book came out as part of a multi-volume series entitled “Horyzonty Nowoczesności;” also important in the historical debate are Paul Ricoeur, *Pamięć, historia, zapomnienie*, trans. Janusz Margański (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), and an interesting volume of studies from Polish cultural anthropology circles, *Dylematy wielokulturowości*, ed. Wojciech Kalaga, (Kraków: Universitas, 2004).

77 Nycz uses the term “interdisciplinary research,” accessed September 27, 2014, <http://www.mishogolnopolski.fora.pl/hyde-park,15/transdyscyplinowosc-a-interdyscyplinarnosc,58.html>

could represent the first step in the search for answers to the question: what is interdisciplinary research supposed to be in practice? In my view, this question remains essential, though it is one that is too seldom discussed. Parenthetically, I would like to point out that – on the Polish version of the most popular and rapidly changing (though not always fully reliable) internet encyclopedia “Wikipedia” – there is no entry for “interdisciplinarity,” or even “multi-disciplinarity” or “trans-disciplinarity!” In the humanities as cultivated in Poland, it is probably literary scholars and young researchers who most intensively address this topic, as evidenced, for example, by Anna Burzyńska and Michał Markowski’s *Teorie literatury XX wieku* (Kraków: 2007) – a specialist’s work that is simultaneously open to other disciplines. The Humanities Forum [Forum Humanistyczne], which brings together young scholars from various disciplines of contemporary humanities (cultural anthropology, culture studies, philosophy, literature studies, history, archeology and sociology) under the “Colloquia Humaniorum,” has already released two successful works corresponding to the requirements of “humanistic imagination” and interdisciplinarity.⁷⁸

Simply put, and without going into all the intricacies of contemporary methodological debate,⁷⁹ interdisciplinarity is based on an interactive meeting of various methodological concepts and research techniques to be used to expand the new and complex catalogue of research questions, to reach for a diversified range of sources and/or (in this context) to build an innovative narrative quality. Multidisciplinary research is based on an awareness that various disciplines coexist without entering into interaction between them. Trans-disciplinarity is the most prevalent. It takes studies of a particular phenomenon, which use different methodological perspectives and exist side by side, and transforms them into a dialogue, by which those perspectives supplement and borrow from one another, and through which the mono-disciplinary narrative is expanded.

A young sociologist and cultural studies expert from Łódź, Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, accurately addressed, in a particular context, the issue of the unreflective use of interdisciplinarity:

78 *Granice dyscyplinarne w humanistyce*, ed. Jacek Kowalewski, Wojciech Piasek, Marta Śliwa (Olsztyn: Colloquia Humaniorum, 2006); *Zaangażowanie czy izolacja? Współczesne strategie społecznej egzystencji humanistów*, ed. Jacek Kowalczewski and Wojciech Piasek (Olsztyn: Colloquia Humaniorum, 2007).

79 An intensive European discussion on this subject has been going on at least since the 1990s. As one example, see the overview: *Transdisziplinarität. Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven*, ed. Frank Brand, Franz Schaller, Harald Völker (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2004).

In the literature (not only Polish) one sees a tendency to talk about inter-disciplinarity in places where you can listen to one another, but where it is difficult to establish dialogue.⁸⁰

It is worth noting that, in Poland, both the practice of inter- and transdisciplinarity and debate on this subject have been going on for many years. Their predecessors were recruited for a long time not from the circle of historians, but from sociologists of culture, led by Antonina Kłoskowska and Jerzy Szacki, and from the editors and authors of *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*. They were accompanied by the Warsaw school of the history of ideas.

POST-DIGRESSION. The three series mentioned above – *W krainie PRL* (with its subtitle: *People. Issues. Problems. PRL Reality Read from Files, Documents, Records and Various Studies*); the “Poznańska Biblioteka Niemiecka”; and “Com-municare” – provide excellent foreground for discussion of this topic. This is what Paweł Machcewicz said during discussions at Warsaw’s Dom Spotkań z Historią [History Meeting House] about the series *W krainie PRL*:

There is no other series in which so many books would appear and which, at the same time, would retain its identity. I think an alternative paradigm to view the PRL has been successfully created.⁸¹

But in my opinion, “W krainie PRL” succeeded in creating something even greater: a multi-perspective narrative about history in general based on the PRL example. The series – whose editorial committee includes Włodzimierz Borodziej, Paweł Machcewicz, Andrzej Paczkowski, Tomasz Szarota and Wojciech Wrzesiński – was shaped by Marcin Kula who, from the beginning of his academic career, has been rooted in issues at the intersection of various disciplines and various national histories, through family (he is the son of a Polish historian associated with the French Annales School and of sociologist Nina Assorodobraj-Kula), and through his research interests (previously, his focus was the history of Brazil). But I locate the essence of innovation and the success of “W krainie PRL” elsewhere, in the first epigraph to the collection of essays and sketches with the emphatic title *O co chodzi w historii?* (2008),

⁸⁰ The quote is taken from a paper “Wątpliwości wokół teorii pamięci kulturowej,” delivered at a conference entitled “Kulturoznawstwo a wiedza historyczna” in Wrocław, May 22–23, 2009, which appears in *Kultura Współczesna*. The Conference, organized by the cultural studies expert from Wrocław Stefan Bednark, represented a significant attempt to show the place and role of history in cultural studies, which until then was derived from linguistics and literature studies.

⁸¹ “W krainie PRL,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 6, 2008.

where Kula confessed his creed (and more) with the words of Albert Einstein: imagination is more important than knowledge!

Most of the publications in this series are devoted to the history of everyday life, a sub-discipline of historical research that became popular in Europe back in the late 1960s through French and Italian historiography. But research results produced by authors in the “W krainie PRL” series do not just fall within the category of “history of everyday life;” they also develop and expand upon that category in innovative ways.⁸² I locate a second research current at the intersection of the history of ideas and mentalities, five examples of which are works by Marcin Zaremba, Anna Sosnowska, Maciej Górny, Anna Wawrzyniak and Zofia Wóycicka.⁸³ A third current examines political rituals – that is, a part of the political culture that is, in itself, understood as a research category.⁸⁴ The fourth current includes the classic study of political history, though one that tackles unconventional subjects and questions.⁸⁵ Somewhere “in between” we find works on the history of culture,⁸⁶ and finally

82 See Jolanta Muszyńska, Aneta Osiak and Dorota Wojtera, *Obraz codzienności w prasie stanu wojennego, Gdańsk, Kraków, Warszawa* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2006); Błażej Brzostek, *Za progiem. Codziennosc w przestrzeni publicznej Warszawy lat 1955–1970* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2007); Bartłomiej Gapiński, *Sacrum i codzienność. Prośby o modlitwę nadsyłane do Kalwarii Zebrzydowskiej w latach 1965–1979* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2008); Jakub Ferenc, *Sport w służbie polityki. Wyścig Pokoju 1948–1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2008).

83 Rafał Stobiecki, *Historiografia PRL. Ani dobra, ani mądra, ani piękna ... ale skomplikowana. Studia i szkice* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2007); Maciej Górny, *Przed wszystkim ma być naród*; Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Bohaterowie, męczennicy, ofiary. ZBoWiD i pamięć drugiej wojny światowej 1949–1969* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2009); Zofia Wóycicka, *Przerwana żałoba. Polskie spory wokół pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych z Zagłady 1944–1950* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2009).

84 Piotr Osęka, *Rytuały stalinizmu. Oficjalne święta i uroczystości rocznicowe w Polsce 1944–1956* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2007); *Odmiany i oblicza komunizmu. Węgry, Polacy i inni*, ed. Maciej Koźmiński, (Warszawa: ISP PAN i Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2006).

85 Bartosz Cichocki, Krzysztof Józwiak, *Najważniejsze są kadry. Centralna Szkoła Partyjna PPR/PZPR* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2006); Marek Wierzbicki, *Związek Młodzieży Polskiej i jego członkowie w latach 1948–1957* (Warszawa: ISP PAN and Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2006); Krzysztof Dąbek, *PZPR – retrospektywny portret własny* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2006).

86 See Marek Cieśliński, *Piękniej niż w życiu. Polska Kronika Filmowa 1944–1994* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2006); Monika Talarczyk-Gubała, *PRL się śmieje! Polska komedia filmowa lat 1945–1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2007); Anna Pelka, *Teksas-land. Moda młodzieżowa w PRL* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2007); Arkadiusz Gajewski, *Polski film sensacyjno-kryminalny (1960–1980)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2008).

something completely groundbreaking in Polish academia, namely studies in the field of *l'histoire croix*.⁸⁷

The “Poznańska Biblioteka Niemiecka” series is a projection of the strength of Hubert Orłowski’s instrumentarium. The significance of this series rests not so much in the fact that, within just a few years, it managed to publish 30 volumes on various phenomena related to German culture widely defined, but rather in the fact that these are works that, in the mainstream of thought on European culture, would not last long on the Polish publishing market. Seven of these volumes were developed by Orłowski, but above all he was the one who created the wider structure of the entire series, giving it a consistent but highly diverse and interdisciplinary character. One could say that the works published in “Poznańska Biblioteka Niemiecka” are – on the whole – a product of the humanistic imagination of its creator. The interdisciplinary nature of the project itself was realized – to take just a few examples – in studies by Norbert Elias⁸⁸ and Reinhart Koselleck,⁸⁹ and in the travels in “time and space” of Karl Schlögel.⁹⁰

“Communicare” has its origins in the anthropological interests of Andrzej Mencwel, the longtime director of the Instytut Kultury Polskiej at the University Warsaw.⁹¹ This series – like the others – includes publications that are on the borders between disciplines, with an accent on history, such as those by Jacques LeGoff, Aleksander Gieysztor, Jan Assmann and Marcin

87 See Małgorzat Mazurek, *Socjalistyczny zakład pracy. Porównanie fabrycznej codzienności w PRL i NRD u progu lat sześćdziesiątych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2005); *Socjalizm w życiu powszednim. Dyktatura a społeczeństwo w PRL i NRD*, ed. Sandrine Kott, Marcin Kula, Thomas Lindenberger (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2006).

88 Norbert Elias, *Studies on the Germans: Power Struggles & Development of Habitus in the 19th & 20th centuries* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1996).

89 Reinhart Koselleck, *Semantyka historyczna*, ed. Henryk Orłowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2001).

90 Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003).

91 See Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organisation of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Anna Wierzbicka, *Słowa kluczowe. Różne języki – różne kultury* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2007); Grzegorz Godlewski, *Słowo – pismo – sztuka słowa. Perspektywy antropologiczne* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008); Christian Vandendorpe, *Du papyrus à l'hypertexte. Essai sur les mutations du texte et de la lecture* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999).

Filipowicz.⁹² The crowning achievement of the series so far, however, is a volume of studies by Mencwel himself that illustrate the author's 20-year-long path through "anthropological imagination."⁹³ It is, in the words of Karol Modzelewski, a "profession of faith and of a particular kind of program."⁹⁴ With reference to historians, Modzelewski develops Mencwel's postulate as follows:

We historians are very often not able to recognize what, in our present day, is a trace of the past, its duration, its heritage. And even if we are able to recognize it, we cannot interpret how it works in contemporary culture. For that you need an anthropologist, a sociologist, a cultural studies expert, a literary scholar, so that we are able to learn more about the hot issues on the map of our times, so that we are able to move into that present. We must get out of our ruts in order, together, to pose the most important questions and search for answers, in a common effort, though with each of us in our respective competencies.⁹⁵

This puts into question my belief in the need for interdisciplinarity. Whether my belief is justified or not is a question I will be able to answer more fully once I gain some distance from the completed "Polish-German Realms of Memory" [Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci/Deutsch-polnische Erinnerungsorte] project at CBH PAN in Berlin, about which I have more to say below. For now, regarding Mencwel's message on interdisciplinarity, I have one comment, which continues the thinking of Krzysztof Pomian: I fear the domination of culturalism. Mencwel rejects this allegation:

I am on the side of integral humanities, but not on the side of the "integration of the humanities." It is impossible to integrate the various fields of scholarship, if one begins from the point of divisions, because these

92 Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Aleksander Gieysztor, *Mitologia Słowian*, updated and expanded edition (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2006); Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Marcin Filipowicz, *Urodzić naród. Z problematyki czeskiej i słowackiej literatury kobiecej II połowy XIX wieku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2009).

93 Andrzej Mencel, *Wyobrażenia antropologiczne* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2006).

94 Karol Modzelewski, "Wokół książki Andrzeja Mencwela, *Wyobrażenia antropologiczne*," *Przegląd filozoficzno-literacki* 4 (21) (2008): 26.

95 Ibid., 30–31.

divisions have taken on real form - indeed institutionally - and can no longer be transgressed, then all so-called connections will be little more than rigid prostheses, rejected at the first step, because one cannot walk on them. Instead, one must cultivate the humanities in particular areas, overstepping their boundaries with the idea that it has only one object in common [...], man and his world. In other words, from this perspective, divisions among fields and academic specializations are derivative, secondary and ancillary to the fundamental obligation of all humanities, which is man in culture and culture in man.⁹⁶

The assortment of topics in the series "Communicare" seems, in any case, to confirm the dominance of culturalistic topics, which Pomian perceives generally as the leading tendency of Mencwel's program:

The study of culture cannot be separated from the study of nature, especially the "second nature" that culture becomes for those who inherit it as something obvious, of which they are not even aware. [...] Culture is - in this case, to a large extent - the word and writing, wherein their material dimension is treated as secondary, to the extent that it is not avoided altogether. I am under the impression that your [Mencwel's] understanding of culture is not so much communicative [...] as it is semiotic. Each of these concepts leads to another research questionnaire, and draws attention to other matters. For you [Mencwel], at the center of things are signs and meaning.

This conclusion reminds me of German historian Reinhart Koselleck's doubts regarding history of the second degree (that is, the one dealing, among other things, with memory). Koselleck - to put it simply - feared the domination of "memory" (as well as the culturalist approach), which could lead to a situation where there is no way to distinguish between the Second and Third German Reichs. Mencwel's imagination, which was so creatively developed, for example, in *Etos Lewicy*,⁹⁷ or in the metaphorically entitled study *Przedwiośnie czy potop*,⁹⁸ allows us to hold the conviction that the series "Communicare" maintains the multidisciplinary balance of its publications.

96 Mencwel, "Odpowiedź," *Przegląd filozoficzno-literacki* 4 (21) (2008): 52.

97 Andrzej Mencwel, *Etos lewicy. Esej o narodzinach kulturalizmu polskiego* (Warszawa: PIW, 1990).

98 Andrzej Mencwel, *Przedwiośnie czy potop. Studium postaw polskich w XX wieku* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1997).

At the end of the 1970s, the Warsaw historian Tadeusz Łepkowski wrote, almost prophetically:

Generally, historians are aware of the fact that judgments they make are not perfect. They are limited by the horizon of a particular history, of a usually narrow experience gained over a very short period of time. I suppose that, among other reasons, this is precisely why history carried out as a team has a great future. It gathers together the experience and knowledge of many individuals. Obviously this is not the mere sum of parts, but something far greater and qualitatively different than history as individually thought out.⁹⁹

That “something far greater and qualitatively different” can be interdisciplinarity, practiced in research teams. One of the forerunners of interdisciplinarity is research carried out in the United States since the 1970s on the Holocaust, which in Poland today continues and is being successfully developed, for example, at Barbara Engelking’s Center for Holocaust Research [Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów].

Since 2006, the “Polish-German Realms of Memory” project at CBH PAN in Berlin has become a sort of laboratory in this field.¹⁰⁰ Its aim is – on the basis of a redefined *lieux de mémoire* – to write a collective synthesis of Polish-German relations, not of the history of events themselves, but of the mutual perception of events, characters, and geographical topoi, all of which serve as artifacts, living symbols that make up the functional memory of Poles and Germans. The vast majority of the project’s authors are historians, who are supported by a group of historians of literature and literary scholars (mainly Germanists), along with a sociologist, a cultural theorist and a political scientist. Perhaps from the perspective of, for example, a sociologist, one could get the impression that this is only a multi-disciplinary project, one that does not build interactive methodological tension, but rather just borrows relevant terminology from other disciplines. But I would disagree. From the perspective of the historian’s research instrumentarium, the “Polish-German Realms of Memory” project is interdisciplinary in two ways. First, it provides an escape

99 Tadeusz Łepkowski, *Przeszłość miniona i teraźniejsza* (Warszawa: PIW, 1980), 16.

100 For more on this subject, see Kornelia Kończal, “Bliskie spotkania z historią drugiego stulecia,” in *Pamięć zbiorowa jako czynnik integracji i źródło konfliktów*, ed. Andrzej Szociński (Warszawa: Scholar, 2009), 207–226; Robert Traba, “Historia wzajemnych oddziaływań (*Beziehungsgeschichte*) i konstrukcja ‘miejsc żywej pamięci’ (*lieux de mémoire*)? Przypadek Polski i Niemiec,” in *Pamięć polska, pamięć niemiecka*, ed. Zdzisław Noga and Martin Schulze Wessel (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2009), 62–77.

from the blind alley of positivist narration that Peter Burke described several years ago.¹⁰¹ Second, any kind of single-directional interdisciplinarity (based on the principle that only history enriches) prevents a proper formulation of research problems. At the heart of the project are descriptions and analysis of those moments when the process of creating realms of memory is initiated; of the mechanisms by which they are rooted in society; of the dynamics by which they are eventually pushed to the level of archiving memory; of their “revival” in the public sphere (cultural memory); and of their diverse functions depending on the contexts of class, religion, region or gender. Fields of research so defined force authors to depart from the framework of their own scholarly discipline, to learn new mechanisms of communication, which – taken together – additionally enhance a universalized body of sources: from various types of mass media and the internet, through literature, iconography, and architecture, to classic archival sources.

However, in this case, too, there is a danger of escaping into one’s own discipline, or into excessive historicization, especially given that trans-disciplinary dialogue itself is so seldom practiced in Poland. Parallel categories often operate to describe the same or similar phenomena. One work put out by CBH PAN in Berlin, *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci* [A Lexicon of Cultural Memory], defines – from perspectives of different disciplines – the phenomenon of mnemonics widely conceived, and is designed to help us escape from the trap of being self-contained in one’s own discipline.

One of the most successful individual examples of interdisciplinary research is the work of Hubert Orłowski. Personally, as a historian, I discovered – for my own use – Orłowski’s broad talents as an interdisciplinary scholar in the context of two fundamental syntheses of German historiography: Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* and Thomas Nipperdey’s *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1918*. Orłowski – a literary scholar – wrote an analytical study that merged both works, like no other historian of Poland, into a broad discourse around the famous “Bielefeld school” and its *Sozialgeschichte*. Indirectly, he created an interesting critique of the positivist historiography dominant in Polish scholarship. Orłowski seems to say: Facts, history as events, can provide important material, but they cannot be the finale of a modern academic work. Only when the author places those facts and events into the broad context of social and cultural processes, using his own chosen methodological approach, can he/she create an original, innovative scholarly work. This does not negate event history; rather, it calls for its modernization in the spirit of *Sozialgeschichte*, of Koselleck’s historical semantics, and takes

¹⁰¹ Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (London: Polity Press, 2005); see also Traba, *Historia – przestrzeń dialogu*, 23 ff. 50

advantage of the innovative nature of Pierre Bourdieu's theories of cultural/social capital, his "field concept," and his notion of symbolic violence.

If I had to describe the intellectual reservoir from which Orłowski continues to draw new and inspirational ideas, I would mention several names: Pierre Bourdieu (sociologist), Reinhart Koselleck (historian), Max Weber (sociologist, political philosopher), Norbert Elias (cultural sociologist, historian), Walter Benjamin (writer, philosopher), Florian Znaniecki (cultural sociologist), Gottfried Benn (writer, philosopher), M. Rainer Lepsius (sociologist of politics), Wolf Lepenies (cultural sociologist), Klaus Zernack (historian and creator of *Beziehungsgeschichte*), Jürgen Kocka (historian in the Bielefeld school), Anthony Mączak (historian), and Michał Głowinski (literary scholar). One could add more names to this list, but I will venture to argue that, in terms of his "intellectual horizon," the above list aptly defines the expanse of Orłowski's preferences, indeed his academic fascinations; he is a literary scholar who – by reaching beyond the framework of his own discipline – promotes and implements the concept of interdisciplinarity.

At the same time, Orłowski shapes his multi-disciplinary instrumentarium with the research operationalization of such categories as stereotype/stereotyping, modernization, and *Bildungsbürgertum*, which have become central categories in describing cultural and social phenomena, in Germany and beyond. Using them (and surrounding them with new sub-categories and his own vocabulary-keywords), he has explored and described the phenomenon of German totalitarianism in Wilhelminian society, the reality of the Weimar Republic, and German-Polish relations.

In this context, by way of a practical exemplification of the wealth of Orłowski's research instrumentarium and its application in the analysis of concrete historical processes, I will mention five works that are each different and yet – each in its own way – interdisciplinary: His *magnum opus*, namely *Polnische Wirtschaft. Nowoczesny niemiecki dyskurs o Polsce* (1998); *Die Lesbarkeit von Stereotypen. Der deutsche Polendiskurs im Blick historischer Stereotypenforschung und historischer Semantik* (2004 and 2005); *Dzieje kultury niemieckiej* (2006, with Czesław Karolak and Wojciech Kunicki); and two smaller works, *Warmia z oddali. Odpominania* (2000) and *Rzecz o dobrach symbolicznych. Gietrzwałd 1877* (2005). These five publications indicate not only the breadth of topics Orłowski takes on, but also the range of his literary forms and intellectual reflections: An analytical study of *polnische Wirtschaft*, that meta-stereotype of "long duration"; syntheses authored by him (*Dzieje kultury niemieckiej*) and edited by him (*Polacy-Niemcy*); a personal, autobiographical sketch integrated into a great narrative about the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and a micro-historical study of the Marian apparition at Gietrzwałd in 1877 that has more to say about the "Warmian Lourdes" than most historical-theological studies.

Closing

Minister Zdrojewski's hesitation over a suitable term to describe the social function of history ("politics of the past" versus "politics of memory") was justified. The semantic potential of both terms is variously and ambiguously defined. The young Polish sociologist Lech Nijakowski has examined these terms in depth, and he convincingly advocates for the use of the term "politics of memory" rather than "politics of the past." He distinguishes three possible definitions of "politics of memory," to draw the following conclusion:

The full definition would read as follows: politics of memory consists of all intentional actions of politicians and officials, having formal legitimacy, whose aim is the perpetuation, removal, or redefinition of specific content of social memory.¹⁰²

But there is no consensus in this regard within the academic community. Bartosz Korzeniowski, for example, argues against Nijakowski's position.¹⁰³ German historian Hans Henning Hahn, in an article published in Polish, sees some differences between the two terms, but he concludes that, methodologically, every so-called "politics of the past" is actually "politics of memory" (*Erinnerungspolitik*).¹⁰⁴ Regardless of which term one accepts, the very fact that Nijakowski has marked out – for the first time with extensive definition – the field of academic discourse deserves our attention. Personally, I prefer to use a term other than the "politics of the past": the "politics of memory" or "*polityka wobec historii*" (politics toward history; politics in the face of history), given the amorphous nature of the colloquial understanding of the term "memory." Why do I prefer one of these other terms? First – at least in the case of "politics of memory" – because in its substantive sense, it embeds memory/history into the process of its social function. This wording makes it clear that politics is trying to construct cultural memory and to shape a model for the political perception of a nation's past. Second, because the "politics of the past" reminds me of interference by governments in academic autonomy, which is characteristic of authoritarian and totalitarian

¹⁰² Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci*, 44.

¹⁰³ See Bartosz Korzeniowski, "Wprowadzenie. Polityka historyczna – propozycje definicji i spory wokół jej zakresu w polskim i niemieckim dyskursie naukowym," in *Narodowe i europejskie aspekty polityki historycznej* ed. Korzeniowski (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2008), 7–28.

¹⁰⁴ Hans Henning Hahn, "Pamięć zbiorowa – przedmiot polityki historycznej," 39.

governments. The “politics of the past” is also limited almost automatically to the “state,” understood as the representative of the political constellation currently in power. In a democratic country, we have at least four public actors who potentially participate in the process of negotiating the vision of history in society: government (political representation); local/regional authorities as representatives of regional historical contexts (depending on the degree of their autonomy); independent media; and civil society organized in different types of associations and organizations, including those that are religious.

An indirect but positive result of the dispute about the “new politics of the past” from 2004–2007 are valuable publications that have generally deepened our thinking on the social functions of history, which – for Poznań philosopher Bartosz Korzeniewski – have become a central topic of research.¹⁰⁵ They also play a role in Ewa Domańska’s reflections on methodology and contemporary historiography.¹⁰⁶ The first individual attempt to outline the research field of collective memory was *Historia – przestrzeń dialogu*.¹⁰⁷ Publications put out by the Instytut Zachodni and the IPN are a collection of studies which – despite their eclectic nature – can be considered a first attempt at a synthetic approach to the subject.¹⁰⁸ The Polish–German historiographical dialogue has also proven to be inspiring.¹⁰⁹ Sociological studies in Poland have been crowned by a multi-volume series “Współczesne Społeczeństwo Polskie wobec Przeszłości,” edited by Andrzej Szpociński.¹¹⁰ New energy

105 Bartosz Korzeniewski, *Polityczne rytuały pokuty w perspektywie zagadnienia autonomii jednostki* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2006), along with many related articles.

106 Ewa Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne. Refleksja o przeszłości w nowej humanistyce* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2006).

107 Traba, *Historia – przestrzeń dialogu*.

108 *Narodowe i europejskie aspekty polityki historycznej*; ed. Bartosz Korzeniewski, *Przemiany pamięci społecznej a teoria kultury*, ed. Bartosz Korzeniewski (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2007).

109 See *Erinnerungsorte, Mythen und Stereotypen in Europa/ Miejsca pamięci, mity i stereotypy w Europie*, ed. Heidi Hein-Kircher, Jarosław Suchoples, Hans Henning Hahn (Wrocław: ATUT, 2008); the entire series of publications is the initiative of Basil Kerski, under the patronage of *Dialog. Magazyn polsko-niemiecki*; an interesting summary of the debate about the politics of memory in Eastern Europe can be found in a special issue of the Berlin monthly edited by Manfred Sapper, *Osteuropa*, (2008, 6/Juni).

110 Barbara Szacka, *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo ISP PAN, 2006). Despite this study’s innovation, and the recognition it received, the one thing that is worrying is the lack of dialog with historical studies focused on memory issues.

continues to be provided by the essays and journalistic writing of Marcin Kula¹¹¹ and Andrzej Mencwel.¹¹² Such periodicals as *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, *Kultura Współczesna*, *Znak* (Kraków), *Przegląd Polityczny* (Gdańsk) and *Borussia* (Olsztyn) systematically enrich the debate.

With the wealth of topics contained in those publications in mind, all of which deserve more consideration than can be given here, I would like to mention a single – but essential – issue raised by Hahn: the cross-border “politics of memory.”

Under the pretext [Hahn writes] that a uniting Europe needs a common history and, with that, a collective memory, what is actually involved here is the authoritarian interpretation of not just the history of Europe, but also the history of regions and the individual nations of Europe.¹¹³

I share Hahn's concerns. Hegemonic memory discourses built upon power advantages of “one's own country over others” create the danger that memory will be appropriated by the most powerful. And yet it is difficult to claim that, in a “Europe without borders,” democratic, self-identified communities will function only within a confined space; such a thing is all the more difficult to expect given that – even within internal structures – collective memory is in a constant state of flux and social re-negotiation. We must therefore strive to develop a new, secure set of rules for the political game, which I would call – reflecting Hahn's views – a code of conduct for the politics of memory, whose basic point would be autonomy for individual communities of memory that need to be respected in relation to their own memories/experiences, and to the memories/experiences of “others.”¹¹⁴

I deliberately finished this “opening sketch” with a “closing” rather than an “end” or a “conclusion.” Public debate in Poland about the “two dimensions” of history is by no means concluded. In fact, it is in a phase of increasingly intensive development, and it is to this fact, first of all, that the motif of “closing”

111 See Marcin Kula's *Komunizm po komunizmie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2006), along with the work cited above, *O co chodzi w historii?*. See also *Wybór tradycji* (Warszawa: DiG, 2003); *Religiopodobny komunizm* (Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, 2004); *Między przeszłością a przyszłością* (Poznań: Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 2004).

112 Andrzej Mencwel, *Rodzinna Europa po raz pierwszy. Dialogi o polskiej formie* (Kraków: Universitas, 2009).

113 Hahn, “Pamięć zbiorowa,” 33.

114 See *ibid.*, 41–42; in this context, see also the “Appel de Blois” (2008) of the international guild of historians.

refers. Second, it refers directly to the deeper meaning of the reflections I have presented in the above “sketch” and, perhaps even more importantly, to the arguments with which I began my volume *Kraina tysiąca granic* (2003). In subsequent sections of this book, I will make no further attempt to synthesize the subjects at hand. What I want to do is recollect my experiences from recent years (at some points I reach further back), putting them into as coherent a narrative as possible, in order to define my own place in the landscape of the Polish debate about history.

Memory of PRL

Anna Artwińska

Negative Memory: Communism and the Perpetrators

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Kraj ludzi tak niewinnych,
że nie mogą być zbawieni. [...]
Kraj bez żądła, spowiedź
bez grzechów śmiertelnych

Country of men so innocent,
they cannot find salvation. [...]
Country without a sting, confession
without mortal sins

Adam Zagajewski

There are two distinguishable modes of discussing about the perpetrators of the communist regime which have been dominating debates taking place in Poland for the past twenty odd years. In anti-communist texts, stress falls on the necessity of legal and moral judgment on the perpetrators' actions, calling them criminals, or – quoting Tadeusz M. Płużański's book – “beasts, murderers of Poles.”¹ Such texts emphasise the opposing

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1 Tadeusz M. Płużański, *Bestie: mordercy Polaków (Reporterskie śledztwo o ludziach, którzy w czasach komunizmu mordowali polskich patriotów, za co nigdy nie zostali ukarani)* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Wolności, 2012). Theses on “sovietization” and “colonizing” are repeatedly mentioned in the works of some researchers referencing post-colonial theories, which seems to constitute an absolute lack of understanding in the potential of that theory, as well as being merely a mechanical application of Edward Said's thesis on post-colonialism as a “travelling theory.”

sides: there are true “Polish patriots” on the one hand – those who had nothing to do with the “criminal regime” – and on the other, there are the above mentioned “murderers,” who, “hired by Moscow,” methodically “kept destroying Poland and the Poles.” The ideology and rhetoric of those narratives have been subjects of debates, analyses, or criticism many times already, and there is no need to focus on them again. Discourses which demand a more balanced depiction of reality in the People’s Republic of Poland (PRL) constitute the second model. They oppose victimisation tendencies, and attempt to show the complexity of the past fifty years, and what is more – especially during last couple of years – highlight its positive aspects, especially noticeable when juxtaposed with capitalism and liberalism. In both models, as I assert in this text, there is no reflection on the issue of perpetration, no reflection that tries to include the memory of perpetrators in Polish practices of remembrance. Such reflection would enable a more comprehensive understanding of the past, involving not only the trauma of victims, but also the trauma of the perpetrators,² as well as the not-uncommon crossover and overlapping of both those roles. Although the evident lack of such reflection in anti-communist narratives is not surprising (after all this is not exclusively a Polish phenomenon),³ it is interesting to notice its absence in liberal, or leftist, nar-

2 Bernhard Giesen, who worked on the question of the “trauma of perpetrators” in the context of fascist crimes, coined that phrase (*Tätertrauma*). The important aspect of his work seems to be a postulate for the “figure of perpetrators not to be discussed solely within the framework of moral and legal discourses of guilt and responsibility of individual individuals, but to try to incorporate it within the realm of collective memory instead.” “Collective trauma” understood in that way becomes a broader term, being a point of reference also for those Germans, who either could have been (and are aware of that), or – in case of later generations – inherited that trauma. See Bernhard Giesen “Die Tätertrauma der Deutschen. Eine Einleitung,” in *Tätertrauma. Nationale Erinnerungen im öffentlichen Diskurs*, ed. Bernhard Giesen, Christop Schneider, (Konstanz: Uv, 2004), 11–53; Bernhard Giesen, “The Trauma of Perpetrators,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey Alexander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 112–154. I employ two terms in my work, the initial meanings of which refer to studies on fascism: “trauma of the perpetrators” (*Tätertrauma*) and “negative memory” (*negative Erinnerung*). It does not mean that I want to similarly model the discourse about perpetrators in PRL after the discourse on the Second World War, or to compare the regimes of fascism and communism. I have employed those terms because of their semantic capability, and believing that they can help better describe and understand the Polish experience as well. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Anja Tippner for pointing my attention to that entire area of research, as well as for many inspiring conversations.

3 Also in reference to GDR, one could point to works written from the anticommunist vantage points, and with interventionist ambitions, concentrating on the necessity of a “just” evaluation of the past. See Hubertus Knabe, *Die Täter sind unter uns: über das Schönreden der SED-Diktatur* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2007).

ratives. It becomes particularly interesting if one were to take into consideration that those circles – in the case of historical events outside the PRL period – stress a need to revise myths about Polish bravery and to start a debate about subjects such as Polish anti-Semitism, post-war forced resettlement of the German population living on territories of Poland, or Polish-Ukrainian relations.⁴ Reasons for such state of affairs, however, are not difficult to name: debate about communism and its perpetrators will remain impossible as long as it is believed that in order to have a conversation, the People's Republic of Poland has to be recognized as a dictatorship, a period of oppression and repression. The true question is: is that really necessary?

Perpetrators as Research Subject

I am interested in a research angle that does not focus on debates concerning worldviews and is not concerned with adding yet another voice to the discussion about the PRL, or another way of coming to terms with the past. My interest in the question of perpetrators does not come from any need to deliver more arguments condemning the PRL and its regime; it is not about breaking the current paradigm either, or about proving that not everything within the communist regime was evil, as such debates tend to take on an ideological tone.⁵ In appreciating the efforts of those who attempt to resist the process of demonizing the People's Republic of Poland (which, in and of itself, is extremely important), I propose undertaking a debate focused on the perpetrators. On the one hand, it would allow for a more complete picture of the past century, creating a context crucial for discourses focused on victims. On the other hand, it would aim to show that not only victims, but the perpetrators as well, should indeed be objects of our attention. It would not be, as proponents

4 A point to the fact that it is easier to accept harm done to the "other:" other ethnically, culturally or in terms of nationality. See Sławomir Sierakowski "Chcemy innej historii," in *Wołyń 1943-2008: pojednanie* (Collection of articles published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*), (Warszawa: Biblioteka Gazety Wyborczej, 2008).

5 It is hard not to agree with Ewa Charkiewicz, who pointed out that the debates about PRL taking shape in the course of systemic transformation were purposefully headed towards becoming "corrupted," so that liberal authorities could be legitimized easier. The goal of my text is not, however, to debate the image of PRL, painted from the perspective of the opposing, anticommunist, or liberal side. I am trying to reflect on whether it is possible to describe that period, without a pre-determined agenda to either denounce it, or "reclaim" it, along with a positive memory of the communism. See Ewa Charkiewicz, "Od komunizmu do neoliberalizmu: technologie transformacji," trans. Ewa Majewska, in *Zniewolony umysł 2. Neoliberalizm i jego krytyki*, ed. Ewa Majewska and Janek Sowa (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2007), 24.

of the “politics of memory” would like, for the purposes of seeking “justice,” but rather to avoid “causing harm to society.”⁶ Determining one’s guilt, or innocence, in respect to one’s past is not within the scope of scholars researching literature or culture. All they are capable of is influencing public discourse, and deciding not so much about actual knowledge, but rather about memory, particularly in a context where memory stops being a function of recollections, and becomes an object of the politics of memory. By casting my vote for having perpetrators become a new subject of study in the humanities, I am presuming that one should make an effort to overcome divisions, which hinders memory that is inclusive of both perspectives – that of victims and of the oppressors. The key question, however, is how we understand the label of being a “perpetrator,” as well as who falls into that category. What is more, since the public discourse is dominated by a tendency to treat communist perpetrators in the same manner as fascist criminals, the very adequacy of that category in respect to communism in Poland is problematic (thus marginalising the experiences of both victims and witnesses of the epoch). In my essay, the category of perpetrator is employed when violence is involved: not exclusively physical violence, but psychological, material and institutional violence as well. Hence, the category is not limited to those who literally had blood on their hands, nor does it automatically include all of the most important operatives of the regime or representatives of the regime’s government, nor the communist party. A communist perpetrator does not have to be a beneficiary of the system. On the contrary: perpetrators can be found among clergy, or men of the opposition movement,⁷ or even among the victims. Everywhere, where regular people, “normal” citizens – out of their free will or coerced, with more or less conviction, more or less successfully – decide to employ violence,

6 Kazimierz Wóycicki formulated the concept in a debate on “Taboo in historical and literary research.” It comes from the following statement: “But let us take a look at a far more difficult taboo: taboo of a conversation about one’s past as an informant of the Security Services. I want to make it clear: conversations on the subject – because pointing a finger at somebody for being a TW (Secret Informant) for many is not a taboo – can be scandalous for a lot of people. Very few talk about it. Is it not harmful to us, as a society, to be so overpowered by a taboo? To such an extent, that there are those who would like to reveal lists of agents, not even knowing what that would entail. On the other hand, there are those who think that it is outrageous and that it cannot be done, and – in any case – all those documents lie,” in *Zapisywanie historii: literaturoznawstwo i historiografia*, ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki, Jan Madejski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2010), 433–434.

7 There is not much said about the violence, use of which has been accepted in some circles of the “Solidarity” movement. And even though these were extraordinary situations, the question of legitimizing violence and employing it to mobilize people most certainly deserves to be noticed separately.

my category becomes valid. I understand the question of perpetration as an issue of cooperation, as an active, or passive, support of a regime that employs violence in order to achieve its goals. In that sense, the issue is not limited to totalitarian regimes only, even though there is a clear difference between its variants, degrees, its reach, consequences, etc. Secondly, I employ this term in its broader meaning, moving away from the perpetrators *sensu stricto*, and denoting those whose perpetration was mediated and passed on as trauma from generation to generation. The mediated trauma of perpetrators, and all of the issues surrounding it, such as, for example, artistic means of representation, do not appear often in the Polish humanities. That is why I find it relevant to speak about that category in terms of a missing link in Poland's collective identity. The question of that heritage concerns representatives of later generations as well, who are often affected by the legacy of perpetrators, as well as those who – even though they remember the PRL regime only obscurely or not at all – cannot escape the question of how they function in such a reality. Discourse on perpetrators, as I see it, should not be an overarching one: the goal is to point people's attention to questions that have remained taboo, or have been described solely from an external perspective. Researching those questions is a symbolic act of repentance which is not aiming to confirm some thesis of guilt or Hegelian "bite." Nor is it an act of "chasing a scapegoat."⁸ Its goal is to show that the system – undoubtedly having some good qualities as well – was a result of many individuals interacting with each other, multiple constellations, and that a lot depended on the moves, manoeuvres and decisions made by specific people. More and more often in research done on the Holocaust, there are theses about the necessity to develop a global, cosmopolitan memory of the tragedy, as that seems to be a way to make the problem no longer exclusively German, but a part of European memory.⁹ Following the same logic, and referencing Polish circumstances (including all necessary differences), it might be worthwhile to assume that the question of communism and its perpetrators cannot be discussed solely in a historical context, or the context of guilt and search for justice. It cannot be limited to the level of singular biographies of people directly involved in the politics of those times. The good fortune of being born later, or having been part of the opposition is not an obstacle, in my opinion, to undertaking the challenge of presenting the past, while simultaneously attempting to depoliticize memory.

8 Teresa Walas, *Zrozumieć swój czas. Kultura polska po komunizmie – rekonesans* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003), 87.

9 Due to the European memory, it is possible to make Holocaust a "global lesson," aiming to minimize suffering in the future. See Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter: der Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

First, a readiness to hear the narrative of perpetrators is crucial and necessary, and only later does one need to look out for the fact that oftentimes the roles of perpetrators and victims overlap, and that Polish history does not lack moments in which victims turned into perpetrators and *vice versa*. Historians often highlight those kinds of intersections in their work. Concerning taboo subject matter in PRL research, Jerzy Eisler notices that:

[...] the least researched, if at all, [are] the themes of relationships between the Security Services (SB) and Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), questions of potential collaboration between some of the KOR members and communist party members...¹⁰

When debating from retrospect, it is important to realize that we cannot claim any certainty as far as roles go. We need to have enough imagination to realize that being a perpetrator is not limited to making decisions involving opening fire on protesting workers: someone had to type that decision out on a typewriter, copy it and send it along, or at least not do anything to prevent it from happening. One should also keep in mind that very often, in most cases in fact, decisions made by the perpetrators did not involve momentous and dramatic events, but pertained to ordinary, everyday matters of life. Hence, these were not always decisions, which decided someone's fate.¹¹ We should try to understand and explain motives of particular actors involved in past events; motives, which oftentimes are much more complicated than they appear from the perspective of all those who deem it necessary to bring those actors to "justice," preferably through the judicial system. The term, "negative memory,"¹² in the title of my essay does not automatically refer to facts from PRL history which involved acts of physical violence. It involves a reflection over acts of psychological violence,

¹⁰ Jerzy Eisler, "Narracje o PRL. Jak się opowiada o historii najnowszej?," in *Zapisywanie historii*. In that context see also Marcin Zaremba's *Wielka twroga: Polska 1944-1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012). The author, by uncovering the dark side of the Polish history, and specifically that period immediately after the war, attempts to explain and understand motives and reasons that pushed "normal Poles" to theft, crime, or ethnic violence.

¹¹ When researching discourses of perpetrators in the context of the PRL, we most certainly should take a closer look at the dynamics of the period itself, and its particular, vastly different phases (in the context of perpetrators, the Stalinist period should be treated separately), which would go beyond the scope of this essay.

¹² Taken from Reinhart Koselleck, see Reinhart Koselleck, "Formen und Traditionen des negativen Gedächtnisses," in *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord*, ed. Norbert Frei and Volkhard Knigge (München: C.H. Beck, 2002), 27.

abuse of power, mechanisms of externalization, compensation, or distortion of facts and experiences as well.¹³ One could doubt, of course, if the term “perpetrator” is appropriate, for example, in the case of a communist party member in a town of several thousands, who tried to fulfil his duties, believing that the communist revolution must have its price. When I use that term, it is not due to an absence of a substitute (potentially as fitting), but rather because it makes the task of pointing out the overemphasis on victimhood easier, as well as the instrumentalisation of the term “victim” in debates taking place in Poland after 1989. If there are so many victims of the past regime among us, there just must be something about those perpetrators after all.

Victims and Polish Victimology

What is striking in reference to the People’s Republic of Poland is the asymmetry of Polish memory. In short, one could state that most of it is inhabited by victims. Within that group, according to its Latin root, we can distinguish two categories.¹⁴ The first one is that of “martyrs and heroes by choice” (Lat. *sacrificium*). In our case those would be activists, demonstrators and members of the opposition movement. Myths of romantic struggle and veteran glory become revisited in stories concerned with that group. The second group, however, is composed of passive and powerless subjects exposed to violence (Lat. *victima*), a group to which most of Polish society becomes assigned in anti-communist narratives. Romantic loftiness of heroism, struggle and sacrifice finds its continuation in narratives of the PRL as an epoch of collective protest of citizens against the regime and the party. That tendency is particularly well illustrated by places of memory: plaques, exhibits, museums and monuments.¹⁵ Inscriptions and religious symbols that inscribe victims into the context of Christian suffering predominate. (As a side note, many of

13 Aleida Assmann, “Pięć strategii wypierania ze świadomości,” trans. Artur Pełka, in *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa: współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (Kraków: Universitas, 2009).

14 On etymological and semantic contexts of the word “victim” see Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006), 73–74.

15 In 2006 there was an addition made to the text on the Monument Commemorating Victims of June 1956 in Poznań. The original “For freedom, law and bread” has been expanded with “and for God.” Pace of creating monuments for victims of communism seems proportional to the pace of changing names of the streets, or monuments, dedicated to memory of PRL.

See Marcin Kula, “Wobec świadectw przeszłości,” in *Zapisywanie historii*, 363–389.

the Russian monuments – on the other hand – prevent the remembrance of both victims and history. Oftentimes, they look as if they are commemorating a natural disaster or a plane crash).¹⁶ If we were to keep it simple, one could say that a bi-polar vision of Polish history becomes legitimated in the collective memory: on one side, there are “them” – “agents of the communist regime,” “pawns of Moscow” – the source of all evil, and on the other side, there is Polish society, clean and spotless, a victim of the system of repression that was forced on it. Depersonalization and generalization pertain to both groups in this case: all perpetrators are evil, and all victims are agents of good. In a less dogmatic version, the story about entanglement and the particularities of those days, which cannot be understood from our contemporary perspective, are endlessly repeated. This second version can be observed in testimonies given by writers, who explain their reasons for joining the communist party, or their support for the regime. The category of perpetrators functions in many debates – if at all – primarily through the more simplistic view: killers of father Popiełuszko, Gen. Jaruzelski, or those who shot at miners from the Wujek Mine. Perpetrators in the background are less often discussed, often reduced to several stereotypes and simplified notions, and not granted any research merit. One faces some difficulty already at the level of language – no one is certain what kind of semantics should be employed. The term “perpetrator,” is often used as a synonym of the term “executioner.” Andrzej Romanowski states:

Since I've been hearing a phrase “executioners of martial law” for months now, I find it difficult not to connect it with a book recently displayed in bookstores, entitled *Executioners from Katyń*. However, since we use the same word to describe members of the NKVD and ZOMO [trans. Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia], it's difficult not to perceive language of our public discourse as a language of hate.¹⁷

These are all correct observations. Nonetheless, not a lot can be accomplished by simply being outraged at hate speech. In my opinion, Poland lacks a centrifugal perspective, a look from within that would strive to understand, not damn or assume that the problem simply does not exist. On the one hand, we stumble upon the idea of the “thick line,”¹⁸ while on the other, the “politics

16 Arsenij Roginskij, “Fragmentierte Erinnerung. Stalin und Stalinismus im heutigen Russland,” *Osteuropa* 1 (2009): 41.

17 Andrzej Romanowski, *Rozkosze lustracji* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 169.

18 Editor's note: “Thick line” refers to a policy of former Polish prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki to avoid punishing people for crimes committed by the communist regime. “We

of memory.” I am far from condemning either the former or the latter, but for some reason I find it difficult to image how an exhibition entitled *Twarze łódzkiej bezpieki* [*Faces of Łódź’s Security Services*] or a movie entitled *Jak zginął Popiełuszko* [*Death of Popiełuszko*]¹⁹ could change our attitudes towards the problem at hand. Knowledge limited to photographic evidence does not explain anything, or provide any context. And the same is true for all the founding myths of the “new” Poland that has been built from the ground up. I believe that instead of debating the regime and its terror, it would be wise to start a conversation about people, who for example signed off on documents for the “one-way trip” of many Polish citizens in March of 1968, without necessarily having any pretences to making the memory of them the only and the most important recollection of communism.

Idealizing the role of victims in narratives about communism is interesting also because that very notion can evoke rather negative connotations outside of that specific context: the so-called “victims of transformation” are presented as people who are guilty of their own poor circumstances, and not as resourceful. Victims of household and sexual abuse can count on very little help from the government as well. Yet, victims of the communist regime are treated differently. In their case, most typically, they are assigned positive attributes. That does not, of course, exclude excesses. Idealizing by default, in the end, targets the very victims by enclosing them in a hermetic formula, and taking away their individual features. The anti-communist perspective is focused not so much on actual victims – people with diverse, complex biographies – but

split away the history of our recent past with a thick line. We will be responsible only for what we have done to help extract Poland from her current predicament, from now on.”

- 19 The exhibition has been opened on January 23, 2007. In the information booklet we read: “Exhibit *Faces of Łódź’s Security Services* portrays 45 operatives, all of whom were holding high positions in Łódź’s security apparatus throughout its time of operations. In the panels, besides the photograph of an individual, there are characteristics of each operative: their service record, as well as excerpts from the documents, which allow to describe that individual’s attitude during breakthrough moments, pieces concerning his work in the Security Service, views, as well as personal life. Featured are individuals such as Gen. Div. Mieczysław Moczar, who helped create the communist repression apparatus in Łódź in the 1940s, or Cpt. Grzegorz Piotrowski, killer of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko. [...] The exhibition is accompanied by workshops addressed to above-primary level school-teachers. Workshops will cover issues surrounding operations of communist apparatus of repression in the Łódź area, and the surrounding region. [...] Workshops are designed to help teachers with preparing lessons dedicated to the modern history. There is a possibility of repeating particular workshops, depending on the demand.” Accessed January 1, 2013, http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portaal/pl/2/4397/Wystawa_Twarze_lodzkiej_bezpieki_Lodz_23_stycznia_2007_r.html

rather on upholding a certain image, or an idea, of the perfect sacrifice. On the website of “We Remember” foundation it reads:

The fundamental goal of this foundation is to bring back the social memory of people who, in the second half of the 1940s, and at the beginning of the 1950s of the twentieth century took to arms in order to fight the communist regime. The goal is to bring back the memory of people who sacrificed their life plans, warmth of home, professional ambitions, and – finally – their very lives on the altar of freedom. They have sacrificed everything that is most precious in this earthly, immediate life. They refused to exist under the yoke of communism – the worst, institutionalized enemy of freedom known to man. Those were people who in the times of the regime’s greatest triumph gave everything they could, when standing up for values such as freedom and independence could cost one’s life. They were the avant-garde in the fight against the communist imprisonment of Poland. [...] Today, there is nothing we can do for them. Today, all we can do is remember them – THE CURSED SOLDIERS. We can remember, and as we remember, we should recall their struggle and sacrifice, and defend their choices from quacks who see the post-war history of Poland, up to the fall of communism, as a sum of actions undertaken for the sake of liberty by members of the communist party, who later left, or were expelled, as well as of those who remained in the party ranks up to its end.²⁰

In the recollection of communism as an “institutionalized enemy of freedom,” as well as of its martyrs, there is no room for shades of grey. All victims are pure and noble, and the goal they served justified the means: including violence. What is more, the perspective of a victim is “cognitively privileged”: the assumption that individuals, or oppressed groups, have true knowledge of the oppression and reasons for it is accepted and repeated.²¹ Małgorzata Czermińska posed a question: “How [do we] move between the Scylla of demythologizing the absolute innocence of the sacrifice, and the Charybdis

20 Accessed December 28, 2012, <http://www.pamietamy.pl/> It is worthwhile to read those declarations in the context of a book entitled *Egzekutor* by Stefan Dąbbski, whose narrator – a former soldier of the Underground Army – talks about the dangers of deriving satisfaction from killing, about murders he committed during his duty in the army – not only of Germans, but also his own colleagues – in order to achieve certain profits, and better his circumstances.

21 Ewa Domańska, „O poznawczym uprzywilejowaniu ofiary (Uwagi metodologiczne),” in *(Nie)obecność: pominięcia i przemilczenia w narracjach XX wieku*, ed. Hanna Gosk, Bożena Karwowska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Elipsa, 2008), 19–22.

of granting victims the cognitive privilege?"²² In addition, is the account of perpetrators truly unable to contribute anything of value to our understanding? By analysing the rhetoric and arguments of those promoting the trial of Wojciech Jaruzelski, Jerzy Jedlicki concluded that the "eruption of their noble anger" was as strong as it was precisely because Jaruzelski dared to publish books and authorize interviews, in which he defended his positions as well as his memory, while admitting mistakes. Instead, they believed he should have removed himself – disappeared somewhere in Russia – and stopped making it hard for social stereotypes to function.²³ One can spot two problems with this particular example: firstly, the lack of faith in the cognitive value of the perpetrators' perspective. Let us recall that Jaruzelski has been accused of being a member of an organized criminal group. Secondly, we can see attempts to instrumentalise victims and their experiences. While the trauma of victims can be passed from generation to generation without question – which has been confirmed by psychological, philosophical and medical studies – it does not mean that everyone who feels outrage and "noble anger" on account of Jaruzelski's martial law, becomes a representative of victims by default. That type of appropriation leads to distortions between the traumatic memory of the actual victims – who often do not speak with their own voice – and the heroic memory of the "cognitive" ones. As a result, there are tales of victimhood that are being created and perpetuated, in which the memory of innocence and bravery becomes activated among generations of people who do not personally remember the martial law period from their own experience. Protests by those who do not subscribe to those types of narratives are based primarily on attempts to reinstate a more positive memory of the PRL – whether through statistics, which show for example that most of Polish society had been for the introduction of martial law, or by pointing to clearly positive aspects of the pro-social policies of the communist regime. Such attempts help to break the monopoly of memory that is through and through anti-communist and has a strong media presence. However, those working to establish a more balanced perspective lack enough focus on difficult and controversial events from the history of the People's Republic of Poland, thereby giving the field away to those participants of the debate who use arguments that exclude dialogue, while employing the language of hate when speaking about perpetrators.

22 Małgorzata Czermińska, "O dwuznaczności sytuacji ofiary," in *Kultura po przejściach, osoby z przeszłością: polski dyskurs postzależnościowy – konteksty i perspektywy badawcze* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 113.

23 Jerzy Jedlicki "Wstyd," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 14, 2008.

Perpetrators and Victims in Literature

According to Przemysław Czapliński, a “portrait of the innocent Pole: living in the reality of PRL, but making no contact with the state apparatus”²⁴ began emerging in the second half of the 1990s. He takes the year 1996 as a symbolic date of its beginnings, since it was the year when the media erupted in outrage over Wisława Szymborska, questioning her credentials to win the Nobel Prize in poetry as she had once written socialist realist poems. Czapliński lists a series of books published in the last decade or so, where the narrative about Poles as victims of the communist regime is further explored: *Madame* by Antoni Libera, *Węzeł* by Józef Ratajczak, *Sól i pieprz* by Ryszard Bugajski, *Jest* by Dawid Bieńkowski, and many more. Joanna Derkaczew has also turned her attention to the issue by analysing TV plays from the 2007/2008 season, such as *Ziarno zroszone krwią* about the tragic fate of the Home Army (AK), *Stygmatyczka* telling the story of sister Wanda Boniszewska’s murder, or *Afera mięsna* about the execution of Stanisław Wawrzecki.²⁵ The PRL, presented as a criminal, authoritarian regime, is embodied in those plays by its official representatives – operatives holding official positions, who take perverse satisfaction from persecuting the pure and noble Polish nation. Not a single author, or director, attempted to take a closer, more thorough look and followed an assumption that turning one’s attention to perpetrators is morally questionable. Attention is reserved for the victims. What is more, a common thread in all of those novels is that perpetrators are a group negligible in size. As a result, we are faced with a paradox: since society in the PRL was a collective victim, where do the “ex-agents,” “ex-commies,” who appear so often in books about Poland’s transition period, come from? Where does the “network” come from, since the paradigm of “Polishness” during the PRL regime has been embodied by cavalry captain Witold Pilecki? Stefan Chwin has appealed many times for a more critical approach towards the past. He writes in *Dziennik dla dorosłych*:

1) Is there a single novel in Polish literature about what Polish soldiers did in Czechoslovakia in 1968? As far as I know, there is no such novel. I haven’t seen a single TV show, or play, or feature film for that matter, about Polish soldiers who in 1968 took away the freedom from Czechs and Slovaks. From the perspective of Polish culture it doesn’t exist. But

24 Przemysław Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany: późna nowoczesność i nasze wielkie naracje* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2009), 123; see also Przemysław Czapliński, “Końce historii,” in *Teraźniejszość i pamięć przeszłości. Rozumienie historii w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*, ed. Hanna Gosk, Andrzej Zieniewicz (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2006).

25 Joanna Derkaczew, “Teatr TV historyczny,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 205, 2007. Quote after: Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany*, 139.

when it comes to Katyń, the Warsaw Uprising, Captain Pilecki – go ahead! Make movies, paint the paintings, and write your novels! But what about Hradec Králové?²⁶

2) It was not Jaruzelski who introduced martial law. He merely started the machinery, which worked flawlessly. Martial law was introduced by tens of thousands of regular Polish army men – boys from Gdańsk, Rawa Mazowiecka, Wrzeszcz, Kutno or Elbląg. They were ship builders, locksmiths, farmers, miners, and tram operators – all wearing winter uniforms of the People's Republic of Poland army. It was them, not General Jaruzelski, or Security Service members, who enforced martial law. Boys from Wejherowo, Oliwa, Sopot, Nowy Targ and Gorzów Wielkopolski were the ones who pacified factories that went on strikes, rammed gates of steel mills and shipyards with their tanks, and terrorized entire cities with their sheer presence. They were the authors of martial law.²⁷

We can only speculate whether a book about what Polish soldiers did in Czechoslovakia will ever be written. However, the problem of “perpetrators” is an empty space for Polish culture, an unspecified space at best. An initial reconnaissance inevitably raises suspicions that perpetrators are most often presented as people from the outside, not members of the community. They are not specific, individual people, but merely a type. What often takes place is what Czapliński describes as the “depersonalization of the system”: many authors seem to have no doubts as far as where to place the pronoun “we,” and where to place “them.” The most glaring example of ideologising the PRL, evoked in almost every paper on the subject, is *Madame* by Antoni Libera. The novel operates on a dichotomy between faceless, merciless communism, and the rest of the Polish populace. *Madame* has been a subject of many analyses,²⁸ and I evoke it here as an example of certain tendencies. Another strategy often found in literature is to demonize operatives, or – a contrary approach – to diminish their role, ridicule, or parody them, etc. Rarely do we find any attention paid to the crossing of roles between perpetrator and

26 Stefan Chwin, *Dziennik dla dorosłych* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Tytuł, 2008), 277. Chwin's remark is particularly interesting, if we were to take into account that there is an upsurge of “tales from the PRL” in Polish literature, and that the introduction of the martial law has many literary representations as well.

27 Ibid., 319.

28 See Przemysław Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany*; Kinga Dunin, *Czytając Polskę: literatura polska po roku 1989 wobec dylematów nowoczesności* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2004); Dariusz Nowacki “Widokówki z tamtego świata,” *Znak* 542 (2000).

victim, the interchangeability and permeation between the two. Yesterday's perpetrators (from the pages of literature) rarely become victims, and vice versa. Some novels, *Haszyszopenki* by Jarosław Maślanka for example, have tried to show the interplay between the worlds of perpetrators and victims. Maślanka's novel takes place during martial law and tells a story of Maksymilian, son of a "troublemaker from Solidarność," his coming of age and friendship with Wronek, the son of a "fat cat from the local police force." However, when it comes to recreating the world under communism, such novels do not break free of stereotypes and hardened opinions. At this point, it would be wise to point out that critical literature, broadly speaking, is not greatly vested in the question of perpetrators – even when they do focus on taboo subjects as well as omissions or gaps in Polish narratives of the past century.²⁹ Opposition and dissident literature which present the problem of perpetrators in yet another constellation – cannot become a point of reference either. Lack of (critical) references to these representations is more or less symptomatic.

However, an attempt to revise the paradigm described by Czapliński can be observed in literary and film works from the past several years. In a novel entitled *Bambino* by Inga Iwasiów, there is a character named Janek, born as a bastard child in 1940, in a village outside of Poznań. He begins his career in post-war Szczecin. In due time, he climbs up the party ladder. He does not spend too much time wondering about the moral aspects of his work: "There's no point in sweating too much about it... the job being not ok. And what is it supposed to be? Do they interrogate, do they coerce? Did anyone see anything? Anyone?"³⁰ Janek is not just a party official, but also a husband, father, and friend. The narrator does not demonize, nor does she try to justify or excuse his actions: Janek's story is presented in a way that does not exclude understanding of his circumstances. Most of his decisions are an end result of his attempts to make his life better than that of his parents. It is interesting to see that he is an integral part of the local community. This perpetrator is not an executioner; he is one of many citizens who engaged in building the People's Republic of Poland. When in 1968, Stefan, a Jew from Janek's circle, is forced to leave Poland, we know that Janek, even though he does not make the decision to expel Jews from Poland, also does not try to oppose it, thereby supporting it with small gestures and seemingly irrelevant actions. Along with Stefan, Szczecin is deserted by many Poles of Jewish descent. We know from

29 I refer to a book entitled *(Nie)obecność. Pominięcia i przemilczenia w narracjach XX wieku*. See also *Enttabuisierung: Essays zur russischen und polnischen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. German Ritz, Jochen-Ulrich Peters (Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 1996).

30 Inga Iwasiów, *Bambino* (Warszawa: Świat Książki – Bertelsmann Media, 2008), 138.

history that there were many people affected that way in Szczecin, as well as in other cities. What is interesting in Inga Iwasiów's narrative is the fact that both perpetrators and victims have faces and biographies, and are part of the same community. Even though *Bambino* is not a tale about a perpetrator (Janek is not even its main protagonist), the author tries to understand his motives and decisions, and present them in a believable way. The perpetrator, in this case, belongs to us, not to them, and is an integral part of community. Many of the biographical novels written in recent years constitute an important voice in that context, tying it in with a question of how to tell a story from a biographical perspective, in which – referring back to Foucault – the focus is not on searching for the essentialist beginning (*Ursprung*), but for the origin (*Herkunft*).³¹ Within family histories, both the past, as well as its continuations, are shaped during the process of reflection on one's own origins, which often turn out to be different from officially formulated versions provided by institutions guarding the "collective memory." Ewa Kuryluk in her *Goldi* (2004), and *Frascati* (2009) tried to deal with the image of a father-communist. Another interesting example would be Aleksandra Domańska's novel *Ulica cioci Oli. Dziejów jednej rewolucjonistki* [*Aunt Ola's Street. History of a Certain Revolutionary*] (2013). In the novel, a granddaughter tries to understand the motives of her communist grandmother.

Question of roles of a victim and a perpetrator intersecting reappeared recently in the cinema. In Jan Kidawa-Błoński's *Różyczka* (2010), protagonist Roman Rożek, a Security Service operative (of Jewish decent)³² becomes

31 See Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Michel Foucault *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993) 139–166. Starting with Foucault's reflections on genealogy as a place of intersection between the body and history, U. Vedder, O. Parnes and S. Willer noted that such perspective leads to the "naturalisation of history," and the "historisation of nature." See Ohad Parnes, Ulrike Vedder and Stefan Willer, *Das Konzept der Generation. Eine Wissenschafts- und Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011). "Historisation" in case of the phenomenon I am interested in would stand for the reflection on historical experiences recorded on the body of a family; experiences which do not allow to be included into dominating interpretative schemes. They are often talked about within the second or third generation.

32 It is worthwhile to notice an important work by Joanna Wiszniewicz, entitled *Życie przecięte: opowieści pokolenia Marca* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2008), which includes conversations with Polish Jews born in post-war Poland. The author attempts to grasp the specifics and different aspects of the Jewish experience, as well as the transformation of their identity after March 1968. I believe it is important that many of Wiszniewicz's interlocutors touch upon the issue of perpetration: their own, that of their parents, friends or close ones, and do not settle for a status of victim. It is even more important, if we consider how difficult it is for the Poles to confront the tragedy of March

a victim of anti-Semitic bashing, which he helped create, and is ultimately forced to leave the country in 1968. Rożek's ex-fiancée, Różyczka (the movie's title), is also both a victim and a perpetrator. She agrees to become an agent and to spy on a certain esteemed professor, but later on – under the influence of emotions – refuses to cooperate and attempts to stop the spiral of denunciations against the alleged “front man.” *Różyczka* is not, by any means, an outstanding film. However, it is an important one from the perspective I am interested in. It turns one's attention to the ambiguity of both perpetrators and victims, while realistically presenting their motives. Rafael Lewandowski in *Kret* (2011) touches upon a similar problem. Protagonist Zygmunt Kowal, a legendary “Solidarność” activist, is discovered to be a collaborator with the Security Services who has passed on information about his colleagues because of his complicated family situation: it will provide his wife with an opportunity to undergo a much needed surgical procedure. However, the film is not about an attempt to explain particular decisions made by the title character *Kret*, which translates to “mole” in English. Equally important is what happens to his son, Paweł, an observer of the collapse of his father's heroic tale, and its subsequent transformation into an anti-myth. He experiences many contradictory feelings, contempt mixing with attempts to understand, a lack of faith mixing with a need to forget and repress. The trauma of the perpetrator becomes transposed on the next generation: faced with the truth about his father, Paweł becomes involved to a point where – in the last scene – he murders an ex-Security Service operative, who has been blackmailing his father. The tragedy shown through this example of a family exposes the dangers of maintaining a close mental bond with the role of victims, compounded by the repression of “negative memory.” As Tadeusz Sobolewski writes: “The Polish Family is our national secret. To talk about it openly after 1989 has been almost as dangerous as it was before that year. We do not have a language to discuss this “other Poland,” but old sins tie us to it, if not directly, than through our parents.”³³ It is worthwhile to notice that the character of the ex-agent is as ambiguous as the character of Kowal himself.

Those three examples I have provided above, were chosen most pragmatically in order to suggest certain tendencies and symptoms. When researching the problem in greater detail, one should design a systematic review of the attitudes of perpetrators and victims in texts of cultural significance, and point out similarities and differences, analysing the poetics and narrative

1968 – after all, it was one of those situations where we most definitely were not victims in the first place.

33 Tadeusz Sobolewski, “Polska tajemnica,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 4, 2011, accessed October 2, 2014, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,10058495,Polska_tajemnica.html#ixzz2PsE1dG5O

strategies of literary works. Fictional works, such as films, should become an important element analysing the discourse on perpetrators, alongside factual works, press debates, or media and cultural events. Literature and art can use their own tools to pass on something that does not appear in debates between historians, publicists, or literary critics. And let us not forget what Dariusz Nowacki once said: "If a writer wants to talk about "how it was," without asking the question "who was I?," he inevitably enters the barren territory of a – silly after all – dispute about the People's Republic of Poland; a dispute identical in structure to current in-party quibbles, or to the latest map of ideological affinities. It is the worst trap of them all."³⁴

Translation: Jan Pytalski

³⁴ Dariusz Nowacki, "Widokówki z tamtego świata."

Katarzyna Chmielewska

Contemporary Historical Discourse on Polish Communism in a Narratological Perspective

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Communism, its history and meaning, has been the subject of numerous works that fill whole libraries, and it is impossible to mention them all within the confines of a single journal article. Seminal and at the same time divisive works on Polish communism have been written by Włodzimierz Borodziej, Andrzej Friszke, Andrzej Garlicki, Jerzy Eisler, Krystyna Kersten, Zbigniew Landau, Adam Leszczyński, Paweł Machcewicz, Mirosława Marody, Piotr Madajczyk, Piotr Oseka, Andrzej Paczkowski, Marcin Kula, Paweł Wieczorkiewicz, Marcin Zaremba, Jan Żaryn and many others. Such works seem to grow and proliferate at a pace horrifying to those who would like to keep up with the current state of affairs or at least read the basic books on the subject. There has also been a noticeable rise in the publication of works which do not fit the traditional academic model addressed to a small group of professional readers. Oftentimes they are authored by academics, but they are written with the mass market audience in mind, and as such they elicit a huge societal response. These are works which we can situate in-between history and cultural or historical anthropology,¹ as well as biographies

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1 It is enough to recall the most recent publication success: Izabela Meyza and Witold Szablowski, *Nasz mały PRL: pół roku w M-3*

and memoirs.² There is also a noticeably growing appreciation of interesting works in the field of social history.³

Out of necessity, I will draw upon only a small fragment from this vast material. I will focus on works written from a certain temporal distance from the 1989 political transition, that is works that were created with the awareness that communism as a phenomenon already belongs to a past era, and that it is to be spoken of in the past tense. These texts are also equally distant from the present and, in a way, already external to the most prominent debates and conflicts of recent times, although they sometimes frame their boundaries. I also would like to view them from a substantive temporal perspective (granted by a decade). To meet this criterion I will refer to works written around the year 2000 (give or take a few years) or published within that timeframe. At the time, the way of talking and thinking about communism was already set, and today we have a chance to view and analyze it from a distance. The majority of chosen texts share an essayistic, casual character, and do not yield easily to the rigor of academic form, but for this very reason they divulge the usually hidden assumptions and preconceptions – the social universe – that rule academic discourse from beyond the scenes, working “behind the back” of neutral discourse. What is more, these works are clearly addressed to the wider public, to the “reading crowd” – the intelligentsia, not only to an elite professional circle, as their ambition is to exert a much bigger impact. A complimentary criterion for selecting texts was the deliberate reference to the term “communism” that is a self-aware and considerate attitude to that category, a comprehension of its semantical and historical fluidity. Communism can be, at the same time, conceived by the authors as an abstract form of government, as particular historical regimes, or simply as the period between 1944 and 1989 in Poland. For obvious reasons I will concentrate on the Polish context, Polish history and Polish historiography.

I will reference essayistic texts on communism authored by renowned academic historians, that is by a few particular writers to be exact: Mirosława

z trwałą, wąsami i maluchem (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012). It is also worth keeping in mind the works of Małgorzata Szpakowska, *Chcieć i mieć: samowiedza obyczajowa w Polsce czasu przemian* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2003); Justyna Jaworska, *Cywilizacja „Przekroju”: misja obyczajowa w magazynie ilustrowanym* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2008), and others.

2 See Andrzej Paczkowski, *Trzy twarze Józefa Świątły: przyczynek do historii komunizmu w Polsce* (Warszawa: Prószyński Media, 2009), Anna Sobór-Świdorska, *Jakub Berman: biografia komunisty* (Warszawa: IPN, 2009).

3 See Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga: Polska 1944–1949. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012).

Marody,⁴ Andrzej Friszke,⁵ Marcin Kula⁶ and Marcin Zaremba.⁷ All of them are historians enjoying a substantial and well-deserved admiration, although this selection can be questioned, maybe not without merit, and be considered unsatisfactory. This is certainly not a representative sample that would reveal the “communist” historical field in its completeness, and tell a definite tale of Polish communism. On the contrary, the chosen examples all belong to the mainstream and share a common strategy: they attempt to keep due distance to their subject and to perform what could be called positivist historiography.

I would like to stress that in this text I do not reconstruct the assertions made by those historians, I do not dispute their theses, and I do not criticize their workshop or methodologies. I do not even reiterate their views on communism. As a matter of fact, the authors themselves play only a secondary role in these investigations, as my primary goal is the analysis of discursive phenomena, certain particular patterns of thought, hidden images and preconceptions, that can be discerned in the texts of these distinguished luminaries. I am well-aware that the resulting image will certainly be incomplete, fragmented, and imperfect, nevertheless it reveals certain crucial traits of the discourse on communism. I ask questions that are standard in literary history: what kind of narrative templates and rhetorical means are used; what metaphors, clichés, recurrent gestures and symbols are employed. I ask how the protagonists (the historical actors of a historical narrative) are construed. I refer to the kind of narratology that can be traced to Roland Barthes and I consider discourse to be the power of presupposition that pulls the strings, obscured from view by the wall of assertion.

Once more I would like to underscore that my opinions do not lay claim to correctness, or are an attempt to lecture anyone. Neither do they enrich the historical methodology. I do not engage in any normative discourse, delineate boundaries, restrict what can and cannot be done in historiography, or define the proper description of the past. I do not issue recommendations and,

4 Mirosława Marody, „Przemiany postaw ideologicznych i przystosowanie w systemie komunistycznym,” in *Komunizm: ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota (Warszawa: Neriton, 2001).

5 Andrzej Friszke, „Przystosowanie i opór. Rozważania nad postawami społecznymi 1956–1970,” in *Komunizm: ideologia, system, ludzie*.

6 Marcin Kula, *Komunizm i po komunizmie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2006) (most articles significantly predate the publishing of the book itself).

7 Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2001), also by the same author: „Komunizm jako system mobilizacyjny. Casus Polski,” in *Komunizm: ideologia, system, ludzie*.

what is crucial, I do not create any “true history.” If I sometimes do suggest, with hope of shining some comparative light, different possible templates for constructing the narrative or historical actors, I do so with the sole aim of revealing other variants, of introducing alternatives, which do not assert the rights of a superior historical truth.

Creating Heroes

Nearly every narrative is built around heroes; the historical narrative is no exception. The identification of historical actors is in itself a meaningful act and one that often determines the ensuing narrative. It is enough to recall ancient *res gestae* (although it is hard to consider them a part of academic historiography, they undoubtedly are a genre of the historical narrative) wherein mighty and valiant knights accomplished eternal and glorious quests, to be praised on the pages of history for ages to come. For comparison one can recall the compound subject described by Bronisław Geremek in *The World of The Beggar's Opera*,⁸ an entity with blurred individual traits (the nameless or pseudonymous paupers, beggars, and vagrants), that takes its tale which, as we would now say, subverts the dominant historical narrative. Geremek's work does not focus on the key players – kings and emperors – as ordinary political history would. It reveals a whole other level of historical subjectivity and a whole other level of historical *bios*. What is the relation between subjectivity and historical agency, can this agency be ascribed only to “lead” characters, or to groups and communities, and which of those should be considered as historical – such issues fall beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, it is worth keeping in mind the kind of historical narrative introduced by Hegel and later clarified by Marx, where social relations (Hegel and Marx) and relations of production (Marx) are considered the prime mover of history and culture, and the so-called great historical figures are considered performers, entering the stage to merely play their parts. The only viable candidate for being the subject of history that is left is the new rising class – previously the bourgeoisie, then the proletariat – although even its agency seems limited, as it rather is merely a facilitator of change, a vehicle of history. According to some interpretations this change can be viewed as an idea of history without a subject (in the traditional sense) or a construct where the subject of history is formed by the whole of humanity. Of course, this does not entail the end of historical narrative or the irrelevance of historical personas, but our understanding of them changes significantly.

8 Bronisław Geremek, *Świat „opery żebraczej”: obraz włóczęgów i nędzarzy w literaturach europejskich XV-XVII wieku* (Warszawa: PIW, 1989).

Each of the aforementioned examples is introduced with the purpose of exposing the relativity of the historical subject's structure, encouraging the reconsideration of "what" or "who" it is and what is its makeup, but most of all how it relates to the modes of historical narratives. What is more, individuation or creation of historical characters does not seem to be the only choice laden with meaning. Their interpretation – as the source of historical processes, that is not merely in the context of their agency, but also in light of ethical categories, such as freedom, responsibility for the future, working for the greater good, or siding with evil, etc. – is of equal importance. This entanglement in the ethical field that is so commonplace in historical discourse – which would startle hardline positivists, who meticulously differentiate (historical) facts from values – is easily discernible as it obscures, first of all, its relativistic nature by usurping the right of universality in its judgements⁹ and, moreover, by its indirect manifestation as a hidden presupposition or an allusive utterance delivered within seemingly neutral statements, or as a way of structuring and describing the area of potentiality. The aforementioned ethical dimension does not exhaust all of the possibilities associated with the construction of historical subjects; a parallel phenomenon is found in the everlasting presence of not only hindsight granted by a contemporary point of view that determines the terms of description, but also in the societal facets of the narrative, through its involvement in contemporary social and political disputes¹⁰ and socio-cultural consequences, to which the past is hostage.

The story of the period from 1944 to 1989 (aside from all the nuances and multiplicity of perspectives) depicts two protagonists: the government, in its broader sense formed by the whole *nomenklatura*, and the society (or, otherwise, the government and the nation). This dualism is one of the most important among the numerous, seemingly innocent, decisions that shape the historical narrative. It is plainly clear that the notions of nation and society are fundamentally different, or at least should be, and that they refer to distinct narratives – society to the sociological narrative, and nation to the nationalistic narrative. Unfortunately, in many of the contemporary works of Polish historians, too little value is given to this seemingly fundamental distinction and as a result the aforementioned notions seamlessly turn into the other. Sometimes the category "society" does not appear at all; sometimes it occurs interchangeably with "nation"; in some cases it simply denotes the nation. Instead of "nation" the broad category "Poles" may be also used; it sits

9 The bluntness of this judgement and its indisputability, fallacious if truth be told, are reminiscent of Bourdieu's symbolic violence.

10 Not necessarily in its immediate aspects, sometimes it simply equals adopting a certain socio-political worldview such as liberalism or Catholicism.

somewhere between the sociological and the nationalistic perspectives, with a slight bend towards the latter. Fortunately some works consequently adhere to the aforementioned distinction, but they are in the minority.¹¹

Actors other than the society (nation) and government feature only sporadically, or otherwise they are variants of the basic subjects, as the narrative accommodates only a clear-cut, purely binary relation. And this is not due to the lack of other suitable *dramatis personae* – the Catholic Church comes to mind as a possible third actor. It is not that the Church is neglected,¹² on the contrary, but it is treated as a partial entity, situated within the space of “society,” and influenced by the same conditions and necessities as the rest of the social body (only to a higher degree), and exhibiting similar aspirations and needs. The Church is sometimes cast as a representation of society,¹³ though, as a matter of fact, from a sociological perspective it would be hard to defend such a proposition. As it would be hard to defend the claim that it shared the same circumstances, experience, principles, aims and activities with the rest of society.¹⁴

Therefore, only society and power are left in the game. It is noteworthy that these two entities are in most cases strictly separate, there is no common ground between society and power, no crossing between their boundaries,

11 Mirosława Marody's works may serve as an example.

12 I do not claim that the issue of the Catholic Church is overlooked or marginalized in contemporary historical research. On the contrary, there are multiple works elucidating the role played by the Catholic Church, its hierarchies and institutions, in Poland.

13 See Jan Żaryn, „Postawy duchowieństwa katolickiego wobec władzy państwowej w latach 1944-1956. Problemy metodologiczne,” in *Komunizm: ideologia, system, ludzie*, 289-302.

14 In this case, it does not make sense to talk either about a structural homology of historical experience, historical goals and strategies, or about conferring of rights, therefore there can be no real representation. The circumstances of the Church as an institution are fundamentally different from the circumstances of the majority of other groups of Polish society, in the timespan between 1944 and 1989. The aforementioned representation is therefore metaphorical in nature, it plays out in the sphere of contemporary imagination, where the Catholic Church of the period ceases to be a historical institution with its own set of rules and goals; one that is otherwise polyphonic and multilayered; and becomes a clear image, an icon of goodness and freedom, which heroically or wisely resists the onslaught of an external opposing force, therefore becoming a stand-in for the whole society. This metonymy of history (*pars pro toto*) occurs in a twofold sense: first, there is evident handpicking of certain aspects and traits from the history of the institution; secondly the history of the church replaces the history of the whole society. This kind of narrative introduces the “metaphoric self” into the story of heroic resistance against an external enemy that was upheld by the “noblest part of society.”

and no intermediate links. The binary structure of the field determines the contradictory relation between the two subjects and significantly influences the story of the past by endowing it with a characteristic trait of inevitable antagonism. This view comes in direct conflict with detailed research. Let us consider, however briefly, certain aspects of the field. Were we to take a closer look at the societal "background" of top party leaders (Bolesław Bierut, Hilary Minc, Władysław Gomułka), their friends, family, associates, their history and upbringing, we would find that the assertion of the isolation of power is plainly false. It is also worth examining the characteristic phenomenon of identification with "our man in power" (as exemplified by Edward Gierek and his popularity in Silesia, especially at the onset of his career); to reflect on the societal environment of councilors, MP's, party secretaries at the local level, and the families of party members and their social and neighborly relations. The phenomenon of double membership in the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and Solidarity (it is estimated by historians to be around one million individuals) would also help explain a lot about the period. The image that would surface from such research would be hard to categorize as depicting a grand rupture between the "power" (which, based on the historical narrative alone, could be considered to have come from outer space, or at least to have appeared *deus ex machina*) and "society," as a metaphysical hiatus, which separates two distinct personas. Even the sole enumeration of the aforementioned issues reveals to us a subsequent complication in the dualistic construct of the narrative. If the "power" and "society" are supposed to be the heroes of history we must consider who these two subjects are exactly. In short, we must ponder the questions: power, that is who? Society, that is who?

The majority of referenced works portray the two entities (power and society) as monolithic figures, their voices become homophonic and purified. It is worth considering who exactly falls into the "power" category? Only members of the political bureau? General or First Secretaries? Or, all secretaries? All members of the Communist Party? Or, more broadly still, all those holding public office in Poland? These are not purely rhetorical questions. With each answer the notion of "power" not only changes its scope, but also its content. Each time we construct a different subject, with distinct social relations, with a different structure of agency, accountability, alienation, or social recognition, we enter a new level of political *bios* and it is a different historiography that we practice.¹⁵ It would be trivial to reiterate that of which historians are well aware of, namely that "power" also underwent a substantial change in time,

15 Either political history or social history.

and that it was perceived differently in 1946 than it was in October 1956, and that 1981 brought on further change.

Two heroes – power and society – therefore meet eye to eye. Monolithic, unambiguous, entangled in a dialectical embrace, depicted “but as two gods, each equal on his sun”. Power controls the game, it makes the crucial moves. Society reacts, answers, conforms, and resists. But it must be noted that power finds itself in an ambiguous state: on the one hand it is the active force which initiates events, but on the other its agency is limited, in a way evident to all writers, by external geopolitical structures, namely, the Yalta Agreements and subservience to the Soviet Union.

Therefore, power does not attain the status of a true actor of history, what entails interesting ramifications not only in the case of the notion of agency, but also accountability. Consequently, even with the assertion of limited agency, the hero “power” is made accountable and, when brought before the contemporary tribunal, is always found guilty. Categories such as guilt, expiation, restitution, atonement, and punishment became devices organizing the “communist” field of discourse. They have monopolized and shaped the canon of cultural practice and framed the discourse of the past as collective traumatic memory. It seems interesting that historians almost never (aside from the discussions centering on the introduction of the martial law in Poland in 1981) seem to bring up the question of whether the power took responsibility upon itself, did it act as an actor making deliberate decisions and was it aware of their social consequences – that is rationally, intentionally and morally. Rather it is granted only limited instrumental rationality that comes down to securing its own replication or, otherwise, the reproduction of its external pattern.¹⁶

This model of representation of the lead actor in the historic narrative is present in the works of all aforementioned authors. Even more telling is the silent identification of power with its top tier functionaries, which means that a whole field of social relations and interactions is beyond the main focus of historical research. And although it becomes a topic of interest for anthropologists,¹⁷ it disappears from the field of view of academic historians.

16 Which all in all does not preclude a devilish wit. An actor's image must not be coherent.

17 I have mentioned these ever more numerous and interesting works earlier. It is nevertheless worth considering the grave consequences resulting from the methodology of this rather young, in the Polish context, discipline. Despite the numerous benefits of anthropological research, such as comprehensive and hermeneutical approaches to the subject, despite the premise that culture is a whole, and so on, it is sometimes evident that the authors seem to treat the world at the center of their research as in some respect oriental. They search for the exotic, the unusual, and even for barbarity and difference,

There is less and less space for a historiography that would take on the task of representing the whole spectrum of social issues, interrelations, dependencies, micro- and macro-powers – reality in all its complexity. There is an increasingly clear dominance of the kind of political history that focuses on the actions of party leaders, on an analysis of the institution of power, its acts and gestures, as well as documents, relations with the Soviet Union, and so forth. The analysis of power, although highly incomplete, dominates the whole field, it rearranges history into a sequence of subsequent notifications and directives. Therefore a unified political history overwhelms the field of potentiality of social history.

It is time to shift attention to the second hero of contemporary history, that is society. This persona seems to be even more interesting. Its field of activity is set by historians between two, not so distant, points. The authors surprisingly agree in this case on a binary mode of social reaction, namely adaptation and resistance.¹⁸ Both these attitudes, it is clear, belong in truth to a common field. That is, as I have mentioned, they introduce a relation of strict antagonism between the two heroes, of a fight or a struggle that presupposes either submission to the historical necessity, or an active and noble resistance against external violence. The changing social and political circumstances in the nineteen-fifties have, according to Andrzej Friszke:

Created ground for both stances of adaptation and resistance. Adaptation – conformism even – as such attitudes were rewarded and made career easier. Resistance as the system of orders, prohibitions, and control has deeply interfered with the sense of truth, justice, and the realization of various needs. [...] Virtually every individual experienced moments when choice had to be made: succumb to expectations contrary to the inner sense of righteousness or resist.¹⁹

Both attitudes are highly meaningful: on the one side we have conformism, careerism, lackeyism, and pursuit of rewards; on the other we have truth, righteousness, justice, and morality. There is no conceivable symmetry between the two. One equals surrendering to external influence and evil, the other means independence and staying true to values. However popular this

which not only and not always characterize the described area, but are rather the result of the writers' own gaze and the current strong cultural tendency to change the not so distant past into a sequence of icons and "cult" (though at the same time "lame") objects.

18 See especially the aforementioned work of Andrzej Friszke *"Przystosowanie i opór."*

19 Friszke, *"Przystosowanie i opór,"* 141.

view might seem among Polish historians, it deserves critical reexamination: is it not possible for “resistance” to arise from complacency to external pressures or from the influence of social and historical conventions? Does “finding oneself” in the “new reality” really amount to a loss of social decency, a denial of truth and justice? What does “adaptation” in truth really mean? Does it encompass all that which does not fall under the category “resistance”? What actions and attitudes can be characterized this way? Daily shopping? Benefiting from theater tickets provided by the workplace? Having coffee in a coffeehouse? Working in a factory? Being the Dean of the History Department at the University of Warsaw or The Catholic University of Lublin? Stating these basic and, it would seem, self-evident questions shows that the space between resistance and adaptation seems to be very narrow, the division between them problematic, and the categories themselves uncertain. Additionally, this structure does not seem to have the capacity to describe even partly the richness of life during the 1944-1989 period. This is a meaningful “trimming”; the narrative places the actor “society” in a heroic convention, in which only three roles are available: there is a place only for the power, the heroes, and the adjusted (in an alternative narrative: traitors).

Through such means contemporary historiography creates a narrative macrostructure, a meta-narrative of treason and fidelity that is a precondition, an existential and axiological presupposition, which should be strictly observed by the story of communism, the PRL, and the years 1944-1989. It is noteworthy that a third, most obvious, possibility is obscured by “resistance” and “adaptation,” that is the path of those who in this way or another accepted the power at least for some time. In the general picture of society, previously highlighted, against common sense and numerous detailed research, there is no place for commitment. Such a stance is barred from the set of feasible responses.²⁰ The reasons for this decision seem to be straightforward. This element unsettles the clear agonistic image of the two completely separate subjects: the absolutely external power and the society, whose morally superior part found itself in resistance (the rest has fallen into a more or less degrading collaboration). Yet it would seem that an understanding of what such commitment or support was, what it entailed, and how it manifested, should in itself prove interesting from the point of view of historical research.

It is symptomatic, in fact, that the stance of commitment has already been partly utilized by the public discourse. It is not difficult to recreate some of the narrative models that are deemed plausible and to point out a few not

20 The committed, or accepting, cannot appear without “translation.” They must be transposed onto other categories. In the aforementioned passage from Andrzej Friszke’s work, they appear as careerists.

incompatible variants: a seduction by miasmas and mirages (the tale of “joining a false religion”); craving for power and retaliation on the previous political order by the “people from nowhere” – those with low social and cultural capital (the tale “mob in power”); or finally the opportunistic, independent of the circumstances, instrumental need of making a career and of an unlimited consumption of material and symbolic goods of dubious worth (“careerists in power”, alternatively “traitors at the table”). The narrative of commitment of members of “the society” (but also of “the power”) through seduction (occurring in an erotic or religious manner) oftentimes takes on the form of ‘confessions after the fact’ of a remorseful former adherent, who through his whole later life attempts to right the wrongs he has done.²¹ The public discourse has therefore appropriated those narrative models which fictionalize the experience of commitment in a specific way, by not only structuring them in light of the well-known finale, which is the political change after 1989 (if they lost, they cannot be right), but also by placing them in a narrative endowed with an extreme moral dimension (at the limits of inferiority, pure negativity), wherein the field is divided into two fundamental sides – power and society, and the social side has its heroes and traitors. Such a division is inevitable, if we consider the heroic model to be the supreme and practically sole narrative archetype.

The difficulty caused by this format arises not only from the fact that it seems skewed, but most of all from the fact that this archetype does not leave room for an accurate description. It is worth taking the opinion of Mirosława Marody under consideration. She has noticed the vagueness of attitudes and the category of commitment itself, and has shown that a critical reexamination of the criteria of that commitment ought to be undertaken. She has also stressed that from the year 1958 through most of PRL’s history, at least until the 1980s, the “ideological principles of the system were accepted, but its institutions were rejected.”²² This assertion seems interesting not only for its immediate message, but equally so for its incitement to a more nuanced reimagining of commitment or acceptance, it therefore opens the question of

21 See Maria Hirszowicz, *Pułapki zaangażowania: intelektualści w służbie komunizmu* (Warszawa: Scholar, 2001).

22 Marody, “Przemiany postaw ideologicznych,” 131. Also compare “similarities between social attitudes at the start and the end of PRL tempted to put forward a thesis about a fundamental rejection of the communist system by Polish society. Although this temptation is still strong, it should not be acted upon. It is not the case that the attitude of Polish society towards the communist regime, and especially towards the ideology it preached, as well as the patterns of behavior within the system, have remained stable through the 45 year period” (Marody, „Przemiany postaw ideologicznych,” 128–129).

what gained approval (and sometimes even acclaim), whose approval, and in what kind of circumstances, what was the nature of that consent, and what ideas and social stakes lay at its foundations.²³

When we talk about society it would be prudent to ask, who are we really talking about, and to reflect upon the principle of representation. Who represents society? Analysis of generalized social responses sometimes overshadows the trivial fact that the postwar society was strongly divided (with significant divisions based on social class criterions) and this alone would make it impossible to expect a unified response towards, let us say, the PKWN Manifesto [The Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation]. Common sense tells us to expect a different response from Countess Potocka than from a pauper from Zawidz. And the new self-made intelligentsia, or middle class, had still a different (and one would expect complicated) attitude towards it. Is it possible to find a single factor that all these cases have in common, and should it even be attempted? Would clarifying them really be an easy task and would that not once again equal a gross oversimplification? Does the idea of a homogenous society founded on the image of "common man" not once again overshadow the conflict, and oftentimes the violence, also of the symbolic kind, that took place not only at the intersection of power and society, but also plagued exactly that which we call society itself? Constructing the image of a homogenous historical actor entails an erasure of the social, cultural, and class conflicts that inevitably occurred within a society which quite violently changed its hierarchical and traditional structure.

Is it then worth paying attention to the problem of who is considered by historians to be the lawful representative of society. Who is the actant of history? I have already mentioned that those who accepted the new social order (either in its entirety or only its ideology, or parts of it) are not taken into consideration, as they are considered a minority. Mirosława Marody writes in the excellent, aforementioned study: "a uniformity of attitudes and behaviors [towards communism] was characteristic of only small groups of individuals – on the one hand those who engaged in armed resistance against the imposed regime and the emerging institutions of the communist state, and on the other hand those who identified with the new Polish order and played an active role in its creation. For the greater part of Polish society at the time accepting the divide between the symbolic sphere [attitude towards the communist ideology – K. C.] and the sphere of action was a price (higher or

23 The question of consent is associated with the question of legitimization. I will return to it in subsequent section of this article.

lower) that had to be paid for the opportunity to participate in the process of rebuilding the country, or even recreating a life, after the destruction of war.”²⁴

The author, following Krystyna Kersten, distinguishes the ideological (or symbolic) level and the sphere of practice, directing attention to the various spheres of engagement or rejection; these spheres could probably be expanded even further. Marody emphasizes the transformations of ideological attitudes in time and refers to cyclical research conducted among the Warsaw students. In 1958, respondents answered the question: “would you like the world to evolve towards some kind of socialism” (a general endorsement of the system’s principles) with a “strongly agree” at 24%, and “agree” at 44%; in 1978, it was 21% and 45% respectively; only in 1983 the answers shifted to 8% and 34% respectively.²⁵ Such a numerous group can hardly be considered marginal, contrary to what the author claims, even if it was just a superficial acceptance of an unspecified idea of social justice, which in itself did not preclude resistance to such institutions as censorship or the Security Service [Służba Bezpieczeństwa]. This kind of attitude or rather attitudes does not destroy the fundamental image of society, which remained in ideological resistance against communism and chose compromise with power for the sake of everyday convenience. What stands out is that such a society is always reactive; it is not the subject of any action and even the postwar rebuilding process is socially depersonalized: it is an external process that one can join, but “there is a price to be paid” for that.

Emplotments

The creation of the actors of history determines the narrative and, conversely, the choice of narrative affects the formation of heroes. I consider emplotments (or narrative patterns)²⁶ to be meaningful chains of events, formed into basic macrostructures in such a way that they organize various narrative elements (facts), endow them with a specific meaning, and determine the rhetorical and interpretative force of historical writing. Independent of its truth value, each story is a modeling of complicated historical matter at its most basic level through the selection and choice of relevant facts, but even more so through their reconfiguration and endowing them with a universal meaning.

24 Marody, „Przemiany postaw ideologicznych,” 127.

25 Ibid., 130.

26 See Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” and “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth,” in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Roberts (London: Routledge, 2001).

The story of two protagonists, that is about power and society, that can be inferred from contemporary historical texts on communism, is constructed on the basis of certain generic beliefs, or plot types. The most significant of them is the aforementioned heroic type of narrative, that is the story of society's heroic resistance to power.

One of its variants is the narrative of treason, very popular in public discourse, which is simply determined by a connection to the "communist system". A story about the society of heroic resistance must arrange the field in such a way that it casts the parts of heroes and traitors and becomes associated with a certain kind of moral discourse (popular mostly during the eighties, derived from personalism and present until this day in conservative narratives), namely the discourse of values (always in the plural, always framed in broad terms and without details), which segregates the participants of past, and even current, events into those who were faithful to values (whatever this may mean, it certainly means that they stood against the new social, political, and cultural order named as communist) and those who betrayed these "fundamental values." Depending on the type of narrative, the betrayed righteous – who stand against the wicked – will be made up of either a handful or most of society (in such conceived community there is a place for the repentant).²⁷

The voice of professional historiography sometimes lends credibility to this kind of story, although when it does it still rarely hits the mark with the hard supporters of the treason narrative. The betrayal metanarrative is sometimes contrasted by historians, as I have previously mentioned, with the macrostructure "little man" that is a vision in which the majority does not take up a fight against the regime, but neither does it contribute to the development of the "political system", and instead tries to find its place within the unaccommodating, imposed reality. Speaking plainly: the people made the best of what they had, somehow managed to make ends meet, but in all this they knew what they knew. This type of narrative, moderate, suggestive, and convincing, obscures, as I have mentioned, the complexity of attitudes exhibited by the whole society, its inner polarization and the multilayered, intricate divisions within it. At the same time, it conceals from view the fact that the criteria of this "complacency" or acceptance were highly diverse. An obvious result of this process is a reduction of any intermediate and hybrid forms, but primarily it results in a denial of representation to a significant part

27 It is symptomatic that the criteria of „struggle“ mostly remain unclear, for some it will be the deeds of the "cursed soldiers," for others wearing a resistor in the 1980s, for others it would be stealing toilet paper from the workplace or listening to Radio Luxembourg. Each time the group of traitors and representatives of the righteous nation rearrange radically.

of society (the adherents), or conversely, granting the right to represent the whole of society to its specific part.

For historians the metanarrative of social resistance seems obvious, therefore even if they dismiss the story of treason and decay, they still remain within the framework of heroic narration, disregarding out of hand other conceptualizations and removing from sight facts and tendencies they are well aware of:

Today nobody disputes the fact, that the political model, which for forty-five years constituted the institutional framework of social interactions in Poland, was a foreign model and that it was imposed by force. Nevertheless, [...] it enjoyed the backing of a large proportion of Polish society, for whom it became a gateway to social and cultural advancement.²⁸

This is a stable model and nobody disturbs the *status quo*, nobody questions it, and although everyone is aware of that “nevertheless” it is not taken under consideration in the big picture of that era.

The theme of power as a foreign element seems to be particularly interesting in historical narratives. It is clear that the postwar relations and international accords, and most of all the Soviet Union have determined the introduction of the system that named itself “People’s democracy” in Poland. The demarcation of global spheres of influence was of utmost importance in the whole process of political transition. But all of this does not necessitate that the power was foreign and does not unequivocally dictate the attitude of citizens towards the new order (and we cannot speak of rejection in every case). What is more, most Polish historians do not share the view which considers the time between 1944 and 1989 as a time when Poland was under occupation by communist or soviet power, and consider it to be a gross oversimplification.²⁹ Still within their texts there is a detectable presupposition, or a basic idea, of a power that is external in its relation to society (completely,

²⁸ Marody, „Przemiany postaw ideologicznych,” 137.

²⁹ Nonetheless this is an image that often returns in the public discourse, that of historians included. It received a novel formulation in Polish postcolonial research, which treats Poland in the years 1944–1989 directly as a space of colonial, cultural, and political domination of Russia (and not necessarily The Soviet Union), cf. the works of Ewa Thompson. Oftentimes these narratives are inherently contradictory, they speak of cultural and intellectual dominance of Russians and at the same time exhibit a conviction of the cultural, social, and political superiority of Polish society. What is interesting is that this inconsistency does not diminish the rhetorical force of nationalistic or anticommunist discourse.

and from the start to the finish), remaining in a state of permanent *agon* with it, always opposed and detested, foreign, subservient, influenced from the outside by the emissaries (or cronies, in the popular discourse) of the Russian empire or soviet communism. At the heart of it, this image lays a precondition to the occupation hypothesis. Certainly, the statements of mainstream professionals are not delivered in such a straightforward and frank manner, nevertheless they still manage to capture the imagination. For example, in professor Kula's texts we can often find emplotments which recasts the seizing and exercise of power in Poland as basically an operation carried out by foreign "paratroopers."³⁰ The author adopts this metanarrative and justifies the reasons, or the grounds, for such feelings and conceptions: communism did not "take root" in Poland because firstly, before the war there were no good socio-economic grounds for communism in Poland ("foreign capital was not an issue"), secondly, communism came from Russia, and in Poland there is a long tradition of uprisings directed against it, especially that the Soviet Union did not manage to claim credit for defeating fascism, and moreover "the template of nationalistic thought is deeply rooted" and "through sheer coincidence of historical events, which is not that hard to explain, there were many Poles of Jewish descent among the communist leaders, which lent itself to interpretations of communism as a foreign (Jewish) invention."³¹ This passage exhibits a characteristic confusion of narrative perspectives, it is unclear whether the historian shows objective facts and relations, his own interpretation of these facts, or the way society interprets them; therefore we cannot be certain if he refers to someone's opinion or presents his own. An auctorial narrator, restating somebody else's views and seeking to distance himself from the presented world would paraphrase the above arguments this way: Polish society rejected communist rule, because its worldview and political inclinations can be categorized as nationalistic ("the template of nationalistic

30 With the legendary image of parachuting communists.

31 Kula, *Komunizm*, 30–31. The first reason is especially worth further consideration. The term "foreign capital," was not unknown to pre-war political and social discourse, especially in its nationalistic, anti-Semitic form that sees "Jewish capital" and "Jewish money" as coming from outside (of Polish society) with the backing of international financiers. In addition, one more rather general observation pertaining to the socio-economic background of the new Polish regime: one cannot fail to notice that the strong economic and social disagreements in pre-war Poland, the scale of poverty and prominent leftist critique of social relations provided a foothold for the new power and helped it secure a substantial social backing, though not of the whole society, of course. This is attested to in detailed research and also in literature, and in any case this is not new knowledge. I consider overlooking this aspect to be a significant smoothing of the picture, retouching it to fit the basic narrative of rejection and resistance.

thought”), anti-Russian (the second point) and anti-Semitic (the presence of Jews disqualifies anything out of hand as foreign). But this would be an altogether different narrative, irrespective of whether the main thesis holds true and the observations are correct. This confusion of perspectives, shortening of distance, and an unclear relationship with the presented world lend themselves to a peculiar end – they bestow the credibility of science to past opinions and judgements without considering their merit, therefore objectivizing nationalistic and anti-Semitic attitudes as comprehensible to our “Polish” outlook. The unfamiliarity of communism to the Polish national character is reinforced by the impression of abnormality, a strange experiment, something construed that opposes a supposedly organic tradition, destroys order, and impairs fundamental values. Therefore, communism appears as a curiosity, an aberration, that disrupts the proper course of history, fortunately for only a short while.



There is a visible tendency in contemporary historical research on communism to simplify the picture, to unify it. This is not the result of distancing from the not as yet distant subject. On the contrary, it results from its perceived proximity. This is a subject which still highly engages its researchers not only due to its significance, but also its actuality. It becomes a stake in the contemporary game for the lawfulness of the cultural and social order that came into being after the fall of communism in 1989 as the antithesis of the previous order, its reversal. Therefore, a complete appropriation of the pre-1989 symbolic capital seems necessary in order to legitimize the present, its ontological and axiological difference from the pre-fall era. A homogenization of the image entails not only its simplification but also significant displacements and omissions. To satisfy the macrostructure of the heroic narrative, the actors must be created in a purely agonic fashion, their axiological status must be clearly outlined (communist power as pure evil that defies any empathetic description which would elucidate its social, or even moral, reasons). Any possible nuances and doubts must be removed from view, any non-antagonistic relations between both sides must be obscured, so as not to disrupt the central narrative. “Power” in particular, and communism in general, must be depicted as completely external and foreign to “society”, as a strange and incomprehensible aberration that needs to be exorcised time and again.

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Communist Women and the Spirit of Transgression: The Case of Wanda Wasilewska

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Life has to be a struggle.

Wanda Wasilewska,
Dzieciństwo [Childhood]¹

Personal Genealogy

In her autobiographical sketch *O moich książkach* [About My Books] (1964), penned towards the end of her life, Wanda Wasilewska noted:

My home schooled me well – far from a bourgeois sense of contentment and bourgeois ideals, it was always focused on general affairs [...], the aura of my family home, where general affairs were always put first, instead of personal ones, must have had an impact on my adult life. It was kind of a given that one should take an interest in what was going on around them, and actively participate in life...²

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1 Wanda Wasilewska, *Dzieciństwo* (Warszawa: PIW, 1967), 123.

2 After Eleonora Syzdek, *W jednym życiu tak wiele: opowieść o Wandzie Wasilewskiej* (Warszawa: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1980), 18–19.

Remembering the upbringing she received in her family home, Wasilewska – writer, Communist activist, wartime head of the Union of Polish Patriots in the USSR, a post-war member of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union – wrote about her *credo*: fight which becomes one's life-purpose and thus is all-consuming. She thought it obvious that there ought to be a direct correlation between one's proclamations and one's way of life: the political forced its way into every nook and cranny of the private sphere, engulfing and subjugating it. At the same time, personal experience became an impulse to undertake political action, to initiate changes or participate in a process already underway. It was a practice that was familiar to the Polish intelligentsia, which had lived and breathed general affairs for decades, but simultaneously a new one, different from the established patterns: the Communists, whom Wasilewska joined at some point, were following the idea of a radical interweaving of the political and the private, of revolutionizing every aspect of social life – and they began with themselves and their environment. As French philosopher Michel Foucault wrote: “revolution [for them – A.M.] was not just a political project; it was also a form of life.”³

In one of his lectures delivered at the Collège de France in early 1980s, Foucault pointed out that starting from the Cynics all the way to contemporary times, revolutions were not merely political events, but also living ideas, rules which governed life, projects manifested by those who propagated them, whose very lives attested to the verity of their slogans, sometimes to the point of (auto)destruction. Foucault was far from making a simple analogy between, for instance, the revolution of 1968 and previous ones, including that of 1917: they were too far apart in terms of the historical, political, and cultural context, as well as in terms of the methods of exacting their demands, or even the way they defined them. And yet, he did notice a certain continuity in thinking about revolutions and the actions of people who dreamed up visions of social change at great personal cost: broadcasting their views meant challenging the world, which in practice translated into separating themselves from the community in which they were raised, and rejecting the rules they were taught, including the fundamental ones on submitting to violence or using it against others: “Going after the truth, manifesting the truth, making the truth burst out to the point of losing one's life or causing the blood of others to flow is in fact something whose long filiation is found again across European thought,”⁴ wrote Foucault.

3 Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (The Government of Self and Others II)*. Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–1984, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 183.

4 Foucault, *The Courage*, 185.

In this article, I would like to take a look at Wanda Wasilewska – “Leon’s daughter,” as she was referred to by her contemporaries when they were trying to underscore her “refined/upper-class/proper upbringing” (Polish, patriotic, intellectual) and her “rejection” of it on her journey to Communism⁵ – in an attempt, based on Foucault’s musings on “revolution, which becomes an existential project,” to capture that which has heretofore eluded her biographers and the commentators of her activities: to see neither the icon or of the Communist coup nor a symbol of national betrayal, but a “living person,” a participant of social life, firmly set within a specific historical and geographical context, and defined by it. I am interested in Wasilewska, and more broadly, also other female activists of the Polish post-war Communist movement, as a revolutionary both in the public and in private sphere, as one of the theorists, ideologists and propagandists of Communism in Poland, but also a person whose “entrance” into Communism took place on many levels, resulting in a certain “scandal of the truth,” to quote Foucault.⁶ This intersection of the private and the public is something striking in Wasilewska’s writing, her literary and journalistic texts, and her personal documents – memoirs, interviews, letters. Wasilewska’s “voice” – rarely recalled today as it is marginalized as “unreliable” and “compromised”⁷ – takes us through the process of how her Communist identity was shaped, revealing the moments she crossed several boundaries: of gender, nationality, social class – a gesture she saw as “rejecting superstition” or “delusions;”⁸ it reveals her gradual experience of the boundaries of Communist transgression as well. This “voice” deserves, I believe, to be heard and to be given a chance to present its own reasons, to reveal its motivations for certain behaviors and actions, especially as other “voices” referenced in this article constantly interpret what she says, closely and carefully “investigating” and “reading” her words. However, Wasilewska does not appear in this article as the only witness in her own trial – she is not put in the position of the accused without a right to defense.

5 See for instance Adam Ciołkosz, *Wanda Wasilewska. Dwa szkice biograficzne* (London: Polonia Book Fund, 1977).

6 Foucault, *The Courage*, 183.

7 Remarking on Wasilewska’s work Joanna Szczęśna, journalist of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, declared: “Although her novels criticizing Poland of the Sanacja period can hardly be categorized as masterpieces of Polish prose, Wasilewska’s books on Soviet reality are simply unreadable.” Joanna Szczęśna, “Wanda Wasilewska: Bywszaja Polka,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23.03.2001, accessed January 20, 2013, <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/kraj/1,34311,192981.html>

8 Wanda Wasilewska, “Listy Wandy Wasilewskiej (I),” *Zdanie* 6 (1985): 36. (Letter to mother from November 25, 1931.)

There is a method of writing about human beings, proposed by feminist literary scholar Toril Moi, which includes his or her voice, assumes empowerment of the “object of study,” but also “reads” their voice contextually, allowing to see human life not as a coherent, finished “product” but rather as “a process of production,” a making of the “I.” Moi calls this method a “personal genealogy,” emphasizing that it is different from biography as it

seeks to achieve a sense of emergence or production and to understand the complex play of different kind of power involved in social phenomena. Personal genealogy does not reject the notion of the self but tries instead to subject that very self to genealogical investigation. Personal genealogy assumes that every phenomenon must be read as a text, that is to say a complex network of signifying structures.⁹

In my attempt to outline Wanda Wasilewska’s “personal genealogy,” I would like to reflect also on the usefulness of the method used by Moi in her work on French writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir for the study of Communism. Looking at the identities of persons/ groups/ generations/ communities in the process of “becoming” and transforming, the analysis of motivations and forces which trigger or inhibit action, while recording the moments of intersection between the political and the personal, can help problematize the image of Communism in Poland, dominated today by a totalizing approach. This is because “personal genealogy” or, putting it more broadly, genealogy as seen by Foucault,¹⁰ is not a project aiming to construct a large, monumental, unifying narrative of Communism, but rather a proposal to break it into many smaller ones: narratives that treat the actors of events as subjects (for instance by not denying them a voice), to situate them in a broad historical, cultural, geographical context, to take into account the complex system of forces and power relations in which they existed and which they undermined, and at other times preserved.¹¹ It is an approach that allows

9 Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29.

10 See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, genealogia, historia,” in: *Filozofia, historia, polityka: wybór pism* (Warszawa–Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000), 113–135.

11 It must be noted that this methodological approach has already been applied in the research on Communism. In *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw’s Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism* (2006) American historian Marci Shore described a generation of Polish intellectuals, enchanted and disenchanted with Marxism, against the background of Polish and European history of the first half of the 20th century. In *Żydokomuna* (2010 motion picture) sociologist Anna Zawadzka looked at Communism through the eyes of Polish-

to “capture multiple aspects of [Communism’s] history itself” but also to see in the “people entangled in its history” something more than only “passive objects run by impersonal forces of the system.”¹²

No One is Born a Communist¹³

Communism is not something one is born with, nor is it something to be “inherited” from one’s parents or grandparents,¹⁴ as clearly proven by the biographies of several Communist (and anti-Communist) activists. Rather, as a set of views, attitudes, approaches, convictions and behaviors, it is something “acquired,” developed in the process of socialization: by reading certain books, frequenting certain circles, meeting certain people. Sometimes, however (and here one can also find many examples), it is also something one can identify with¹⁵ against the grain of socialization: against the education received at home, against the tradition one is shaped by – something formed in a certain field,¹⁶ whether intellectual or political, as a result of principles governing this field or in violation thereof.

I emphasize this, because it is common in Poland (though not only here) to view Communism, especially among the intellectual elites, as a kind “blindness,” “bite,” “seduction” or “possession”; a kind of “impulse,” “momentum,” “action” leading to a tragic “reaction.” Such reasoning applies also to Wanda Wasilewska’s case. Adam Ciołkosz, an activist of the Polish Socialist Party and Wasilewska’s friend from her days in Cracow’s Union of Independent Socialist Youth, and a political opponent after the war, spoke of Wasilewska’s involvement in Communism as a kind of “ecstasy of love” or “passion” which

Jewish activists, noting both their differences at the point of departure but also the evolution of their views and attitudes from the 1920s until the present.

12 Marcin Starnawski, “Tęsknię za tobą, Żydzio-rewolucjonisto! Demitologizacja, etos i nieprawomyślnie lekcje w filmie Anny Zawadzkiej *Żydokomuna*,” *Recykling Idei* 13 (2012): 168.

13 To paraphrase the famous sentence from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, “No one is born a woman” (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 301.

14 Marci Shore, *Nowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*, trans. Michał Sutowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2012).

15 For the difference between identification and identity, see Stuart Hall “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 1–17.

16 As defined by Pierre Bourdieu. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Dystynkcja. Społeczna krytyka władzy sądzonych*, trans. Piotr Biłos (Warszawa: Scholar, 2006).

gripped her suddenly and fervently.¹⁷ Remembering Wasilewska of the Lviv period (1939-1940), the ex-communist poet Aleksander Wat mentioned “fanaticism,” her almost religious “ecstasy” or “exaltation” or “mysticism [as the] Saint Teresa of Communism.”¹⁸ Both of these frames of reference – religion and love – are particularly powerful when applied to women; Wasilewska’s femininity sharpens her image as someone irrational, ecstatic, possessed by sudden passions.

However, explanations of the “nature” of Communism based on religion/ love fail to reveal motivations behind the human involvement in it, except for the psychological one: ultimately, the Communist (especially when female) is presented as weak and prone to “addiction.” They also fail to account for “the journey into Communism,” focusing only on the movement in the opposite direction, where freeing oneself from “addiction” is being praised as a demonstration of individual willpower and determination. Finally, they do not encourage a reflection on what this journey may have encompassed, its obstacles or sacrifices: if we assume involvement in Communism to result from an “impulse” or “blindness,” all discussions of it as a process, a movement with everything that the movement entails, and its consequences (changes of direction, pauses, changes of pace) are rendered invalid.

Meanwhile, the latter issue, i.e. engagement as a process, often extended over several years, a movement that is difficult to define as something steady or straight, seems particularly important when discussing Wasilewska. Her “passage into Communism” was not, as revealed especially by her letters, a single “jump into the realm of freedom,”¹⁹ but a long process that on the one hand occurred smoothly (being a “young lady from a good family” she could afford the luxury of “maturing into radicalism”), but on the other, was not free of its shocks, precisely because of the environment Wasilewska was raised in.

An analysis of such process should begin with two questions: what “makes” someone a Communist, what private and/ or public events, what emotional “upheavals,” what thought processes are behind it? And when exactly can we pronounce someone a Communist? Is it determined by the party affiliation, an ideological declaration, a specific act (and of what kind)?

17 Ciołkosz: “And here is the key to the story of Wanda Wasilewska’s life. When the Soviet troops entered Polish territory, she discovered – as Piotr did – the true love of her life, the red star” (in Adam Ciołkosz, *Wanda Wasilewska*, 32).

18 Aleksander Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, vol. 1 (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 317.

19 After Andrzej Walicki, “Marksizm i nieudany „skok do królestwa wolności,” in *Polska, Rosja, marksizm* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 397-446.

In Wasilewska's case, these questions were frequently asked, but depending on who and when penned her biography, the date of Wasilewska's "entrance into Communism" moved back and forth. The early (sympathetic) biographies by Soviet authors²⁰ accentuated her every act of youthful rebellion, even as a child, to present Wasilewska as a radical as early as possible. Others (who are anti-Communist), in turn, emphasized her long "socialist childhood" and safe life under the wing of her father's influence, followed by a sudden "jump" into the deep waters of Communism on September 17, 1939, when she fell into Stalin's arms.²¹ Questions about the exact date of her "joining the Communists," but also about the symptoms of her pre-war Communist activity – a certain verification of Wasilewska's biography – were used both to legitimize her status as an icon of the Communist revolution in Poland or, on the contrary, to expose her as a "traitor," "renegade," "a degenerate daughter of her people."

Wasilewska's case is interesting because in a lot of respects, it differs from a typical "blueprint of a Communist." She was a self-proclaimed PPS (Polish Socialist Party) supporter and not ashamed of her background. Talking to historians of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in January 1964, she started with a "confession":

I was born into a PPS family with strong independent leanings, in a family not only reluctant, but hostile toward Russia, whether Tsarist or Soviet. Already in early childhood, my PPS family and the cult of Piłsudski made me see certain connections between things. It was clear, that the red banner stood for the workers. My father worked in a socialist press house, went to the workers' meetings, my mother was active in the workers' movement. Already as a child I grew used to May 1 being an important holiday, a day when holding my mother's or my father's hand you walk in the first row of the parade.²²

Remembering her childhood, Wasilewska also reconstructed the tradition she was raised in: a patriotic, committed one where the Romantic notion of a struggle for freedom interconnected with the positivist idea of hard, daily work. The struggle for Poland's freedom was a priority for her parents,

20 See Elena Usievic, *Vanda Vasilevskaâ: kritiko-biografišeskij ošerk* (Moskwa: Sovetskij pisatel, 1953); Leonid Vengerov, *Vanda Vasilevskaâ: kritiko-biografišeskij ošerk* (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1955).

21 See Ciołkosz, *Wanda Wasilewska*.

22 Wasilewska, "Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej," in *Z pola walki* 1 (41) (1968): 118.

Leon Wasilewski and Wanda *nee* Zieleniewska (they both supported Józef Piłsudski's push for independence), and so was social and educational activism – before WWI Wasilewska's father published *Przedświt* [*Daybreak*], a socialist journal, and her mother was a member of the Circle for People's Education.

In the autobiographical essay quoted earlier, *O moich książkach* [*About my Books*], Wasilewska spoke of her family home having “schooled her well,” teaching her to connect the private, the intimate and personal with the public, the social and the political; a secular, democratic, egalitarian environment. She admitted being raised in a context that stimulated activity instead of teaching passiveness.²³ And it was a particular kind of activity, consisting of teaching, writing for leftist journals, agitating in small towns and villages, organizing a workers' library or taking part in the students' theatre where in 1933 she staged *Cyanide*, a play by Friedrich Wolf (1929) about the problem of conscious motherhood; in other words, a “traditionally socialist” kind of activity, reformatory rather than revolutionary in nature, as for some time she viewed the latter type – associated with the Communism – as something fanatical, almost sect-like.²⁴ In her circles, as among the majority of the society, Communism was viewed if not with hostility, then definitely with suspicion and distance.²⁵ Several years later she noted that the decision to join the Union of Independent Socialist Youth and not any other similar youth organization was motivated precisely by the radicalism of the Communists with regard to their methods:

I can't remember which pamphlet exactly said that, but I remember reading a sentence that said: “Fighting against socialist fascism: we must join labor unions and if they can't be taken over, they must be destroyed.” And that was the moment I decided to join the ZNMS [Union of Independent Socialist Youth] and not “Życie” [“Life”] because I thought that when one joins a labor union, one should work for it. I thought it made no sense

23 The ethos of Polish pre-war leftist intelligentsia was the subject of Andrzej Mencwel's *Etos lewicy: esej o narodzinach kulturalizmu polskiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009).

24 See Eleonora Syzydek, *W jednym życiu tak wiele*, 56. A critical portrayal of the Communist Party of Poland of that period can be found in Jan Alfred Reguła, *Historia Komunistycznej Partii Polski* (Warszawa: “Drukprasa,” 1934).

25 For discussion of the portrayal of the Communists, the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Russia in Polish interwar poetry, see for instance Ewa Pogonowska, *Dziki biesy: wizja Rosji sowieckiej w antybolszewickiej poezji polskiej lat 1917–1932* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2002).

to destroy a union which took so much effort and work to create – and then, suddenly, I hear they're to be destroyed.²⁶

Elsewhere she added:

We had a lot of trouble with the Communists because they aggressively promoted actions that could end in the spilling of blood and we believed that that should not be done. We engaged in rather innocent fights with the police – we threw pepper at the officers, salt in their eyes etc. We tried to avoid spilling blood.²⁷

Several of Wasilewska's friends, critical of Communism after the war, highly valued her PPS activity. Aleksander Wat wrote that "being a daughter of a socialist minister, she absorbed good traditions at home,"²⁸ and Julian Strykowski thought that the "scent of Austro-Hungarian Cracow around her, the atmosphere of Leon Wasilewski's home (Wasilewski was a foreign minister in Piłsudski's government)" helped to balance the outlook of the "Red Army Colonel," which was the rank Wasilewska gained during the war in the Soviet Union.²⁹ Stalin appreciated Wasilewska's PPS past for different reasons: Eleonora Syzdek, one of Wasilewska's biographers, believed she was chosen to represent the Poles in the USSR since, as a member of PPS, she was less suspicious to Stalin than the members of the Communist Party of Poland, dissolved in 1938.³⁰

And yet, it was precisely her lack of KPP (Communist Party of Poland) membership before the war, combined with Stalin's significant degree of trust gained in the Soviet Union, that resulted in the degree of interest in Wasilewska, or even suspicion, in postwar Poland. If she was never a member of a Communist party, why then was she the one to represent Polish interests to Stalin. Did she represent those interests as a Polish

26 Wasilewska, "Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej," 123.

27 Ibid., 135.

28 Wat, *Mój wiek*, 315.

29 Julian Strykowski, *Ocalony na Wschodzie* (Montricher: L'Édition Noir sur Blanc, 1991), 180.

30 Eleonora Syzdek, *Działalność Wandy Wasilewskiej w latach drugiej wojny światowej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1981), 68. In a conversation with Teresa Torańska, Jakub Berman said that: "Stalin [...] was impressed that a daughter of a pre-war Polish minister – Leon Wasilewski, and a writer, is also a Communist," see Teresa Torańska, *Oni* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 1997), 354.

Communist, or as someone appreciated in the Soviet Union (or by Stalin himself?)³¹ for different reasons? Talking to Polish historians in 1964, questions such as these were politically motivated – on the one hand they were meant to increase the credibility of Wasilewska herself, clarifying who she was in fact, whether she was a Polish patriot and Communist or a Soviet agent, and on the other hand, to legitimize Władysław Gomułka's "Polish way to socialism" that began after October 1956.³² This is why, answering these questions, Wasilewska was careful about her choice of words:

I've never had an inclination for leadership, and did certain things because I could, because I had opportunities to do them and others didn't. And even though I did my best not to cause any kind of friction, I understand that there were people who didn't approve that suddenly the Communists, the KPP [Communist Party of Poland] members, people with a certain view about the Soviet Union and with a long time party membership, former prisoners etc., were not talked to, and all the matters were settled through me.³³

Wasilewska's lack of institutional affiliation was important for Adam Ciołkosz for another reason: it discredited her as a radical. He wrote, sarcastically, that before the war she "stuck with the PPS [Polish Socialist Party]" and if she indeed was a radical, it was "only to the degree that the entire PPS was radical at that time."³⁴ He recalled that the choice of PPS was "practical" for Wasilewska: as a socialist she could operate legally and, additionally, with the help of the "fairy godmothers," "this revolutionary, this new version of Rosa Luxemburg (though of lesser intellect), the Polish Pasionaria not even once (let me stress: not even once) had known the bitter taste of prison bread, not even once had she looked through the barred windows of the prison cell, not once had she been struck by the lawman's club."³⁵ Questioning Wasilewska's

31 One of the most frequently repeated "legends" about Wasilewska involves her alleged sexual relationship with Stalin. See for instance Sławomir Koper, "Ulubienica Stalina," in *Kobiety władzy PRL* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czerwone i Czarne, 2012), 33–85.

32 See Andrzej Werblan, *Stalinizm w Polsce* (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze i Literackie, 2009).

33 Wasilewska, "Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej (1939–1944)," *Archiwum Ruchu Robotniczego* 2 (1982): 427.

34 Ciołkosz, *Wanda Wasilewska*, 16.

35 *Ibid.*, 47.

radicalism as something “unstable,” “emotional,” almost childish, Ciołkosz created an image of pre-war PPS as the only left party that consistently and maturely had continued to criticize the state authorities and had resisted it with determination.

Wasilewska herself explained her institutional choices as follows:

(...) what happened, happened as it does for everyone: one's character shapes the environment. My life was greatly influenced by the people I'd associated with.³⁶

Her memories suggest that she followed her parents in many areas: the ethos of action and involvement as well as a certain school of thought and action of the Polish intelligentsia. Her radicalism grew gradually. It also resulted from the disappointment with the situation in the country, of which she wrote many years later:

My early childhood was spent in the atmosphere of a dream about a free, independent Poland... How this independent Poland was supposed to look was of less importance, pictured vaguely and it seemed to go without saying that it would be free and just for all. I was raised surrounded by romantic literature and poems about the fight for freedom, steeped in the tradition of Polish uprisings, books about fighting the Tsarist regime and the Prussians, in the deep belief that once liberated, Poland will be a paradise for all of its people. Then came 1918. From WWI and the Revolution toppling the Tsar, the Polish state was born, after 120 years of non-existence. And it immediately revealed its classist face. It was a capitalist state, dependent on foreign capital, with all its consequences. The rift between childhood dreams and reality was glaring, even for a child. This is why as a thirteen-, fourteen-year-old, I went to workers' meetings and demonstrations, and joined the youth socialist organization during the first year at college.³⁷

– and from the disappointment with the fact that the chosen path, that of reform, led nowhere as former revolutionaries, both old and young, made compromises with state authorities, were given nice jobs and thus turned into conformists. In a letter to her mother from 10 September 1934 she wrote:

36 Wasilewska, “Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej,” 120.

37 Wasilewska, “Podróż po życiu i książkach (I),” *Tu i Teraz* 1 (1983): 16.

I am formally suffocating: Cracow is fast turning into a muddy puddle... What I know for sure is that we're a bunch of fools, lunatics who wasted their lives for several years for a handful of bastards to grow in wealth and power at our cost. [...] After all, we were accomplices in deluding the people, we participated in the big scam taking place continuously at the expense of the masses. The Communists are absolutely right in this respect.³⁸

Complaining about apathy and being deprived of the possibility of action, she also criticized the elitism among the authorities of the Cracow's PPS, the growing distance between the party's upper and lower tiers, and more to the point, the betrayal of principles that the PPS claimed to champion. Writing to her mother on April 8, 1932, she noted:

The masses moved to the left – I am now snowed under with work and I can see that in the last few months the process accelerated significantly. But the “top” has remained where it used to be. Hence the gap between the “top” and the “masses,” and moreover, the “top” is completely certain of its greatness and wisdom, which rules out the possibility of communication... I am sure that it will only take a few more months of misery – the people are desperate. [...] The Party won't have any say here, I mean the Party as the current group of people. Something will be done: either the Communists will do something, or us, or us and the Communists together.³⁹

In the spring of 1932, she joined the faction of radical youth which increasingly pushed for confrontation with the Sanacja authorities, advocating for a broad structure of resistance created jointly with the Communists (as part of the then-established Popular Front). In another letter to her mother, from November 1931, Wasilewska still confessed to becoming “thoroughly ‘bol-shevized’ in all respects. And I’m willing to take this further. For far too long I failed to re-examine several utter superstitions.”⁴⁰

What did she have in mind mentioning “superstitions”? Did she mean only formal, institutional ties with the Communists? Or rather adopting, at least in some respects, the Communist view of relationships between Poland and Europe, including the situation in the Soviet Union? The last point seems

38 After Syzydek, *W jednym życiu tak wiele*, 97.

39 Wasilewska, “Listy Wandy Wasilewskiej (I),” 37.

40 Ibid., 36 (letter from November 15, 1931).

particularly significant as it concerns not only Wasilewska's worldview and the direction it was evolving in, but also the important question of the "nature" of Communism in prewar Poland: to what extent did it result from a "fascination" of the Polish Communists with the October Revolution, and to what extent was it born from the disappointment with the situation in Poland? There was also the question of its support by the Polish intelligentsia (one of the proposed explanations claims that this support was provoked by the atmosphere of the late 1930s, as well as rumblings of the oncoming war). Wasilewska's case proves that the matter was more complex: in the vast majority of conversations with historians, she claimed that on the eve of WWII she had no doubt that only the Soviet Union was capable of stopping fascism. This conviction was not shaken by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939:

As we discussed this matter, we've concluded that clearly the situation was such that the Soviet Union had to postpone at all costs a clash with Germany. Although this evoked rather complicated emotions, apparently, it was necessary to save the Soviet Union.⁴¹

Just before the outbreak of the war, she already "put her money" on the Soviet Union. Also a year or two earlier, when the Moscow trials took place and the Communist Party of Poland was dissolved, she believed that "certain actions [were] necessary" as fascism was growing stronger and the USSR was becoming increasingly isolated on the international stage. Several years later she discouraged voices critically evaluating pre-war events: "It seems to me that one must approach these matters carefully today, so that later diagnoses are not transferred to those times."⁴²

In May 1936, Wasilewska participated in Lviv in the Congress of Cultural Workers which gathered writers, intellectuals and cultural activists opposing war and imperialism and championing humanist values. Congress participants adopted a resolution declaring that:

Advocating common struggle of all people exploited and oppressed by fascism, regardless of their nationality, we believe that the fight against the imperialist war is the first duty of all progressive cultural workers.⁴³

⁴¹ Wasilewska, "Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej," 189.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴³ After Syzydek, *W jednym życiu tak wiele*, 143.

It was a declaration of international cooperation of the leftist intellectuals to oppose the expanding fascism, but also nationalism and capitalism. It made no reference to the “leadership” of the Soviet Union, emphasizing instead international humanist values. Wasilewska left Lviv convinced that “today the place of the writer, of the artist is among the proletariat of towns and villages, fighting for its liberation,”⁴⁴ a conviction expressed in her last pre-war novel, *Ziemia w jarzmie* [*Land under Yoke*] (1938). It was both anti-capitalist and anti-nationalist book – or rather, by locating the action of the novel in the areas along the Bug river and focusing on the Polish countrymen exploiting uneducated peasants that spoke a mix of Polish and Belarusian – it was a book revealing the strong interconnections of class and national relations, and economic exploitation increased by the power drawn from access to the dominant language and culture.⁴⁵ In this and in her earlier novels such as *Oblicze dnia* [*The Face of Day*] (1934) and *Ojczyzna* [*Homeland*] (1935), Wasilewska accused Poland of unequal treatment of its citizens, of “being twofold”: bourgeois and proletarian, for the elites and for the masses. “What did Poland give to those who fought for it? Whose true homeland has it become? The answer was clear and unambiguous – that Poland is a mother to factory owners and landowners, and a stepmother to the worker and peasant,”⁴⁶ Wasilewska wrote after several years of being disappointed with interwar Poland, a disappointment she transferred to her protagonists.

The content of her prewar novels was not something that pleased the Sanacja authorities (which we know also from Wasilewska’s letters to her father⁴⁷): a clearly drawn picture of misery and exploitation, anger born of having no sense of prospects, a growing “hum” of an approaching revolution.

44 After Syzydek, *Działalność Wandy Wasilewskiej*, 48–49.

45 In the 1930s ethnographer Józef Obrębski conducted broad research of ethnographic relations in western Polesie – area overlapping one described by Wasilewska in *Ziemia w jarzmie*. Grażyna Borkowska referenced his work asking about the role of Poles in the processes of colonization of these territories which now belong mostly to Belarus and Ukraine. See Grażyna Borkowska, “Perspektywa postkolonialna na gruncie polskim – py-tania sceptyka,” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2010): 40–52.

46 Wasilewska, “Podróż po życiu i książkach (I),” 16.

47 In a letter from February 9, 1934 Wasilewska wrote to her father: “I castrated what I could, I’m still afraid it won’t be enough, but really [otherwise – A.W.] the entire thing loses any sense. [...] Formally the censor has nothing to pick on right now, and if he wants to pick on something that is alluded, there’s nothing I can do about that” (“Listy Wandy Wasilewskiej (II),” *Zdanie* 11 (1985): 28.) In a commentary to that letter, Eleonora Syzydek explained that Leon Wasilewski was personally involved in the publication of *Oblicze dnia*.

In the final scene of *Oblicze dnia*, Anatol, a bricklayer, becoming a leader of the protesting workers, announced that together they will build “a new world:”

Anatol turns his head and looks at the street. The crowds flow like a river. Here and there blooms a sudden red banner. Above it all floats the victorious song, wondrous, cheerful and mighty. Like wine, through the streets rushes unspeakable joy, yearning satisfied. He looks at the terrified faces, their impotent rage, at the group marked with filthy fear and says – not to them but to his own dark childhood days, dreary teenage years, his rebellious youth, to the flowing crowd and the billowing banners – firmly, confidently and gleefully: We are building a world of the free people!⁴⁸

The building of the “new world” had already been announced in Wasilewska’s earlier poem, written after the so called Cracovian accidents of 1923 when the police fired shots at protesting workers.⁴⁹ Its final lines read: “From their death comes a bright day for the world/ They are the seeds scattered onto ground/ From which there shall grow/ A great and happy and joyful/ Proletarian homeland!”⁵⁰ Expressions such as “free people” and “proletarian homeland” were of key importance in these passages, assuring that those who were promised justice together with independence will themselves reach for it. In March 1936, *Płomyk* Glimmer, a children’s magazine published by the Polish Teachers’ Union and co-edited by Wasilewska, referenced an example of this “proletarian homeland” being created right next door, causing a stir in the media and leading to accusations of “pro-Soviet propaganda.” Did she really “promote” the Soviet model of revolution, furthermore, “for foreign money” as

48 Wanda Wasilewska, *Oblicze dnia. Pisma zebrane*, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1955), 195. In his review of the novel for *Wiadomości Literackie*, Emil Breiter wrote: “Wasilewska stormed literature with a battle cry [...] She knows only two types of might: darkness and rebellion. There is no communication between these words, there is no bridge over the abyss, one is either here or there. The battle is for life and death, and the victory certain, immediate and decisive. In Wasilewska’s novel, victory becomes a fact. Baryka’s place is taken by the young Anatol leading the millions of unemployed to their triumph” (Emil Breiter, “Powieść Wasilewskiej,” *Wiadomości Literackie* 42 (1934): 4).

49 See Tomasz Marszałkowski, *Zamieszki, ekscesy i demonstracje w Krakowie 1918–1939* (Kraków: Arcana, 2006).

50 Wasilewska, “6.XI.1923” in Helena Zatorska, *Wanda Wasilewska* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1976), 165.

claimed in the title of a recent film about Wasilewska?⁵¹ Did she play with the Polish authorities knowing that if needed, her father would come to the rescue? The whole affair spawned much gossip⁵² contributing to the Wasilewska's "black legend."⁵³

Ciołkosz believed that it was precisely Wasilewska's "looking repeatedly" to the east in search of good models, of modern solutions for social relations, which eventually pushed her to replace her "Polish homeland, or two Polish homelands, with a new homeland: a Russian-Soviet one,"⁵⁴ defining her as a Communist of a certain type. Grounding his authority in the fact that he knew the young Wasilewska and was the one to introduce her to the secrets of "party work," Ciołkosz claimed that until the mid 1930s, she certainly had not been a Communist, and when she became one, it was immediately in the "Soviet fashion" (Ciołkosz dismissed her earlier radicalism as a "romantic whim").⁵⁵ His memories cast a shade on Wasilewska: they presented her pre-war attitudes as "confused" and the only Communist tradition Ciołkosz eventually linked her with was the Soviet Stalinist one.

It is not my intention to search for the "truth" about Wanda Wasilewska, to find out facts that would determine precisely when she became a Communist and how she consequently defined her Communism. The case of Wasilewska seems interesting to me as it allows us to look at Communism in Poland (especially in pre-war Poland) as an "identity in making," formed within a certain context, undergoing transformations dependent on various internal and external factors, to look at Communism as a "manifestation" both public and private. Wasilewska's case shows also that the process of becoming a Communist was accompanied by breaking out of certain roles and crossing certain boundaries. But also by establishing new ones.

51 See *Wanda Lwowna Wasilewska*, TVP 2008.

52 Maria Dąbrowska wrote that in Poland "no one touched a hair on Wasilewska's head." "She was getting good money for the books and *Płomyk*. The only unpleasant thing she experienced was when she was stripped of editing *Płomyk* after it increasingly became a tool of Soviet propaganda." See Maria Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki. 1914–1965*, vol. X (1956–1957), (Warszawa: PAN, 2009), 41.

53 Wasilewska herself claimed that the *Płomyk* affair was an "innocent" matter, "spanned into something" during the period when the relationship between Poland and the Soviet Union were improving: "One should remember that a deal was made, 'The International' was played at the castle as the Soviet delegation was coming" ("Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej," 180). Also Janina Broniewska wrote about the *Płomyk* affair in *Tamten brzeg moich lat* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1973), 102–108.

54 Ciołkosz, *Wanda Wasilewska*, 43.

55 *Ibid.*, 44, 50.

Life as a "Scandal of Truth"⁵⁶

Wasilewska often described her life in terms of motion, flow and change: "one lived in a constant tension of the nerves, in a constant search for the last ounce of strength."⁵⁷ This motion is to be taken literally – as specific actions that she undertook – but also metaphorically. The communism she engaged in was a total kind of motion, a crossing of all boundaries, norms, barriers, a "fluidization of all that is solid," as in the words of *The Communist Manifesto*: "all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."⁵⁸ The more she was "swayed" politically by Communism as an idea seeping into her novels and speeches, the more it was becoming – to quote Foucault – a "form of life," a lived idea, "a principle defining a certain mode of life"; it gave birth to the "scandal" of revolutionary life which by "breaking with the conventions, habits and values of society life" bore witness to the truth.⁵⁹

The "scandal" of Wasilewska's life was that in several areas she moved beyond what was allowed by the societal norms of the circles she was raised in: she crossed the class boundary, "stepped out" of her gender role, broke several unwritten rules of life in a national community. Her relationship with Marian Bogatko, a bricklayer, can be seen as one such manifestation, especially as it was not formalized for years. Cracow's society was not particularly stirred by this, as Jan Topiński recalled: "we were all united by bounds of cordial friendship and more than one worker-student marriage resulted from this."⁶⁰ However, from the perspective of the Warsaw intelligentsia, whose ranks Wasilewska joined in autumn 1934, a relationship between a minister's daughter and a worker could seem unusual, as indicated by an admittedly friendly remark found in Janina Broniewska's memoirs: "Marian Bogatko, Wanda's husband, was to an extent a prototype for Anatol from *Oblicze dnia*. Bricklayer by profession, and – on the top of that – one from Cracow, which gave the whole thing a specific character."⁶¹ Ciołkosz, too, saw in Bogatko a model for

⁵⁶ After Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 183.

⁵⁷ Wasilewska, "Lata, które minęły (8)," *Argumenty* 35 (1975): 8.

⁵⁸ Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, accessed May 5, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/cho1.htm>

⁵⁹ Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 183–184.

⁶⁰ Jan Topiński, "Trzy pokoje w Domu Robotniczym na Dunajewskiego 5," in *Cyganeria i polityka. Wspomnienia krakowskie 1919–1939*, ed. Kazimierz Bidakowski (Warszawa: „Czytelnik,” 1964), 88.

⁶¹ Janina Broniewska, *Maje i listopady* (Warszawa: „Iskry,” 1967), 242.

Anatol, but contrary to Broniewska, he believed that the relationship with Wasilewska did not benefit the former, leading to his “de-classing”:

Bogatko de-classed and stopped working entirely. He looked after the house, assisted his wife in her activities among the literary left, in May Day marches he'd walk with a group of journalists and writers not with construction workers, he switched to the bourgeois lifestyle and there was nothing about him that resembled Anatol – the flame and sword of revolution.⁶²

The way Ciołkosz saw it, Wasilewska and Bogatko's crossing of boundaries in their private life came at a political cost: Bogatko transformed into an odd hybrid – a worker aspiring to the intelligentsia, more so, assisting his wife in her activities – and no longer corresponded to the image of a male leader of a proletarian revolution sought by the prewar left intelligentsia. Instead, it was Wasilewska who took the helm of the Communist left during the war, which – combined with Bogatko's death in Lviv in May 1940, added a ghastly, demonic-castrating undertone to the entire story. Years later, Ciołkosz assessed:

There was something abnormal about her [Wasilewska's – A. M.] choice of men: she needed someone intellectually inferior. She herself admitted she could only love men whose standing was lower to hers. She was attached to them and jealous of them, she had an “owner's instinct” in this respect. They were indispensable but they were not the most important thing in her life.⁶³

Wasilewska viewed her relationship with Bogatka differently: although she did model Anatol's character on him,⁶⁴ she did not treat Bogatko only as “literary material.” Raised, as she used to say, in a mixed environment of workers and intelligentsia,⁶⁵ she saw her relationship with a worker neither as a misalliance, nor a whim. While still in Cracow, she wrote to her mother:

62 Ciołkosz, *Wanda Wasilewska*, 16.

63 *Ibid.*, 25.

64 In a letter to her mother from 16 July 1933 she wrote: “In general – the world as darkness, proletariat as the maker of the new day. This is why the main protagonist is a bricklayer, shamelessly modeled on Marian by the way.” (“Listy Wandy Wasilewskiej II,” 26.)

65 Wasilewska, “Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej,” 119.

You want me to write something about Marian, Mama [...] I've never thought that one could feel about anyone the way I feel about him. [...] This boy does not think about himself for a second – giving comes so easily and naturally to him that it is almost unnoticeable... For some time it troubled him that he's a worker... we debated about him turning into an intellectual... I strongly opposed. I don't want him to do anything because of me.⁶⁶

Wasilewska admitted that Bogatko inspired, but also motivated her: he was the first person to read her writing and suggest improvements. She was proud that he led the bricklayers' strike in Cracow in July 1933. In another letter to her mother, Wasilewska worried about his future:

Warsaw is first and foremost something for my benefit but I care for it mostly because of Marian. With time, he will inevitably become like our worker activists – and that would be terrible... And the way things worked out here, they'll want to destroy us.⁶⁷

According to Broniewska, Wasilewska's relationship with Bogatko was "regarded, not without reason, as the most successful,"⁶⁸ and perhaps its secret lied in it being non-normative gender-wise. Bogatko, coming from the "manly" workers' circles, clearly did not view as "unmanly" several activities he took upon himself, such as looking after Wasilewska's daughter from the first marriage, making coffee or becoming his wife's secretary, nor did he seem envious of her literary or political success (he joked with Broniewska that together they were Wasilewska's "entourage," "a retinue of the suburban queen" – as they referred to Wasilewska.)⁶⁹

Did her relationship with a worker trouble her parents? From the exchange of letters between Wasilewska and her mother it seems that it was rather its informal character which did, its public manifestation of contempt for social conventions:

I've seen several times what a good decision it was not to get married. Firstly, for our own sake – do you remember, Mama, how you said yourself that one should do what springs from the inner need and not what

66 *Listy Wandy Wasilewskiej (I)*, 38. (Letter from October 6, 1932.)

67 *Syzdek, W jednym życiu tak wiele*, 97. (Letter from September 10, 1934.)

68 Broniewska, *Tamten brzeg moich lat*, 127.

69 *Ibid.*, 97.

is required by other people, appearances or compromises? It would be cowardly to give in to some gossip we don't care about at all. Secondly – I am finally a person and not an attachment to a person. Were my husband an idiot or loser he could be an attachment to me, but now things are as they are and even if Marian and I were viewed as equals, I would still be disadvantaged by just being a woman; I would be a “Mrs.” and not myself. For party-related reasons we can, being two independent units, serve different functions that would not be entrusted to a married couple... Anyway, what is actually the issue here? We're so happy together it's almost ridiculous... Marian is an extraordinary man, an extraordinary husband and an extraordinary father and he would remain one with or without marriage.⁷⁰

This particular letter seems important for two reasons. Firstly, Wasilewska criticized marriage as a union frequently born out of societal pressure and upheld out of concern for tradition or form. She opted for relationship based on choice and not a need to adjust to social norms, for a union of two free persons of equal status. One could naturally claim that Wasilewska's declaration, just as her relationship with Bogatko, was nothing particularly unusual among the prewar Warsaw intelligentsia, looking no further than Irena Krzywicka's views and her relationship with Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński.⁷¹ But what seems to make Wasilewska and Bogatko exceptional was their declared (and, according to several witnesses, also practiced) gender and class egalitarianism: belief that their relationship was devoid of power resulting from belonging to a particular gender or social stratum. The question of power must have been important for Wasilewska, since she devoted an entire passage in the quoted letter to the woman's position in private relations with men, and – in broader terms – in the relation with society. Wasilewska wanted to see herself as equal to men and a church marriage would put her in a subordinate, inferior position. She would stop “being herself,” carry meaning as “an independent entity” and become “an attachment” to the man, a “Mrs.” She felt that a non-formalized relationship would not take away her

70 Syzdek, *W jednym życiu tak wiele*, 84. Wasilewska and Bogatko got married in late 1936: “When in 1936 Bogatko and I were invited to the Soviet Union, the question of marriage act resurfaced [...] whether we wanted to or not, we decided to go to my old Calvinist congregation in Leszno. When the preacher asked for some statement of religious character, and we were in a hurry, he got mad and finally asked: I don't understand, what is it that you actually want – to get married or to get some papers? I replied: definitely some papers only” (Wasilewska “Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej,” 121–122).

71 See Irena Krzywicka, *Wyznania gorszytelki* (Warszawa: Iskry, 1999).

independence, the way marriage would, her autonomy and significance as an entity, it would not reduce her in the public sphere to the role of “her husband’s wife.”⁷²

Echoes of the quoted letter can be found in *Oblicze dnia* where Anatol is accompanied by Natałka, a female character who does not see herself as an addition to the man but as an autonomous entity, a comrade in the shared struggle, which is what she builds her identity on: “Natałka is happy. Since she’s come here, among these people, she does not feel an orphan anymore. Everyone cares for everyone, everyone thinks of everyone. Soon she is to understand that a «comrade» means much more than a «brother».”⁷³ She lives with Anatol in an informal relationship, despite surrounding frowns, especially from women who point fingers at Natałka, calling her a “slut.” They defend their marriages as the only space of self-realization for women – despite the violence inflicted by their husbands and the exhaustion from house chores, turning marriage into anguish rather than something joyous.

Paper, patent, document. A brand pressed onto the forehead for the rest of one’s life. Something that gives meaning, position, something that justifies – everything: drunken fists, syphilitic ulcers, stupid children. It’s all part and parcel of married life, after all. And here, between the basement and the third floor, Natałka walks just like that, with no patent, no stamp, no seal, her face shining with the shameless light of love.⁷⁴

Marriage in Wasilewska’s novel joins the ranks of oppressive institutions such as the church, school, workplace, but its particularly oppressive character reveals itself with regard to women: this is where connection between the power of patriarchy and the power of capital is the strongest. This is why Natałka and Anatol reject marriage, convinced it is the only way to save love, mutual respect and human dignity.

72 One may wonder to what extent Wasilewska’s attitude resulted from an attempt to avoid the fate of her mother who, after a period of activity in the Polish Army during WWI, turned to looking after the house and later “hid” in theosophy – or, more broadly, to avoid the fate of all politically active Polish women who with the end of wars and revolutions were relegated to the private sphere, “redirected” to the roles of wives and mothers, and channeled their energies into religion and charity. See Alicja Kusiak, “Narodowa pamięć historyczna a historia kobiet,” in *Polka: medium, cień, wyobrażenie*, ed. Monika Rudaś-Grodzka et al. (Warszawa: Fundacja Odnawiania Znaczeń, 2006), 214–217.

73 Wasilewska, *Oblicze dnia*, 139.

74 Ibid., 160.

One could wonder whether and to what extent Natalka was based on Wasilewska herself: during the bricklayers' strike in Cracow, she aided Bogatko and they lived together without marriage. Still, the matter is more complicated than a simple analogy between life and literature. Both the letter to her mother and the novel are important as Wasilewska's manifestation of independence: private and public, signifying her search for the possibility of autonomous action, of emphasizing one's self. Did she see a chance for it among the Communists? Despite being a successful writer and speaker, for many she remained her father's daughter: "Leon's daughter" was how she was referred to, or "Roman Szymański's widow" (after her first husband who died of typhus in August 1931). Continuously inscribed into the patriarchal structure of kinship, she was losing the right to individual achievement. As a woman and an activist, her symbolic meaning was achieved through the names of men she had ties to, her father's in particular: it defined her and established her political value. She wanted to build her own history among the Communists:

When my father died [in December 1936 – A.M.] – and at that time I was a fully grown-up person – comrades and Communists, who had very clear opinions of him, brought a wreath for his coffin with an inscription: "For Wanda's father."⁷⁵

Years later, Jan Karaśkiewicz, a communist activist and a soldier of the First Polish Army in the USSR, recalled Wasilewska at the peak of her activity:

I began to look at her a bit differently. So far I'd seen her and known her as a social worker, one of those who use words and the pen to fight for social justice and political liberties. Then we realized, my comrades and I, that she grew into a statesperson who represents a specific, consistent political orientation.⁷⁶

Among the Communists, Wasilewska built both her public and personal history. It was where she found her "family of choice": with Janina Broniewska, the ex-wife of the revolutionary poet Władysław Broniewski and co-editor of *Łączyk*, she shared her daily life in Warsaw, and they later walked together the war trail in the Soviet Union, joined by a "friendship stronger

⁷⁵ Wasilewska, "Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej," 133.

⁷⁶ Jan Karaśkiewicz, "Wyrosła do rangi męża stanu," in *Wanda Wasilewska we wspomnieniach*, ed. Eleonora Syzydek (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1982), 135.

than love.”⁷⁷ Her views of family as a relation of choice had little to do with a traditional definition: intimacy and bonds of kinships were not a matter of shared genes but of shared experiences, views, work; they did not come from birth, from the natural state of things, but from a gradual sharing of memories and shared codes of communication. This is how Broniewska described it:

Both of them [Wasilewska and Bogatko – A.M.], complementary and inseparable became to me – at that time and later – something more than natural siblings could ever be. One does not choose brothers or sisters. Those two were a choice of the heart, of the mind. Each day, family bonds grew tighter.⁷⁸

Although Wasilewska never rejected her biological family (nor was she rejected by them), she admitted “forgetting sometimes about some of its members”: she and her elder sister Halszka “were not particularly close” which changed to an extent only during the Lviv period.⁷⁹ On the other hand, she was always close to her father with whom she had “a quiet pact – we would not discuss politics because we knew that would result in an irreversible tear.”⁸⁰ The attitude to Russia was a particularly sensitive issue in their relation:

My father, whom I loved dearly and to whom I was very close emotionally, hated Russia as such. It didn’t really matter whether it was a white Russia or a red Russia. It was an attitude of absolute negativity toward Russia, regardless of its state and form.⁸¹

A question arises: should this very different view of the individual and community, related possibly to Wasilewska’s political evolution, not “spare” issues of such fundamental importance as nation, homeland, patriotism? Should there really be no limits to even the most radical criticism of the

77 Janina Broniewska *Maje i listopady*, 242. Broniewska’s friendship with Wasilewska was discussed in detail by Marni Shore: “«Czysto babski»: A Women’s friendship in a man’s revolution,” *East European Politics and Societies* 12 (3) (2002): 810–863.

78 Broniewska, *Tamten brzeg moich lat*, 302–303.

79 Wasilewska, “Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej,” 335.

80 Ibid., 133.

81 Ibid., 120.

nation? (Wasilewska characterized it as “two camps between which there can be no agreement: one consisting of workers and peasants, the other of those who hate and exploit workers and peasants.”)⁸² Ciołkosz said that Wasilewska’s notion of “two homelands” was nothing new or shocking in the PPS: “We didn’t hold *Ojczyzna* against Wasilewska; as Polish pro-independence socialists we accepted it entirely.” What they could not “accept” and “forgive” Wasilewska was her “breaking away from the Polish homeland” and “replacing it with a new, Russian-Soviet one”: “This was her greatest mistake in life.”⁸³

Ciołkosz’s assessment, extremely harsh and stigmatizing, resembles that of a teacher chiding a schoolgirl for a failed exam in Polishness. Meanwhile, for the present article, the motives behind Wasilewska’s “choice” of the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1930s and reasons why she felt there “at home” even before acquiring its citizenship are equally important as the question why she stopped feeling “at home” in Poland. When did her searching for an alternative become a “betrayal”? An interview with Antonio Negri, providing the following definition of “betrayal,” may be an interesting point of reference for further reflection: “Betrayal signifies the ruin of an ongoing project of construction. It is, strictly speaking, an act of destruction... Betrayal shatters «the common».”⁸⁴ It seems that the case of Wasilewska allows to present the problem differently, asking: can we speak of betrayal where there is no community or where the functioning of community prevents the individual from becoming/ feeling a part of it?⁸⁵ What kind of national community did Wasilewska reject and what kind of nation did she fight for? It is a complex issue, especially as the war imposed on everyone, including the Communists, new obligations both toward Poland and the Soviet Union. British historian Eric Hobsbawm noted that in the face of fascism, the pre-war internationalism gained new meaning: it was becoming a kind of antifascist patriotism or even “antifascist nationalism [...] engaged in a social as well as a national conflict.”⁸⁶ This change was reflected in Wasilewska’s interviews but its detailed analysis lies beyond the scope of this article. At this point one

82 Wasilewska, “Lata, które minęły (I),” *Argumenty* 21 (1975): 1 and 8.

83 Ciołkosz, *Wanda Wasilewska*, 42–43.

84 Antonio Negri, *Negri on Negri. Antonio Negri in Conversation with Anne Dufourmentelle*, trans. Malcolm B. DeBevoise (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 53.

85 For this observation I am indebted to dr Grzegorz Wołowicz and the panel “PRL w (auto) biografii,” organized by IBL PAN on 24 October 2012.

86 Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 147.

can only say that her understanding of Communism as the “absolute criticism of all that exists” could not “exclude” issues such as nation, homeland, patriotism and Polishness; and searching for an alternative for that what existed, for what was “natural,” was inscribed into this mode of thinking, acting and living.⁸⁷

There lies also the gist of Wasilewska’s “scandal of the revolutionary life:” after a critic and art historian Mieczysław Porębski it can be defined as a sequence of “spectacular transgressions of the normal, socially sanctioned order of things.”⁸⁸ Her crossing of boundaries took place in different directions and on several levels. She crossed them in her private life and in the public sphere, blurring or even annulling the distinction between the private and the public. She sometimes actually annulled the private for the sake of the political, as she did when she agreed to cooperate with the Russians despite being aware that the NKVD was responsible for Bogatko’s death in Lviv in 1940. In his memoirs, Soviet politician Nikita Khrushchev revealed that “Wasilewska believed that it was not the case of premeditation and continued active work.”⁸⁹ All of this may be hard to comprehend: did she see her beloved husband’s death as collateral damage? Did she put his death and her own life on the altar of the cause they both had been fighting for? Perhaps it was political pragmatism or maybe simply fear? I can find no answers to these questions. Her daughter Ewa Szymańska said that if Wasilewska suffered, she never let it show: “Bogatko’s death was taboo in our house. We never talked about it.”⁹⁰ One way or the other, it was yet another boundary that she left behind.

The Limits of Transgression

Somehow, the notion of boundaries “stuck” with Wasilewska: her biography is measured up with a sequence of boundaries she violated or crossed. Ciołkosz claimed that her moving to Warsaw marked the first threshold crossed on her

87 See Michael Hardt, “Komunizm jest bezwzględną krytyką wszystkiego, co istnieje,” *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, accessed January 1, 2013, <http://www.praktykateoretyczna.pl/index.php/michael-hardtkomunizm-jest-bezwzględna-krytyka-wszystkiego-co-istnieje>

88 Mieczysław Porębski, *Ikonosfera* (Warszawa: PIW, 1972), 120.

89 Nikita Khrushchev, “Fragmenty wspomnień,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* 132 (2000), 140. In another explanation of Bogatko’s death, it was caused by the “anti-revolutionary gangs,” in some versions of Polish, in other of Ukrainian origin. Some sources claimed Bogatko was the target, others that it was Wasilewska who at this point was already a delegate to the Supreme Council of the USSR. Eleonora Syzydek, *Działalność Wandy Wasilewskiej*, 78.

90 See also documentary *Errata do biografii: Wanda Wasilewska*, TVP 2009.

journey to Communism – the next one being Wasilewska's choice of the Soviet homeland in September 1939. Joanna Szczęsna commented on the issue of Poland's eastern border which became symbolic for Wasilewska's relationship with her father – he negotiated it for Poland after the end of Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920, she surrendered it to the Soviet Union at the end of WWII. A precise outline of the boundaries allowed critics to delineate in her biography areas which still remained Polish and which were foreign, areas of patriotism and of "betrayal." Disambiguation of what had been elusive and unclear became a mechanism of restoring the very order that Wasilewska, and the idea she followed, managed to disturb. Labels such as "renegade," "traitor," "collaborator" can be thus seen as a gesture of "introducing order," performed also through labels referencing her gender and defining her position relative to men – such as "Stalin's favorite" or "Leon's disgraced daughter."⁹¹ Not only did such labels deprived Wasilewska of individual agency and subjectivity, they were also helping to domesticate the threat of Communism as "the world turned upside down"; the assumption that a female Communist is not a "comrade," equal to men, or an independent activist, or politician, but someone's daughter, wife or lover made it easier to take control over her (and as a consequence, of the entire system), to restore the temporarily disturbed "natural" order of genders within the national community.

Thus, the gesture of overstepping boundaries – Wasilewska's tendency to transgress – deserves attention not only in the context of private, biographical discussions but also in the political and cultural ones: we are dealing with a situation where a certain symbolic potential of an individual made her particularly "attractive" to various authorities. They inscribed into her their own content whose sense changed depending on the political situation. A detailed analysis of Wasilewska's biography, continuously rewritten and corrected, allows to see her as a "liminal character," one used to mark the boundaries of political periods and ideological attitudes.⁹² Stalinism made her into a revolutionary icon, an embodiment of progress, a symbol of bourgeois Poland transformed into the peoples' Poland; consequently, the movement inscribed in her life became an allegory of movement that swept

91 Szczęsna recalled that in *Historia Polski* by Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, Wasilewska is referred to as "Leon's disgraced daughter." Szczęsna, "Wanda Wasilewska."

92 I discussed the construction of Wasilewska's biography in Polish People's Republic and Republic of Poland in an article entitled "«Wanda, co wołała Rusa». Wytwarzanie (biografii) komunistki – wytwarzanie (tożsamości) narodu," in, *PRL - życie po życiu*, ed. Katarzyna Chmielewska, Agnieszka Mroziak, Grzegorz Wołowicz (Warszawa: PWN, 2013). For the concept of Wasilewska as a "liminal character" I am indebted to dr Grzegorz Wołowicz from the Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences.

through the entire society. On the other hand, during various “patriotic turns,” emphasis was placed on her military and social activities, reactivating the connection to Romantic, national symbolism: in a long chain of such connotations Wasilewska would “lose” the uniform of being the Colonel of the Red Army and become simply a women and army leader – another incarnation of Adam Mickiewicz’s Grażyna, or Emilia Plater, or Polish Joan of Arc. For the opponents of the political orientation she identified with, she embodied the “monstrosity” of a world without boundaries, the “horror” resulting from the fact that “all that is solid melts into air,” the “pathology” of Communism as a system of “disturbed norms.” Hence, there have been attempts to disambiguate her choices, clarify her attitudes, establish identity boundaries for her transgressions (or offenses) based on gender, nationality, class and others.

Finally, one can pose the open question about the extent to which the mechanism, described by literary scholar Maria Janion, of repressing women from the public space while simultaneously turning them into allegories⁹³ – living signs of the revolution – applies also in the case of Wasilewska and the Communist revolution. With the end of the war, she gradually moved away from big politics – the sphere of power and decision making – and engaged increasingly in a different kind of public activity: propaganda, both diplomatic and literary, but also increasingly in home and family-related matters. In Wasilewska’s own retelling, the moment of stepping back, or being removed from the decision making bodies, was given rather enigmatic explanation, related to health issues and family life which, located in Kiev, rendered her participation in big politics impossible. According to her family members, friends, political opponents and in the official biographies, the post-war Wasilewska was a woman who first and foremost valued family life, and only later did she appear as an award-winning author and a political authority. One could risk an assumption that after the war ended, Wasilewska became one of the icons of the new order in its phase of stabilization, institutionalization and ossification.⁹⁴ While becoming a symbol and a beneficiary of this order, did she become aware of the limitations for instance associated with gender roles?⁹⁵

93 See Maria Janion, “Bogini Wolności (Dlaczego rewolucja jest kobietą?),” in *Kobiety i duch inności* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 1996), 5–49.

94 See Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power. Soviet political posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1997).

95 One may wonder whether after the war Wasilewska experienced a certain paradox of Communism described by Marshall Berman: “Marx looked forward to communism as the fulfillment of modernity but how can communism entrench itself in the modern world without suppressing those very modern energies that it promises to set free? On the other hand, if it gave these energies free rein, mightn’t the spontaneous flow of

According to historian Felix Tych, who talked to her in January 1964 in Warsaw, Wasilewska “played her role till the end” and “gave the impression of a fully Sovietized person.”⁹⁶ This assessment, however, does not say whether through “playing the role” Wasilewska actually became attached to it or whether there was in her approach a sense of discomfort, disappointment, frustration. An answer can perhaps be found in the post-war letters to her mother, where Wasilewska described her health problems: “Besides, I think that all my ailments come from one source only, as they used to sing in Warsaw before the war – «it’s those damn nerves, dammit».”⁹⁷ Perhaps (but this is only a careful hypothesis), Wasilewska’s diseased body expressed something she could not express otherwise: a certain kind of resistance to the corset of a monument which she was given to wear. But it is also possible that both the “role” and the “resistance” were just a part of life understood as “following the truth” which, as Foucault wrote, took one to the very edge of (self) destruction.

Translation: Anna Warso

popular energy sweep away the new social formation itself?” Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (London-New York: Verso, 1982), 104–105. We do not know what role her relationship with the Ukrainian writer and politician, Oleksandr Kornychuk, played in Wasilewska’s post-war life. Several people but also official biographies recalled that Kornychuk was the “reason” behind her decision not to return to Poland. The relationship was supposed to fulfill her as an intellectual but first and foremost as a woman. This vision fitted perfectly the post-war order where there was finally a place for love and happy family life, which Wasilewska described in her several novels: *Po prostu miłość* [Just Love] (1944) and *Gdy światło zapłonie* [When the Light Comes On] (1946). However, according to Władysław Gomułka, Wasilewska’s “following her heart” did not benefit her in the end: “As it is usually the case with women, she put her marriage and her feelings for Kornychuk before everything else. I think that years later she regretted this choice. But there was also no return, she had to drink from the cup of bitterness that was once filled with love and personal happiness.” See Władysław Gomułka, *Pamiętniki*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW, 1994), 493–494. One could also wonder if Wasilewska found happiness in this relationship or was she simply “stuck” in a certain role which also involved – apart from the appearance of a fulfilled activist and writer – the appearance of a happy woman (even if the reality was quite different).

96 After Joanna Szczęśna, “Wanda Wasilewska”

97 After Zofia Aldona Woźnicka, “O mojej siostrze,” in *Wspomnienia o Wandzie Wasilewskiej*, 77 (letter from April 2, 1947). Wasilewska’s younger sister, Zofia Aldona Woźnicka, recalled that after the war, “Wanda suffered from a lot of health issues. She had an acute catarrh of the stomach (late in 1946), and a painful inflammation of the nerve in the left arm (1951), in the summer of 1952 radiculitis immobilized her for over a month. She suffered from a chronic sore throat, damaged by her many speeches.” 76–77.

Grzegorz Wołowiec

The PRL in Biographies: Preliminary Remarks

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These facts really occurred,
and there is no good reason not to speak of them.¹

I am disgusted and tired of this subject.²

It is trivial to say that the political history of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL), and the question it raises, still remains the subject of an ongoing interpretational debate which, alongside professional historians, engages various participants of the broadly conceived public debate: politicians, lawyers, artists and "common" citizens. The highly divisive nature of these questions is highlighted by the biographies of individual, particular participants of PRL's history: both its key players, who have at some point in time had a significant and active role in shaping its form, and those who merely happened to live at the time, often on the margins of mainstream politics.

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1 Roman Graczyk, *Cena przetrwania? SB wobec „Tygodnika Powszechnego”* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czerwone i Czarne, 2011), 58–59.

2 Opinion of Ewa Lipska quoted in Kalina Błażejowska, "Wszystkie twarze Adama Włodka," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, January 14, 2013.

Biography, which is one of the fundamental, ancient forms of historical writing, remains – puzzlingly – the rarest among the historiographic genres dealing with the period of the People's Republic of Poland. Among the vast literature written on this subject, there is about a dozen books strictly fulfilling the requirements of the genre. This was pointed out in a debate that took place in 2008 at the “Rzeczpospolita” newsroom. Faced with reporters' queries about the source of such a state of things, leading contemporary historians of PRL did not really provide an answer and quickly shifted the focus to other matters. I present this part of the discussion in full:

“Rzeczpospolita”: Why is it that among the myriad books on PRL, some of which are published in the series “In the Land of PRL,” there are no biographies? We lack a proper biography of Bierut, Jaruzelski, Michnik and Wałęsa. What is going on? These are all attractive subjects; through them it would be easy to reach those readers who value this way of looking at history.

Marcin Zaremba: Writing biographies seems to me to be something different from traditional historiographic work.

Andrzej Paczkowski: On the contrary! It is a traditional form of academic history.

Marcin Zaremba: But maybe it is as Paweł [Machcewicz – G. W.] said, that also in this respect there was a rupture of continuity. For if there is a substantial number of works written by Polish authors on some historical figures, then there are not many biographies dealing with contemporary history. Andrzej Friszke is working on a biography of Jacek Kuron...

Tomasz Szarota: There is a biography of Berman, as yet unpublished, though awarded by the IPN.³

Since that time, few biographies of the people important in PRL history or, more broadly, the history of Polish communism,⁴ have been published. However, in no way can it be said that the rather disheartening state of affairs

3 Krzysztof Masłoń and Tomasz Stańczyk, “Czym innym jest pamięć, czym innym historia,” *Rzeczpospolita*, April 26–27, 2008. Panelists: Marcin Kula, Paweł Machcewicz, Andrzej Paczkowski, Tomasz Szarota and Marcin Zaremba.

4 Anna Sobór-Świdarska, *Jakub Berman. Biografia komunisty* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej. Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2009); Eryk Krasucki, *Międzynarodowy komunista: Jerzy Borejsza: biografia polityczna* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2009); Bogdan Gadomski, *Biografia agenta: Józef-Josek Mützenmacher (1903–1947)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Tedson, 2009); Andrzej Paczkowski, *Trzy twarze Józefa Światły: przyczynek do historii komunizmu w Polsce* (Warszawa: Prószyński Media, 2009).

in this respect has changed much. Looking from a metahistorical point of view,⁵ this state of affairs can be explained in the following way: the factual matter that makes up the lives of most of the figures that could be of interest to contemporary scholars of PRL lends itself with utmost difficulty to the kind of historiographic narrativity which they employ for the purpose of representing levels of events of a higher than the biographical order – in particular the national level. When treated with due diligence, in a comprehensive manner, it frequently does not fit within the dominant interpretative framework of twentieth-century Polish history, disrupting its inner consistency, subverting it even. Maintaining the stability of the predominant analytical paradigm and sustaining the legitimacy of the methods of narrating facts and defining concepts within that paradigm (the basic concept of communism, among other things) remain, in my opinion, the main reason behind the aversion some historians exhibit towards undertaking projects of a biographical nature.⁶ The biography of Jakub Berman by Anna Sobór-Świderska, mentioned by Tomasz Szarota, and the biography of Jerzy Borejsza by Eryk Krasucki, both published in 2009, are currently the only notable attempts to deal with this issue, also, to a certain extent, from the metahistorical point of view. Let us recall the voluminous book, backed by a substantial archival query and annotated with more than 1600 footnotes, by Sobór-Świderska. It was awarded a prize from the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – henceforth IPN). At the same time it faced strong criticism from several historians, including those associated with the IPN itself. Piotr Gontarczyk, for example, has accused the author of, among other things, tampering with facts, presenting untruthful interpretations, “contriving things absent from the documents and describing irrelevant and inconsequential episodes,” “overlooking that which is much more important.” Generally speaking, of elementary incompetence as a historian and the propensity for exonerating criminals:

What I see as an attempt by the author to obfuscate the true role played by Jakub Berman cannot culminate in any kind of considerable success. Too much is retained in the documents. The achievement of other scholars is too great, in this respect. It can be overlooked, twisted, or straightforwardly manipulated, as the author does in this case, allowing our

5 I refer to the tradition of analysis and interpretation of historiographic discourse represented by Hayden White and his disciples.

6 My more detailed study of this subject can be found in: „Biografia komunisty jako temat wypowiedzi historiograficznej,” in *(P)o zaborach, (p)o okupacji, (p)o PRL. Polski dyskurs postzależnościowy dawniej i dziś*, ed. Hanna Gosk and Ewa Kraskowska (Kraków: Universitas, 2013), 363–374.

imagination to run wild. The thing is, this has little to do with proper scholarship.⁷

In the present text, I would like to move beyond the field of historiography and look at the representation of lives of those who helped build and lived in the PRL in a wider context by investigating the rules of biographical (and autobiographical) discourse in the current public sphere, broadly conceived of. It is in this sphere where the question of presenting and interpreting those lives that were a part of the PRL incites emotions to a degree not usually seen among professional historians, who for sake of professionalism rather err – as was mentioned – on the side of caution when it comes to such pernicious approaches to the past. Emotions get involved, and sometimes even go through the roof, when biographies of individuals who are still alive and present in the public sphere, or those who for some reason are important to particular groups or factions, become the subject of scrutiny. In such cases, biographical disputes often run their course in the courthouse.

Therefore, to put it another way, I would like to propose as the subject of my preliminary investigation those rules (and forces that shape them) which determine what is said, and how it is said, on the subject of PRL biographies, while in no way hoping to reach any final conclusions. What can and what cannot be said about them. What can be seen in them and what cannot be seen. What is not allowed or welcome. The focus of my interest is placed on the current situation within a broadly conceived field of biographical representations of the past from the PRL period, and the rules of decorum that govern it, not to mention their source. These rules influence the current atmosphere surrounding PRL life stories and determine the intensity of the resulting debate and its permanent inconclusiveness.

An exemplary case of such an argument (one of many, but probably the most spectacular), was the case of the biography of Ryszard Kapuściński by Artur Domosławski⁸ and the stormy debate it unleashed, which, as it seems, was the biggest post-1989 public debate concerning a single book. What could have stirred such emotions?

The vision of Ryszard Kapuściński's life as presented by Domosławski was, in a self-aware and assertive way, positioned against the already established and accepted official portraits of Kapuściński. The integrational principle utilized in the book allowed for harmonizing within a single narrative those episodes, which were omitted, or at least diminished, in previous iterations

7 Piotr Gontarczyk, "Antybiografia komunisty," *Rzeczpospolita*, March 13-14, 2010.

8 Artur Domosławski, *Kapuściński non-fiction*, (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2010).

of the writer's life. Such episodes were considered inconsequential or non-essential for developing Kapuściński's biography and stature, and basically incompatible with the established narrative pattern, threatening its rationale. Domosławski's book presented a coherent interpretive whole – narratively, ideologically, politically, ethically – that was pointed, clear-cut and radically different from the previous ones, affirmative in its overall evaluation of Kapuściński, although not without critical remarks.

I lay aside the question of verisimilitude concerning the portrait presented by the biographer and the veracity of his interpretations. In this case, as always, these are elements subject to evaluation and debate. What I am interested in is the particular reception of Domosławski's work. It is telling that in the course of the whole debate surrounding the book, the strategic interpretative innovation introduced by the author was barely recognized and comprehended. The author failed to rattle the well-established readerly habits, and his book was read in accordance with the prevailing modes of reception. Set against this matrix, Domosławski's book presented itself to most partakers in the debate, against his intentions, as openly discrediting Kapuściński. This was greeted by some with visible delight and by others with disapproval, which in some cases turned into barely withheld outrage. The former treated Domosławski's book as an unexpected, but welcome acknowledgement of their way of thinking about Polish history and its preeminent figures on his part. The latter saw it as an incomprehensible and disloyal assault on the stature of a great writer, an attempt to publicly discredit his persona, undermine his authority as an exemplary citizen and Pole, but also as a father, husband, and distinguished writer.⁹

The debate surrounding Domosławski's book, despite its scale, achieved little in terms of changing its participant's outlook on the PRL period. On the contrary, it only hardened their previously held beliefs: polarized, yet intrinsically interlinked, and, at their core, constituting a single interpretive framework.¹⁰

The fundamental thesis of this text is that the contemporary state of affairs in the field of biographical representations of the PRL is the result of a broad, fundamental conflict of two basic attitudes towards the history of

9 My more detailed study of this subject can be found in "O Domosławskim i jego krytykach," *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2011): 279-288; also published in *Opowieść PRL*, ed. Katarzyna Chmielewska and Grzegorz Wołowicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2011), 210-220.

10 In the sense given to this notion by Stanley Fish. See Stanley Fish, *Interpretacja, retoryka, polityka: eseje wybrane*, ed. Andrzej Szahaj, trans. Krzysztof Arbiszewski et al. (Kraków: Universitas, 2002).

Polish communism which evolved after its fall, closely corresponding with two conflicting ideas of the political (defined by Chantal Mouffe as “constitutive of human societies”¹¹) that shaped the Polish political scene after 1989. First, there is the notion of consensual politics, which promotes acting towards the communist past on the basis of so-called reconciliation;¹² the other notion is that of antagonistic politics,¹³ oriented towards the so-called cleansing within the historical sphere. The tension between them structures the space of contemporary public discourse and, by placing its participants within an interpretive framework, determines their forms of expression and their understanding of what others say.

The first of the above-mentioned hegemonic strategies, inclusive and assimilative in a certain sense, views the communist and PRL historical heritage, at least in its particular manifestations, as an impediment in reaching so-called “national accord.” The second strategy, exclusive and segregational in its character, fuels the rationale behind a confrontational political agenda which monopolizes all legitimate claim to power (including symbolic power). These general attitudes are in turn transformed into two practical, conflicting “historical politics” with their distinctive terminologies, practices and institutions. And in particular, with incompatible frameworks for the so-called revision of the communist past, they provide diverging hierarchies and presentations of historical facts, not to mention contrasting strategies of narrating both collective and individual past.

The first of the scrutinized attitudes concentrates on promoting everything that enhances the construction of a community that is as inclusive as possible. It focuses on showcasing the identity of its members, with the aim of building cohesion and neutralizing the previous political conflict. This, on the one hand, entails a preference for those facts, historical figures and events that can be introduced into a narrative which encourages social consensus by means of a comedic strategy – a history of unification after overcoming the obstacles and threats disrupting social unity; a tale of a superficial and inessential difference and regained identity. Such a broad, all-encompassing narrative is capable of accommodating a large number of participants of the Polish communist past, although not all of them. It validates, for example, dissident

11 Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 9.

12 Attempting to overcome the we/they relation and constituting a “harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble,” Mouffe, *On the Political*, 10.

13 Based on a friend/enemy relation: «they» are perceived as putting into question the identity of the «we» and as threatening its existence (p. 16). It is worth underlining that Mouffe is skeptical of both introduced concepts as conflicting with the idea of a (well-functioning) democracy.

biographies (of the so-called revisionists) and legitimizes the participants of the 1989 accords (of the so-called Round Table), who were representatives of the former government. On the other hand, adjusting past events to fit in a conciliatory macro-narrative must inevitably make certain facts, questions, or problems taboo, or at least trivialize them. This “adjustment”¹⁴ of the past by means of omissions, reductions and retouches, leaves representations structured in a manner which makes them vulnerable to critique or attack.

The second of the showcased attitudes is oriented in the opposite direction: at the foundation of a tragic vision of Polish society that it depicts, lays a conviction of a divisive, insurmountable and permanent conflict. Composed of facts supposed to prove the irreducible, essential differences between antagonistic groups, it turns into a story of a superficial and fraudulent identity of a bogus community, and the final dissolution of its structures. “Lustration” as a specific modality of historical representation becomes a basic tool of differentiating, “we” from “they,” of exposing the enemy within – a primary weapon of an unfinished and ongoing anti-communist insurrection for independence. As much as the first of the described strategies tries to achieve an interpretive scaling-down or diminishing of the tensions and divisions that make up the history of Polish communism (its genesis and subsequent course) in the name of social unity, the second strategy upholds the actuality of those tensions, transcribing the former conflict onto the present. An “eternal” communism (functioning beyond space and time), and the communists of yore, who are somehow still present in the social fabric, are cast in the role of a “constitutive outside,”¹⁵ becoming the negative precondition of Polish identity; and anticommunism (after communism) becomes the cornerstone of politically motivated identity projects.¹⁶

Historical falsehoods on the one hand and disastrous outcomes for contemporary public life on the other are, in blunt terms, the outcome of the discursive configuration outlined above. Domosławski's book was just another one in a long line of its victims. Defying both aforementioned paradigms of interpreting PRL history, not adjusting the past, but instead proposing a new

14 I use this term after W.G. Sebald. See Winfried Georg Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Modern Library, 2004), IX.

15 Mouffe, *On the Political*, 15.

16 See publications of the Kraków based Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej: Bronisław Wildstein, *Dekomunizacja, której nie było czyli Mistyfikacja triumfująca* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2000); *Antykomunizm po komunizmie*, ed. Jacek Kłoczkowski (Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2000); *Antykomunizm polski: tradycje intelektualne*, ed. Bogdan Szlachta (Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2000).

reading of that past, it was deemed a lustrative endeavor and, as such, praised by some, discredited by others.

This goes to show how hard it is, even twenty years after the fall of PRL, to formulate a public statement pertaining to that past (individual or collective) in a form that is neither an accusation nor an apology, without playing the part of a prosecutor nor an advocate. Even if we attempt to circumvent these dualities, either the language itself will fail us, or, in the rare instances when we manage to sidestep its trappings, the public will still misread our work. This exposes the extent to which contemporary debates on the subject of Polish communist past is governed by the very same logic of loyalty and treason, adherence and apostasy, destructive to democratic politics, which was present from the very beginning of that history and active until the late 1980s. These values have, in truth, been strongly internalized by both sides of the political and historical disagreement, and this is only confirmed by subsequent iterations of this conflict, which always unfolds along the same lines. The fervent attacks on Domosławski's book were, as a matter of fact, also motivated by the desire to shield its protagonist from condemnation and exclusion from the public sphere, and the accusation of national apostasy.

I do not want to delve into considerations of whether the dismantling of the PRL could have gone better than it did. The turn of events in countries that found themselves in comparable historical circumstances as our own – disentangling themselves from a dramatic, conflicted past as in Italy, Germany, or Spain, which was comparatively most similar to our own case – casts doubt upon such scenarios. Although in each of these countries, the details of the process were different, revealing a unique chronology and dynamic, its basic components have remained the same: “the politics of forgetting” and “the politics of memory.” On the one hand, endeavors leading, in the name of political pragmatism, to the cooling down and neutralization of conflict; on the other hand, an ethically motivated reassessment and historical reckoning, often intensely embroiled in contemporary politics (as well as generational conflicts). Poland's specificity seems to lie in the fact that both these mutually exclusive strategies have flourished concurrently in the same period. As of now, there is little to indicate that they have lost their appeal.

Translation: Rafał Pawluk

Politics and Poetics of Space

Elżbieta Konończuk

In the Meanders of Geopoetics

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Geopoetics entered Polish literary studies via various routes, led by researchers representing diverse directions within the humanities looking to confirm their own scholarly intuitions, expectations toward literature and methodological tendencies. This revival of research on the forms of articulating space in literature resulted in the emergence of numerous, sometimes contradictory, concepts of geopoetics. As an attractive and extremely poignant term, it broke away from the poetic-philosophical base and drifted toward an interdisciplinary methodology allowing to explore various relationship between the experience of geographical space and its artistic expression. Thus, what is shared by all types of geopoetics is a reflection on the mutual relations between literature, art and geographical space.

Without broader references to the work of Kenneth White, but with due appreciation of the category he proposed, Elżbieta Rybicka included geopoetics into the Polish theoretical and methodological discourse. In *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* [*Geopoetics: Space and Place in Contemporary Literary Theory and Practice*], the author presents a coherent project, attributing geopoetics with a broad semantic range: geopoetics, she emphasizes, is an ambiguous notion which is a consequence of its poetical origins. From

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a range of definitions testifying to this ambiguity, Rybicka selects the one which is most precise, one which (I believe) opens the widest semantic field: “a study of the intellectual and sensual man-earth relation aimed at developing a harmonious cultural space”.¹ As Rybicka proceeds to methodically complete the outline of the thematic area covered by the presented definition, her theory acquires an anthropological character and becomes part of the discourse of cultural literary theory. Rybicka’s tools for the interpretation of literature articulating broadly conceived experiences of a specific geographical space constitute a methodological proposal to study the relations between literature and geography in the context of disciplines such as geoculturology, geocriticism, geopolitics and geohistory. Rybicka views geographical spaces as ambiguous texts carrying geographical, historical, cultural and anthropological meanings and is interested in the methods to interpret the literary representations of those spaces; methods which activate numerous intersecting discourses, thus impacting the dense network of mutual references which essentially shape a “harmonious cultural space”.

The concept of geopoetics proposed by Rybicka follows the tendency originated by Kazimierz Brakoniecki, who accentuates the differences between his own geopoetic literary practice and that of Kenneth White who highlights his fascination with pure geography and distances himself from history and historiography. While Brakoniecki stresses that, as a resident of Central Europe, he cannot “break free from the pressure of history,” White is fascinated by space in its prehistoric or ahistorical importance which he locates in the cosmological and geological shape of the territory. This is because the historical aspect of the place is entangled in a web of ideological, political, economic and social relations which include place in the geopolitical order. White is thus interested in the history of the earth which is readable from its geological shape, an idea well reflected in the theory of “textonique de la Terre” presented in one of his latest works.² The notion of tectonics refers to the idea of tectonic movements of the Earth’s crust and to the theory of wandering continents; it also opposes the category of textualism, viewed by White as ultra-literary and reductive, reducing everything (including the entire Earth) to a text. Tectonics is a process of continuous change of the Earth’s “text,” one which opens the human spirit to the ongoing, century-long transformations

1 Elżbieta Rybicka, *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* (Kraków: Znak, 2014), 64, after Kenneth White, *Poeta kosmograf*, trans. Kazimierz Brakoniecki (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Biblioteczka Centrum Polsko-Francuskiego, 2010), 35.

2 Kenneth White, *Panorama géopoétique. Théorie d’une textonique de la Terre* (Editions de la Revue des Ressources : Lapoutroie, 2014), 107-108.

through which our planet continues to acquire new meanings. White listens to the speech of the landscape in the hope of hearing the primary voice of the earth and wants to touch the prehistoric space, or to locate traces of the original landscape, and to feel the eternal union of man with the cosmos. The poet experiences that, for instance, in Cornwall, while contemplating the steep sea-shores formed from green serpentine, covered with picturesque moors and floating mists, arousing awe and emotions and evoking the sense of the world's cosmic permanence.³

I would refer to the concepts proposed by Rybicka and Brakoniecki as anthropological; both the theoretical and methodological geopoetics outlined by Rybicka and its regional-poetic variety offered by Brakoniecki fit within the order of cultural literary theory. Their approach is complemented by the notion of autobiographical places introduced to Polish geopoetics by Małgorzata Czermińska who expands the conceptual frame of the discipline by adding the auto-geobiographical aspect.⁴ Proposals by these three scholars have become integrated consequently with the Polish theoretical thought and gained the status of a method which offers its own research tools, and a language for description of the literary phenomena which articulate the experience of a particular geographical space. The relations of literature, art and geography are an extremely interesting and important research area in the context of the interdisciplinary turn in the contemporary humanities: investigation of those relations resulted in the development of new subdisciplines in geography (i.e. humanist and cultural geography) and in literary studies (i.e. geopoetics, geocriticism, geoculturology and geoesthetics).⁵

In recent years, as a result of Rybicka's research, geopoetics has become in Poland a popular and intensively developed discipline. Edward Kasperski's

3 White presents his biocosmopoetic experiences in his autobiography, which he refers to as a geographic-intellectual journey. Kenneth White, *La carte de Guido. Un pèlerinage européen* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011), 53.

4 Małgorzata Czermińska, „Miejsca autobiograficzne,” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2011); see also Małgorzata Czermińska, „Słowo wstępne. Miejsca autobiograficzne Czesława Miłosza,” in Czesław Miłosz, „*północna strona*,” ed. Małgorzata Czermińska and Katarzyna Szalewska (Gdańsk: Scholar, 2011).

5 Whose research methods focus on the broadly defined relation between geographical spaces and their representations in art and literature. See Bertrand Westphal, *La géocritique. Reel, fiction, espace* (Paris: Minuit, 2007); Wasilij Szczukin, *Mit szlacheckiego gniazda. Studium geokultuologiczne o klasycznej literaturze rosyjskiej*, trans. Bogusław Żyłko (Kraków: Universitas, 2006); Elżbieta Rybicka, „Geopoetyka, geokrytyka, geokulturologia,” *Białostockie Studia Literaturoznawcze* 2 (2011); *Géoesthétique* under the supervision of de Kantuta Quirós et Aliocha Imhoff (Dijon: Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Dijon, 2014).

article, whose title suggests the initiation of geopoetics in the poetics of space, is thus somewhat surprising. Ignoring the founding texts of the geopoetic discourse and the work by the Polish researchers who adapted it to the native environment, the author proposes a concept of geopoetics completely detached from its philosophical and theoretical sources. Kasperski believes that the task of geopoetics is to “study in the works of literature, art and culture, spacial elements which are marked anthropomorphically”.⁶ He also adds that “in geopoetics, space is not identical either with physical space nor with geometric, geographic and cartographic space”.⁷ Consequently, “geo” appears to be a misleading ornamentation in Kasperski’s project: one simply cannot talk about geopoetics as detached from the experience of physical, geographical and cartographical space.

Viewing geopoetics as a discipline to investigate cultural forms of anthropomorphizing space (subordinated to man as its “host”), Kasperski adopts an anthropocentric attitude, as opposed to White who favors the humanities to be de-anthropocentrized. White views man not as the Earth’s “host,” but as a resident who poetically dwells in it, reading its poetry, listening to its music; in other words, experiencing the cosmological poetics of the universe. It is precisely this attitude, one completely unrelated to the anthropomorphization of space, is how White understands the lyrical and philosophical presence of man in the world.⁸

In *Geopoetyka. Związki literatury i środowiska* [*Geopoetics: The Relation between Literature and Environment*] Anna Kronenberg presents geopoetics as one of the “green” currents of the ecological turn. She notes that “in the framework of national research, geopoetics as a term had been stripped of several aspects which are of crucial importance to its founder, including the ecological tradition, connections between literature and the environment and man’s relationship with the Earth”.⁹ Kronenberg’s own proposal is founded on a rather superficial reading of White’s work, one which ignores the French texts (crucial to geopoetics) and places geopoetics in the context of disciplines stemming from the ecological turn, such as ecocriticism, ecophilosophy or ecofeminism. Thus, situating it within the ideological order, Kronenberg reduces the

6 Edward Kasperski, „Geopoetyka. Ku nowej poetyce przestrzeni – pierwszy krok w chmurach,” in *Geografia wyobrażona regionu. Literackie figury przestrzeni*, ed. Daniel Kalinowski, Adela Kuik-Kalinowska, Małgorzata Mikołajczak (Kraków: Universitas, 2014), 39.

7 Kasperski, 24.

8 White, *La carte de Guido. Un pèlerinage européen*, 211.

9 Anna Kronenberg, *Geopoetyka. Związki literatury i środowiska* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo UŁ, 2014), 33.

semantic field of the concept. Meanwhile, in the latest monograph devoted to White's work, one encompassing both his literary and academic works and essays, Christophe Roncato marginalizes the relationships between ecocriticism and geopoetics. Although he stresses that both disciplines posit a poetic inhabitation of the world, the task of geopoetics – according to White – is to combine theory and practice in a way where habitation becomes something more than a concept or idea.¹⁰

Simplifying the matter, Kronenberg relates geopoetics to the concept of nomadic subjects proposed by Rosi Braidotti and concludes that “giving subjectivity to the natural environment is a priority both for White and Braidotti.”¹¹ Formulations such as this invite a reflection on the adequacy of language as a tool for analysis and interpretation of the thematized phenomena. Kronenberg sets for geopoetics the task of “giving subjectivity to the natural environment,” while Kasperski tasks it with describing cultural “anthropomorphizations of space”. Thus both scholars, the former probably unintentionally, present an anthropocentric perspective of the Earth's host who “gives subjectivity” to the natural environment, placing himself or herself in the center as a point of reference. The problem of the adequacy of analytic language can be seen also in Kronenberg's interpretations of literary works. On the one hand, the author develops the concept of “green” reading and writing (seen as the result of the ecological turn in the literary studies), one based on “a new type of subjectivity” where the “subject is rooted in a particular place to speak from, draws power from its locality, body, gender, tradition, its relations to other people, animals and the natural environment”.¹² On the other hand, her practice of “green” reading is marked with the language of structural analysis, and following the declaration of reading texts for a new kind of subjectivity, categories such as the speaking subject sound anachronistic. When she defines the task of geopoetics as a search for “the relations between the speaking subject and the natural environment”¹³ (or writes about “the elements of the world becoming elements of the body of the lyrical subject”¹⁴), Kronenberg mixes two different philosophical and methodological orders. There is no place for disembodied, categorized subjects within the ecological

10 Christophe Roncato, *Kenneth White. Une œuvre-monde* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014), 202.

11 Kronenberg, *Geopoetyka*, 95.

12 *Ibid.*, 33.

13 *Ibid.*, 230.

14 *Ibid.*, 234.

discourse. The experience of locality, of a geographical and environmental tangibility, requires a language open to the corporeal and sensual experience of the writer and the reader.

We can thus undoubtedly speak of two versions of geopoetics: the anthropocentric one represented by Elżbieta Rybicka and the deanthropocentrized one, rooted in White. Anna Kronenberg's proposals seem to be located in the latter tradition, or at least they could be if a more careful editing process of *Geopoetyka. Związki literatury i środowiska* allowed the author's reflection to be conveyed with more precision. In her book, Kronenberg criticizes Rybicka's detachment from the basic context of geopoetics, namely the ecological tradition which she views as crucial to White's ideas. However, his more recent works (more recent than the ones referenced by Kronenberg) allow us to assume that White's interests revolve around man's geographical environment rather than the natural one. Importantly, his geopoetics is rooted in Bachelard's poetics of space where human imagination is shaped by space. It is physical matter that Bachelard believes to be imagination's efficient cause, noting also that a reflection on matter shapes open imagination.¹⁵ As a result, poetic image, rooted in the substantiality of the landscape, reflects the experience of inhabiting a territory. For White, geographical matter is a source of imagination determining our poetic dwelling in world.

Following Thoreau, White attaches great importance to the music of the landscape, such as the sounds of rain pattering on the windows, and learns to listen to the sounds of the earth and track the presence of geopoetic tonalities in musicians such as Ferruccio Busoni or John Cage. Intrigued, White quotes a passage from Busoni's letter, sent from the US in 1910, where Busoni seemed to define perfectly well what the music of the earth was by recalling a conversation with a Native American: the woman spoke of her tribe's need for a musical instrument constructed as a hole in the ground, with strings stretched across the opening. Busoni replied to the woman that such an instrument should be referred to as the voice of the earth and received an enthusiastic response from her.¹⁶

White's theory was also inspired by the work of Luigi Russolo, one of the first theorists of electronic music whose futurist manifesto *The Art of Noises* (1913) posits irregular vibrations, the sounds of wind and thunder, creeks and waterfalls, the cries of animals and the noise of the city as a remedy for the

15 Gaston Bachelard, *Wyobraźnia poetycka*, trans. Henryk Hudak, Anna Tatarkiewicz (Warszawa: PIW, 1975), 115.

16 Kenneth White, "The Music of the Landscape," in *The Wanderer and his Charts. Essays on Cultural Renewal*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004), 225.

boredom and banality of Western music. Using rhythms derived from nature, a kind of musical “ready-mades,” he calls for a renewal of contemporary music. White’s discussion of geopoetic tonalities in avant-garde music shows how the idea of geopoetics is understood in art.¹⁷

White’s essays are an account of his travels which, in the context of his philosophy, could be referred to as geopoetic journeys whose destination is to discover the “poetics of space.”¹⁸ This is the goal he sets for geopoetics, referring to the latter as the lyrical and philosophical aspect of our presence in the world, presence understood also as a lyrical dwelling in the world. Seen this way, presence in the world is realized through movement in space and a search for places where one can experience the cosmological poetics of the universe. To describe this phenomenon, White reinterprets Novalis’ and Whitman’s work on writing the earth, in other words, on beauty inscribed in geographical places and natural phenomena. Continuing their reflection, he sees poetry’s causative force in geographical and natural phenomena which, when read as metaphorical “texts” by man, may result in aesthetic experiences.

Anna Kronenberg charges Polish scholars of geopoetics with a misinterpretation of ideas crucial to White’s philosophy, having assumed that those ideas are related to ecology. However, the dispute over geopoetics, tied to the history of the term, is much older and has its roots in the theoretical literary turn which took place in France after 1968. As a term, “geopoetics” was first used by Michel Deguy in *Figurations*, published in 1969. Michel Collot notes that it emerged as a natural consequence of the change in the meaning of the literary work which involved abandoning the immanent concept of the latter as an autonomous creation, and a return to Friedrich Hölderlin’s famous formula of poetic dwelling in the world. This creative attitude, one expressing post-structural tendencies, was presented by the poets gathered around *L’Éphémère*. Collot stresses that setting new tasks for poetry understood as a manifestation of “being in the world” had to produce a neologism, “géo-poétique”. Deguy even suggested introducing the notion of “geo-poétique,” where the silent “h” was meant to emphasize a search for poetics capable of

17 Ibid., 226.

18 Texts such as Kenneth White *Le figure du Dehors* (Paris: Le Mot et Le Reste, 1982), *L’Esprit nomade* (Paris: Grasset, 1987), *L’itinéraire de Kenneth White* (Rennes: Bibliothèque municipale de Rennes, 1990), *Le Plateau de l’albatros: Introduction à la géopoétique* (Paris: Grasset, 1994), *The Wanderer and his Charts* (Edinburg: Polygon, 2004), *L’Ermitage de Brumes* (Paris: Dervy, 2005), *Poeta kosmograf*, trans. Krzysztof Brakoniecki (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo: Centrum Polsko-Francuskie w Olsztynie, 2010), *La carte de Guido. Un pèlerinage européen*, White, “Panorama géopoétique”.

expressing the relationship between the human spirit and the physical space, and the task of dwelling in the world, viewed as an ethical responsibility for the world.¹⁹ Deguy's concept of geopoetics was based on the premise that "all logos is topological" and expresses the experience of the earth. He writes about the conviction that certain things and their arrangements, or certain places, created parables; that geo-logy could be understood the way astrology was, that a kind of "geo-poetics," learning the valleys of the earth, was possible just as it is possible to learn the figures of the thinkable, and that the metaphor or translation of being to the figures of thought was the name for "poetic" space.²⁰

Geological metaphors are abundant also in Deguy's poetry, which seems to suggest that a similar type of spatial imagination characterizes both creators of geopoetics. He describes, for instance, the man of furthest reaches, building a house where the plains meet the valley, crushed to a pulp by the alluvial and volcanic moraines, captured at the crossing of the moraines of clouds and moraines of forests, but reborn in the morning without hate toward sudden things but rather grateful to the mine and the typhoon, to the avalanche and the well caving in to devour him.²¹

Kenneth White refers neither to Deguy's poetry, nor to his theoretical work where the concept of geopoetics is founded on the linguistic theory of spatial metaphors. The Scottish poet "seized" the concept nine years later, notes Collot, significantly broadening its semantic field and moving toward the phenomenological definition of being in the world.

The simplest definition of geopoetics as proposed by White the wanderer, and at the same time one which opens the widest semantic fields, reads as follows: geopoetics begins when the body enters a space.²² White's poetic imagination is dominated by open space, the experience of which is articulated through several figures serving also as epistemological metaphors. White understands space as a challenge to explore, to follow each disappearing horizon. The notion of extravagance appeals to him due to its etymology: "extravagare"

19 Michel Collot "De la géopoétique," in *L'habiter dans sa poétique première. Actes du colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle*, ed. Augustin Berque, Alessia De Biase, Philippe Bonnin (Paris: Donner lieu, 2008), 314.

20 Collot, "De la géopoétique," 316. [Here adapted basing on the Polish translation from French by the author of the article - A.W.]

21 Michel Deguy, [*Nikt nie był nawiedzaczem...*], trans. Edward Stachura, in Edward Stachura, *Wiersze, poematy, piosenki, przekłady*, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1984), 389. [Based on the Polish translation - A.W.]

22 Collot, "De la géopoétique," 318.

means “to stray outside,” “wander off,” and it is the meaning the poet will use in his work. The figure of “outside” (*dehors*)²³ is of key importance to his spatial imagination: for White, discovery requires wandering away, going beyond, as is evidenced by all geographical discovery, often resulting from the explorer becoming lost in space. Consequently, his philosophy emerges from moving beyond the fenced and separate theories, beyond the enclosed area of the city toward the spaces of lands which open the thought. Roaming “outside” the known and described areas is extravagant in its nature as it always results in a discovery of the unusual. White’s poetics uses also other figures of the “beyond” reflecting the experience of a space that opens up, provokes reflection and invites discovery, figures such as white territory, margin, peripheries, littoral, horizon; in other words, figures of crossing borders and evoking openness to all periphery.

The essence of White’s geopoetics lies therefore in an exploration of poetics and poetry of space, realized through “poetic dwelling in the world” which requires an understanding of land-writing (Walt Whitman) and reading the world-text, listening to its music. White’s geopoetics emerges from several inspirations which can be expressed through popular but thought-opening adages: that there can be no culture without nature (Jean-Jacque Rousseau), that in wildness is the preservation of the world (Henry David Thoreau), that great poems of heaven and hell have been written but the great poem of earth remains to be written (Wallace Stevens); “if I have any taste, it is for hardly anything but earth and stones” (Arthur Rimbaud); “remain faithful to the earth” (Friedrich Nietzsche); “poetically man dwells in the world” (Friedrich Hölderlin); and meaning takes place through motion (Maurice Merleau-Ponty).

Its interdisciplinary character, able to reflect a holistic system of thinking about the relationship of man and the world, is an important aspect of White’s geopoetics. The poet draws inspiration from Alexander von Humboldt’s *Kosmos*, and in particular from Humboldt’s interest in geology, mineralogy, oceanography and landscape. Just like the von Humboldt brothers, White is fascinated by the comprehensive approach to the study of nature, and repeats after Wilhelm that poetry, science, philosophy and history are not separate from each other, but create a certain whole in the mind of a man who thus achieves the state of unity.²⁴

Alfred Korzybski’s theory about the confusion of the object and its representation in the process of cognition (expressed in the famous formula: the map is not the territory) was White’s other important and frequently

23 Kenneth White, *La Figure du dehors* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2014), 89–102.

24 White, *Poeta kosmograf*, 68.

referenced source of inspiration. Basing himself on its premises, White develops his own theory where the map is treated not as a representation of the world but as an invitation to cross the borders of the territory represented by the map, in the direction of what lies hidden under representation and remains, unknown, unusual, eccentric and wild. When he writes about uncharted territories (even in the age of google maps and google street), White has in mind the perpetual opportunity to explore phenomena such as wind direction, migrations of birds, clouds or smells.

His essays from *La carte de Guido. Un pèlerinage européen*,²⁵ from 2011, exemplify the kind of writing which White refers to as intellectual and existential geography. Sketching a mental map of his life in transit, the narrator-cartographer gives his biography the shape of a map. In one of the essays (*Dernières nouvelles de Bruxelles*), White describes a visit to the Royal Library in Brussels where he retrieves a twelfth century manuscript entitled *Liber de variis historiis* – a treatise that is at once cosmographical, geographical, toponymic, historical, philosophical and poetic in character. Its author, Guido of Pisa, included in the work a unique map and White, like a medieval copyist, carefully redraws it in his notebook. The gesture of copying allows him to take possession of the medieval vision of the world, created with piety and aesthetic attention to every detail by the authors of the map. Found in the medieval manuscript, the map fascinates White because it conveys the experience of a “beautiful whole,” “a symphony of the world.” The Medieval manuscript, an example of holistic knowledge of the world expressed through the language of geography, history and poetry, seems to White to be a confirmation of the cosmological poetics of the universe. Old maps – geographic and artistic representations of the territory – reinforce in White the belief that the cartographers of old, sensitive to the poetic nature of the world, were in fact the first representatives of geopoetics. Referring to himself as a “poet-cosmographer” he believes that the goal of poetry is precisely to discover and describe the poetic dimension of the cosmos.

White is fascinated by space in its prehistoric and ahistorical sense, in other words, in its cosmological, geological and atmospheric aspects. He listens to the speech of the space, and particularly to the speech of the natural landscape which conveys the original voice of the world. In another essay, *Fumée bleue sur falaise blanche*, the poet describes his journey to Cornwall in search of the voice of the original landscape, one not entangled in the web of historical, political, economic and social relations. The experience of primordial space is brought by the observation of the coastline which fascinates the

25 See also Elżbieta Konończuk, „O poetyckim zamieszkiwaniu świata według Kennetha White’a,” *Białostockie Studia Literaturoznawcze* 2 (2011).

writer as a place where two elements meet. Similarly, watching the tall, black, rocky shore dripping with water, produces the impression of witnessing the emergence of rocks from the chaos.

Consequently, the speech of the landscape becomes the source of a deep experience which, following White, could be referred to as a "source experience," an emotional reaction to the primordial beauty inscribed in a place. Experiencing the relations of man and universe, finding a deep connection to the space, becomes possible as a result of poetic intuition providing access to the "white world" or the "white territory". Alluding to the ancient tradition of presenting northern and unknown areas on the map, the metaphor refers to the idea of exploring the pristine and peripheral spaces uncharted by the cartographers.

The theme of white territory returns in *Sur les Crêtes de l'Aurore*, also included in the autobiographical *La carte de Guido*, describing the author's journey to the Pyrenees, preceded by a study of a geomorphological map of the region. White often searches for the source of poetic inspiration in the geological nature of the place. Heading towards the white peaks of the mountain chain, he watches the theatre of forms and colors, and his imagination completes the spectacle with a visualization of millennia old geological processes: the formation of the rocks, the layering of calcium, dolomite and quartz deposits, the movement of tectonic plates and the geological movements which formed the mountains and gorges.

White understands geopoetics as a special poetics of experiencing geographical space, a poetics of experiencing the earth and the cosmos. As a "cosmopoet," he believes the relations between poetry and geography to be a crucial element in the repertoire of the humanities which always tell the story of man's habitation of the world. White practices such lyrical dwelling not only by reading the landscape and interpreting the poetry and music of the land, but also by giving his work geographical forms.

His travels narrate what the poet himself talks about: the formation of deep bonds with space, labeled as *livres-itinéraire* ("book-routes" or "book trails"), constituting the kind of writing practice which Michel de Certeau refers to as "spatial stories," understood as a record of practicing space.²⁶ De Certeau sees the very act of wandering as a creation of specific texts in space, or pedestrian speech acts,²⁷ and White's journeys and travels are precisely that, a kind of utterance.

26 Michel de Certeau, *Wynaleźć codzienność: sztuki działania*, trans. Katarzyna Thiel-Jańczuk (Kraków: WUJ 2008), 115-129.

27 de Certeau, *Wynaleźć*, 99-100.

His works are a record of spatial experience, which means that they make up a biography-map (or a bio-atlas) describing geographical, poetic, emotional and intellectual routes. A biography-map not only presents the space, but also invites one to practice it.²⁸

In his poetic (geopoetic) practice, in the attempts to access the essence of the geographical experience, White searches for a synthesis of the subject and the form, inspired by the experience of space. Consequently, he constitutes genres such as "world-poem," "river-poem" or "diamond-poem"²⁹ defined as follows: "a long river-poem where I gather the maximum number of elements, whose coherence resembles that of a water current. Or a diamond-poem, a piece of crystalline rock, a poem emerging from concentration".³⁰ *Les Archives du Littoral*, a river-poem which could be viewed as White's lyrical, intellectual and philosophical manifesto developing into a lecture, thus functions both as a poem and a geopoetic dissertation while *Handbook for the Diamond Country* contains several diamond-poems, each constituting a crystallized poetic whole and a record of a reflection-concentration³¹.

Spatially determined, White's imagination dictates not only his literary works and theoretical reflection, but also his organizational practice. Christophe Roncato notes that White took over from Whitman the metaphor of the archipelago in order to use it as a name for the network of spreading branches of the International Institute of Geopoetics whose presidency he passed to Régis Poulet in 2013. A dozen islands of the archipelago (Archipel de l'Institut international de géopoétique) spread around the world and

28 Mariusz Wilk's "trace-book," *Lotem gęsi* [By the Flight of Geese] may serve as a good example of practicing White's "biography-map". Wilk describes his journey to Labrador inspired by White's *The Blue Road* and following the poet's footsteps. Recounting his fascination with White's travels, Wilk confesses: "I took the first steps on his *Blue Road* in a small hotel bar in Sławkowska Street. From the first page, it was a complete immersion. When I came upon the sentence about wandering away as far as possible, to the limits of the self, until a territory is found where time transforms into space, where things emerge in their nakedness and the wind blows without a name, it was then when I knew that I have found another brother. [...] Wilk believed that in Labrador he would see his original face. "What I need the most is space, a great white breathing emptiness for ultimate meditation". He also searched for Labrador tribes, weary of nations and states. See Mariusz Wilk, *Lotem gęsi* (Warszawa: Noir sur Blanc: 2012), 12.

29 White, *Poeta kosmograf*, 34-35.

30 Ibid., 41-42. [this and the following footnote reference Polish translations of a selection of White's work from French – A.W.]

31 Ibid., 126.

referred to as a geopoetic Atelier³² are the result of the strategy of *archipelisation* (archipelagization) or *océanisation* (oceanization) outlined by White himself and adapted by the Institute: in the 2010 general report, the poet explains that what he has in mind is a dispersed and simultaneous influence in various disciplines and countries.³³ Rocanto adds: “geopoetics [...] does not stop before the doors of any Atelier, but spreads over the boundaries. Just look at its presence, more or less understandable on the Web, and its influence on various disciplines: geography, literature, architecture, the visual arts...”³⁴

Archipelagization refers to more than the institutional spread of the idea of geopoetics. The idea permeates many disciplines and discourses focused on various forms of articulating the experience of geographical space. Thus geopoetics, in the form of islands, has spread itself over numerous disciplines and discourses, not only enriching the anthropological, poetological, regional and ecocritical aspects of research in literary studies. A well-sounding and extremely spacious concept, applicable to all artistic records of man's interaction with space, geopoetics has now entered for good the vocabulary of the contemporary humanities. Since as a field it has been formed based on a fragmentary reception of its creator's work, we should speak rather of several geopoetics, the nature of which is often determined by frequently instrumental uses of various aspects of White's thought. Meanwhile, the author of *The Blue Road* certainly deserves a more in-depth appreciation, especially as his theory is well rooted in the French tradition of research on spatial imagination lead by Gaston Bachelard and George Poulet, and very well known in Poland.

Translation: Anna Warso

32 Roncato presents the history of the Institute's growth from the first atelier founded in Brussels in 1992, followed by Atelier géopoétique d'Aquitaine (1993), Scottish Centre for Geopoetics (1995), Atelier des deux rives de Tübingen, Centre géopoétique de Paris i Centre géopoétique de Belgrad (1996), Centre suisse de géopoétique (2004) – and Atelier italien opened in year 2012. See Roncato, *Kenneth White. Une œuvre-monde*, 206–208. [Here translated from Polish – A.W.]

33 Roncato, *Kenneth White*, 216. [Here translated from Polish – A.W.]

34 Ibid.

Elżbieta Rybicka

From a Poetics of Space to a Politics of Place: The Topographical Turn in Literary Studies¹

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Spatial Turn or Topographical Turn?

The overabundance of so-called “turns” in the humanities today may lead rapidly to a kind of inflation or, as some suggest, to treading water, or to simply ending up back where we started. With those most recent shifts – the cultural turn, the iconographic turn, the performance turn – we are dealing not so much with temporary successors as we are with simultaneity and mutual influences. Of these, the most problematic in the Polish context appears to be the spatial/topographical turn. In fact, neither of those two variants has been firmly established or even attempted widely yet in Polish terminology, and the

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1 This article is part of a larger project called *Geopoetics: Space and Place in Contemporary Literary Theory and Practice*, where ideas simply noted in passing here are developed in detail, such as the history and evolution of the field as well as the problem of the new regionalism, the relationship between literature and geography, and the question of space in theories of gender. It was also printed before, in *From Modern Theory to a Poetics of Experience: Polish Studies in Literary History and Theory*, ed. Grzegorz Grochowski and Ryszard Nycz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014).

status of the turn itself could be called into question. Magdalena Marszałek, for example, finds the notion of a topographical turn debatable:

The question of the extent to which interest in geography and topo- and cartographical techniques creates a new paradigm in history, sociology, or cultural studies (the topographical turn) is debatable, while understanding geographic space in terms of cultural practices of the construction of territories, identity, and memory, is widely agreed upon across the disciplines.²

If we understand the spatial/topographical turn as a paradigm shift, then indeed doubts may be warranted. Labeling a trend in scholarship a “turn” does carry with it, however, the suggestion of something else, namely, a dynamic of action, a state in progress, a turning point, a reorientation. And I believe this is the case, as well, with the spatial turn: there is more dislocation than stabilization in it for now.³ It is worth pointing out at the outset that this “turn” has its institutional anchoring in British and American “place studies;” it has its trade journals here (*Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*; *Gender, Place and Culture*, etc.), and its associations (Institut International de Géopoétique, Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, etc.). A signal of the paradigmization of the spatial turn is also the proliferation of sub-disciplines from humanist geography and cultural geography to anthropology of place and space, geocriticism, and geopoetics.⁴

These institutional factors obviously stabilize the reorientation, though at the same time they may constitute a kind of commons for exchange and further circulation. In terms of why the so-called turn seems so attractive to literary studies, what appears most pertinent is the potential contained within a new language and lexicon, as well as the influx of concepts associated

2 Magdalena Marszałek, “Pamięć, meteorologia oraz urojenia: środkowoeuropejska geopoetyka Andrzeja Stasiuka,” in *Literatura, kultura i język polski w kontekstach i kontaktach światowych. III Kongres Polonistyki Zagranicznej*, ed. Małgorzata Czermińska, Katarzyna Meller, Piotr Fliciński, Poznań 2007. This is the only article I am aware of dealing directly with the issue of the topographical turn in the context of Polish literature.

3 It took until 2008 for there to be an anthology of texts from different disciplines (anthropology, sociology, political science, religious studies, cultural studies), namely, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Barney Worf, Santa Arias (New York: Routledge, 2008).

4 *The Anthropology of Space and Place. Locating Culture*, ed. Setha M. Low, Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga (Malden: Blackwell Publishing 2003); *La Geocritique: mode d'emploi*, ed. Bertrand Westphal (Limoges: PULIM, 2000).

with the spatial turn. That is why I am interested less in the pragmatics of it and more in the dynamic of contemporary reconfigurations of a spatial, thematic, and disciplinary nature; the trajectories of dislocations; as well as the active development of this area of interest. The spatial/topographical turn not only looks into contemporary space in movement, but is itself subject to ceaseless dislocations.

The question I want to focus on is also this problem of nomenclature and the question of whether this reorientation ought to be called a “spatial turn” or rather a “topographical turn.” As similar as their meanings are, they are different in terms of territorial custom. They also cover distinct geographical territories, since “spatial turn” is employed mostly in Anglophone regions, which obviously lends it an additional power, while “topographical turn” is more common in Germanlanguage contexts.⁵

Yet particular territorial usages are less important than the pragmatics of general use in the contemporary context. “Topographical turn” has a decidedly greater and more attractive semantic potential, particularly for literary studies. Etymologically, topography as *topos graphos* – the description of space – has a more solid basis in the field of literary studies, not only with respect to a rich and long rhetorical tradition. In the contemporary conceptual landscape topography harmonizes with the conviction of literary and cultural shaping of space. It resonates perfectly, as well, with other related concepts – heterotopias and topotopography,⁶ toponym and topology, atopia, utopia and dystopia, the atopic subject and atopiation.

For these reasons, I am inclined to consider the topographical turn a local, and perhaps positional, variant of the spatial turn, local meaning having to do with the domain of *graphein*, where a linguistic approach to space is considered a valuable one. Meanwhile the spatial turn I treat as a useful formula having to do with the contemporary rise in interest in space in the different disciplines and artistic practices. These concepts can obviously be used interchangeably, provided, however, that it is understood that they come from different fields and have been tools of different disciplinary languages, which means that the relationship between them is currently one of a chiasmic nature.

The trajectories determined by the topographical turn lead to a range of areas of writing and literary research. Of the examples of direction that interest can take, regionalism is especially important, and in particular, the so-called

5 The foundational text is Sigrid Weigel's article “Zum ‘topographical turn’: kartographie, topographie und raumkonzepte in den kulturwissenschaften,” *KulturPoetik* 2 (2002).

6 This term is taken from Joseph Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Berkeley: Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995).

new regionalism. Thematic spatiology as a traditional field (spatial topics in the home, yard, hills, deserts, etc.) is reinterpreted and now read most often from the perspective of gender, postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, or in conjunction with the construction of national identity. That latter deserves its own note – as it creates an extensive section of ideological literary landscapes (this is most actively pursued in British “place studies”) and directing attention toward modern dislocations of space and identity.⁷ This direction of study results from the conviction that literature creates and transmits national landscapes and ideological places; Poland is an excellent example of this, having created in the nineteenth century a national spatial repertoire of topoi founded in the opposition between city and country.⁸

The fact that spatial categories might be attractive analytical instruments in researching the relationships between national identity and literature – even on a scale as large as centuries-old Portuguese literature – is confirmed by Ewa Łukaszyk's book *Terytorium a świat. Wyobrażeniowe konfiguracje przestrzeni w literaturze portugalskiej od schyłku średniowiecza do współczesności* [*Territory and World: Imagining the Configurations of Space in Portuguese Literature from the Late Middle Ages to Modernity*].⁹ Łukaszyk's book traces the developmental dynamics of Portuguese conceptualizations of space, evolving from the notion of national territory as a space that had to be ceaselessly expanded by the power of the religious myth (legitimizing imperial conquest) through the collapse of that vision and ultimately twentieth-century nomadism. National mythic geography is interpreted as an instrument serving to confirm the sense of identity in connection with a given territory. Łukaszyk's proposed conceptual toolbox (territory, border, itinerary, nomadism, diaspora, “mythic geography”) can be treated as its own modern repertoire of topoi, *loci communis* that form a commons of writing, literary history, ethnic studies, and national mythology.

The issue of the relationship between place and literature is complex and linked to many other realms in a variety of different ways. It may have to do

7 Bernard Sharrat, “Writing Britains,” in *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality, and Identity*, ed. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

8 I wrote more about this in the book *Modernizowanie miasta. Zarys problematyki urbanistycznej w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* (Kraków: Universitas 2003), 48–53. See Ewa Ihnatowicz “Kiedy kamienica jest a kiedy nie jest domem polskim,” in *Obraz domu w kulturach słowiańskich*, ed. Teresa Dąbek-Wirgowa, Andrzej Z. Makowiecki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Wydział Polonistyki, 1997).

9 Ewa Łukaszyk, *Terytorium a świat. Wyobrażeniowe konfiguracje przestrzeni w literaturze portugalskiej od schyłku średniowiecza do współczesności* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2003).

with the relationships of writers to concrete places, such as familial places or those visited on trips. The connections between these places and literature can be described, as Robert Packard describes them, in terms of “refraction” – a term borrowed from optics – if one assumes that literature is a prism that transforms authentic loci into literary places.¹⁰ That relationship can also be understood, however, from the perspective of a geography of literary *milieux*, where concrete places become a creative space enabling literary or artistic activity. An impressive example of this approach is Shari Benstock’s *Women of the Left Bank* – a fascinating tale of how Left Bank Paris became the birthplace of an alternate version of modernism in the early part of the twentieth century.¹¹

In the most general terms, it is now commonly accepted that literature and geographical place are not mutually exclusive but are rather complementary, engaged in ceaseless negotiations with one another.¹²

Meanwhile, research on the city in literature is still actively being developed, powered now by new ideas from postcolonial studies and the new literary geography. There are innumerable examples, but the most representative of the current literary phase of urban studies seem to be texts dealing with the specifics of today’s cultural situation in former colonial metropolises, and in particular, London. Postcolonial London is an especially acute problem in much critically acclaimed literature (Naipaul, Rushdie, Smith, Kureishi, Malkami), which tends to show with photographic clarity the contemporary stratifications and ethnic, national, religious, gender-based, and cultural shifts there¹³ – which is why it is worth dedicating a little more space to this phenomenon now. When examined from the perspective of new spatial reconstructions, the question of the old dichotomous and hierarchical relations between metropolis and colonies come to the fore, this being the foundation for colonial and postcolonial discourse and contributing to the next evaluative oppositions based on domination and subordination (center-periphery,

10 See for example Robert Packard, *Refractions: Writers and Places* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1990), 3.

11 Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

12 See one of the most recent anthologies dedicated to this topic: *Literature and Place 1800-2000*, ed. Peter Brown, Michael Irwin (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006).

13 Kevin Robins, “Endnote: To London: The City beyond the Nation,” in *British Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Peter Brooker, *Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film and Urban Formations* (London: Palgrave, 2002); Sławomir Kuźnicki, “Miasto widzialne, lecz nie widziane. Londyn w Szatańskich werwetach Salmana Rushdiego,” in *Miasto. Przestrzeń, topos, człowiek*, ed. Adrian Gleń, Jacek Gutorow, Irena Jokiel (Opole: Uniwersytet Opolski – Instytut Filologii Polskiej, 2005).

East-West and in the urban structure of cities: order-chaos). Unmediated contact between inhabitants of the metropolis and the colonies in the colonial era led either to the proclamation and confirmation of “strong,” “pure,” and essential identities (e.g. Jean Rhys’ *Voyage in the Dark*), or – as in V.S. Naipaul (*The Mimic Men*) – to the imitation of the imperial cultural pattern.

The fall of the empire is succeeded on the one hand by the decentralization of the metropolis by the influx of immigrants from the periphery, undermining the system from within and transforming the old hierarchies while also creating a qualitatively new “third space” of cultural hybridization (in Homi Bhabha’s understanding). The process of dismantling that opposition, however, is accompanied by the appearance of the next one: the reproduced metropolis-colonies relationship now exists within the metropolis itself, in the guise of the opposition between center and the suburbs that, in Europe, condemn their residents to marginalization¹⁴ (examples include Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* or *Zadie Smith’s White Teeth*). As a consequence of these processes, the space of the city, the former metropolis, becomes a territory of struggle, conflict, and violence against an ethno-religious backdrop (e.g. Kureishi’s *Black Album* and *Londonistan* by Gautam Malkami), and the old cultural and ethnic difference between metropolis and colony – which once served as the origins of domination – now becomes an object of consumption and multicultural fashion, itself sometimes interpreted as neocolonialism. From the point of view of literary scholarship, the fact that the spatial relations and their reconfiguration launch a new analytical lexicon in research on colonial and postcolonial literature (culture), including categories of ethnicity, race, class, geography, the problems of globalization, transculturation, hybridization, and the politics of representation is also important.

Ecocriticism leads in yet another direction, and although its connection with the topographical turn may be debatable, they do both share the category of place. The most concise definition of ecocriticism is that it prioritizes research on the relationship between literature and the environment, nature and culture.¹⁵ The repertoire of questions asked by ecocriticism goes something like this:

¹⁴ See *Cities on the Margin, on the Margin of Cities: Representations of Urban Space in Contemporary Irish and British Fiction*, ed. Philippe Laplace, Éric Tabuteau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2003).

¹⁵ This is, of course, one of many definitions of ecocriticism, featured in Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), XVIII.

How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category? Do men write about nature differently than women do? In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? What view of nature informs U.S. Government reports, corporate advertising, and televised nature documentaries, and to what rhetorical effect? What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art, history, and ethics?¹⁶

The close relationship with the topographical turn is also the result of the fact that ecocriticism – as a new discipline, therefore seeking an anchor for itself in the past and in tradition – has included in its territory terrains that have long been explored. The question of literary representations of nature, for instance, is that sort of traditional arena of inquiry.

The questions above, as formulated by Cheryl Glotfelty in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, are a terrific example of the characteristic features of modern trans-disciplinary thinking. This new orientation in literary studies is, after all, a response to the processes and phenomena of the world (in particular, the ecological crisis), without, however, straying too far from its own backyard: that is, what is specific to literary studies. It is skillfully in dialogue with the tradition of its own discipline and yet simultaneously unafraid of opening up to new ideas and disciplines not strictly literary.

These trajectories may sometimes appear to simply be returns to old, familiar places. However, the modern cultural context lends them new meaning. So it is, for example, with the case of regionalism, whose revision and re-envisioning we owe to postmodern culture. Regional literature was treated as a secondary phenomenon until the 1970s and 1980s, and it was only its rising popularity from the 1960s on in the United States that new ways of interpreting and evaluating it came into being. The relationship with postmodernism is, in this case, also quite complicated – new regionalism appeared in literature alongside postmodernism, and both they

¹⁶ Ibid., XIX.

shared a critique of elitist modernism, especially its universalist usurping. As much as literary postmodernism was geared toward formal experimentation, however, and uninterested in geography and topography, so new regionalism did opt for realist techniques, placing location at the fore in a very clear way. This is also why it tended to be treated by the critics as a reaction to postmodern confusion or a way of escaping the chaos of postmodern culture.¹⁷

Now, however, new regionalism is most indebted to minority discourses, and especially to theories of postcoloniality. Local and regional narratives are treated as a kind of emancipatory strategy and a critical response to the Great National Stories on the one hand while, on the other, as a reaction to globalizing atopias and non-places. New regionalism also enters into a curious relationship with the surregional, that is, with what is now the global. Salman Rushdie provides an apt and succinct summary of this in a novel that is both regional and cosmopolitan, about both Kashmir and Los Angeles: every place, he argues, is part of all other places.¹⁸ Finally, new regionalism is not merely a variety of literature about concrete places, or located in such places; it is also “an attempt to find a new place from which to study literature.”¹⁹

The spatial turn, as I wrote above, is connected with other turns: cultural, iconographic, performance. The most significant was definitely the cultural turn, which lent literature and literary studies (as well as humanities as a whole) placement and displacement at once. Placing or situating research is not only a metaphor: more and more importance is given to the fact of the geographical “position” of the researcher (often an immigrant) as well as to the place that person has come from, as well as the place that person went when he or she did leave. The biographies of Edward Said, Arjun Appadurai, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and many others that are either embedded in the introductions to their books or contained in separate texts are ample demonstration of this. Citing and publicizing their biographical context is not, in their case, simply an element of self-representation, but rather a strategy of self-placing, thanks to which their lives actually act as testaments to the trans-positionality of the theories they advocate. Roberto M. Dainotto writes interestingly of the new position of the intellectual in today’s world:

17 See Jerzy Durczak, “1960–1980: nowy regionalizm,” in *Historia literatury amerykańskiej XX wieku*, vol. 2, ed. Agnieszka Salska (Kraków: Universitas, 2003), 372.

18 Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (New York: Random House, 2006).

19 Roberto Dainotto, *Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 4.

If the old modernist intellectual, fundamentally a *deraciné*, saw literature as a “strategy of permanent exile” and fundamental displacement [...] the new intellectual rather likes to pose as a topologist: S/he speaks from one specific place of cultural production and about a localized “geography of the imagination” within whose borders a given literary utterance may remain significant, relevant, and even intelligible. “Positionality” [...] is the magic word, and you’d better take it literally.²⁰

Place and position, let us recall, play a double role here: that of geographical location and that of research method.

The relationship between the spatial turn and the cultural turn cannot, however, be understood as one of cause-and-effect nor as a relationship of successors. More apt is a metaphor of circulation, which is also the conclusion to which we are led in the remarks on the significance of geography for culture in *Introduction to Cultural Studies*:

One increasingly important aspect of cultural studies is what can be called the geographies (or, indeed, topographies) of culture: the ways in which matters of meaning are bound up with spaces, places and landscapes. One sign of this is that the language of cultural studies is full of spatial metaphors [...] Yet there is more to this than just language since there is also a sense that culture – particularly when it is understood as something that is plural, fragmented and contested – cannot be understood outside the spaces that it marks out (like national boundaries or gang territories), the places that it makes meaningful [...] the landscapes that it creates (from “England’s green and pleasant land” to the suburban shopping mall).²¹

The most important consequence of the cultural turn for topographical methods does appear to be the reconfiguration of the relationship between literature (and literary studies) and geography.

Culture, Literature, Geography: Flows and Reconfigurations

Shifting interest from the poetics of imaginary spaces to the interactions between literature and real spaces necessarily creates opportunities

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Brian Longhurst, et al., “*Topographies of Culture: Geography, Meaning, and Power*,” in *Introducing Cultural Studies* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008), 130.

to renegotiate the limits between literary studies and geography, especially since over the course of recent years both partners in that trans-disciplinary dialogue have changed.

The door was initially opened by humanist geography, which was developed in the 1970s as a form of resistance to the quantitative methodology that then dominated the field. Humanist geographers, then, treated polemically the idea of space as formulated by the hard sciences and subsequently adapted for a geography with pseudo-scientific ambitions, opposing to it approaches especially interested in its anthropological and cultural dimension.²² Space, along with the subject experiencing it, thus became a commons where geography and other areas of study – such as sociology (to invoke but Florian Znaniecki's "humanities coefficient") and anthropology – intermingled. But it wasn't only those areas, because both the object of study (place as experienced by man, cultural landscape), as well as the new hermeneutics (emphasis placed on understanding, and not explaining) also brought humanist geography ever nearer literary studies.

For this reason, too, literature became an important point of reference for humanist geographers, important insofar as it may constitute justification for and confirmation of their theories of place. Literary representations of landscapes read by geographers may in fact reveal both the specifics of individual experience and interpretations of space as well as the cultural framework for that type of reading. A Polish example of this is Dobiesław Jędrzejczyk discussing the significance of landscape in the prose of Gustaw Herling-Grudziński:

For the description of landscape, for the writer as well as for anyone else set in said landscape, the construction of meanings, and seeing is the lending of sense to looking, reaching all the way down into hidden, invisible dimensions of reality [...] In other words, there is in the description something that the landscape itself does not contain and that is exclusively the product and property of the vision of the person watching [...] From the perspective of humanist geography, everything Herling-Grudziński inscribes into his landscapes is important – that is, what in the description of landscape is the beginning of new meanings.²³

22 See Krzysztof H. Wojciechowski, "Koncepcje przestrzeni geografii humanistycznej," in *Przestrzeń w nauce współczesnej*, ed. Stefan Symotiuka and Grzegorz Nowaka (Lublin: Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowska, 1998).

23 Dobiesław Jędrzejczyk, "Krajobraz kulturowy jako metafora bytu," in *Kultura jako przedmiot badań geograficznych. Studia teoretyczne i regionalne*, ed. Elżbieta Orłowska (Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Geograficzne, 2002), 21, 22.

For humanist geographers, literature is also important as a source of examples of *genius loci* that might escape the grasp of other, more scientific methods, as well as ways of experiencing space and lending it affective hues.²⁴ In other words, literature provides the language for understanding “mute” and “anonymous” territories, and it is thanks to this that they are able to signify.

And now comes the question of whether or not the relationship between the disciplines also worked in the other direction – that is, was humanist geography also a source of inspiration for literary scholars? Certainly some members of that school, especially Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward T. Hall, did inspire scholars of literature, and distinguishing between place and space has benefited a variety of disciplines.

Beata Tarnowska's *Geografia poetycka w powojennej twórczości Czesława Miłosza* [*Poetic Geography in Czesław Miłosz's Postwar Work*] is an important and extremely thorough book within Polish literary criticism.²⁵ Its object is Miłoszean topographies, poetic descriptions of American landscapes, as well as Lithuanian and French landscapes, considered along two axes: the geographic and the metaphysical. Place, that is, the fundamental category drawn from the discourse of humanist geography, attains a dual status and is both a concrete place on Earth, experienced and interpreted, as well as Place, with its symbolic meaning.

The need to renegotiate between literary scholarship and geography does result from a series of new challenges, since what acts now as the principle impulse to bringing them closer together is the cultural turn, which has transformed both disciplines – opening them up to one another and providing a repertoire of shared questions, problems, and ideas. Of course this process affected all of the humanities in delineating a new map – though it ought immediately to be stipulated that the metaphors of maps and mapping that appear more and more frequently are too static to reflect the dynamic and quite transversal nature of these transformations. If we are sticking with visual-spatial metaphors, then more apt might be the multi-dimensional metaphor of the map of migrations and trajectories of wandering concepts, movements, and displacements, where established borders undergo dislocations, and the spatial dimension – albeit against Cartesian logic – must be supplemented with the historical.

24 Hanna Libura, “Geografia i literatura,” *Przegląd Zagranicznej Literatury Geograficznej* 4 (1990): 107–114.

25 Beata Tarnowska, *Geografia poetycka w powojennej twórczości Czesława Miłosza* (Olsztyn: Wyższa Szkoła Psychologiczna, 1996).

The evolution of humanist geography into cultural geography was a consequence of the cultural turn within the field of geography,²⁶ the latter being linked to the former by the recognition of cultural mediation as the basic framework for the experience of space, but it is different in its decidedly greater emphasis on the question – to invoke today's mantra – of race, class, and gender, sensitivity to issues of power and symbolic violence as well as the politics of representation.

What, then, unites both disciplines after the cultural turn? The link seems to be the rejection of those definitions of culture that treat it as the product of an intellectual elite, the recognition of its positionality, the situation of it within local parameters, research into popular culture, an emphasis on cultural pluralism, and the idea that culture is a battlefield. For example, Peter Jackson, one scholar associated with cultural geography, defines culture in a manner clearly borrowed from British cultural studies, as “a domain in which economic and political contradictions are contested and resolved,”²⁷ although of course, as he immediately adds, it cannot be reduced to those economic and political contradictions. The fundamental question posed by the new cultural geography of how culture lends meaning to places and spaces also applies to literary practices and research.

The flow of cultural and geographical concepts into literary research leads, meanwhile, to the next reconfigurations – to literary geography being more open than it once was to the “positional” dimensions of literary texts. As much as literary geography in the Polish context is commonly thought to be an auxiliary area for the research of the spatial location and activity of literary life,²⁸ other conceptions exist within, for example, Anglophone literary geography. Beginning with the obvious, that is, research into the interaction between literary representations of authentic geographical places and those

26 Chris Philo, “More Words, More Words, Reflections on the «Cultural Turn» and Human Geography,” in *Cultural Turns/ Geographical Turns: Perspectives on Cultural Geography*, ed. Ian Cook, et al. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2000). For a comprehensive introduction to the problematics of cultural geography see Mike Crang's *Cultural Geography* (London, New York: Routledge, 1998).

27 Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1989), 1.

28 Amongst the newer works see, for example, Jowita Kęcińska's *Geografia życia literackiego na Pomorzu* (Słupsk: Instytut Kaszubski, 2003). NB: for the sake of precision in distinguishing between the fields, it may indeed be better to refer to this, as Kęcińska does, as “geography of literary life.”

places,²⁹ and continuing on to such tasks as situating literature in global contexts. The anthology *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* gives a number of diverse examples of literary geography after the cultural term, reading modernism after the topographical turn. The rationale for the reconfiguration of modernism in terms of geography and cultural criticism, say the editors of that volume, is the fact that our situation in the world, as well as our conceptions of home, work, travel, information, as well as the cultural identities that emerge from those, are the object of radical change.³⁰ That change applies equally to modernism in literature, which should be reviewed from the perspective of colonial history, at the very least.

A wonderful and inspiring example in Poland of literary geography is Dorota Kołodziejczyk's work, which combines an analysis of the new spatial imagination in Anglophone literature with the categories of cultural geography.³¹ What is more, it sets in motion and dislocates spatial metaphors, making use, for example, of Foucault's heterotopias in order to describe postcolonial identity:

Instead of the universalizing historicism of postcolonialism, he proposes a differentiating cartography of subjectivity in which the situating of the subject, its positionality, its internal tension between movement (migration, travel, uprooting) and staying in place (making a home, establishing roots) shows identity as a heterotopia: a place where several different, often incompatible or mutually unfamiliar spaces. Using the definition of heterotopias from strictly spatial categories to categories of identity has a revolutionary effect – it shows the inadequacy of the dichotomy of self/other, indispensable to the analytical goals in constructing a coherent identity but casting the danger of crisis and inward inconsistency safely onto the outside.³²

29 Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, "Introduction: Locating the Modern," in *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Routledge: London, New York 2005), 2.

30 See for example Jeri Johnson's "Literary Geography: Joyce, Woolf and the City," in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Melbourne: Blackwell 2002).

31 Dorota Kołodziejczyk, "Antropologiczne fabulacje – hybryda, tłumaczenie, przynależność we współczesnej powieści anglojęzycznej," in *Ojczyzny słowa. Narracyjne wymiary kultury*, ed. Wojciech J. Burszta, Waldemar Kuligowski (Poznań: Biblioteka Telgte, 2002); Dorota Kołodziejczyk, "Kolonialne kontury, globalne przemieszczenia. Nowa wyobraźnia przestrzenna w literaturze i teorii kultury," *Czas Kultury* 2 (2002); Dorota Kołodziejczyk, "Trawersem przez glob: studia postkolonialne i teoria globalizacji," *Er(r)go* 1 (2004).

32 Kołodziejczyk, "Trawersem przez glob: studia postkolonialne i teoria globalizacji," 21.

What is New in Theories of Space?

The cultural reorientation of both disciplines reveals their multiple and complex connections to processes transforming culture both at a macro- and a micro-level – amongst which might be mentioned globalization, the hybridization of cultures, the development of new media and new communication technologies, tourism, ecology, and the environmental crisis. Theories of these processes and phenomena have provided a new set of questions as well as answers, but above all, they have led to new conceptions of space. Simplifying somewhat, contemporary thought on space after the cultural turn is characterized by the following tendencies:

1. the chiasmatic understanding of the relationship between space on the one hand and language, literature, and culture on the other;
2. a view of space that is not essentialist, but rather dynamic – space as variable configurations or transitional spaces, non-places;
3. combination of spatiality with temporality;
4. a return of the category of place, and with it the accentuation of the local and regional, as well as other (gender, ethnic, class, cultural) parameters of the scholar, writer, or artistic practices, in addition to the problematizing of local-global oppositions, connected with the above;
5. particular interest in hybrid spaces, heterotopias, and borderlands;
6. a shift of perspective from ontology to ideology, from mimesis to the pragmatics of power over space, from universal mythification to symbolic violence, from the poetics of space to the politics of place;
7. the idea that literature performatively invokes, creates, and lends meaning to space.

The chiasmatic understanding of the relationship between space and language has been most aptly formulated by Ewa Rewers in her book *Język i przestrzeń w poststrukturalistycznej filozofii kultury* [*Language and Space in Poststructuralist Cultural Philosophy*] which was, incidentally, the harbinger of the spatial turn in Polish humanities. The textualization of space and the spatialization of discourse as two inseparable and mutually influencing processes had as their goal above all the dismantling “the relationship, established in the tradition, especially the philosophical tradition, but immeasurably more complex, between language and space, logos and logosphere, text and environment, speech and *khora*.”³³

If something new might be added to these findings, it is worth noting those critics who testify to the limitations of the “cultural” and anthropocentric conception of space, these critics appearing, among other places, in ecocriticism.

33 Ewa Rewers, *Język i przestrzeń w poststrukturalistycznej filozofii kultury* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1996), 8.

Secondly, it is also worth noting that the current understanding of language points more and more frequently to its ideological and political dimension.³⁴ One of the localizations (and dislocations) of culture consists in the fact that there is no way to point up essentialist, universal conceptions and definitions of space and place.³⁵ It is thus worthwhile to recall Tim Edensor's book *National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life*, extremely valuable not only in terms of its original characterization of the eponymous issue, but also because it is particularly representative for contemporary thought on space and place. It takes into account above all the fact that both our conceptualizations of space, as well as our cultural spatial practices, including those that come from the sphere of every life, are a dynamic configuration undergoing ceaseless transformations. Edensor does not ask, in other words, what space is, and he does not come up with any "theory" of space, but in drawing on diverse cultural experiences, he does show places as constellations of variables.

Edensor does emphasize that at the level of everyday experiences, of equal importance is the setting of that experience within the world of culture (elite and popular), ideology, ideas, and immersion in pre-reflexive and somatic experience. The ability to perceive and to weave into the scholarly narrative that private experience, that appreciation of a child's perception of places, which outlines that primal, not yet pragmatic, but entertaining map of the space of the everyday, allows the discourse of contemporary theory to attain an important counterpoint here. In a word, Edensor understands space as a dynamic configuration of ideology, everyday life, and sensuality.³⁶

A significant feature of current spatial research is also its tying together spatiality with temporality, geography with history. This was how Michel Foucault was already viewing heterotopias: "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies."³⁷ From a different perspective historicity was set in space by Pierre Nora when he created the conception of

34 See among others bell hooks' "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," in *From Yearnings: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 1989).

35 Peter Brooker, for example, does not define place or space in his Glossary, placing them positionally in with different contemporary theories. Peter Brooker, *A Glossary of Cultural Theory* (London: Arnold, 2002).

36 Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2002). This type of thinking about spaces and places derives, at least in part, from specific developments in British cultural studies, which after Raymond Williams accept the broad definition of culture as "lifestyle."

37 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," in *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* March (1984). English translation by Jay Miskowicz.

places of memory (*lieux de mémoire*). In the social sciences, meanwhile, David Harvey recognized timespace compression as a quality specific to postmodern culture. Also noteworthy is research on “geohistory,” of which, in Poland, a terrific example is the work developed by art historian Piotr Piotrowski.³⁸

In discussing the return of place in contemporary theories, we must first, of course, recall the crisis of the traditional concept of the place, its erosion, disappearance, or depreciation. Usually the phenomenon of placelessness, to use Edward Relph’s term, is linked to modernizing processes, with societal and economic transformations on the one hand and, on the other, a notion of nation marginalized by local and regional values. The visual testimony to those universalist pretensions of modernization was clearly architecture’s International Style, while further development only strengthened mobility (and thus the absence of belonging to a place) as well as the homogenization of the landscape, as Edward Relph believes. The problem of place erosion affects numerous cultural phenomena significant in supermodernity, according to Marc Augé.³⁹ His brand of non-places (*non-lieux*) calls attention to the transitive character of contemporary spaces, the transient spheres of airports and train stations, shopping malls and amusement parks.

But if one wished to address the return of place now, emphasis would be placed on questions of locality – though it ought to be pointed out at once that this is a locality after the spatial turn, and therefore one undergoing dislocation, reoriented, set in motion, and understood positionally, and thus in relation primarily to global processes. Their mutual entanglement is emphasized, of course, by theories of glocalization, Doreen Massey’s “global sense of place,” or Arjun Appadurai’s “global production of locality.”

Nor is it difficult to discern that the spatial turn has been directed particularly at certain places on the world map. At border regions, sites of subordination, ancient metropolises – that is, at wherever space is subject to circulation, dislocations, and symbolic violence. These are seconded by theories of the hybridization of culture and identity, Edward Said’s “real-and-imagined space,” Gloria Anzaldúa’s “new *mestiza*,” and Homi Bhabha’s “third space,” among others. All of these demonstrate the importance of these frontier territories for contemporary culture, as well as the importance of new conceptualizations of individual and collective identity. Of course, it is difficult to determine to what extent the interest in border space is the effect of contemporary

38 Piotr Piotrowski, “Drang nach Westen,” in *Sztuka według polityki. Od „Melancholii” do „Pasji”* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007).

39 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1992).

theories of hybridization, creolization, and mestization,⁴⁰ and to what extent those concepts originate in the experiences of such spaces. That question would, in any case, be a poorly formulated one – better, yet again, would be the vantage point of circulation.

The question of the transition from poetics of space to politics of place deserves special attention, because it is the most likely to spark controversy. As self-evident as that transition is in the discourse of the humanities in the west, politics and ideology remain ghosts of the Polish humanities. On the other hand, the embeddedness of literary representations of space in power is a self-evident problem, though it ought to be added at once that it is unusually susceptible to trivialization and over-application.

For the purposes of culturally-oriented literary research, we can distinguish several “fields” showing the effects of a politics of place. Firstly, politics of place is a linguistic issue, as well as an issue of lexicon and of the question of to what extent power over space is articulated in language. A simple example is: border or frontier? Recovered territories or territories obtained?⁴¹

Secondly, politics of place is a sphere of imagology, or, to employ Edward Said’s term, imaginative geography, and thus a question of the significance of the literary representation of space in creating an *imaginarium* important for an image and/or constructing ethnic, national, social, and gender identities. An example could be the problem of power in space from the perspective of gender – from the ideology of the hearth⁴² through the dominance of public space over private space to the subjugation of the female body in a university building that used to be a barracks.

Third, politics of place can also definitely be spoken about in a much more rudimentary way, that is, in terms of the creation of a community based on similar spatial and geopolitical experiences. An example of this might be Katharina Raabe’s and Monika Sznajderman’s *Znikająca Europa* [*Europe Vanishing*], which constructs an alternative (and imaginative at once) geography

40 See Adam Nobis, “Kategoria hybrydyzacji kultury w dyskusjach, sporach i koncepcjach globalizacji,” in *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 3 (2007), on issues of hybridization.

41 Suggestive examples of this type of linguistic “politics of place” are provided in the volume *Kresy – dekonstrukcja*, ed. Krzysztof Trybuś, et al. (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2007). [Translator’s note: the questions in Polish are of “kresy” or “pogranicza,” and “ziemie odzyskane” or “uzyskane.” These definitions refer specifically to historical issues of Polish geography, the former to the eastern regions of what is now Poland and what is now Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, and the latter refer to formerly Prussian lands, now Polish (again)].

42 See Lora Romero, “Bio-Political Resistance in Domestic Ideology and Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” *American Literary History*, 1 (4) Winter (1989): 715-734.

of an “other” forgotten European community. It also reveals the performative dimension of literary representations, creating a new map of Europe.

In Lieu of Predictions

It can be reasonably expected that the issue of literary space will in the near future occupy a place as privileged in poetics as have once – quite recently, in fact – the problematic of narrator and narrative situation, the problematic of time, the problematic of the morphology of plot or – very recently indeed – the problematic of dialogic and dialogism.⁴³

Janusz Sławiński's article, which contains the above citation, was published in 1978 and was the introduction to a volume entitled *Przestrzeń i literatura* [*Space and Literature*]. Reading both his article and the rest of the collection almost forty years later is conducive to comparisons – historical but not exclusively – as well as to a certain amount of skepticism. In fact, after that reading, making predications on the future of the topographical turn in Polish literary studies would be risky business. Nonetheless, I do consider the new areas of research and spatial concepts valuable in the pursuit of Polish literature because – and here I quote Sławiński again – “the need for an exchange of languages of study along with its attendant reformulations of well-known topics, diagnoses, and theses is also one of the most basic driving forces in work in the humanities.”⁴⁴

That type of revision and new language is undoubtedly required by the question of a regionalism that in Poland has been reduced to a nostalgic and escapist variant of “local patriotism,” while of course the ideological project of a homogenous national culture effacing regional differences and local histories is a problem that both pre- and post-dates World War II. The concept of an open (and simultaneously critical) regionalism developed in Borussia did not become widely known, but it could serve as a starting point for further research. Thus it is perhaps local narratives that are most in need of examination from a new perspective.⁴⁵

43 Janusz Sławiński, “Przestrzeń w literaturze: elementarne rozróżnienia i wstępne oczywistości,” in *Przestrzeń i literatura*, ed. Michał Głowiński and Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1978), 9.

44 Ibid., 10.

45 See Inga Iwasiów, “Inna uległość. Trudne początki szczecińskiej lokalności,” in *Narracje po końcu (wielkich) narracji*, ed. Hanna Gosk (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, 2007).

Within the Polish tradition, it would be interesting to take another look at the relationship between literature and geography – obviously incorporating the nineteenth-century work of Wincenty Pol. Similarly, geographical discourse analysis and its literary aspects might also be incorporated into the analysis of anthropological writing (e.g., the “painterly geography” of Waław Nałkowski).

The question of the relationship between subject and place (or non-place) is also worth considering in the new topographical lexicon. Spatial categories actually act now as the parameters for comprehending individual subjectivity (*homo geographicus*, the *atopic entity*), as well as collective, local, regional, and cosmopolitan identities.

In any case, the horizon for geopoetics seems wide open, all the more so since, as I have attempted to demonstrate, although the term itself – topographical/spatial turn – is not really used in Poland, much existing Polish research could, in fact, be related to it. These initiatives, scattered over different disciplines, also show that the new spatial imaginary is not only the object of research, but also a fact pertaining to the theoretical and critical awareness of the scholar, important because it leads to a reconfiguration of the humanities as a whole. The inspiration of the spatial turn does, however, require local sensitivity and global openness.

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Borderland Discourse and the Question of the Other – Stories from Chełm Land

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Preliminary Remarks

There is something other, different, which lies between empire and nations.¹ Some new non-uniform quality constituted by the region, the borderland – a living space common to people of different ethnic backgrounds, of different nationalities, people who are subject to the influence (through various means) of the powers that in general reside in distant centers. It is in those centers where national self-portraits are forged; it is where enlightened representatives of the nation create its awaited (and idealized) images in the areas of science, art, morality, and politics. The production of symbols, of self-knowledge, that which is ours – proper, beneficial, right, and true – is also aimed at the identification of the Other, the one who is our doppelganger *a rebours*. What and how he thinks, how he looks, and how he behaves contradicts our ideals; what is more, this constitutes a permanent threat to our values. This state of emergency will be lifted only once the Other transforms into our own likeness. This process, if it ever occurs at all, can never be absolute,

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¹ This text was prepared for the international conference *Chełmszczyzna – między imperium a narodami*, dedicated to the centenary of the foundation of a separate Chełm voivodship (Lublin-Chełm-Łuck, December 2012).

at most it can result in some form of inept mimicry that at any moment could revert to the primal stage, revealing its true (evil) side and threatening us anew. The center is therefore tasked with keeping its borderland inhabitants in a state of constant alertness; an awareness of the fact that the Other, that is the enemy, does not sleep.

Chełm Land – in terms of its representation in various genres of literacy such as institutional documents, political journalism, reportage, novels, and historical works – is a territory far less prosperous, and therefore in some respects less interesting than Eastern Galicia. The reason seems obvious: the latter saw the historical development of a strong cultural hub emanating to faraway centers of political power and capable of creating its own symbolic representations – Lviv. I am not quite sure whether I will be able to say anything original about Chełm Land given the copious amounts of studies done in Poland on the borderlands. Did Chełm Land possess any special significance within this discursive framework? Probably not. Nevertheless I will attempt to show different varieties of such discourse by referring to texts (to a large extent also in the footnotes) that prominently feature this land. For me literary works, including reportage, are the most important, although, from the point of view of contemporary literary studies, we would view many of them as second or even third-rate works. A novel by Kajetan Kraszewski, Józef Ignacy's younger brother, which will be mentioned here, does not belong to the nation's literary canon. Moreover, it is hard to find any mention of this author in such revered handbooks as Julian Krzyżanowski's *Dzieje Literatury Polskiej* [*History of Polish Literature*]. A reportage work on Chełm Land by Władysław Reymont, one of our Nobel laureates, is rarely mentioned in his biographies – Krzyżanowski also overlooks it. Nevertheless, both these texts are at present readily available in their unabridged form on the internet. This is the paradox of contemporary media – one can find almost “anything” as there are no criteria for selection: those works which comprise the canon are confronted on the web by those which were discarded by the same tradition. It is obvious that nothing in culture is ever lost, and nothing in it is ever final, or rather, nothing is semantically closed (adequate to its own self), or semantically neutral; all enunciations, freed from the voice of their “author,” enter previously unanticipated contexts and become endowed with new meanings. Accepting this cultural mechanism, I seek out in the “Chełm texts” (of course not only in those available on the web) answers to the question of how the inhabitants of that land are perceived by the authors who usually write about it either from a distance or visit it personally, but in both cases approach it equipped with a certain knowledge or worldview that shapes and frames their understanding of the Chełm borderlands and its people. Or is it possible that the reading of these texts will

only unveil another instance of the Polish discourse on power, entitlement, and resentment?²

This question expresses my greatest fears. It is easier for me to speak of “my own” borderlands: Upper Silesia. I console myself that this should not hinder me from discussing another borderland region, the one which has gained the exclusive right to be categorized as “Kresy” in the Polish language, describing the country’s “eastern territories.”³ I come from the south-western part of the country, which – this might seem a bit ironic – did not have the same luck as its eastern counterpart for at least one reason: the former’s populace have not produced so many great writers as the “Kresy” have since the 19th century. The point is that since that time, works of literature have become for the Polish public the most important source of knowledge about “Kresy” – knowledge that mythologizes reality.⁴ The power of literary fiction, its ability to construe the perception of the world, becomes evident to me when I think about one short work that epitomizes this mechanism. I have in mind a kind of reporter’s itinerary from the land of my childhood, that is Silesia, from the 1930s by a writer who was born and raised on a Polish estate in Kresy. Let us examine the perceptual schemata he uses, I cannot say to comprehend, but rather to familiarize himself with that landscape and its inhabitants. And so, in the chimney smoke flowing above factories he sees “a symphony of mist, sapphires, grey velvets and tactile motions”; in the shape of a factory building, the Opera de Paris; in the figure of chimneys, the heroes of *Turandot*; in the Katowice voivodship building, “a Petersburg character,” “The Winter Palace”; in an old woman, “a faint spot,” which “as in [...] a canvas of a great painter... ends the whole composition and constitutes the subject of the painting”; in a carousel, “the Prater star” from postcards once sent to him from

2 See and compare views on the borderland discourse: Edward Kasperski, “Dyskurs kresowy. Kryteria, własności, funkcje,” in *Kresy. Dekonstrukcja*, ed. Krzysztof Trybuś, Jerzy Kałużny and Radosław Okulicz-Kozaryn (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2007), 98–99 and Leszek Szaruga, *Palimpsest Międzyzmorza (zarys problematyki)*, accessed October 21, 2012, <http://www.tekstualia.pl/index.php?DZIAL=teksty&ID=258>

3 The notion „kresy” entered the language after the borders of the Second Polish Republic were formed, especially its eastern border, with the Soviet Union, delineated by the Treaty of Riga of 1921. That is when “it became «politically undesirable» to use the historical names «Lithuania and Russia» to designate that land [that is the eastern part of the country – J.P.H.]” Stefan Kieniewicz, „Kresy. Przemiany terminologiczne w perspektywie dziejowej,” *Przegląd Wschodni* 1 (1991), quoted after: Marek Wedemann, “Gdzie leży Beresteczko? Kresy na mapie,” in *Kresy. Dekonstrukcja*, 33.

4 Bogusław Bakuła, „Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego (zarys problematyki),” *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2006): 13.

Vienna by his parents; and in the rough sounding Silesian surnames ("Pyzik," "Warcok," "Opolony" ...), he is disappointed not to find the suffixes "ski," or even "icz."⁵

Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz entitles his reportage *Fotografie ze Śląska* [*Photographs from Silesia*], because he does not experience Silesia in any way that is not mediated by the intellectual-iconic clichés (if I may call it that) of the dominant culture which he, who was brought up among the landscape of Ukraine and Mazovia and educated on the ideals of western art and architecture, takes with him wherever he goes. Clichés used to describe Silesia symbolically subjugate it and render it voiceless, therefore allowing the writer only to perform a monologue of Polishness associated and equated with the western tradition (this is accompanied by his political correctness, which compels him to utilize the banalities of the "sanacja" propaganda such as "here, where Polish princess brought German colonizers...").⁶ In consequence he himself does not really know where he is. He does not understand that world, and he encounters within it only what he is already well acquainted with. The rhetorical category "photography" is just a convenient excuse he makes up for himself, an alibi for his inability to come into contact with the reality of the world he is supposed to observe.

Of course my aim here is not literary criticism. I am much more interested in a certain cultural mechanism that is inherent in the question of what happens to a subject under the "influence" of a certain text which imposes upon him foreign content (in the aforementioned case, it was Silesia). Clearly as a result of such a clash (with self-ascribed descriptions of that land, which are in themselves multilayered), what emerges are hybrid semiotic forms.

In turn, a hybrid language predetermines (i.e. formats, frames, however one may call it) its users' perception of the world, which as a language-object or factual-fictional mixture must acquire hybrid properties. This process is all the more effective the more the text penetrates into the center of semiosis – or, in other words, into the collective imagination – of a particular culture, which occurs for example through its inclusion in school textbooks. *Fotografie ze Śląska* is indeed a textbook example.

The reading of a literary text presented above utilizes, as can be seen, the tools of semiotic analysis and partially of postcolonial theory. Similarly, I would like to approach the texts – not only from literature, or those that are

5 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, „Fotografie ze Śląska,” (1936) in Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Podróż do Polski* (Warszawa: PIW, 1977), 101-109.

6 Ibid., 108.

memoirs or reportages, but also scientific ones – focused on Chełm Land and written by Polish authors foreign to this region. I will focus on the descriptions of its inhabitants; I will attempt to determine to what extent they become an embodiment or a mask of national ideologies, of the political and religious discourse which, alongside providing a sense of identity to their own, determines the Other. There is a question of the degree to which the described behavior of the Others is a realization of the intellectual content of texts of culture? A question the answer to which can merely possess a hermeneutical dimension, and a corresponding value.

I understand “discourse” from the title as a system of cultural practices which are a realization of a particular worldview, and the knowledge contained therein which defines the criteria of a true – and analogously false – understanding/perception of that world; it defines good/right/correct and bad/wrong/incorrect beliefs, as well as ways of talking about it and behaving in it. Discourse understood this way is a system of knowledge which rules reality, produces texts as well as institutions (literary, scientific, political) which do “violence” to things – as Michel Foucault put it.⁷ It is, as a matter of fact, a mechanism of exclusion: forbidden words, evil (other or foreign) people, false beliefs, and undignified behavior.

I am therefore primarily interested in language used as a weapon in the struggle for dominance between the nation states and nationalist movements, a weapon used for manipulating public opinion and producing ideological representations of the Other, who inhabits the borderlands – regions such as Chełm Land, which is the center of my focus here, but also Silesia and Galicia – and breaks in upon the (previously linear) history of nations.⁸ From this point of view, the problem of dominance turns into an experience with a “fundamental cultural dimension”⁹ in the borderlands, territories woven together from multiple histories and languages. This experience allows one to recognize otherness. How is the Other spoken of? The language of description, its semantics and pragmatics reveal in detail the relations between the dominant culture and the subordinate culture, between the inhabitants of the center and the inhabitants of the peripheries.

7 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. Alan Mark Sheridan-Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 229.

8 See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), Maria Delaperrière, “Gdzie są moje granice? O postkolonializmie w literaturze,” *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2008): 13.

9 Said, *Culture*.

The Other in the Field and in the Tavern

I will start with probably the oldest motif in the borderland discourse, which can be found in the novel *Chełmianie: opowiadania z lat 1792-1796* [*Inhabitants of Chełm: Stories from 1792-1796*] (1878), written with a truly Sarmatian flamboyance by Kajetan Kraszewski. This is how he describes the dwellers of Chełm Land:

Here I am bound to name the Kunicki's, the chamberlain's wife nee Węgleńska, Konstancya the daughter of Wojciech, the Castellan of Chełm; her sisters married in *sociam vitae*: Katarzyna – Swirski Mateusz the Chamberlain of Sanok, Róża – Gałęzowski, Wiktorya – Staniszewski the Sword-bearer; they all settled in nearby lands and kept notable households, so have Konstancya's brothers: Antoni Węgleński, the Mayor of Chełm, and Onufry, Standard-bearer, both noble men. Therefore, a family bloomed with so many members, living in harmony, ruled over all of Chełm Land.¹⁰

It is the pantheon of Polish nobility, the names of interconnected families accompanied by the titles of held land offices. Nobility is, as is well known, a class that cares little about education, sparsely utilizes writing, listens rather than reads, and therefore primarily creates a so-called oral culture (with a primacy given to such genres of speech as tales, jokes, and proverbs), where historical truth merges with fiction. Tedious, on the face of it, enumerations, catalogues of proper names and titles, serve in this case as a system of information, allowing people to put their world in order by revealing before them the mystery of its origin. The history of that world exhibits a genealogical, not a chronological, structure and stratification. Lists, enumerations – read hermeneutically – are a kind of sacred ritual, a way of introducing an absolute order into the world, of establishing a firm foundation of its present

10 Kajetan Kraszewski, *Chełmianie: opowiadania z lat 1792-1796* (Warszawa: Nakładem Gustawa Sennewalda Księgarza, 1878), 36. Similar lists of names appear in writings about nobility. For example, here is a list provided by Henryk Rzewuski in his argument for the superiority of Polish over western nobility: "In our land the magnates did not form a separate state; they were the nobility, they were the nation, they picked the wives for their sons from a vast field; therefore they did not lose reason. And which French or German magnate wrote law or at least a decent book? Show him to us! Haberdasheries and grocers produce lawmakers, politicians, poets, and historians. Not so in our land, where men like Lew Sapiecha, Piotr Herburt, Maksymilian Fredro, Wacław Rzewuski, Ignacy Krasicki, Ignacy Potocki, Tadeusz Czacki, Rejs from Nagłowice, were all nobles and inherited the offices they held." Henryk Rzewuski, *Pamiętki Soplicy*, ed. Zofia Lewinówna (Warszawa: PIW, 1978), 170.

form.¹¹ There is no one especially noteworthy in the quoted passage, besides “noble men” who were given lands to rule over. These are anonymous lands: they have no proper names besides those referring to places where power is exercised (Chełm, Sanok). A typical colonial discourse in which encounters with the Other do not occur. Granted, he can appear within its framework, but strictly in power relations of a paternalistic or even patriarchal character.¹² The Other can therefore acquire only the form of a servant or child. In any case, he is some lesser image of the master, worse than the latter, often a distorted version (though sincere and not intended to ridicule) of the genuine, masculine, fatherly ways of talking and behaving. We read in Kraszewski’s novel:

The fields, as far as one could see, were filled with workers; though toiling and grinding, they sang and chatted happily. Stanisław Olędzki, in spite of his indiscretions, was much liked by the local and neighboring people, mostly because he knew how to talk to them and often treated them to some vodka, himself drinking to their health; and when he started telling his tales and ideas they laughed their heads off, and he could do with them as he pleased.¹³

It is an idyllic image of the land and its inhabitants living in harmony, accord, and cordiality. Heart-warming scenes of a father (sometimes strict, but capable of “indiscretions”) playing with the children, who drink with him the heavenly nectar (in mythology it was ambrosia or wine, in the Chełm variant, it is vodka), they chat, sing, and laugh – all this allows Chełm Land to be perceived ahistorically, as a place suspended in an eternal present.¹⁴ It is as if God almighty had just established his covenant with “me and you and every living creature of all flesh”

11 Jean Pierre Vernant, „Mityczne aspekty pamięci,” trans. Aleksander Wolicki, *Konteksty* 3-4 (2003): 202, 203. See also on this subject: Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, trans. Alastair McEwan (London: MacLehose, 2009).

12 In this respect the patriarchal discourse is close to the „symbiotic discourse” as defined by Aleksander Fiut. Aleksander Fiut, *Spotkanie z Innym* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 47-48.

13 Kraszewski, *Chełmianie: opowiadania z lat 1792-1796*, 137.

14 Edward Said will call this phenomenon the „ethnographic present.” In relation to descriptions of nature in the borderland discourse this category is used by, i. a., Hanna Gosk, “Polski dyskurs kresowy w niefikcjonalnych zapisach międzywojennych. Próba lektury w perspektywie postcolonial studies,” *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2008): 25-26.

(Gen. 9:15¹⁵), promised that there shall never again be flood, then blessed them and ordered: "And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein" (Gen. 9:7). One of the sons of the Ark's builder was Shem – the progenitor of Sarmatians, whose "eternal present" was supposed to last six hundred years, and laying the story of his life also required a list – a record of generations: "The sons of Shem: Elam, and Asshur, and Arpachshad, and Lud, and Aram. And the sons of Aram: Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash. And Arpachshad begat Shelah; and Shelah begat Eber" (Gen 10:22-24) and so on. By creating lists, the inspired author, just as the aristocratic storyteller, attempts to grasp eternity, a detailed memory of old times allows him to uncover the divine (eternal, invariable) order of the universe.

The common people, in Kraszewski's work, require paternal care. They reveal their immaturity by scarring the Polish language, or rather its version which the author considers "standard." But there are also other signs of this. In their infantilism, the people are unified, depersonalized; power that is individually and ritually exercised rules over a society that is formed not by private persons with proper names but rather by an anonymous collective, designated through metonymic names such as Ivan, Vasyli, or Prokop.¹⁶ In the novel's plot, these are exotic figures, usually mute elements of scenography – innocent, natural, worshipping their master, and having no other "gods" before him. If some candidate for a new "master" appears (in the novel, they are visited by an emissary of the Emperor of Austria, who introduces himself as their protector from presumed oppressors), then he only provokes their laughter. In a description of this episode, Kraszewski allows himself to briefly introduce the language of his folk hero, with the sole purpose, as it turns out, of procuring a pointed joke. In an enclosed field of stabilized meanings, firmly contained

15 This and all subsequent references to the Bible are to The King James Version. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: OUP, 1997).

16 An estate coachman from Sławatycze introduced himself to Reymont when he visited Chełm this way: "Their Lordships call me Ivan – he explained, grasping the reins in his hand. I sat in the britzka, the whip cracked and the horses moved on. – In truth my name is Nikon, but such is the way of the estate to call the postilions of the drawing horses either John or Mathew. Here, on the Bug, they make you an Ivan – he laughed, cracking the whip furiously, turning into a broad, muddy road." Władysław Stanisław Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki* (Gdańsk: Tower Press, 2000), 4. Cf.: "The landowners of Hrubieszów Land formed a rather close-knit society, which, despite considerable changes in the structure of the Kingdom of Poland, remained impenetrable to elements from other classes or layers of society [...]."*Społeczeństwo Królestwa Polskiego*, ed. Witold Kula, (Warszawa: PWN, 1965), quoted after: Irena Kowalska and Ida Merżan, *Rottenbergowie znad Bugu* (Warszawa: LSW, 1989), 17.

within the triangle formed by the country estate, church, and peasantry, there is no place for any external elements. The people devoted to their Polish master cannot simply acknowledge some miserable "Unterhaus advocate" who "in his oratory fervor exclaimed: I am a humane man, economist, democrat!! – I understand all this quite well, this is why the emperor sent me." We subsequently read:

The peasants listened to this lofty rhetoric in silence, huffing and scratching their heads [...] and when this last argument was heard, Ivan nudged Prokop with his elbow.

"What did the German say?" he asked.

"Devil only knows," Prokop replied indifferently, spitting through his teeth; as the aroma coming from the bar was causing him some discomfort.

"Don't you understand?" asked Vasyli, once a menial, who was more cunning than the others.

"Man!! I don't understand," guileless Ivan replied.

"He says," Vasyli explained, "that at first he was a foreman, later a manager, and then a thief and that is why he was sent here.

"Oh! The German scoundrel," Ivan muttered.¹⁷

Notice: the scene takes place in a tavern, and this is not without reason. This is a place which enjoys extraterritorial status to a certain degree and is governed (as far as it is possible) in accordance with the rules of democracy. It is where people of different class, nationality, and faith looking for food and shelter encounter each other. A tavern, inn, taproom, pub, and saloon carry with them, in their semantic content, a promise of reconciliation, unity in disparity – in the haze over hot meals, in the heads of guests heated by drinks, in the racket of multiple languages spoken by the nobleman in the company of the poor and insignificant; travelers, vagrants, pilgrims, and tourists immersed in stories, (democratic) dialogues, exchanging news from all over the world; there is an atmosphere of an enclave, a promise of new land, of deterritorialization (as some contemporary humanists might say), and the surpassing of everyday drudgery with all its problems and tragic conflicts. The essence of the described phenomenon has been given a paradigmatic formulation by the narrator of *Don Quixote*, a work that gave rise to the modern literary genre that is the novel. This is how he speaks of one of his heroes, who "arrived at that inn, which he looked upon as the heavenly goal where all

17 Kraszewski, *Chełmianie: opowiadania z lat 1792-1796*, 150-151.

earthly misfortunes are happily terminated.”¹⁸ This statement can be considered an exemplary reading of the inn motif, an antidote to the curse of the tower of Babel; the inn which becomes a place where the sons and daughters of various tribes, languages, countries, and nations scattered “abroad upon the face of all the earth” (Gen. 11: 9) return from their exile. Only there does the initial trustfulness arise in them anew, a trust in that we all share the same tongue and whatever we attempt will be possible.

Polish literature frequently explored the inn motif,¹⁹ though often overlooking the multilingualism of the depicted community. The quoted passage seems (based on my knowledge which is quite limited, I admit, as I am not a literary historian) to be one of the few instances in all of Polish literature, when we hear a foreign language, and in particular Ruthenian/Old Ukrainian. Another such example is a record (two short passages to be exact) from the 1840s. Henryk Rzewuski, in his description of Zaporozhian Sich, situates his hero, among other places, inside an inn where he encounters a “numerous mix of various nationalities,” he hears the language of peasants and Ukrainian gentry, the Crimean and the Lithuanian language, he hears and puts down in the original a fragment of a blind storyteller’s folksong: “Krywda krywdoju, a otczyzna otczyzną [...] szczo maty persze [...] pobyje, a potom pomyłuje.” He also notes in the Ukrainian language, the answer of a Jewish innkeeper to his question, “[W]ho are those Cossacks so splendidly dressed and so generous?” The latter answers, “A wy czużyi, szczo ne znajete zaporoskich Kozaków? [...] Oni z rybow w desiat’ podwod byli w Humaniu [...] Nym słonko zajde, to wy ich obaczyte, jak oni u sebe chodzą.”²⁰

This is not heteroglossia yet as we do not find a clash of different viewpoints or beliefs of the actors in the presented world here. Rather, it is only (?) multilingualism, and a spectacular multilingualism, I would say, at that: in a public setting (an inn), we see and hear the Others, which rarely happens in Kresy literature. Local Others usually speak Polish,²¹ sometimes it is Pol-

18 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The History and Adventures of the Renowned Don Quixote*, trans. Tobias Smollett (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1998), 315.

19 This is a completely different topic. Some of the works that use this motif belong to the canon of Polish literature, among them: *Sir Thaddeus*, *The Peasants*, *Ashes and Diamonds*, *Mother Joan of the Angels* [*Matka Joanna od Aniołów*], or *Austeria*. It seems that the idea of a wedding used by Wyspiański (the action takes place in a farmhouse) is just another iteration of the inn motif.

20 Rzewuski, *Pamiętki Soplicy*, 105, 107, 108.

21 This is also pointed out in Aleksander Fiut, *Spotkanie z innym* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 49.

ish more or less subjected to some stylistic operations, such as archaizing or adding some local color through dialect. This pattern seems to be confirmed by the last statement of the Jew – the author of the commentary to the PIW edition of *Pamiętki*, which I refer to in this text, notes that in their published edition, even he speaks Polish!²²

Let us return to Chełm Land. The nobleman's tale [*gawęda szlachecka*] is a genre rather lacking in depictions of local Others. When the greatest master of this genre in the twentieth century (and he well may have been the last), Melchior Wańkowicz, dedicates a whole chapter of his autobiographical novel to Chełm Land, he still meticulously omits the fact that the village of Besko in Sanok County, where the novel takes place, was inhabited until 1945 by both Poles and Ukrainians in equal numbers. All his heroes are friends and family: daddy, mommy, granny, miss Michasia, auntie Mania...²³ Therefore, the story has the structure of a monologue, it offers a one-sided account of the world – there is no place for ambiguity within its confines. There are good reasons to presume that polysemy of the story could be damaging to its author, who otherwise in his other autobiographical novel, *Szczenięce Lata* [*Puppy Years*] (1934), gave voice, in its original form, to the Belarusian dwellers of Kałużyce. After the war, Besko remained in Poland, and in 1945, nearly all the inhabitants of Ukrainian nationality were forced by the Poles to flee to the Ukrainian SSR – it is therefore possible that mentioning them in *Ziele na kraterze* [*Herbs in the Crater*] (written in 1951, published in 1957) would provoke the intervention of censorship. No matter what were Wańkowicz's particular reasons for the concealment of the Others in his retrospective of the journey to Chełm Land, this fact can be explained by a much more basic factor, which is, broadly speaking, the ideology of the noble nation. It belonged to a specific social class whose self-knowledge historically shaped the discourse of Polish identity in its entirety (by the way: mostly illiterate peasants and the weak bourgeoisie could add very little to this discourse) – therefore texts produced within the sphere of its influence represent only our expectations, beliefs, hopes, and fears...

It is the same with Kajetan Kraszewski, who also fails to endow his novel with a fully developed dialogical structure. The presence of Others is based on their pageantry. They serve, above all, as decoration; the architecture of the inn or the village landscape allows for the appearance of sovereigns: the good master as well as the foreign invader. Relations of power culminate in this

22 See Zofia Lewinówna, *Komentarz*, in Rzewuski, *Pamiętki Soplicy*, 383–384.

23 See Melchior Wańkowicz, *Ziele na kraterze* (Warszawa: IW PAX, 1973), 48–64. On the topic of Besko village see Apokryf Ruski. Otwarte Ukraińskie Zasoby Naukowe, accessed December 19, 2012, <http://www.apokryfruski.org/?s=besko>

spectacle with the main characters calling upon irony, which serves them as a weapon against all other actors, and in general against anything that is different. Here irony conveys paternalism: it is more of a monologue, a game and play with the twisted self-portraits of the dominant culture, than dialogue. This results in the creation of closed semiotic forms that circulate within a single culture – this communication practice brings about the threat of potential social antagonisms. Multilingualism (as we shall see) will turn into the nightmare of Babel. Thus, the theatricality of multilingualism depicted through the medium of a single language, considered universal and natural, makes it possible to “properly” express such western words like “humane,” “economist,” or “democrat.” Moreover, it is also the language of virtuous people, courageous and just, who the simpleminded and (in their naivety) docile can only imitate through mimicry, with an unintentionally comic effect. As research on gendered cultural identity suggests, nationalisms, just like colonialisms, are self-depicted as being male; and the minorities – the subjected, the colonized – are female.²⁴

The Intertextual Other

Chełm Land comes into prominence only as a “sacred land,” a “Polish Calvary,” and becomes enriched through proper names previously absent in its literary depictions.²⁵ It gains importance in light of the goals defined by the national center, in light of interests of a strictly political nature. The periods of that center’s most prolific activity of producing texts focused on this region are concerned with two major events: the dissolution of the Uniate Eparchy and

²⁴ See Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007), 325–327. Symptoms of the patriarchal discourse, especially in relation to the Ukrainian populace, have appeared – evidently on many levels – in the main currents of Polish politics of the interwar period. Józef Piłsudski said in reference to Volhynia in 1926: “the government [...] should be strong and strict, but also just.” Nationalists spoke of Ukrainians in a similar way. We read in an article in *Gazeta Polska* (Jan 15, 1936): “The attributes of proper national politics, besides its main goals, are manhood and determination. Such politics cannot allow itself to be derailed by some unpredictable, tragic mischief. It cannot, even for a moment, forget the need to show relentlessness and strength in those cases, where its success can be hindered.” Both quotes in the appropriate order after Waldemar Paruch, *Od konsolidacji państwowej do konsolidacji narodowej. Mniejszości narodowe w myśli politycznej obozu piłsudczykowski (1926–1939)* (Lublin Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1997), 200, 330.

²⁵ „At dawn I continued my journey. As if in a pious pilgrimage through such stations of Polish Calvary as Łomazy, Piszcząc, Biata, Horbów, Pratulin, Janów, and many other places, made famous by the miracles of folk people faith and martyrdom.” Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 24.

its incorporation into the Russian Orthodox Church (1875), and the process of administrative separation of the governorate from the Kingdom of Poland, or to be more precise, from the Siedlce and the Lublin Governorates (1912). The Land itself seems to be of little importance. Its inhabitants are valued by the center only as long as they resemble us, the people of the center, and it is best if they become an idealized and favorably retouched self-portrait of us. By the center's decree, a martyrological, national, and religious perspective is to define the whole Chełm Land; to constitute the cultural code that will frame both the self-knowledge of the local recipients of this communication, as well as the expectations of the center's emissaries who visit the land from faraway Warsaw or Krakow. This is one of the reportages, written in the autumn of 1915, just after the battlefield had swept through this land:

Chełm Land always inspired much interest and talk all throughout Poland, and in previous years it was mentioned by everyone with an accompanying painful sigh, as it was well known what hideous moral torture, what difficulties and sorrows, were a part of Polish life there. News of the quiet but fierce fight that was waged over there for the very existence of the Polish soul and language reached Krakow incessantly; the names "Chełm" and "Chełm Land" were synonymous with the names of martyrs.²⁶

Historical sources tell us that most of the Uniate clergy in that region was Polonized;²⁷ that sermons were preached in the Polish language; that the Uniate resistance to the Russian religious oppression intensified the activity of the Polish church and civil organizations in the Chełm Land; that from 1877 onward, Jesuits conducted secret missions there from the lands of Galicia, organizing Uniate worshippers into Confraternities of the Rosary, "whose members guided the religious life of a community devoid of priests"; that the

26 Michał Siedlecki, *Z ziemi lubelskiej. Jesień 1915 r.* (Kraków: Druk W.L. Anczyca i Spółki, 1916), 47.

27 „[...] The Polishness, if not of the whole than at least of a vast majority, of the Uniates was unequivocally attested to in an excerpt of the address directed to the imperial throne through the Governor-General of Warsaw on December 18, 1867, signed by three canons who remained in the Chełm cathedral chapter [...] in paragraph nine, requesting parochial schools, the Uniate clergy writes «Let education be conducted only in the Polish language, as this is the wish of the whole Uniate population, and these schools would be also readily frequented by children of parents belonging to the Latin Church»." Henryk Wierciński, *Ziemia Chełmska i Podlasie. Rys historyczny i obraz stanu dzisiejszego* (Warszawa: Gebethner i Spółka), 20.

national and religious awareness of the “obstinate” “was influenced by Polish language publications that were shipped to the Bug River Counties since the end of the 1870s”; written sources point to the “considerable influence on the attitudes of the local “obstinate” population” of the Towarzystwo Opieki nad Unitami (Society for the Care of Uniates), founded in 1903, which handled the distribution of press concerned with national issues with titles such as “Polak” [“The Pole”], “Katolik” [“The Catholic”] or “Przegląd Wszechpolski” [“All-Polish Review”], where “the persecuted were persuaded to renounce Orthodoxy and convert to Catholicism.”²⁸

The struggle for dominance between churches and civilizations – eastern and western – sets the tone and shapes the meaning of the Chełm borderland discourse. It reinforces the production of ideological representations of the Other – simplified, clear-cut, and ready for political use. Previous categories of identity and difference have changed their semantics: the ethnic identity of Poles is complicated by the religious difference that is manifested by the Uniate population. For those Poles who wrote on Chełm Land, either during the time of the Kingdom of Poland or the Second Polish Republic, the Uniates became the other us – a kind of our idealized self-portrait – saints martyred for the faith. This image therefore bears the characteristics of a discursive construct. Creating it required using narrative templates, which can be traced to religious writing, literature, historical works, and political writing in their mutual translocations.

In an attempt to preserve the chronological order of the source material, I will first refer to a fragment of romantic poetry, which although not dealing directly with the events that took place in Chełm Land, will nevertheless be used later in one of the historical accounts that focus on it. What is important in this case is the poetic theatricality, pathos and sublimity in

28 Jarosław Cabaj, „Postawy ludności Chełmszczyzny i Podlasia wobec kwestii przynależności państwowej swych ziem (1912, 1918–1919),” *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 4 (1992): 65–67. Of course Polish historical scholarship informs of the Russian propaganda counter-offensive, which conducted a massive publicity campaign with special focus on the plans of establishing the Chełm Governorate. “The dispute between Russian and Polish authors – was of greatest importance – we read. The third interested party – the Ukrainians – had less opportunities to present its opinions.” Andrzej Wrzyszczy, *Gubernia chełmska. Zarys ustrojowy* (Lublin Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1997), 38.

Besides books, press articles, and brochures, Russian propaganda also used pamphlets – published by the Chełm Prawosławne Bractwo Bogurodzicy (The Orthodox Brotherhood of the Mother of God) – to mobilize the Orthodox faithful. Some also point out that all this was accompanied by the illegal “Poczajów leaflets” (circulated between 1905 and 1907) that were addressed to the Orthodox peasantry, and were “characterized by low literary level and primitivism of their argumentation,” they debased Polish Catholic priests, and called Catholicism a heresy. *Ibid.*, 40.

depicting the tragedy of characters and events, equating them with paradigmatic images of human suffering found in the Bible or the hagiographies of the first martyrs of Christianity. The events depicted usually take place on a stage where a sacrifice in the name of faith takes place before the public's eyes. These are two fragments of a reportage-poem by Juliusz Słowacki – written in 1846 – devoted to the repressions of the Uniate population:

Our torment, starvation, and drowning, moved
 The priests, and Jews, and peasants:
 Loud cursing and shouts were heard,
 And a Jewess runs to the shore,
 Shining with her golden locks,
 Like a mother, charges, pulls the soldiers back
 [...]
 She raised her hands – and like a harvester,
 Covered me with a bale of those locks...
 I look – by the pump the bishop himself with a branch,
 Though clearly fearful, as white as paper
 The priests by his side: blood dripping down their arms
 Red staffs – clearly they beat someone –
 Restless they mutter, sometimes they bark.
 They walk as if they have lost their mind.
 I approach silently – till I see the Uniates
 Priests – by the pump, blood on their beards.
 Naked – they lay, like cadavers on ice...²⁹

Scenes of torment and martyrdom, universal in their cruelty – they could as well be carried out, in the eyes of present-day readers, by ancient Romans as well as SS squadrons. Contemporary, nineteenth-century readers could be reminded by such scenes of analogous circumstances that befell Polish saints, based on the knowledge formed under the influence of popular hagiographies, undoubtedly also widely circulated by Jesuit priests in Chełm Land. When, for example, Saint Adalbert sets out on a missionary journey to Lithuania, he expects (as Piotr Skarga writes) a “martyr’s crown” and indeed that is what he finds, being killed upon his arrival in that land at the hands of Baltic Prussians who “drowned seven spears in his flesh, and mutilated, hanged him

29 *Rozmowa z matką Makryną Mieczysławską*, after Wasilewski Leon, *Chełmszczyzna i sprawa jej oderwania*/ Leon Płochocki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo „Życie,” 1911), 92–93, 94–95.

from a tree.”³⁰ Such scenes of cruelty were therefore something “normal” not only for readers of poetry, but also for the faithful, though illiterate, churchgoers who were familiarized with them through sermons. As a result, they had to enter the realm of human experience. Therefore, they also played a part in identifying the Other as an enemy – deadly and devoid of any individual traits. Good becomes hostage to evil, the cruelty of Orthodox Russians and Ukrainians becomes a counterpoint to the great sacrifice of the Poles, both Catholic and Uniate; the barbarity of the East, a counterpoint to the civilization of the West.

I am not interested in single-mindedly pursuing historical truth. However, it is impossible not to mention the fact that the work of our national bard is based on a fraud, of which he himself was also a victim. The poet met Makryna Mieczysławska, the hero of this work, in Paris among the emigrants who eagerly awaited any news from the faraway country. Especially the type of news, as one would expect, which confirmed the common presuppositions about the hardship endured by compatriots in the partitioned homeland under occupational rule. The revelations of the nun, a simple woman, were so suggestive and electrifying that they moved the leading figures of the community such as Mickiewicz and Prince Adam Czartoryski; her account was not only reported by Polish, but also French newspapers at that time. Her story even precipitated diplomatic intervention by the Vatican before the Russian government. However, the woman named Makryna had essentially made up the story of the beaten, raped, and drowned nuns, and the massacred Uniate priests, entirely from start to finish. In the end, this is of no great importance for my argument. What counts are the images that have penetrated into the tissue of collective imagination, images “whose significance, in the opinion of a literary historian, is as independent of their historical source, as the significance of Dante’s infernal visions, and he obviously did not journey to hell and back.”³¹

In Słowacki’s retelling of the story, a Uniate bishop (it was supposed to be the apostate Józef Siemaszko), in converting to Orthodoxy, betrays his faithful and becomes their oppressor. The peasants and Jews take the side of the victims: the Catholic nuns and Uniate priests. The Orthodox “priests” are nearly vampires (“sometimes they bark”); creatures otherwise straight from the

30 Piotr Skarga, *Żywoty świętych pańskich narodu polskiego* (Sanok: nakład i druk Karola Polłaka, 1855), 11. On the cult of Skarga in Poland, see Ignacy Chrzanowski, *Wśród zagadnień ksiązek i ludzi* (Lwów: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1922), 178–214.

31 Julian Krzyżanowski, *Dzieje literatury polskiej* (Warszawa: PWN, 1979), 288.

Romantic imagination, possessed by a craving for blood.³² Literature speaks through the power of imagination, using for that purpose brutal, often naturalistic, images and motifs that are well-known from hagiographies, sermons, and legends. Their overabundance can be catastrophic on the artistic level, threatening with theatrical artificiality. This is evident in *Rozmowa...* [*The Conversation...*]. Although, on the (let us call it so) performative level, things are very different. The pictorial power of representations can facilitate their agency in dangerous and uncontrollable ways, strengthening their ability to interfere with social practices. Images and historical representations do not vanish in culture: they begin a life of their own independent of the past *itself*; between them and facts, there is continuity – they proliferate, multiply, and interfere with the latter. In some of his reportages in the volume *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki* [*From the Land of Chełm: Impressions and Notes*] (1909), Reymont, a neo-romantic, relates stories that justify moral wrongdoing in its pure form, and he seems not to give a second thought to what he writes, completely enthralled by the logic of martyrological discourse. A Polish mother answers those who, after kidnapping her son Fieduszka with the aim of baptizing him into the Orthodox Church, attempt to return the child to her: “I no longer have a son! [...] And if you put this strange pup in my house, I will beat it like a dog!”³³ Other parents in their attempt to shelter their children from a similar fate – according to second-hand accounts noted down by Reymont about the so-called “obstinate” (concerning events of 1784) – are subjected to persecution, which gradually pushes them towards the brink of human endurance, their fate reminiscent of the biblical Job. Just two excerpts: Koniuszewski “with more fervor and zest [than others – J.P.H.] defended his faith, and losing consciousness under the lash, he still shouted: ‘I am a Pole, and a Catholic! Kill me, I still won’t convert!’”; “He worked his

32 I will just note that the “Ukrainian folk” has its model representative in Polish literature in the Cossack, who is an embodiment of a warlord, and who, by the way, possesses an enviable command of the Polish language. This is exemplified, i. a., in *Zamek kaniowski* (1828) by Seweryn Goszczyński, who is a representative of the so-called Ukrainian school of Polish Romanticism. Let us take a look at some images preserving the stereotype of “Ukrainian folk” as barbarians and haters of Poles, from this romantic tale (depicting the events of 1678, known in historiography as the Massacre of Uman): “Just a few Poles, one mansion to rob;/ Then I could enjoy my drink!”; “«Hey children, sack the lord’s chambers!»/ – The Ataman’s lungs roared with fury”; “«Knife, my knife! You shine to no avail/ And I sharpened you in vain; [...] and sooner you rust, sooner I turn to dust,/ Than in a manly strife with fate/ My spirit in joy, you in blood will bathe!»/ Thus the Cossack spoke, shaking his head.” Seweryn Goszczyński, *Zamek kaniowski*, ed. Maria Janion and Maria Grabowska (Warszawa: PIW, 1958), 58.

33 Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 40.

fingers to the bone, and deprived himself and his children of everything, but paid, and did not bring the boy to the Orthodox church. It did not take long, though, before the day came when he no longer had money to buy even salt.”³⁴ Finally, the whole family commits mass suicide, dying in a burning barn, and all this in a religious frenzy like that of early Christians in Roman amphitheatres: “But the singing persisted, steady, sublime, celestial, it seemed a happy greeting of paradise, a hymn of the resurrected, an ecstatic song of faith...”³⁵

One can presume that this is how the writer from Warsaw imagined us - Others in the borderlands before he even arrived. Obviously, he also read Słowacki – and even used his phrases directly, when, for example, he compared Uniates – those martyred saints – to “stones thrown by God at the ramparts.”³⁶ This is how a powerful literary depiction takes over the Polish collective imagination, creating coherent narratives of the past, where fiction meets reality, where narrative – a mythological, ideological, and literary

34 Ibid., 26. Examples of Job-like suffering in the name of faith can easily be found in Polish hagiography, see Piotr Skarga on Saint John of Dukla: “And most fervently, while he was a preacher in Lvov, revealing the apostasy killing their souls to the schismatics and Armenians, he guided them to the unity of the Church. And God generously bestowed upon him great sickness, finally blindness, so that he could, as a second Job or Tobit, serve him with even greater will, and by having solely Him before his eyes, to be able to contemplate Him more fully” (Skarga, *Żywoty Świętych pańskich narodu polskiego*, 71). Answer of a “Uniate” peasant to imperial officials menacing him to convert to Orthodoxy: “I swear upon my grey hair [...] I will not relinquish my faith in the least, and none of my neighbors should do so. Holy martyrs have endured so much torture in the name of faith, our brothers have shed so much blood, and so we should follow their example.” A.P.L., *Schyzma i jej apostołowie z okoliczności ostatnich prześladowań Unitów w Dyecezyi Chełmskiej* (Kraków: W drukarni W. Korneckiego, 1875), 47.

35 Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 31.

36 “Each day I listened to mortifying stories about the past, each day someone exposed his wounds before my eyes, barely healed, and whispered through pale lips the stories of his kinfolk; and each day the living, still bleeding, memory conjured the figures of saintly martyrs, terrifying scenes of «conversion», unspeakable suffering, and superhuman sacrifice. The pitiful echoes of cries and the wild, scattered noise of whips, shots, and lamentations have sounded in my heart long and painfully. And every time, at each place, I was haunted by innumerable pale shadows of the fallen, which «like stones thrown by God at the ramparts» have plunged into burial pits, offering their whole lives as evidence of the steadfastness of their faith, and of their nation.” Ibid. 24.

And the corresponding fragment of Słowacki’s poem *Testament mój* [*My Testament*]: “I beseech you – let the living not lose faith/ And carry the flame of knowledge before the nation/ And if need be – go to their death one by one/ like stones thrown by God at the ramparts!...”

attempt at framing events – meets description.³⁷ History has been cruel to the inhabitants of Kresy, this is beyond doubt, but this does not change the fact that their behavior and the representation of that behavior through language were both culturally modeled by literary, religious, and political sources, undoubtedly in varying proportions that cannot be precisely determined. That is why symbolic representations, or self-portraits, of a nation (even more so in the case of cultural and not national states) are the proper objects of intertextual studies. In ritualistic spectacles, where blood flows and prayers sung by dying innocents suffering for their faith ascend to the heavens, we observe the pinnacle of life as defined by a community that is under siege, a community of proselytes in a diaspora manning a bastion, a watchtower at the ends of the earth surrounded by hostile elements.³⁸ That is where one plays with life and death, that is where one toils each day for survival and for the preservation of identity – that is where the nation regains its vital strength, there it once again becomes a single body, and that is where the cultural center is finally relocated. Now the periphery becomes the center as it is where ritual experiences occur, where initiation is performed, where

37 I am well aware that most texts available today, at least on the internet, on the subject of (say) the Uniate Koniszewski family, directly repeat Reymont's account – see and compare for example Tadeusz Czernik's blog, accessed November 19, 2012, <http://tadeuszczyrnk.wordpress.com/2011/05/19/unici/>; Tadeo, *Bohaterstwo unickiej rodziny Koniszewskich* (Salon 24, Niezależne forum publicystów), accessed November 19, 2012, <http://lubczasopismo.salon24.pl/2rp.pl/post/310758,bohaterstwo-unickiej-rodziny-koniszewskich>. The same accounts are also referenced by historian Ryszard Bender in his introduction to Józef Sebastian Pelczar, *Prześladowanie Unitów w Chełmszczyźnie i na Podlasiu* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Świętego Biskupa Józefa Sebastiana Pelczara, 2011).

38 An exemplary description of such a community looks like the following: "In Podlasie and Chełm Land, the Union was defended only by Poles, not Uniate, but Roman Catholic. Their tormentors were thugs from the Ruthenian Uniate population in Galicia. One should conclude that the people were predominantly Polish, although belonging to the Greek Catholic order. We have proof of that in their letters. One writes, for example, to his former neighbors, "«My beloved brothers, you know no hardship, as there is no hardship in Poland, but among us there is hardship». Another writes: «Oh, brothers and sisters remaining in Poland!» A third sends his best wishes: «We pray for you to the Sacred Heart, that God allows us to see you in our Polish homeland». In another case we read: «Oh, we are the wretched exiles from Polish lands». [...] Therefore one cannot necessarily be an adherent to the Latin order, but also of the Uniate order with the liturgy in Old Slavonic, and nevertheless be a Pole! [...] This explains the existence of Polish Uniates. This also explains the differences in character. Ruthenian people did not defend Catholic faith in martyrdom! Poles alone held their head high defending the faith against Russian guns." Feliks Koneczny, *Święci w dziejach narodu polskiego*, part *Podlasie i Chełmszczyzna* (1937), accessed October 19, 2012, http://www.nonpossumus.pl/biblioteka/feliks_koneczny/swieci/260.php

the passage from childhood to national maturity occurs; finally it is the place where Polishness comes into its own, and what is more: it becomes grander, more virtuous and genuine. But beware; this whole narrative is just social engineering, a mere illusion. The borderlands, represented in this way, are nothing more than a construct manufactured by a geographically distant center which administers the production of an ethnic group's portraits of itself, wielding symbolic power over even the furthest peripheries of its inhabited lands.

In consequence of what was said previously, the intertwinement of description and narrative, of the chronicling of events with preconceived narrative plots which endow them with meaning, is the property of not only literary, but also scientific texts. An awareness of the artificial structure of historical facts is exhibited by professional historian and politician Leon Wasilewski (pseudonym Płochocki), when at the end of his work *Chełmszczyzna i sprawa jej oderwania* [*Chełm Land and Its Annexation*] (1911), he attaches, as an appendix to what he calls "factual material," "three most beautiful works of literature, based on the bloody history of the "obstinate."³⁹ The first is... *Rozmowa z Matką Makryną* [*A Conversation with Mother Makryna*]. Of course, the author fails to mention the hoax. And by giving his book a two part structure – "factual" material with the addition of fictional material – he only confirms the general rule at the center of our discussion: a historian is incapable of fully freeing himself from the collective imagination that is permeated by literary narrative plots.

Imagination that is rooted in a romantic vision of a messianic nation dominated linguistic representations of this region which were conceived by authors regardless of their political orientation. Wasilewski himself, a socialist, explains the appeal and ascendancy of Polish culture in the land of the (future) Chełm Governorate through "the ideal Polishness of former Uniates," a Polishness acquired "by way of heroic fighting and long-suffering martyrdom,"⁴⁰ which for the people of that land, even those speaking Ukrainian (this is what Ukrainian nationalists supposedly cannot comprehend according to the author), was to become "more precious than natural Polishness of a multi-generational Polish-peasant."⁴¹ In this short excerpt we are

39 Leon Wasilewski, *Chełmszczyzna i sprawa jej oderwania*/ Leon Płochocki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo „Życie,” 1911), 68. Beside *Rozmowa...* there are also two stories by Żeromski (pen name Maurycy Zych) *Poganiń* and *Do swego Boga*.

40 Ibid., 34.

41 Ibid. To paint a complete picture, I should add that the Polishness of Chełm Land was obvious to our politicians at the beginning of the twentieth century – the so-called liberals do not express themselves as emphatically as Wasilewski, their language is more, as we

presented with two abstract, unverifiable, and literary-esque categories of Polishness: “ideal” and “natural.” Utilized in propaganda as persuasive arguments, these notions perform a kind of regulative role: the phrases in which they occur do not possess a concrete meaning as they cannot be either confirmed or denied. However, that is not their point. What is important is that these notions create a conceptual framework for human experience by giving it meaning, referencing some transcendental reality which shines a light onto everyday experience and emanates with such force that it warms the heart. “Laws of history,” as Henryk Wierciński argues, confirm that the counties on the left banks of the Bug River and “a substantial strip of land on the right bank of the Bug River” belong to Poland, as these lands have “for ages shared in the fate of Poland, good and bad. Through the whole course of history, they have fervently exhibited Polish sentiments and an attachment to Poland,”⁴² and so on. The Polish perspective hijacks the cultural difference in such descriptions as it is the only perspective that is supposed to be universal, explaining everything, exposing the roots of conflict, pointing out the perpetrators as well as the victims, ultimately showing the cruelty of barbarians and the heroism of saints.⁴³

would now say, politically correct – they speak of “Ruthenian land” (Chełm Ruthenia) – not Russian land – where “undoubtedly Polish culture dominates.” Mieczysław Biernacki, *Wczorajsze walki* (Lublin, 1916), after Tadeusz Stegner, “Ukraina widziana z Warszawy na początku XX wieku,” in *Polska – Ukraina. Osadczuk*, ed. Bogumiła Berdychowska i Ola Hnatiuk (Lublin Kolegium Polskich i Ukraińskich Uniwersytetów: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2007), 75.

42 Wierciński, *Ziemia Chełmska i Podlasie*, 20. The same author in numerous studies of a strictly propagandist nature, cf. *Zew krwi polskich męczenników z ziemi chełmskiej i podlaskiej* (Lublin, 1939). Here, i. a., a fragment of Reymont’s reportage. The book was published by Lubelski Wojewódzki Komitet Popierania Misji Katolickich na Chełmszczyźnie. The committee was founded in 1939.

43 See Bakuła, “Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego,” 25. From a presumed right to rule over these lands and people comes Piłsudski’s political stance towards them. These are excerpts from his appearance in Rivne in Volhynia on January 22, 1920: “We, the Poles, were the object of various borderland politics. We were familiar with that kind of politics, as it has been practiced by others in relation to us. All over the world, politics of the borderlands is similar to the one we were subjected to. I know no other borderland politics than that of humiliation and oppression, which has as its motto: «Woe to the vanquished!» We, the Poles, know full well, what results it brings, how little it offers, what meagre fruit it bears. [...] If throughout the world there is dishonesty in borderland politics, I would like for our borderland politics to be honest.” *Pisma zbiorowe*, vol. 5 (Warszawa, 1937), 103, after Wedemann, “Gdzie leży Beresteczko? Kresy na mapie,” 32. What the author probably meant by “borderland politics” is “annexation politics” or, otherwise, “colonial politics.”

The Stranger

The Other is someone, or rather something, radically (ontologically) different, eluding our categories of perception and knowledge which are considered natural, and as a result becoming an embodiment of evil, unconceivable and incomprehensible, devoid of meaning; something that can only be labeled as a “force which brings destruction”⁴⁴ – a potential source of threat to the familiar world order. After separating Chełm Land from Poland, Orthodoxy will not hold back: it will also change “all holidays,” therefore upsetting the eternal, natural order of the world, or the history of salvation, where – to once again give voice to one of Reymont’s interlocutors – “our Polish Christ was born on the 24th of December!”⁴⁵ “Two worlds observe each other through silent eyes, two cultures and two voids, impossible to cross,” thus the writer registers his impressions after a visit to a Chełm museum (on one side of the chamber hang the portraits of Uniate metropolitan bishops, “the architects of the union, its benefactors, defenders, and martyrs”; on the other side hang “the fanatic heads of contemporary shepherds, with the notorious Eulogius at the far edge”⁴⁶). The “obstinate” relinquished “all relationships” with the “church and parish,” “as it was taken over by a different language, different faith and strange people; nobody set foot even in the church graveyard.”⁴⁷ At the time of their persecution, the Ukrainian nationalists (Wasilewski accuses) did not defend them, but “their complete absence in Chełm Land was clearly visible.” “Instead,” he goes on to write, “among the people who have become the ‘scourge of God’ for the Uniate population of Podlasie and Chełm Land, there was never a shortage of Ukrainians, both from Galicia and Russia.”⁴⁸ “Ruthenian Uniates” from Galicia, according to Feliks Koneczny, supplied “thugs and tormentors” menacing the Poles living in these territories. Why did they do so? This can only be explained by “a difference in character” between these two nationalities.⁴⁹

This is a vision of the tower of Babel, where one does not simply encounter the Other, but clashes with the Stranger, an alien being “with unknown motives and propensities, intentions, and customs.”⁵⁰ They are so different

44 Gosk, *Polski dyskurs kresowy w niefikcyjnych zapisach międzywojennych*, 31.

45 Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 23.

46 Ibid., 55.

47 Ibid., 34.

48 Płochocki, *Chełmszczyzna i sprawa jej oderwania*, 49.

49 See Koneczny, *Święci w dziejach narodu polskiego*.

50 Zygmunt Bauman, *Między chwilą a pięknem: o sztuce w rozpędzonym świecie* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Oficyna, 2010), 111.

than our (natural) intentions and reactions, that they elicit within us fear and terror, even disgust, and aversion to something that cannot be associated with ordinary people. Something monstrous, undefined and ungraspable in its outlines; a viscous, grey, overwhelming mass. Such an Other is not another human being, but some mute creature; it rarely, if ever, speaks in its own tongue; rarely, if ever, has a name, or it hides behind "an impenetrable wall of laws, prohibitions, fines, and prisons,"⁵¹ or takes on a form of an undifferentiated "numerous, dark mass," or "a mass of people, without a defined name,"⁵² terrifying in its incomprehensibility, spewing anarchy, or the "Shab-bos public" which crowds the streets of Chełm, "flowing in a black, clamorous and incessantly expanding river," in the background of which we notice our kin: "somewhere a clerk's hat passed, an officer's sword rattled, and a panicked ordinary civil Aryan slid by the gutter."⁵³ If the Chełm Governorate is created, then, as the newspaper *Ziemia Lubelska* [*The Land of Lublin*] warned at the time, "the russification of the city will be limited to offices," "and the Jews will become the true rulers of the city."⁵⁴ Such Others cannot be trusted. We should be wary of such Others, and keep them at a distance. The wisest thing that can be done is to be constantly suspicious of them, and remain alert at all

51 Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 34.

52 "Jews, who constitute a numerous, dark crowd stand in the streets [of Chełm] where they take care of their small-time business." Siedlecki, *Z ziemi lubelskiej*, 48. The same metaphor of an anonymous "crowd" or "mass" can be found in relation to Ukrainians in propaganda brochures created at the time of the creation of the Chełm Governorate. See and compare: "Aside from the «Bloyalist-Russian» claims to this piece of land, there are also new claims – Ruthenian, Little-Russian, and Ukrainian, according to Hruszewski's new nomenclature – being made. When we refer to them we will always use the Polish historic name and call by the name of Ruthenians only that, strictly folk, ethnographic mass which suddenly – only in Galicia, of course – comes forward with unprecedented political and national grievance held against the whole world, directed with unprecedented fervor against Russia and the Poles." "This folk mass, of indeterminate name, with some claims of statehood, without any determined borders, which were put into its head by leaders brought up with the ideas of "Cossack freedom," a mass that barely has any signs of its own literature [...] has exhibited extraordinary inferiority in all areas of thought and knowledge. Having found themselves in the midst of Galicia's prosperity, their leaders have directed their feeble intellectual powers not to bringing that people to the level of a nation, not to drawing clear lines in accordance with reason, that would lead some future, but to reviving the ideal of Cossack anarchism and using it as a guide to all aspects of public life." Franciszek Rawita Gawroński, *Oderwanie Chełmszczyzny i Rusini* (Lwów: Skład główny w księgarni H. Altenberga, 1909), 12–13, 18.

53 Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 56.

54 Article from 1910 (no 241) reprinted in Henryk Wierciński, *W sprawie wydzielienia Chełmszczyzny* (Warszawa: Druk Piotra Laskauera, 1910), 163–164.

times; we must follow each move they make, and not allow them to transform into our kin as such a metamorphosis would necessarily be faked or false. There is no other possibility.

Suspensions, distrust, alertness, fear even; these are all manifestations of mixophobia – a typical response to life among strangers, people who are different from us, who choose different lifestyles, who are different in their everyday behaviors and responses. Suffering from mixophobia we strive to be among our kin, to create “a community of similitude,” “islands of unity and sameness among the sea of heterogeneity and difference.”⁵⁵ The human world is broken in half: we, on the side of light, in the rays of the sun, individuals rooted in time and space, with determined roles in the social order, civilized citizens (of an ideal, stipulated) *polis*, steady and obvious in our clear and virtuous intentions; encounter them, a mass that is uprooted, itinerant, undefined by either law or tradition, living beyond the *polis*, somewhere in the lines of shadow, a semantic hollow devoid of articulate cultural transmission. The preservation of identity, the belonging to (Polishness in this case), must be counterbalanced by a separation and disavowal of Others. This is the simplest and yet most dangerous method of integrating a community. It is the source of intercommunal antagonisms, which needs to find release, unavoidably leading to a bloody confrontation. We will witness it in the Second World War. But for now, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the mills of symbolic violence are in full swing, reshaping the Other into our nightmare – the “«loyalist» careerists of Chełm,” who spit with hateful venom, cunning and treacherous beings, with a fluid, declarative identity.⁵⁶

55 Bauman, *Między chwilą a pięknem: o sztuce w rozpędzonym świecie*, 15, 116.

56 „Polish identity and Catholicism are the source continuous irritation, a mere mention of them causes «loyalist» careerists of Chełm to erupt in a paroxysm of rage so strong that they burst with lies, denunciations, slander, and threats. They babble beyond reason, as if sick with their own venom of hatred. In truth, they elicit involuntary pity. Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 55–56. “In the end the Jews will take care of it, and this place will change beyond recognition, I am certain, that when they sense it is in their interest then they will start wearing red kosovorotka’s and Russian kaftans, they will change their language, repaint their signs, subscribe to proper magazines, and begin to shout each time an opportunity arises: «we Russian people», and they will hunt us with more zest and fury than even the «loyalists» themselves (ibid. 56). “The Ruthenians of Chełm, which are now called Ukrainians by the government, have fully merged with the Russians; they were Orthodox, and when the Austro-German offensive arrived at the gates of Chełm, they went to Russia of their own accord just as the Russians did. An Orthodox Ukrainian considered himself Russian, shared the same fear with Russians and the same hate towards Western empires, and a feeling of solidarity only with Russia” (Siedlecki, *Z ziemi lubelskiej*, 49). And just one more later snapshot from the Soviet-occupied city,

The social landscape of Chełm borderlands, preserved within literary accounts, is reminiscent of an archipelago: scattered islands which lie close to each other yet remain completely distant despite their common origin and history. The discourse that relates to them, similar to the whole discourse on the borderlands, is, recalling the words of Bronisław Bakuła, “the product of Polish culture and of Polish thinking on the subject of «community»,”⁵⁷ which means that if Others figure in it, then it is only as a manifestation of the center’s ideological requirements, with the sole aim of excluding them from the community equated with Western civilization, or including them in it. In either case, the cultural difference is subject to being annihilated: assigned on one occasion, rejected on another. It is asserted that such a course of action is grounded either in God’s grand plan, or in the “laws of history,” which confirm the legitimacy of the center’s claims to land and peoples, supporting the feeling of being in possession of intellectual and moral superiority over the Others. That is why the multinational and multicultural territory of Chełm Land failed to produce any form of regional community. That is why its symbolic representations lack any signs expressing the need for mutual understanding between separate universes of meaning, or any attempts at creating some means of coexistence which could turn into a life shared with others in a neighborly way, more harmonious and bearable. Today, we can hypothetically imagine some version of history involving the communities inhabiting those lands, according to which such signals emerge, focusing the gaze of its recipients enough to permit them to penetrate that shadow-line, beyond the darkness which conceals the Other. Such messages (we could go even further in our thinking) would also enhance their imagination and their ability to empathize with strangers, facilitating their trust in them. If it were the case that the language of social communication concerned itself with building bridges between cultural differences (while taking into account the thesis that social reality is ultimately artificial), then maybe to some extent (however small, but nonetheless meaningful in a situation in which the lives of particular people are at stake) it would be able to lower the level of fear of *otherness* and... the fate of the ethnic groups which are the subject of this paper would have been entirely different during the 1940s.

But, the very notion of “borderlands” itself seems to preclude any kind of identity – “borderland identity” is almost an oxymoronic expression, as it

from 1939: “In rotting Chełm, in a dirty sweep, among happy Jewish cheers, the bodies of Polish defenders were decomposing” (Wańkowicz, *Ziele na kraterze*, 284).

57 Bakuła, *Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego*, 28.

concerns a form of presence in lands distant from the homeland, in peripheries inhabited by Others, which require us to play the part of proselytes performing a historical mission that is legitimized by nature (i.e. laws of history) or transcendence, depending on the worldview of the respective discourse. It is, in any case, a land where Polish, Russian, Ruthenian/Ukrainian, and Jewish elements clashed, shaping Polish collective imagination at the turn of the twentieth century both as the subject and the object of colonialism, as the colonizing and the colonized.

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Trajectories of "Western Borderlands" Memory After 1989

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From Borderlands to Borderlands: the Dimensions of Return

The problem of naming arises amid cultural studies conducted after 1989 that focus on the space of (post) displacement and its literary representations, which address the issue of cultural "taming" of the western and northern territories incorporated into the Polish borders after the Potsdam Conference. We are directing our attention to a fundamental issue, however problematic, regarding difficulties with defining space (understood literally) that is undergoing an analytical process. Defining western and northern borderlands, adjoined to Poland after 1945, as "Recovered Territories," is seen today as an example of anachronism and axiologization, which follows the politics of memory created by the Polish People's Republic (PRL) stemming from the "myth of the Piast dynasty."¹ However, if the general postulate to rename (demythologize) this ephemeral land does not evoke any controversy, while the dominating proposal among the ones presented is to move towards

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1 See Halina Tumolska, *Mitologia Kresów Zachodnich w pamiętnikarstwie i beletryście polskiej (1945–2000)* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2007).

neutralizing that emotional charge, so far there has been no agreement as far as what should be the new "collective" name for spaces of (post)displacement. In academic and literary works, one can see – depending on the particular issue being stressed, as well as on the methodological perspective – a turn towards displaying primary features of spaces previously marginalized ("[Polish-German] borderlands"²), shifts from mythical designations towards historical ones ("the Polish post-Yalta Occident"³), or simply geographical ("Western Territories"⁴), as well as metonymies referencing studies of particularities and cultural representations regarding specific places or local realizations of the PRL's politics of memory (such as in the case of Gdańsk, Wrocław, the territory of Warmia, or Lubusz Land).⁵ That selection signals a variety of themes attached to the subject of displacement and all its branches. Reflection over these subjects becomes possible due to relatively new research initiatives as well as critical languages at our disposal (such as cultural studies, studies of memory, geo-poetics, or new regionalism). On the other hand, it seems to prove how difficult it might be to write a coherent, trans-regional history of displacement (an experience, which, after all, was trans-regional, transgressive and pivotal in shaping the post-war

2 See Kamila Gieba, "Od antygermańskiego przedmurza do pomostu ku Europie. O przemianach postaw wobec niemieckiego dziedzictwa kulturowego w dyskursie regionów pogranicza (na wybranych przykładach)," in *Nowy regionalizm w badaniach literackich. Badawczy rekonesans i zarys perspektyw*, ed. Małgorzata Mikołajczak, Elżbieta Rybicka (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 231-245; Arkadiusz Kalin, "Polsko-niemieckie pogranicza literackie: geopolityczne reorientacje w polskiej literaturze powojennej – rekonesans," in *Nowy regionalizm*, 209-231; Andrzej Sakson and Robert Traba, *Historia i pamięć polsko-niemieckiego pogranicza* (Olsztyn: Warmińska Purda, 2007).

3 See Joanna Szydłowska, *Narracje pojałtańskiego Okcydentu. Literatura polska wobec pogranicza na przykładzie Warmii i Mazur (1945-1989)* (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo UWM, 2013).

4 See *Wspólne dziedzictwo? Ze studiów nad spuścizną kulturową na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych*, ed. Zbigniew Mazur (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2000); *Ziemia Zachodnie – historia i perspektywy*, ed. Wojciech Kucharski, Grzegorz Strauchold (Wrocław: Ośrodek „Pamięć i Przyszłość,” 2011).

5 See *Miejsce i tożsamość. Literatura lubuska w perspektywie poetyki przestrzeni i antropologii*, ed. Małgorzata Mikołajczak, Kamila Gieba, Marika Sobczak (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2013); Małgorzata Mikołajczak, *Zbliżenia. Studia i szkice poświęcone literaturze lubuskiej* (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2011); Hubert Orłowski, *Warmia z oddali. Odpominania* (Olsztyn: Borussia, 2000); Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, *Spotkania czasu z miejscem. Studia o pamięci i miastach* (Warszawa: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011), (specifically chapter VI: *Asymetrie pamięci: Gdańsk i Wrocław*).

demographic structure of the entire country⁶) fundamentally at the terminological level, all the while pointing to a larger issue:

Writing such book (a dictionary? a guide? a reportage? a novel?) seems as urgent as it is risky. It is urgent because we have tools and theories it requires: nomadism, post-colonialism, gender theories, new historicism, territorial reclamation, political turn, etc. It is risky because the catalogue of multi-genre, multi-language texts, which touch upon issues in various ways connected to the experience of displacement is endless.⁷

Without deciding at this point which of the options would be the most fitting if one were to try and write such a “utopian monograph,”⁸ I would like to merely stress one possible thread. While treating (post)settlement literature as a medium of cultural memory of post-war migration, I would like to highlight its entanglement in other traditions because it appears more important in 20th-century Polish culture in deciding the latter’s shape, ultimately posing questions about reasons and results. That is why I have decided to replace “Recovered Territories” with “Western Borderlands” in the title. However, before I can begin to explain the term’s usefulness in reflecting on the trajectory of contemporary cultural memory concerning the Western and Northern Territories, it is worthwhile to take a brief look at its history.

The term was popularized and became widespread during the inter-war period,⁹ and had its second rise to prominence in historiography and

6 See Piotr Eberhardt, *Przemieszczenia ludności na terytorium Polski spowodowane II wojną światową* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PAN, 2000).

7 Inga Iwasiów, “Hipoteza powieści neo-post-osiedleńczej,” in *Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI w.*, ed. Hanna Gosk (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 210.

8 Ibid.

9 Few examples of phenomena surrounding literature: magazine “Kresy Zachodnie” published by the Association for Defense of Western Borderlands (Związek Obrony Kresów Zachodnich) (1921–1934) and the anthology: *Pisarze polscy Kresom Zachodnim*, ed. Bolesław Gorczyński, et al. (Warszawa: Association for Defense of Western Borderlands, 1925). As a side note, the term itself seems to be much older – it appears for the first time in a novel by Jan Zacharasiewicz *Na kresach. Powieść z naszych czasów w trzech częściach*: “Our Borderlands have changed. From Dnieper River and steppes of Ukraine they have moved to the Warta and Noteć rivers. Here is where we stand and fight for what is ours” – Jan Zacharasiewicz, *Na kresach. Powieść z naszych czasów w trzech częściach* (Lipsk: 1867), 335. In between the World Wars the term has been used primarily within the National Democracy circles as a counterpoint to Eastern Policy of Józef Piłsudski,

journalism¹⁰ in the 1990s. The effort to reclaim it for critical discourse in literature was undertaken by, among others, Halina Tumolska and Bogusław Bakula with their initial attempts at cataloguing prose works dedicated to the experience of migration. Bakula, in a text entitled "From Borderlands to Borderlands: A Postwar Migration Novel about the Western Borderlands"¹¹ explained his choice with the fact that in the case of northern and western territories, the "new reality had a borderland-like character for a period of time."¹² The argumentation at this juncture does not provoke much dissent: indeed, especially during the initial post-war years, one was faced with a borderland in the most fundamental, literal meaning of the word, synonymous to a border area of a specific geographical area.¹³ Moreover, the validity of using that term comes from the fact that those areas became inhabited, to a large extent, by populations coming from the pre-war, eastern provinces of the country, which in turn resulted in a natural transfer of traditions and customs, or a broadly understood *habitus* – a borderland's mentality to the west. Thus, the exchangeability of the term in question has to rest, Bakula continues to explain, on a simple relation between territorial losses and gains which occurred after 1945, transferring "old" cultural capital (weakened by the war) to a new place. Finally, by creating a particular typology of settlement-inspired texts (including several narrative archetypes such as western-style adventures, stories of veterans, romantic exploits, or utopian pioneers).¹⁴ Bakula signals the problem of intertextual references to the so-called current of borderland literature as well. The latter, although the author himself does not suggest it

which has been promoted for economic reasons (an unquestionable profit for the "young Poland" and a retribution for Partitions) and social-cultural motives (pointing attention to struggles against *kulturkampf* and germanization taking place in the ex-Prussian territories).

10 See Zbigniew Rykiel, "Kresy zachodnie w Polsce," in *Kresy – pojęcie i rzeczywistość*, ed. Kwiryna Handke (Warszawa: Slawistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy, 1997), 207–228.

11 Bogusław Bakula, "Z Kresów na Kresy. Powojenna migracyjna powieść o kresach zachodnich," in *Bakula Antylatarnik oraz inne szkice literackie i publicystyczne* (Poznań: WiS, 2001).

12 Ibid., 68.

13 See <http://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/kresy>, accessed September 19, 2014. In his later text, Bakula writes about Borderland-like character as 1) multi-national; 2) multi-cultural; 3) settler-like, or even colonizing; 4) devastated; 5) fulfilling defensive functions; 6) Boundary-like; 7) forbidden and full of mysteries and secrets, dangerous. See Bogusław Bakula, "Między wygnaniem a kolonizacją. O kilku odmianach polskiej powieści migracyjnej w XX wieku (na słownym tle porównawczym)," in *Narracje migracyjne*, 167.

14 See Bakula, *Z Kresów*, 74.

directly, seems to constitute a kind of dictionary of “useful” terms and motives for describing realities of the recovered territories, which initially had “similar” characteristics at the beginning.¹⁵ Hence, one more interpretation of the “borderlands” emerges. They are understood as a point of reference in the analysis of settlement literature.

Despite the logic of this argumentation, I am willing to risk a statement that from a broader context of Poland’s culture of memory, building such analogies can create a sensation of inadequacy, and cause a cognitive dissonance. In short: the term “Western Borderlands,” mentioned at the beginning and characterized by the highest degree of re-axiologizing potential among listed terms, in my opinion, seems to fail the test of facing a discursive load associated with the “Borderlands” in the sphere of culture, or within the place it occupies in the writing process of Polish narratives. Treated as a matrix in the process of cultural reproduction, it loses its syntactical connectedness while simultaneously achieving the absolute, attaining an absolutizing value.¹⁶

While employing this term, I do not intend to forcefully claim the simple translatability of some borderland formula as a superior analytical category, or to prove its universal character when used to describe the phenomenon

15 Ibid. In one of the first, at this point “classic,” texts from the realm of Borderland studies, Eugeniusz Czaplewicz created a list of Borderland’s metonymies, among which he includes: exoticism, endangered boundary, school of bravery and chivalry, deep eternal forest, no man’s land, the kingdom of beautiful and proud Nature, folk elements, the meta-space of adventure, goal of a particular mission and organic work (economic outposts), “chopped off” limbs of a nation state’s organism, intense condensation of antagonisms, the front line of Christianity, places of memory (e.g. tombstones). Even though in earlier works of settler literature there were mentioningss of boundaries of socialism, fields of battle with elements of fascism and capitalism, labor heroes, eerie flat landscapes every now and then pierced by gothic towers, it was Gniezno and Grunwald that rose to the foreground of memory, and the “outpost” was no longer a farm, but a State Collective Farm and a factory. Functions of those elements of the world presented were close to those proposed by Czaplewicz. See Eugeniusz Czaplewicz, “Czym jest literatura kresowa?,” in *Kresy w literaturze*, ed. Eugeniusz Czaplewicz, Edward Kasperski (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1995), 15.

16 See Mieczysław Dąbrowski, “Kresy w perspektywie krytyki postkolonialnej,” *Porównania* 5 (2008); Jan Kieniewicz, *Ekspansja, kolonializm, cywilizacja* (Warszawa: DiG, 2008); Dariusz Skórczewski, “Melancholia dyskursu kresoznawczego,” in Dariusz Skórczewski, *Teoria-literatura-dyskurs. Pejzaż postkolonialny* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013); *Kresy – dekonstrukcja*, ed. Krzysztof Trybuś, Jerzy Kałużny, Radosław Okulicz-Kozaryna (Poznań: Wydawnictwo PTPN, 2007); Robert Traba, “Kresy: miejsce pamięci w procesie reprodukcji kulturowej,” in *Polska Wschodnia i Orientalizm*, ed. Tomasz Zarycki (Warszawa: Scholar, 2013); Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011).

of migration memory.¹⁷ An alternative term, "Western-Borderland-like," is useful primarily due to its ambivalent character. In its literal meaning, it refers to a geographical area, where a post-war settlement operation has been taking place. At the same time, however, it refers one back to its "Borderlands" specificity understood as proposed by Bakula. However, it could be seen as an antonym of a great tradition, based – as I have already mentioned – on similar narrative structures, but set in a completely different historical-social context, hence distorted and functioning similar to a funhouse mirror. Finally, "Western-Borderland-like" could be defined as a looped story about the original Borderlands, only written from a greater spatial distance (the subject resettled out West), as well as temporal (for example, from a perspective of a descendant of the displaced and brought up in the West). Within such twists of meanings, the juxtaposition of "Borderland-like" (with the entire trove of its cultural meanings) and "Western-Borderland-like" (with its spectral character: an amalgamation of, often contradictory, artificially generated meanings from the interwar period, and the period after 1945) seems to prove useful also when using guidelines and conclusions established in recent years within the critique circle of the so-called Borderlands discourse. I employ terms "Western Borderlands/Western Borderland-like" primarily to signalize the unintentional involvement of that literature in a dominating identity-memory discourse, which is being established by so-called Borderland nostalgia.¹⁸

The perspective assumed in this work is a result, firstly, of the fact that at the base of displacement experiences, there lies a loss of Borderlands understood not only as an element of the national *imaginarium*, but simply as an actual homeland. Although all the way up to 1989, there existed a specific "ban" on expressing opinions on the subject of "lost roots" and on the discomforts

17 Bogusław Hadaczek has provided such proof in his consecutive publications devoted to Borderland literature. He develops concepts of "symbiotic Borderland people" and "Borderlands of post-Yalta children" – concepts legitimate to a degree (which I talk about later on) – by classifying works of writers such as Zygmunt Trziszka or Henryk Panas (most colorful and vivid characters of post-war settler literature), and Paweł Huelle, Stefan Chwin or Kazimierz Brakoniecki (the most outstanding authors of the "small homeland" literature) as a direct continuation, or a "post-war outgrowth" of Borderland current. He explains that authors have been raised in "Borderland environment" and come from resettled families. While the biographical-familial key is correct to a certain degree, the thesis stating that against such points of departure the theme and context of their work (located in the space of "Recovered Territories") remain a secondary phenomenon, less important than "Borderland characters," becomes problematic. See Bolesław Hadaczek, *Historia literatury kresowej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 365–400.

18 See Jan Sowa, "Zamiast zakończenia: Nostalgia, bohaterowie i miejsca pamięci rzeczywistości postkolonialnej," in *Fantomowe ciało króla*, 495–536.

(psychological, cultural, social, or economic) stemming from it, from forced relocations, it should be recognized as an inevitable biographical context that reflects on the structure of the memory of an individual, statistical repatriate. An asymmetrical relationship of "live memory," cultural memory, as well as collective memory created by the discourse of the PRL has been based on the "mechanism of a phantom reality in the system of history monopolized by the ideology of a "socialist country": everyone knew that the [former] Borderlands existed, but nobody spoke of them publically, or officially."¹⁹ On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that the quality of being Borderland-like, understood as a mental, ideological, or narrative category has a crucial impact on the process and structure of collective memory of displacements, also in that phantom reality. What is more, one could risk stating that Borderlands' discourse determines contemporary cultural memory. Bakula writes:

That [particular] literary and cultural myth has consumed the Polish imagination, trapped it and, in a certain sense, limited its willingness to explore the contemporary reality. The literature of the Borderlands that references migration, or stems from it directly, one that is nostalgic, trying to rebuild broken ties of tradition, has submerged Polish imagination in a peculiar utopia.²⁰

Longing for a lost place in the context of national migrations, which is of interest to me, appears to be a danger, since it demotivates us from investigating the situation on the ground, as well as critically rethinking of one's own *de facto* post-migration condition. It often leads to becoming trapped in a retrospective bubble of imaginings and phantoms, or of expelling authentic experiences of the "displaced" subject outside of the narrative, and creating a kind of temporal gap in textual reconstructions of his or her fate (connected to growing up or assimilating in new cultural and political realities). The tendency to enclose oneself in retrospective utopias is aided by strongly ideologized realities of the contemporary literary field, which determine the shape of literature. That separate, idealized current in post-war prose constituted the official medium of memory of "repatriation," and introduced the preferred vision of "Recovered Territories" into circulation. The experience of migration, in most cases, was forced into strict narrative schemes which had been subordinated to the rhetoric of profit, a return to the motherland, the

19 Traba, "Kresy: miejsce pamięci," 157.

20 Bogusław Bakula, "Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego. (Zarys problematyki)," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2006): 67.

legitimization of "Polishness" and "familiarity" of territories recovered after 1945 or, seen from a broader perspective, simple praising of the socialist order. That is what could explain, to a large extent, its fiasco as well: its accompanying argumentation had an ideological character, and not an emotional one.

(Non)memory, or the inability to create cultural memory of displacement, and resettlement, is directly connected to "Borderland longing," since it constitutes one of its elements. At a time when public discourse is lacking space to grieve at the right moment after an actual loss, the following stages of working through that historical trauma cannot take place. As a result, one could assume, in a slightly simplified manner, that the ideologization understood as an "emotional block" has resulted in transformation of grief into a particular kind of melancholy, in which the "resettled" subject:

keeps living in the world of simulacras, substitutes of reality, "necessary fictions," and cultivates the suffering coming from his impoverishment. That impoverishment, however, should be understood not so much as a physical loss of territory, but rather in terms of an individual and collective trauma of cultural disinheritance – as a [...] lack and ontological incompleteness, [a] painfully felt deprivation.²¹

In consequence, we are speaking of a meaningful shift: not so much about being attached to the lost object, but rather to a primary gesture of its loss.²² That is how one could characterize post-war "Borderland literature,"²³ creating a particular counter-discourse of Northern and Western Territories that connects with the year 1989.

Artificial Paradises: the "Western Borderlands" Camouflage

The regime change of 1989 was followed by the "unlocking" of memory and the end of censorship which provided a chance for correcting narratives of experience distorted by the official discourse of the passing epoch, as well as reworking through the above mentioned "trauma of cultural disinheritance." However, when one attempts to describe the transformation of memories of those individuals displaced after 1989, it appears as if they were emerging from a peculiar game of absence, from a multi-dimensional practice of

21 Skórczewski, *Teoria-literatura-dyskurs*, 129.

22 Ibid., 131. Compare Slavoj Žižek, "Melancholy and the Act," *Critical Inquiry* Summer 4/26 (2000): 660.

23 Skórczewski, *Teoria-literatura-dyskurs*.

camouflaging which constituted their very existence. In the following part of my essay, I would like to point our attention to three literary projects that have led not so much to memory's full unlocking, but rather to a specific form of paralysis representing literature's (post)displacement identity.

In the 1990s Borderlands literature became enriched by the prose works of writers born in the West (the second generation of migrants), those "post-Yalta children," who explored their family genealogies in their work (such as Włodzimierz Paźniewski, Stanisław Srokowski, Aleksander Jurewicz, Marek Ławrynowicz, Anna Bolecka, Piotr Szewc, et. al.), and for whom the trauma of resettlement became an irremovable element of their personal archive of memory and a kind of loop:

For those who had not undergone that specific kind of "displacement" in the form of being expelled from their "Borderland homeland" personally, the memory of it, stored within another memory, became a "displacement" experience in and of itself. Deprived of its original meaning marking those who personally experienced it, the memory transformed into an intersubjective sense of lack felt by the general population, becoming an element of the "Polish fate."²⁴

That situation brings about a particular imperative to the story, as stated by the narrator of *Lida*: "I knew that if I failed to utter that story of displacement, my life would be incomplete, it would have a shadow lurking – some unfinished business."²⁵ The problem, however, lies in the fact that the novel is merely (or maybe a s m u c h a s) a prologue and epilogue of the "story of displacement and resettlement." An adult narrator, brought up somewhere else, arrives in the land of his grandparents and starts to live through their fate, rotted not in their experience but in their text, from which emerges a vision of reality having very little to do (once again) with the current reality as well as social experience. Such a compensatory model of writing, of enclosing oneself in a well-known bubble of imaginations, constitutes a kind of camouflaging which is based on hiding behind family genealogies the sense of (one's own) deprivation, connected to growing up in a (post)displacement space.

Excluding the most contemporary prose devoted to the Borderlands written from the "western" perspective, which incidentally constitutes a separate notion of the history of Polish literature, I would like to take a closer look at the conceptual locus of "Borderlands" in literature inhabiting the Western

²⁴ Ibid., 129.

²⁵ Aleksander Jurewicz, *Lida* (Kraków: Znak, 2004), 17.

cultural landscape. Remedy for that post-memory loop was supposed to take the form of literature about "individual homelands,"²⁶ or – as Tadeusz Komendant would like it to be – the "literature of roots,"²⁷ which was an attempt at cleansing the "Western Borderlands" discourse of remnants from the PRL (P. Huelle, S. Chwin, A. Liskowacki, O. Tokarczuk, M. Sieniewicz, K. Brakoniecki, K. Czyżewski, and many others). It is assumed that these narratives, states Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, "point one's attention to their complex, multi-national and multi-cultural history. It is not a preservation of identity, but debating over it that is a foundation of memory practices in those regions today."²⁸ Focus on tracing inscriptions of otherness inscribed into western and northern spaces was supposed to bring back justice, and resuscitate the voice of the already absent host in these described spaces, as well as recreate their palimpsest structure. It was accompanied by a strong sense of duty for:

taking upon oneself the archeology of the place, as well as looking into traces left by the Other. From a broader social perspective, however, the fundamental stake at hand was the attempt at transforming the collective consciousness, of granting it a story, which would allow for "taming" and settling the space.²⁹

The whole effort was for "roots, which needed to be grown,"³⁰ for a story to be told not necessarily about exiles, but settlers. Paweł Huelle himself, in one of his early interviews, stated that the experience of his grandmother, who came to Gdańsk from Lviv, was "nothing more, or less, than a deep background,"³¹ but what he was interested in was a complex history of the space in which he grew up.

26 Literally "little homelands" in the original Polish.

27 See Tadeusz Komendant, "Czym była, czym mogła być literatura korzenna," *Tytuł 1* (1997); Robert Ostaszewski, "Lokalni hodowcy 'korzeni,'" *Dekada Literacka* 7/8 (2002): 41-51; Przemysław Czapliński, "Mapa, córka nostalgii," in Czapliński, *Wzniosłe tęsknoty. Nostalgie w prozie lat dziewięćdziesiątych* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), 105-128; Czapliński, "Literatura małych ojczyzn – koniec i początek," in *Pisać poza rok 2000. Studia i szkice literackie*, ed. Andrzej Lam and Tomasz Wroczyński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2002), 110-127.

28 Saryusz-Wolska, *Spotkania*, 236.

29 Krzysztof Uniłowski, "«Małe ojczyzny» i co dalej? Krytyka, rewizje i nawiązania do nurtu z lat dziewięćdziesiątych," in *Kresy – dekonstrukcja*, 54.

30 *Ibid.*, 56.

31 Paweł Huelle, "Nigdy nie jechałem do Lwowa," *Tytuł 2* (1992): 37.

Krzysztof Uniłowski would write after many years, in the context of *Weiser Dawidek*, that “the literature of «individual homelands» is the bread and butter of Borderlands’ literature in 20th-century Polish prose.”³² One could risk a statement that the moment of breakthrough (and the “unlocking of memory” connected to it) not only liberated the language of the story from the censors’ do’s and don’ts, but caused a more problematic need for finding new language in general as well. The generation of “roots writers” – continuing Uniłowski’s line of thought – directed its search towards post-war literature of the Borderlands (both national and émigré), the accessibility of which constantly improved in the eighties. Even though it constituted more of a historical phenomenon at the time, it was not the chronology, but the reading experience that determined its popularity. The most important element of such camouflaged and repeated transfer of historical material would not be the concept of organic work or the Borderlands understood as a place of conflict for a strong collective identity, but rather the concept of an idealized, multicultural Borderlands created on the pages of post-war novels by authors such as Stanisław Vincenz, Jerzy Stempowski, Józef Wittlin, Andrzej Kuśniewicz, Andrzej Strykowski, Józef Mackiewicz, Andrzej Chciuka, Tadeusz Konwicki, Julian Strykowski or Zygmunt Haupt. Features characteristic for that literature can be found in “Western Borderlands” novels as well. In attempts to describe these new “artificial paradises,”³³ there sprung a vision of trans-ethnic dialogue, polyphony, hybridity, coexistence of competing values and hierarchies. Such a vision was also open to the voice of the Other who, in Levinasian manner, became a somewhat domesticated identity in a situation of “ambivalence, ambiguity, and volatility.”³⁴ The worlds of the past were “told with help of images and anecdotes,”³⁵ and finally characters and objects “lost their real, ontological status, and turn[ed] into signs, becoming nutrition[al] material for myth-creating processes.”³⁶ Practically, it equated to a return to a “brilliant epoch” of childhood with strong origin/genealogical themes underpinning family myths, initiating experiences motivated by encountering Otherness. The narrative was frequently told in the framework of a child’s biography (e.g. *Weiser Dawidek*, *Opowiadania na czas przeprowadzki*

32 Uniłowski, “Małe ojczyzny,” 54.

33 Marek Zaleski, “Naprzód w przeszłość,” in Marek Zaleski, *Formy pamięci* (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz/Terytoria, 2004), 179.

34 Dąbrowski, “Kresy w perspektywie,” 12–14.

35 Zaleski, “Naprzód w przeszłość,” 180.

36 Ibid.

by Paweł Huelle), or the perspective of the Other who had been excluded up to that point (e.g. *Hanneman* by Stefan Chwin or *Cukiernica pani Kirsch* by Artur Liskowacki).

If one were to search for the memory of displacement and resettlement in a vision of a world constructed in this way, one would realize there is very little of it left. From a rich repertoire of texts, it is enough to bring up Huelle's *Opowiadania na czas przeprowadzki*. The potential of the "moved" and "displaced" condition of the protagonists, already suggested in the title, does not seem to be used to its fullest extent, since one is talking about movement in time, rather than in space. Despite small, albeit persistent, signals of change in the geographical-historical order, traces of the past seem to dominate over the space, to dazzle, amaze, fascinate, and determine its overall character. It is visible already at the basic level of the interchangeability of proper names of the explored places. And so, in a story entitled *Winniczki, kałuże, deszcz* from this collection, which is about a family's attempts at fixing their budget with the father, the narrator, being fired (most likely for political reasons), a "retrospective" map of the immediate area is created: although Stolzenberg, Luftkurort Oliva, Nawitzweg, Glettkau and Langfuhr "morph" into Pohulanka Oliwa, Dolne Młyny in Brętów, Jelitkowo or Wrzeszcz, other names have remained "stronger than the war, displacement and fires, changing the way they sound only slightly, and [only] on the surface, like Ohra to Orunia, Brosen to Brzezno, or Schidlitz to Siedlce"; most importantly, however, the most "precious" names have survived in this manner, ones "which [have] lasted by their sound like old people who stick to long trodden paths."³⁷ The harmony between two realities – the one from the past, unlivd and German, revealed through a line of mediations (such as maps, photographs, books written in Shwabacher, overheard stories), and the present one, Polish, uninteresting, with piling existential problems – becomes unbalanced, favoring the former.

Another good metaphor pointing to a dislike towards the present can be found in adventures of a protagonist from a short story entitled *Stół* [*The Table*]. The piece of furniture from the title is a German kitchen relic, an axis of home space, and a remnant of the former tenant. The reception of the above-mentioned table oscillates between fascination with traces of a former German way of life, its quality and reliability, as well as disgust stemming from the fact that the table belonged, after all, to a "Nazi foe" (as the mother of the narrator used to say). That dislike leads to its ultimate destruction, and a search for something more appropriate and inherently "one's own." In the end, it turns out that all the stores in Gdańsk carry only triangle shaped tables, produced as

37 Paweł Huelle, *Opowiadania na czas przeprowadzki* (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz/Terytoria, 1999), 46.

a part of some unspecified six-year plan. Hence, the family remains without a table – the home's *axis mundi*. Only a trip to a mysterious carpenter in the Żuławy region allows them to replace the missing piece. It is Kaspar, a man-ghost, an Easterner who belongs to a different, old, and mythologized order; a man who is able to preserve the peace and family life of the narrator.³⁸ Rescue comes in the form of the past, and most often it was somebody else's past.

Finally, the last piece from the collection, entitled *Mina*, is one of the few stories in that volume where there appears a direct reference to displacement and resettlement (the protagonist Mina has moved to Gdańsk from her small town, most likely located somewhere in the Lower Silesia region). The topic of the post-Yalta migrations seems to be an exotic one, as if recalling a tale of far-away, mythical lands. The narrator listens closely to a story told by a woman about her childhood and home parts:

Mina's childhood, that distant time which the monologue dived into, as if to take a deep breath, was a far away and unknown land to me, even though Mina was born, and spent the first twenty years of her life in the same country as I did. A Silesian town, located close to the German border, emerged from her stories as an exotic island [...] She also spoke of Russians, a few thousand of them in town, and about a closed district, where Soviet soldiers lived with their families. [...] There was, however, much more that I didn't know about. A closed mine, immobile wheels of industrial elevators, or a settlement of Russian soldiers, where sounds of gunshots and harmonica, or choral singing, could be heard, were for me as distant as were the stories about Mont Hermon and the fallen angels.³⁹

Mina hides a secret within herself. She carries a traumatic experience on her shoulders (a rape which took place beside the Russian barracks). What is more, she is "surrounded by cold." She can feel it with her entire body, a cold which has existed from the very beginning almost.⁴⁰ Living with cruel, personal memories, she begins falling into insanity, and is locked up in a psychiatric hospital. One could say that her situation looks terrible and without any chance of improvement. The already adult narrator, who comes to visit her, observes the disintegration of her body and soul. She keeps coming back to him in his dreams, almost haunting him. In the latter part of the story,

38 See Saryusz-Wolska, *Spotkania*, 301.

39 Huelle, *Opowiadania*, 173–177.

40 Ibid., 174.

a citizen of Gdańsk, who is also locked up in that hospital, a "man with rakes," an old border patrolman awaiting his Angel who will save him from sin, starts to fascinate the narrator. He allegedly shot at a girl who tried to run across the border and flee from the country. Her body was never found, and the entire story, taken with a pinch of salt, begins to function almost as a biblical tale of guilt and punishment.

The story is kept in a strongly gnostic atmosphere, and is apparently based on the universal struggle between good and evil. However, in the context of the issue I am specifically interested in, Mina becomes a figure of Otherness from an "exotic island," recounting tales as removed as "Mount Hermon and the fallen angels," sustaining a sense of distance and highlighting the fact that the narrator does not identify with the heroin's experience. Even though the experiences of characters are deeply rooted in the space of resettlement – almost typical of it one could say – they begin to function like fairytales in this case. Historical elements evoke a different order of reality, constituting merely an excuse for undertaking a metaphysical tale: "It is not a case of personality; Huelle seems to be suggesting something more. It must be some dramatic principle of existing in the space of Borderlands – not so much a political, but rather an existential one."⁴¹ That universalizing frame marginalizes individual experience of the "world tainted with war,"⁴² the present time which runs on the rhythm of compulsive repetitions (Mina's sexual promiscuity), an enclosure within an entirely intimate landscape of one's own experience. Inability to cope with that experience eventually leads to madness. In order to avoid it, to prevent succumbing to the trauma deeply connected with the reality of war, as the narrator seems to be suggesting, it is safer to seek salvation in tales about the Other.

Risking simplification, one could assume that the plot of the stories mentioned above takes place somewhat outside of politics and history, turning the text into a gesture of negating the present. What is more, one could have an impression that the intimate, recollective, first-person perspective does not constitute a reversal of any particular, historical reality, but refers back to metaphysical insufficiencies, as well as to the only appearance of existence in general. As a result, it leads to an enclosure within a retrospective utopia of escaping from the present into a (quasi)modernist template, underpinned by a desire for an essential identity and mythologization of a multi-ethnic community of "denizens" (absent as such). On the one hand, one could assume these actions to be anachronistic against the challenges of the "new

⁴¹ Bakula, *Narracje migracyjne*, 176.

⁴² Ibid.

reality,” but on the other hand, one’s attention is caught by the popularity of that type of prose, leading to its trivialization. “If the ‘homeland’ constitutes one’s roots, if the city is a palimpsest of cultural memory, if the young hero undergoes initiation[,] the true problem of locality has been covered by clichés and banalities.”⁴³ One could say that the phenomenon takes place recurrently as the banality fulfills readers’ fancy and assumes an actual position in the process of creating the cultural memory of the region. That model of writing, framing oneself within that well-fitting banality, creates a vision of a multi-cultural reality based on pseudo-anthropological reflections. However, there is also a second type of camouflage spread between the already absent Other and the negation of the reality that defines the People’s Republic of Poland – a reality, which for many, defined childhood.

Finally, it is worthwhile to mention a work by Kazimierz Brakoniecki, as well as writers focused on Borussia. The work developed more or less at the same time as the literature of “individual homelands” and was considered to be one of its variants guided by yet another symbol with a Borderland pedigree – the Atlantis of the North. The symbol’s roots go back to the fascination with Miłosz’s concept of “homeland Europe”:

In the eighties, reading *Native Realm* by Miłosz became a discovery of Baltic Europe, which I later called the Atlantis of the North. And it was Miłosz [...] who became a patron of my poetry of lives, metaphysically concrete and synonymous with histories, with which I tried to universalize the local fate and place (*worldology*)... The cult of the individual homeland, or a cult of the metaphysics of space in *Native Realm*, which was supposed to be comprised of my province of Man (Olsztyn and its surrounding areas) as well, oriented one towards a non-antagonistic, dialogue-driven cultural vision of mutual presence, a mutual presence of peoples and nations, living and the dead, myths and symbols.⁴⁴

The poet from Olsztyn goes further, writing, “It is not about praising the home town regardless of its value, but about expressing man’s fate in his psycho-historical context.”⁴⁵ Attention is drawn, firstly, to the universalizing idiom, and secondly to the cult of the past, the specter of ancestors that

43 Elżbieta Rybicka, *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* (Kraków: Universitas, 2014), 335.

44 Kazimierz Brakoniecki, *Polak, Niemiec i Pan Bóg. Olsztyńskie szkice osobiste* (Olsztyn: Borussia, 2009), 51–52.

45 Ibid., 72.

determines the entire outlook on reality. "Memory became a main tool within the literature of people's roots, used not only to describe the lost world [...], but also to build a higher, epistemological order,"⁴⁶ Brakoniecki states elsewhere, and adds that the starting point for creating prose beyond the notion of individual homelands, as well as post-nostalgic prose should be realistic, and critical in its basic assumptions, and universalistic in its message. On the basis of several statements, the conclusion that comes to mind is that of individual-homeland authors retreating into aesthetic forms and popular clichés, and post-Borderland authors hiding in an emotional world of their grandparents (not their parents, which is telling!), or Prussians enclosing themselves in a particular kind of tombstone, in which every other step brings an almost paranoid, ethical reflection, and a generalizing metaphysical argumentation. Brakoniecki admits:

Yes, I am a melancholic, mystical atheist. I partake in an archaic cult of my ancestors, a cult of my/our dead, because I am dead myself already; I look at you from that side of a photograph, from a cloud, from that small Earth, from that apartment in Barczewo and Olsztyn, from that street in a world shrouded in memory and forgetting, which unglues from today's reality. I speak the Polish language of men killed and dead, who demanded from me to express their complaints for years, and so I finally fulfilled my mission and felt freed.⁴⁷

Even though those recalled words constitute a reaction to critical opinions on Brakoniecki's Prussian project, there is no irony in referring to the project itself (contrary to what one could have thought). It is a serious line of reasoning, proving the correctness of the proposed vision of a local community. From that vision emerges the last type of articulatory paralysis in the story about migrations that spans between the cult of ancestors and the "worldly," universalizing ethical approach.



All of the above mentioned cases point, in the first place, to a multilayered resistance to the Borderland template, unwillingly becoming language that is familiar and understandable, and only later guiding us towards the past. Worlds presented in the prose of origins, stemming from a nostalgic attitude,

46 Kazimierz Brakoniecki, *Prowincja człowieka* (Olsztyn: Borussia, 2004), 18.

47 Brakoniecki, *Polak*, 12.

were headed at a certain point, according to Przemysław Czapliński, “towards a complete restitution of the past, hence writing of it was guided by [...] a wish to meticulously replicate that past reality.”⁴⁸ Those narrative steps came from an ethical and nostalgic need, but also seemed to be fundamentally defined by melancholy and a desire for compensation. In restitutions themselves, resettlement experiences pertaining to the present become negative points of reference. One can see them almost as an impulse to retreat. Hence, turning “towards that distant and immediate past of a multinational Polish Republic does not seek any truth about that past, but rather an escape from the problems of the present.”⁴⁹

These hardships could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it is not about “taming” or “un-remembering” the tale of the Other, but about:

a double bottom, often pushed aside in our culture. We “tame” not only the post-German character of the western parts of Poland, but also the cultural homogeneity of our country. Although coming from one of the most ethnically, religiously, linguistically and nationally diverse areas of Europe, we inhabit territory, which is extremely homogenous today. The trauma of that change has not been, as it seems, fully worked through in our culture, and some timid attempts at coping with it can be found under the veil of taming the “post-Germaness.”⁵⁰

Secondly, such a situation refers us back not only to the question of the social composition of our country that was lost after 1945, but also to events that took place later on, as well as results of those events, reflected directly on the condition of the generation’s identity; a generation raised in that “homogenized” Poland. Robert Ostaszewski described a search for a cut-to-fit, but ultimately only a replacement, identity as follows:

The entire literature of “individual homelands” is based on a dogmatic assumption (hence not requiring any proof) that a person should seek his or her permanent identity. Why there are so few individuals who attempt to discuss this notion? On the surface, one could think that there is nothing to ponder. It seems obvious that a well-grounded identity provides a cognitive and existential comfort, allows for reconciling with tradition and upholds memory. It is enough to take a look at novels from that genre

48 Czapliński, “Mapa,” 168.

49 Zaleski, “Naprzód w przeszłość,” 179.

50 Saryusz-Wolska, *Spotkania*, 287.

to observe that protagonists who do not bow in front of local chapels are most often unstable shreds of human beings, while later on, after rooting themselves firmly, they live in the paradise of certainty and stability. But it is a special kind of memory – a constructed one.⁵¹

These artificial worlds of "roots" literature have one more crucial task: to hide and censor the origin, or "the initial experience of uprooting, which the People's Republic of Poland [PRL] brought upon everyone after the war."⁵²

Shame: Beyond the Trauma of the "Loss of Borderlands"

To summarize and conclude, the literature concerning the "Western Borderlands," in the context of migration experiences, is based on multilayered strategies of camouflage, stretching between numerous borrowings from older traditions (e.g. the Borderland tradition), returns/repetitions to/of the grandparents' experience and a reconstruction of the perspective of the (local) Other, which amounts to a *de facto* exteriorization of the experience. Such polarization reveals a distinct dislike towards a narrative reflection on one's own experience, as well as on the experiences of the previous generation that took place during the PRL era. It seems that not only the trauma of displacement and resettlement (the trauma of loss), but also the trauma of life placed in a new reality cast a shadow on generational biographies and literary attempts at coping. Brakoniecki admits:

Born in the early fifties of the twentieth century, I belong to that typical post-Yalta generation, which has been filled with darkness and fears of a heavily bruised generation of parents and grandparents hurt by the war. That trauma could not be avoided, especially in the overtaken Western and Northern Territories, where we showed up by accident and not out of our free will, even though that's where we were born.⁵³

Simultaneously, such darkness and fears remain on the margins of his narrative, which receives markers of compensation in yet another sense as a result. One could risk posing a thesis that this self-exclusion has, as its

⁵¹ Ostaszewski, "Lokalni hodowcy korzeni," 41.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Brakoniecki, *Polak*, 30.

foundation, a denial of shame linked to growing up (functioning) in the “Recovered Territories” during the communist regime, which was recognized as the epoch of greyness, mediocrity, and monotony that is best exposed in the older narratives of the “Western Borderlands.” At the same time, however, that same shame is rooted deeply in the historical context. The remaining part of Brakoniecki’s statement is a good illustration:

And we, the children, a generation educated and diligently memorizing a vision of history and reality sponsored by the People’s Republic of Poland, we took part in that spectacle of creating emotional structures of collective memory, a new identity, social and national integration, believing in truths presented to us, which were enforced by personal and national experiences of the Second World War.⁵⁴

In yet another passage he adds:

I was born at the time of Stalin and Bierut, I was a child and a boy at the time of Gomułka, I was a student and I entered the adult life at the time of Gierek, and was done with my bruised youth during Jaruzelski’s regime, and that very list, today, looks like a veteran’s prayer. And I was neither a warrior, nor a veteran – only a man in despair.⁵⁵

About his father he wrote:

As the years passed, he grew full of admiration for the power held by PRL authorities, which he thanked for his social rise, a single-nationality state, peace, a stable job, and accessible health care. “If only they left us with Lviv, we wouldn’t have missed anything,” he used to tell his friends, while drinking vodka, “At least they set the situation straight with the Jews in the party.” Throughout his life he listened to Radio Free Europe, like most other Poles, who calmly went up the ladder of making their small careers, complaining about the Russians and long lines in the stores, smoothly adjusting to the authoritarian regime with its predictable system of references and dependencies, corruption,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 33–37.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

banal theater of lies – everyone acting according to his own abilities and limits.⁵⁶

As we can see, the emotions accompanying the loss of individual homelands (in the parents' generation) became subdued, as the time went by, by the helplessness and despair that followed a "bruised youth," feelings which were made diffuse by passive co-participation in the socialist society, or simply put: by a conformist attitude, a "smooth adjustment to the authoritarian regime." All those elements gave rise, in turn, to the above-mentioned shame.

If we were to take a closer look at it, its presence in the generation of "post-Yalta children" stemmed from, in my opinion, two distinct factors. Firstly, from directly experiencing poverty, fear, violence (both physical and symbolic), as well as longing, a sense of temporariness and alienation, creating an atmosphere of the "family home"⁵⁷ – emotions which constituted an echo of war experiences taking place in the PRL reality, not seeming like a specifically interesting subject. That kind of reception of the world creates a dissonance between the world and a strong idea of the self in both the collective and individual sense, determined by deeply interiorized convictions about randomness, about being a "guest" penetrating other people's houses, involuntarily intruding into somebody else's privacy and history. We are speaking here about an unwarranted shame resulting from the feeling of humiliation, of being stuck in a situation of dependence on a socio-political system, family ties and the Other. It is shame resulting, to a great extent, from social norms that, in a given community, are considered proper and valued as positive, while impossible to be realized in the given historical circumstance.

This phenomenon in literature interests me personally, as do tendencies to make certain themes linked to the migratory experience absent. We could here mention an additional phenomenon described in the already-classic work of Norbert Elias – being "ashamed of shame."⁵⁸ Such feelings often

56 Ibid., 31-32.

57 Anna Wylegała, *Pamięć a przesiedlenia. Studium (nie)pamięci społecznej na przykładzie ukraińskiej Galicji i polskich "Ziem Odzyskanych"* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2014), 111-154. The author, relying on empirical evidence, mostly accounts of the displaced, describes thoroughly their circumstances during initial stages of adaptation. She highlights that fear, violence, poverty, as well as longing and sensation of temporality and alienation playing the most important part in the formation process of their new social reality.

58 Norbert Elias, *Przemiany obyczajów w cywilizacji Zachodu*, trans. Tadeusz Zabłudowski (Warszawa: PIW, 1980). See Gershen Kaufman, *Forbidden Fruits: Taboo and Tabooism in Culture* (Cambridge: Bowling Green, University Press, 1989).

become a taboo that one should consider, following Thomas Scheff, as a kind of triple spiral leading to the gradual removal of the “shameful” experience from one’s consciousness (or from the text).⁵⁹ Additionally, in the case of the excerpt quoted above, the category of ancestral shame⁶⁰ might come in handy as well. It is a category which, in its assumptions, is trans-generational and crisscrosses multiple and often distant experiences in which an individual did not participate in directly, but is aware of their consequences primarily by feeling ashamed.

Post-displacement and post-resettlement shame may be a “recognizable case, at least for a certain segment of a generation,” and a “highly specific” type of phenomenon, which Piotr Szenejch describes as follows, while talking about the art of tackling the experience of living in the PRL:

It is not only a private or intimate shame. It takes place not only during everyday “interactive rituals” between individuals (a phenomenon brilliantly explained by Goffman). Its sense cannot be exhausted by simply recognizing phenomena such as shame, embarrassment, or feelings of one’s worth as rooted in deep layers of a local cultural system (which would be pointed to by every anthropologist), social structure, economic relationships (explicated by sociologists researching emotions), history of changes in social conventions (described by Norbert Elias), or discourses shaping local sensibilities, history and culture. That extensive catalogue should be also expanded by a phantasmal geography – a perspective of global dependencies, past and present, as well as a reflection on ideas relating to it. One is concerned here with a certain magma of a social class and postcolonial shame, a careerist fear of being naïve, embarrassed for

59 Thomas J. Scheff, *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotion, and Social Structure* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990). Such actions are close to the phenomenon of bypassed shame which (according to Helen Lewis) is a form of questioning, and emerges at the moment when an individual desires to avoid shame even before he or she experiences it. “Bypassed shame is linked to experiencing painful feelings and, to a lesser extent, thinking about them” writes Elżbieta Czykwin. One could risk a parallel, and state that in case of resettlements, we are not only speaking about thinking, but also about writing. See Elżbieta Czykwin, “Konflikty małżeńskie w kontekście emocji wstydu,” *Wychowanie w Rodzinie* 5 (2012): 130. See Helen Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971), 194. On the subject of the low “visibility” of shame in society and culture which perceives shame as a sign of weakness or imperfection, see Thomas J. Scheff, “Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory,” in *Sociological Theory* 18 (2000): 85.

60 Elspeth Probyn, *Blush. Faces of Shame* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 107–129.

"civilizational delay," and finally with feelings of shame caused by members of one's tribe, marked by all kinds of shortcomings.⁶¹

From the perspective of geographic dependencies, phantasmal in character, into which the (post)displaced person becomes entangled, we can understand (using a postcolonial key) the helplessness felt against the realities of a system that is going away. Hence, we have the relationship of subduing oneself to the hegemonic discourse, and involuntary participating in practices related to it. In the context of a broader tradition, the attitude signalized above is close to the "poetics of a non-heroic acceptance of reality."⁶² According to Hanna Gosk, it is a tale that is fundamentally absent from the Polish national narrative, which follows the poetics of harm and sacrifice, or heroic resistance. The first one saturates the other one with shame, and takes away its voice, almost blasphemous in nature. As a result, it often leads to misrepresentation, introducing that non-heroic subject into a broad circle of victims (the above-quoted case of "despairing man"). Referencing Richard Rorty, Gosk observes that:

the most effective method of administering long lasting pain to men is to humiliate them by making things that they have considered of the utmost importance seem trivial, out-of-date and helpless. Allowing for something like that to happen causes (can cause) shame.⁶³

It seems that the thesis applies in the context of the displaced subject entangled, on the one hand, in communist discourse "bruising one's youth," while on the other, in family stories of "individual careers" tainted by the mark of poverty, the discomfort of inhabiting a space taken away from former occupants, or even a creeping resignation from a willingness to return to one's ancestral homeland on account of external "historical reasons." These are banal factors, but in the context of Poland's tradition of resisting what is "shameful," they strengthen the sense of helplessness, the attitude of "victimhood," more than that of "heroism" in the socio-political reality of the past. At a time when it became possible to recount experiences of displacement, stories underwent

61 Piotr Szenajch, "Sztuka wstydu," *Krytyka Polityczna* 31/32 (2013): 91.

62 Hanna Gosk, "(Nie)obecność opowieści o wstydzie w narracji losu polskiego," in *Kultura po przejściach, osoby z przeszłością. Polski dyskurs postzależnościowy – konteksty i perspektywy badawcze*, ed. Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 87.

63 Ibid. See Małgorzata Mikołajczak, "Upokorzenie jako parametr osadniczego losu w powieści neo-post-osiedleńczej i regionalnej literaturze osadniczej – dwa scenariusze," *Lamus* 1 (2014): 24–28.

auto-censorship, camouflaged in compensatory narratives about meeting the Other, multi-cultural communities, memories of a glorious past or the “inevitable” loss of eastern homelands. In short, turning one’s own experience into taboo was a turn towards pride, reversal of shame. It was also most certainly a turn towards a tradition of heroism, originating in the Borderlands.

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Sylwia Chutnik

Games of Memory and the Gender City Model: A Practical Conceptualization

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My aim is to showcase initiatives directed at commemorating women associated with particular Polish cities. However, in order to describe these various projects, campaigns, and discussions, I must start with the problem of the topography of the city itself.

Italo Calvino in his book *Invisible Cities*¹ focuses on interpretations of urban landscapes. In an oneiric dialogue, grounded in symbols, between the novel's two protagonists, a realistic topography fuses with the illusionary. As a result, we cannot be certain if the cities depicted by the author exist in reality, or whether they just serve as illustrations of our approach to spaces through which we travel. From these enigmatic tropes a model of a city arises, from which subsequent stories and different places are derived. One of the fragments provides a description of this model: "It is a city made only of exceptions, exclusions, incongruities, contradictions."² If we take a closer look at narratives relating to the history of the city from a gender perspective we will notice those "exceptions," though they are not without the aforementioned

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1 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harvest, 1978).

2 Ibid., 69.

incongruities and contradictions. As a result, an analysis of representation of the history of men and women who have influenced the development of a particular city (on various levels) is marked by shallowness and “exclusions.” Is there a model of a city, in Calvino’s sense, that we could use whenever we needed to describe space from both perspectives: male and female? And how does it relate to the Foucauldian idea of heterotopias? We could assume that a model of the “exceptional city” would be some kind of a universal and democratic template, which could be utilized to portray the biography of a certain person, to widen the context of that depiction, and to describe places of memory and ways of preserving memory. In light of the above assertion, preceding endeavors of “investigating” the female traces within the urban space would be directed exactly at validating the city as a construct made up of contradictions. Therefore, if genders conceived of as cultural phenomena were to be based on differences,³ then acknowledging them, especially in historical discourse, would be a straightforward fulfillment of the previous, dominant pattern of interpreting the city from the point of view of a single (male) gender.

Certainly, if we were to strictly adhere to the letter of Calvino’s text, we would be unsettled by the final sentence of the passage dedicated to the model city: “But I cannot force my operation beyond a certain limit: I would achieve cities too probable to be real.”⁴ Does, therefore, a city concerned in an equal manner with both its male and female inhabitants – by considering their disparate experience – become too ideal a city, disintegrating in a general model of accountability? This is a bold statement, especially when we consider previous achievements of researchers studying the influence of men and women on the development and shape of cities.

The frameworks devised for describing the history of women in urban contexts have dangerously drifted towards matters of everyday life, like advancements in weaving, childcare and housework. This trend is hardly surprising, as the activity of women has customarily been assigned to the private sphere. This can be traced to, among other things, biological essentialism⁵ and stereotypical understanding of gender roles.⁶ We find this viewpoint

3 In this basic distinction, I omit particular sociological and philosophical theories that describe the tension between the cultural genders, and instead I rely on a standard, intuitive understanding of that term as counterweight or opposition.

4 *Ibid.*, 69.

5 Sandra Lipsitz Bem, *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality* (New Haven: Yale, 1993).

6 An interesting comparison of “female” and “male” traits can be found in the research on stereotypes by M. Korczyńska, “Co rządzą naszymi oczekiwaniami wobec partnera?” in

reflected in popular history books, as well as textbooks, where there is a visible scarcity of female heroes.⁷ This relates both to the study of contemporary times and prehistory. As psychologist Małgorzata Szarzyńska-Lichtoń points out: "Visions of prehistory of women and men and their role in life that are created by science oscillate between two opposites."⁸ Traditional concepts depict women as dependent on men and subject to one view of the world, whereas a competing interpretation focuses on the visible dominance of women in Stone Age societies, resulting from biology (childbearing, meal preparation). In both cases, the attempt at describing history mainly serves to further the hierarchic view of genders and fails to reveal a meaningful parallel past. This standard approach is worth mentioning because it often appears in context of initiatives attempting to complement historical research.

Dimensions of Tropes

For a few years now, we have been seeing in Poland a clear interest in this topic on the part of non-governmental organizations and urban activists, with Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, and Poznań leading the way. These are not only examples of grassroots initiatives seeking to preserve the history of women. A definite integration of cultural gender into the history of the city and the development of urban studies are undoubtedly the outcome of many decades of academic research on the subject.⁹

We can distinguish three main areas of interest and interpretation: architectural (the least examined by Polish researchers, it is related to functionality

Zrozumieć płeć. Studia interdyscyplinarne II, ed. Alicja Kuczyńska and Elżbieta Katarzyna Dzikowska (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004), 307.

7 Research on this subject, as well as training for teachers, is conducted by i. a. "Toward the Girls" association, www.wstronedziewczat.org.pl, accessed Januray 1, 2014.

8 Małgorzata Szarzyńska-Lichtoń, „Stereotypy płci i ich realizowanie w rolach życiowych w kontekście historycznymi kulturowym,” in *Zrozumieć płeć. Studia interdyscyplinarne II*, 354.

9 The Research Team of the Social History of Poland in the 19th and 20th Centuries of the Institute of History, University of Warsaw, deserves a mention in this context. The team consists of several members of the university staff and doctoral candidates of the Institute of History UW and other research centers, and conducts research on the history of social and cultural change within the Polish territories in the 19th and 20th centuries. The team publishes works in large part dedicated to women and their situation in the context of various aspects of life, as well as conducts projects and seminars.

of designed space), historical (focused on memory and the emotional faculty) and social (based on interactions and creation of cultural ties).¹⁰

The first focuses mainly on urban planning, which does not always take the needs of various social groups into account. Mothers can serve as an example of such a group. The difficulty of noticing their “struggle for space” arises from the stereotype that regards mothers as passive and confined to the domestic space. Meanwhile the guardians of children under two years of age (this is on average the age at which children cease to require a stroller) and of children with mobility impairments wage a daily battle by leaving their homes and moving around the city, fighting for their right to exist within its spaces. Those who travel the city with a stroller come against many obstacles. Some of those obstacles are impassable, especially for parents of older children with disabilities. Carrying the stroller down a flight of stairs from the fifth floor, entering an office lacking a wheelchair ramp, or crossing a street bulwarked by high curbs is oftentimes impossible. The situation is only made worse by the absence of infrastructure, such as infant changing tables in offices and shops. This furthers isolation and is a form of discrimination against certain social groups.

Gender oriented interpretations would compel us in this case to investigate who designs our cities, who signs off on the projects, and who decides on their implementation. It is often a person that did not bother to empirically examine what it means to carry a stroller, sometimes weighing around thirty-three pounds (with the child, commodities and items required for travel beyond the home). Considering the relation in the use of parental leave benefits in European countries, we will notice that the care of young children is mostly left in the hands of women.¹¹ Their expectations of comfort or safety might be overlooked, because their gender is not adequately represented in the halls of power. Another question: why do mostly women care for infant children? Is it a question of biology (breastfeeding, instinct) or rather our culture decidedly determining family roles. Furthermore: why is such a numerous group of citizens barred from freely using the public sphere? By way of deduction we will arrive at the priorities of city government, economic questions and commercialization of space. Becoming aware of the problem, we cast away the layers of doubt and examine in detail the phenomenon as a whole.

10 *Miasto oczami kobiet*, ed. Patrycja Dołowy and Justyna Biernacka (Warszawa: Fundacja MaMa, 2012).

11 Although a rise in the use of paternal leave can be seen (in August 2014 about 20.9 thousand men were beneficiaries) the parental leave that is available in the second half of the child's first year of life is used by only 2% of entitled fathers (according to ZUS estimations published in September 2014).

If we consider the aforementioned problems, then Calvino's model city becomes full of impassable streets and endless stairs. It is a space of exclusion for parents with young children, the disabled or people with impaired motor functions (such as the elderly). High curbs and crooked pavements effectively prevent free movement within the city, but they also create new areas for interpretation. Anthropology clashes with somber economy and the design of urban space as previous research strategies seem helpless in the face of crooked pavements. Repeatedly it turns out that in the process of analyzing themes related to contemporary cities we encounter social categories other than gender.¹²

Let us take a closer look at two subsequent areas of interest for scholars surveying the city in light of gender.

Anthropological Her

It is hard to write about the female point of view in historical research without resorting to the term "herstory." Although it is rather unfamiliar in the Polish research tradition, and has no equivalent in the Polish language, it is used ever more often as a symbol of a gender oriented interpretational strategy. What is the result of looking through the eyes of female experience? Is it one of possible choices of research methods,¹³ or is it rather a way of complementing or expanding official history?¹⁴

Regardless of the interpretation, the concept of "anthropologising history" seems interesting. Sociologist Grażyna Kubica refers to it in her book on women from Bronisław Malinowski's social circle. Recalling Michael Roberts, she says that her aim is to "mark the presence of voices overlooked in the great narratives of the contemporary world order."¹⁵ The aforementioned initiatives for reclaiming and retaining the history of women are founded on the idea of enabling the voices of both genders, irrespective of the scale or field of their activity in the historical context. Anthropology provides a possibility of a comprehensive framing of the studied subject, without hierarchizing its

12 This is clear in Tovi Fenster's work (for example in the article *Gender and the City: The Different Formations of Belonging*) or in the book *Cities and Gender*, ed. Helen Jarvis et al. (New York: Routledge, 2009).

13 Monika Świerkosz „Gender Studies – w drodze czy na rozdrożu?” in *uniGender* 1(5) (2010), www.unigender.org

14 Grażyna Kubica, *Siostry Malinowskiego czyli kobiety nowoczesne na początku XX wieku* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006).

15 Ibid., 8.

meanings. History itself can then be considered as a groundwork for reflections on the present, employing various disciplines of knowledge, creating an interdisciplinary study of the human being: his past, his creations and his epoch. In the "adventure with history" conceived this way, it is much easier to find a "feminine strand of tradition," described by philosopher Jolanta Brach-Czaina,¹⁶ as it will never again revert to being an overlooked theme in the official narrative, but will become legitimate; from now on subject to equal rules. It is through a hierarchy of importance of particular personas, themes, and events, that women have become invisible to history. In the context of events such as a political coup, the foundation of a girls' school, military conflicts, the invention of a new weapon or medicine for a contagious disease, the history of everyday life was a lost cause. This holds true on both the national and local level, but is most clearly visible in the history of cities. Looking at the fate of Warsaw, the scale of war damage and its reconstruction, it is hard to focus on other important, even decisive, moments.

As traveler and historian of Warsaw Olgierd Budrewicz once stated:

Warsaw alone happened to be more often an object of military action than a normal city; sometimes there was more military personnel within its borders than there were civilians. The history of Warsaw is a monumental battle fresco.¹⁷

There is no place for non-war narratives if history is perceived this way. Therefore genre literature is deficient in examples of women who contributed to the city and had influenced it. This is reflected in conventional guided tours catering to tourists, which shape the image of the city. The sheer number of sites related to war or the uprising overwhelms and is the reason why the name of the city is often pronounced by foreigners *war-saw* (a city which has "seen war").¹⁸

"The Unwomanly Face of War" was unmasked by Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich through the voices of heroic women who partook in the Second

16 Jolanta Brach-Czaina, "Wprowadzenie," in *Od kobiety do mężczyzny i z powrotem. Rozważania o płci w kulturze*, ed. Jolanta Brach-Czaina (Białystok: Trans Humana, 1997), 8.

17 Olgierd Budrewicz, *Zdumiewająca Warszawa* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1968), 5.

18 This wordplay inspires artist to search for new meanings hidden within the name. One example is the work of Dominika Truszczyńska that showcases sites related to war, of special importance to the author and associated with her "private city map." The overlapping of personal and historical narratives is very common in Warsaw due to the number of sites relating to combat.

World War. During her work on hundreds of interviews she also kept a journal in which, at the very beginning, she wrote:

But why? I asked myself more than once. Why, having stood up for and held their own place in a once absolutely male world, have women not stood up for their history? Their words and feelings? They did not believe themselves. A whole world is hidden from us.¹⁹

Utilizing oral history is one of the elements of herstory and it is a direct result of the belief that what can be a source is not only a recollection or interview, but also a comic book, personal keepsakes, private photo albums. Anything that can be collected, and that relates to women, in some sense creates a new narrative of their history.²⁰ As the authors of *Przewodniczka po Krakowie emancypantek*, write it is clear that:

The absence of women and their achievements in historical textbooks is equaled by our real and symbolic exclusion from the public sphere as contemporary women.²¹

How did Italo Calvino understand memory in his *Invisible Cities*? He placed it alongside the visual sphere. He wrote that the city consists of "relationship between the measurements of its space and the events of its past."²² Therefore the street grid, with all its flaws that were addressed earlier, directly relates to the memory of events, which took place in a given space. Events experienced by both men and women. By overlooking one gender, we recreate a deficient picture of what Calvino calls "language of memory" – repeated signs that enable the city to exist. The urban fabric becomes a sponge that sucks up and swells with a multitude of meanings of events taking place within a particular space. According to this interpretation the more we fill the city with stories the more swollen and full it will become.

19 Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Random House, 2017), XVI.

20 Kornelia Kończal, „Pamięć w historiografii. Kilka uwag o tym, dlaczego historycy uprawiają memory studies i co z tego wynika,” in *Historia w kulturze współczesnej. Niekonwencjonalne podejście do przeszłości*, ed. Piotr Witek et al. (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Edytor.org, 2011), 61.

21 *Krakowski szlak kobiet. Przewodniczka po Krakowie Emancypantek*, ed. Ewa Furgat (Kraków: Fundacja Przestrzeń Kobiet, 2009), 8.

22 Calvino, *Invisible*, 10.

Let us take a closer look then at few initiatives that attempt to restitute memory and fill the urban space.

Warsaw Trails, Murals, and Braids

Joanna Piotrowska and Anna Czerwińska of the Fundacja Feminoteka have created a virtual museum on the organization's website (www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum). One can find there not only biographies of particular women, but also lesson plans for teachers. The aim of the project *Muzeum Historii Kobiet* is the retention of the memory of Polish women, who have contributed to the development of local as well as global history. Their field of work or the area they have innovated is only a secondary consideration. Therefore we find writers, social activists, politicians and philanthropists among their ranks. We also see heroes of everyday life such as cabaret dancers or sportswomen. All these women share fundamental character traits such as freethinking, courage and unconventionality. Two large special exhibitions have been held thus far: *Pokolenia Kobiet* and *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki*. There is a documental feature associated with the latter. It depicts everyday life of women during The Warsaw Uprising.²³ The relationship of the fate of individual women with the city's history is inseparable, and by making sense of their choices we come closer to grasping the day-to-day realities of the military operation of 1944. Complementing this endeavor is a guide and collection of essays titled *Warszawa kobiet* [*Warsaw of Women*] by the author of this article. It connects alternative tour trails (10 paths) with a biographical introduction of 25 female heroes of these walks.²⁴

A mural commissioned by The Warsaw Rising Museum, and completed in 2008 by the artistic collective "Święta Głowa Marii Antoniny," is also associated with the uprising. It depicts four women in battledress, covered in blood. One of them holds a small dog in her arms. The image conforms to a comic book convention. The caption reads: "We also fought." It draws attention to the role women played in military combat, as well as to the omission and devaluation of their involvement in the fighting – both as civilians and military personnel.²⁵

23 Documentary *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki*, Fundacja Feminoteka, Warszawa 2009.

24 Sylwia Chutnik, *Warsaw of Women*, trans. Katarzyna Nowakowska et al. (Warszawa: Polityka Spółdzielnia Pracy, 2011).

25 It is worth recalling for example the historical supplement to *Tygodnik Powszechny* 49 (2001), and the interview with Anna Jakubowska, runner and medic in the AK battalion "Zośka," who has said that: "War does not only belong to men. It is indeed different for women than for men, but who knows if it isn't harsher." There are numerous other re-

The project *Warkocze M*²⁶ of Fundacja Centra will serve as a third example of tracing women's history in Warsaw. It was carried out in the Muranów area, a space directly tied with the history of Polish Jews and the post-war reconstruction of the Polish capital in the socialist realism style. Women of various ages participated in the project, adding a cross-generational dimension to the endeavor, as well as creating a broad field for interpretation of individual experience arising from particular activities. One such activity was the charting of a personal map of Muranów by labeling places of special significance to the participants of the project. And so, in a game with the martyrological tradition of streets such as Nalewki or Anielewicz, points such as "my first kiss" or "favorite grocery store" were marked. The provocative confusion of orders was intended not only to reorient the hierarchy and result in a convergence of private and public spheres, but also to introduce a decentralized way of thinking about the city. What is at stake here is not simply finding the "point of origin"²⁷ for the borough, but rather a reevaluation or – hopefully – relocation of the "point of interest" to the individual experience, one that is even intimate. This game of memory occurs at the level of details – bits of a larger history. This is in no way a revolt against history, but rather a form of completing it with individual stories.²⁸ They are the root of both the notion of "modern patriotism," as well as of the construction of "pop-history."²⁹

Another kind of game is found in this context in the subversive treatment of criticism that is often addressed not only at the notion of "herstory," but also at gender analysis. As an attempt at restructuring the negative definition of those methods, it also points to a certain deviation from traditional forms of historiography: both in relation to sources, and the form of historical discourse. It is the effect of, among other things, the "democratization of

lations and testimonials of women who participated in the 1944 uprising in the same issue.

26 The project resulted in, among other things, a publication in form of a comic book *Kobiece historie z Muranowa*, ed. Joanna Tomiak and Natalia Judzińska (Warszawa: UFA, 2012).

27 We are aware that the quest for the center is not always purposeful. See *Warszawa. W poszukiwaniu centrum. Miejski przewodnik*, ed. Anna Sańczuk et al. (Kraków: Znak, 2005).

28 A similar construction is found in a book by Beata Chomątowska, *Stacja Muranów* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2012).

29 The Warsaw Rising Museum utilizes it tirelessly, offering comic books, location-based games and board games, producing avant-garde plays and organizing plain air painting. A description of all these efforts can be found on the museum's website www.1944.pl. The notion "modern patriotism" is used in official communication of the Chancellery of the President and considered to be one of the top priorities of his presidency. It is also part of governmental policy.

discourse of the past” and “overcoming the monopoly exerted by academic history over the production and organization of historical knowledge.”³⁰ This poly-historical translation of memory is tied with a technological revolution (internet, access to recording equipment) and renouncement of the concept of authority founded on classical sources. This sets in motion many initiatives intent on unburdening “noble history” and reestablishing it as inspiring and, what is important, close to contemporary life.

Guides to Kraków. Tales of Łódź and Kalisz

One of the better known examples of the discovery of women's local history is the series *Przewodniczki po Krakowie emancypantek* [*Guides to Krakow of Suffragettes*]. Scholars Ewa Furgal, Natalia Sarata and an accompanying team of women have edited and published, under the auspices of the Jewish Association Czulent, Women's Space Foundaton and the Jewish Community Centre, the first Polish series of herstorical guides. Alongside biographies and photographs of individual women we can also explore the assembled guided tours. Workshops for city guides, a board game and a pocket calendar are a continuation of the series.

Paradoxically, what Marek Ostrowski introduced in an analysis of the point of view of legendary figures, Wars and Sawa, rings even more true in the case of publications from the *Przewodniczki* series. He points to the top-down (Wars) and bottom-up (Sawa) perspectives.³¹ In this case the bottom, or foundation, would consists of particular histories of individual women, their life stories merging with the history of Kraków. And the up, or the general level, would mean a linear placement in both the history of Poland and on a typical route of a guided tour.

The guided tours are becoming ever more customized, as the industry adapts to the higher expectations of foreigners. It is no longer enough for travel and tour agencies to simply place information about the “walks”: what counts is a creative approach to an interesting and original topic. In Warsaw, Łódź and Kraków, there are opportunities to experience the history of women associated with the city through walks that offer sightseeing of places of importance to their heroes. These are buildings, town squares, streets, also monuments and memorials. In all of the mentioned cities the tours are conducted on themed “routes,” they encompass individual boroughs, topics (e.g.

30 *Historia w kulturze współczesnej. Niekonwencjonalne podejście do przeszłości*, ed. Piotr Witek et al. (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Edytor.org, 2011), 10.

31 Marek Ostrowski, *Tryptyk warszawski* (Warszawa: SCI-ART. Organizacja Badań Naukowych, 2009).

writers route, aristocratic route) and are addressed to particular groups (foreign tourists, city inhabitants, children, other guides or teachers).

A certain completion of these publication comes in form of yet another guidebook, this time published by Ha!art under the title *Kraków kobiet*. As the editors point out:

One can say that "Women's Kraków" existed forever, inseparably intertwined with "Men's Kraków," in such an intricate manner, that despite its daily experienced difference it remained unnoticed.³²

The modern form of the book, as well as a respectable array of authors make popularization of this "intertwined history" very probable.

Another game of memory is *Łódzki szlak kobiet* [*Women's Paths in Łódź*] that was initiated by the collective "Kobiety znad Łódki" and it is designed as a project for preserving the history of women in Łódź. At the outset, information relating to the history of women associated with the city are gathered, and then walks and meetings are planned. The framework of the project also encompasses photographic exhibitions, museum events and guided tours open to the public that mainly focus on factory trails.³³

Another worthy example of searching for women's trails in the city that is coupled with cultural and social events is the project "Równe babki." It was developed by the Stowarzyszenie Żywa in partnership with the Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku "Calisia" w Kaliszu and Klub Krytyki Politycznej w Kaliszu. This initiative is an attempt to create a contemporary history of Kalisz as seen through the eyes of its female inhabitants, the so-called heroes of everyday life. This endeavor bears resemblance to the Warsaw *Warkocze M* project, which focused on individual histories with the history of the city serving as a backdrop.

Multiplied Signs

In all of the described cases of activity at the intersections of history, tourism, anthropology and art, the focus is on complementing official discourse and overcoming preceding forms of construing the city. History is not just about learning the countries' history, important dates and the succession of royal dynasties. The fate of ancestors of both genders is a constituting element of

32 *Kraków kobiet*, ed. Agata Dutkowska and Wojciech Szymański (Kraków: Ha!art, 2011), 8.

33 It is worth recalling the publication by Izabella Desperak, Grzegorz Matuszak, Marta Sikorska-Kowalska, *Emancypantki, włóknarki i ciche bohaterki* (Pabianice: Omega-Praxis, 2009).

personal identity, source of culture and social rules. Study of the past can be a starting point for highly intriguing enquiry and research conducted in a very personal key. One of such keys can be the rediscovery of women who lived, worked, and created in our country, city, or borough. It turns out there were many such women. Oftentimes brilliant and certainly inspiring and interesting. Our memory of them is unfortunately deficient, and they often make history as wives, mothers, and helpers. Examples of "herstorical" endeavors in Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, or Kalisz all have set before them the task of changing the attitudes towards the current hierarchy of memory and constitute a new way of looking at the question of forms of preserving the past.

Italo Calvino writes: "Memory is redundant; it repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist."³⁴ If we apply this assertion to initiatives intent on discovering the "city of women" and introducing it into the universal model, then we will perceive individual activities as new "signs," necessary for broadening the picture. If the language of memory of space is intricate and redundant, then it requires material, from which it will create new narratives and through them complete the city's image.

Translation: Rafał Pawluk

³⁴ Calvino, *Invisible*, 17.

Sites and Non-Sites of Memory

Andrzej Szpociński

Sites of Memory

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Researching sites of memory has recently become popular among scholars, particularly among historians and sociologists. Kornelia Kończal points to dozens of significant research projects, including international endeavors, focusing on the issue.¹ While the interest itself in social, cultural and political aspects of living history (as sites of memory are nothing other than living history²) could be seen as something perfectly obvious, the international career of the term “sites of memory,” applied today to almost all forms of the past tangibly felt in the present, is intriguing indeed and should become subject to deeper reflection.

This article consists of two integrally related parts: the first one is an overview of how “sites of memory” tend to be defined and researched today. The second part includes a hypothesis claiming that the career of the term can be traced to the fact that it resonates well with a particular sensitivity of contemporary culture, including present-day historical culture, to the spatial and the visual.

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¹ Kornelia Kończal, „Europejskie debaty na temat «miejsz pamięci»” (Berlin: Centrum Badań Historycznych PAN, 2007), [manuscript in possession of the author].

² A term introduced several years ago by Nina Assorodobraj-Kula in “Żywa historia,” *Studia Socjologiczne* 2 (1963).

The study of “sites of memory” began with Pierre Nora. In an article entitled *Mémoire collective* published in the early 1970s, he postulates the need for research into “sites of memory.” Nora never defines the term, but it seems that he used it primarily to refer to institutionalized forms of collective memories of the past. Consequently, for Nora, a “site of memory” refers both to a historical archive and a monument, as well as to a private apartment where combatants would gather to celebrate some anniversary of importance to them. Nora speaks of the “site” in its literal meaning, one where a community such as a nation, an ethnic group or a party deposits its memories or considers the site to be an integral part of its identity.³

As I have already mentioned, Nora never defined precisely the notion of *lieux de mémoire*, nor was it his primary goal. He rather wanted to raise the awareness of the wealth of research strategies which can be used to investigate the diverse forms of the past’s continued existence in the present.

To capture the specificity of Nora’s proposals formulated in his early writings (in the beginning of the 1970s), *lieux de mémoire* should be translated rather into “sites of remembering” or “sites of memories,” or perhaps better yet as “sites where one remembers,” and not as “places of memory.” The concept of those “sites of remembering” or “sites of memory” is strongly rooted in two traditions. The first one is Maurice Halbwachs’s tradition of researching the social frames of collective memory. The investigation of “places of memories,” as outlined by Nora in the above mentioned article, is an analysis of the institutional frames of creating, upholding and transmitting the memory of the past. It is assumed here that specific shapes which the remembered past may take and its functions (social, cultural, political) depend largely upon the nature and the organization of groups, institutions and authorities become guides in the attempts to awaken it. In Nora’s earlier writings, one may also note a trace of a concept formulated explicitly some time later - I am referring here to the distinction between the “culture of memory” and the “culture of history.”⁴ The former, usually labeled in anthropology as “traditional cultures,” are characterized by spontaneous, superficial references to the past. The past is present in them naturally in a way, although it is not recognized as such because they lack categories allowing to distinguish the past from the present; in “cultures of memory,” the past and the

3 Pierre Nora, „Mémoire collective,” in *Faire de l’histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 401.

4 Nora’s distinction between the “culture of memory” and “culture of history” overlaps in its general outline with the distinction between the traditional and modern societies functioning in the theories of modernization.

present merge into one, ageless “now.” Nora contrasts “cultures of memory” with “cultures of history.” In the latter, the past is felt to be something decidedly different from the present. Cultures of history are characterized by a significant development dynamic and as such they pose a constant danger to the past. However, only the latter culture, Nora claims, can evaluate the past and only in those cultures can the past be subjected to the special techniques of commemoration. In one of Nora’s later works,⁵ places of memory refer to all practices (objects, organizations) whose main goal is to uphold (stimulate) the memory of the past. There has not been a serious continuation of this fascinating line of research on the memory of the past, as far as I am aware.

The second tradition consists of mnemonics employed by the ancient and medieval rhetoricians recalled by Frances Yates in *The Art of Memory*⁶, published in the 1960s. It is a book that Nora directly refers to, as he does to the ancient and medieval traditions it describes. Yates writes about the forgotten art of memory, common in antiquity and the Middle Ages. In the most general sense, it relied on imagining and remembering a certain layout of places, the architectural layout being one used most frequently for that purpose, although not the only one. Next, chosen and laid out elements of space (columns, capitals etc.) were assigned appropriate images which awoke in the memory certain facts whenever the need arose, Yates writes while referring to the writings of Quintilian. This applies to all places (*loci*) and regards them as custodians, capable of producing appropriate “deposits” (*imagines*)⁷. Propagating the art of memory, the ancients assumed that “the most complete pictures are formed in our minds of things that have been conveyed to them and imprinted to them by the senses, but the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight, and consequently perceptions received by the ears or by reflection can be most easily retained in the mind if they are also conveyed to our minds by the mediation of the eyes.”⁸

However, the theory on the “art of remembering” is not of great importance in the context of my investigation. I would like to simply point out that the old mnemonic practices of *imagines* and *loci* were independent from each other. Initially, the choice of particular “sites of memory” (*loci*) and locating within them particular images (*imagines*) was a matter of individual choice. The art

5 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History. Les lieux de mémoire,” *Representation* 26 (1989).

6 Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

7 Ibid., 2.

8 Yates, *Art of Memory*, 4, after the Loeb edition: Cicero, *De oratore*, II, lxxxvii, 357.

of memory was, as a result, nothing other than a technique used to improve remembering. In this initial phase (in ancient and medieval culture) the concept of “sites of memory” had little to do with any kind of historical culture (social/collective memory), as we cannot speak here of any culturally regulated referencing of the past.

We can speak of “sites of memory” as elements of historical culture only when the association of *loci* with particular elemental content (*imagines*) becomes culturally regulated, in other words when particular *loci* are associated only with some and not with any content elements (*imagines*). The degree of interpretative discipline may vary, in any case, depending on the broader cultural context: from a strict codification of contents ascribed to a particular place to situations when the only codified interpretative principle states that the place in question is a trace of the past.

“Sites of memory” can function only in those cultures which respect the notion that a certain object (to paraphrase Paul Ricœur) has “something to say to us” about the past. Put a little differently, acquiring the status of being a “place of memory” due to its compositional makeup results in a principle stating that in a given culture, the past is conveyed only through the accounts of eyewitnesses but also indirectly, through signs and symbols.

One could posit that in the light of the second tradition, the category of “sites of memory” can be understood as nothing other than symbols of a sort.⁹ Their specificity is related to at least two matters: the materiality of the media and the field (the past) they refer to. In the former case, the metaphorical “site of memory” accentuates the place, and in the latter, the past. The plentitude and diversity of research practices concerning sites of memory is rooted in the fact that some scholars tend to focus more on the referenced object (the past), while others focus on the way it is given to us (the site). Let us take a closer look at these two positions.

Few have noted the striking resemblance between the closing part of “Presentation” in the first volume of *Les lieux de mémoire* and the project of

9 I would like to stress that the interpretation of places of memory located within this tradition does not concern the one discussed before; in this case - in contrast to the former, no statement is made on the intentionality of commemoration. For Nora, this discrepancy is of no great importance. What results from his distinction into the “culture (epoch) of memory” and the “culture (epoch) of history” is an a priori assumption that in the 20th and 21st century culture, all references to the past are intentionally organized. It seems to be an assumption not only too far reaching but also heuristically unproductive, as it does not allow to capture the differences between decidedly diverse forms of intentional commemoration. I will return to this issue towards the end of this article.

iconology formulated several decades earlier by Erwin Panofsky.¹⁰ Nora proposes a program for analyzing various “sites of memory” understood as depositories of the past, researched with the method Panofsky suggests for examining works of art (at the level of iconological analysis). The editor of *Les lieux de mémoire* intended to sensitize scholars to the existence of numerous, usually overlooked depositories (sites) of the past. Simply using our imagination allows us to notice in chronicles and legal acts, not to mention language, art or poetry, the depositories (sites) of memory.

It is easy to notice that in this case the materiality of “sites” becomes an attribute of secondary importance. The “sites” in question can be understood metaphorically, as all sorts of signs and symbols attract attention as potential depositories of the past. I believe that such broadened use of the term “sites of memory” is justified if only for the fact that both the real (i.e. museums, statues, archives, temples, etc.) and the metaphorical “sites of memory” manifest the same properties: they are the property of particular social groups and they contain some or other values (ideas, norms, behavior patterns) important from the perspective of that group. The difference lies in the fact that for the former, “ownership” can be understood literally and entails the possibility of visiting such places, while in the latter case, people refer to metaphorical sites of memory as to one’s past.

Metaphorical “sites,” connoting spatiality, are poignant here. These, in the names of people (such as the Margrave of Greater Poland), events (September 1939) and cultural artifacts (The Last Supper), can become - like archeological sites - a source of never ending search, continuously revealing new, overlooked or underappreciated aspects of the past. This broad interpretation of “sites of memory” can be found in Nora’s later writing. This is also how in the early 1980s the author of this essay first encountered “sites of memory.”¹¹ However, such interpretation has its drawbacks too: its range becomes identical to that of notions such as the remembered past, collective memory, social memory, and so on. To avoid the unnecessary proliferation of terminology, I suggest that we use “sites of memory” only when events, people and cultural artifacts are seen in collective memory as depositories (symbols) of not one particular value, but of matters important to the community in general, as a “site” where one finds and can continue finding diverse values.

10 Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), Vol. 1, XIX-XXI.

11 Andrzej Szpociński, “Kanon historyczny,” *Studia Socjologiczne* 4 (1983): 129-146. See also Andrzej Szpociński, *Pzmiany obrazu przeszłości Polski. Analiza słuchowisk historycznych dla szkół podstawowych 1951-1984* (Warszawa: Instytut Socjologii UW, 1989).

Such interpretation of “sites of memory” assumes that they are fundamentally based on intergenerational bonds. Practices related to “re-visiting” (recollection can be viewed as a specific form of visitation) become then a form of remaining true to one’s ancestors and saving for future generations important values, ideas and behavioral patterns. To avoid a misunderstanding, let us stress that “staying true to one’s ancestors” does not have to (at least theoretically) be identical to respecting any element of their heritage in the contemporary world. “Staying true” and “in the memory of” may also signify the presence of this heritage as a context that co-creates the meaning of products and events in contemporary culture.

Factors leading to the transformation of “ordinary” events into “sites of memory” and the way these “sites” function have a historical character, being tied to a particular time and culture. A way of referencing the past discussed a moment ago is inevitably related to the culture of modernity, of “great narratives,” one dominated by a sense of linear time - that is time where the present is stretched between the past and the future, and all three elements are viewed as linked in one chain connected by causality. This culture of modernity is ceasing (or has already ceased) to dominate discussion in contemporary culture, although this remains debatable. Zygmunt Bauman, seen by some to be an unquestionable authority on the matters of culture, believes the disappearance of continuity to be an important feature of contemporary culture. “As the whole disperses into a series of ephemeral, randomly appearing and shifting islands, its temporality cannot be described with the category of linearity.” The category of *longue durée*, used as a temporal frame of reference for constructing “life projects,” both in the individual and collective dimension, ceases to be a useful tool.

One may disagree with Bauman’s radical theses but he does manage to capture (as others also do, in fact) an important aspect of contemporary culture: the shrinking of areas governed by a linear sense of time. The discontinuous nature and liquidity of social constructs; the temporary, mercurial character of all associations, groups and communities that individuals may belong to throughout their life; and finally the randomness of the identity shaping processes that from the start assume its temporariness and impermanence all stimulate the emergence of a culture where intergenerational bonds grow weaker and consequently disappear.

How is one to reconcile this observation (from which clearly follows that “sites of memory,” understood as intergenerational, lose their significance in contemporary culture) with the incredible popularity of research devoted to “sites of memory” among historians? The paradox of the situation is that this sudden surge coincides with the incontestability of tendencies undermining the cultural foundations upon which “sites of memory”

operate as “depositories” of the collective past (whether national, regional or supranational).

I believe a solution to this mystery can be found in the emergence, within the last twenty-five years or so, of new phenomena in culture, not to mention historical culture, and consequent shift in understanding of what “sites of memory” are. What I have in mind is the visualization and theatricalization of culture as well as cultural history, and the resulting visualization and theatricalization of “sites of memory.” All these phenomena emphasize, much more distinctly than older forms of interacting with the past, the spatial character of contemporary culture, and I would like to dwell on this issue a little longer.

By theatricalization I mean the ever increasing role of various kinds of happenings and performances in contemporary culture, and in historical culture in particular;¹² and by visualization, the phenomenon of domination by visual experience in the processes of transmitting and perceiving the past. Visualization and theatricalization of general culture have taken place mostly due to the improvements and expansion of visual technologies and tools. But apart from technological factors, the phenomenon was and is stimulated by equally important factors of a “purely” cultural nature. I would like to discuss those now in more detail.

Among the new tendencies of contemporary culture, one finds a phenomenon that I will refer to, for lack of a better term, as the *historization* of space. To characterize it, I must refer to the concept of the historical background conceptualized by Kazimierz Dobrowolski who defines it as a set of cultural artifacts from all fields of human activity which influences the behavior of the current generation.¹³ In everyday life, according to Dobrowolski, we rely on routine and habit. Consequently, we do not distinguish between the historical elements of background and the contemporary elements of the foreground.¹⁴ Their existence, function and influence can be discovered only by a professional equipped with appropriate knowledge – a historian, sociologist or an anthropologist. A historicized space can potentially function in opposition to its historical background, where the age of the elements

12 See Ewa Domańska, “«Zwrot performatywny» we współczesnej humanistyce,” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2007): 48–61.

13 For certain reasons, it is convenient to speak in such cases of the dominating role of “visual events” understood as all visual experiences where the consumers search for information, meaning or pleasure (see Konrad Chmielecki, “Przedmiot – Światło – Powierzchnia,” *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 4/50 (2006): 134.

14 Kazimierz Dobrowolski, *Studia z pogranicza historii i socjologii* (Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1967), 9–10.

constituting the historical background, whether of great or little value, is communicated ostentatiously.

Generally speaking, the goal of the professional is to reveal (and communicate) the temporal dimension of reality by the appropriate management of space. In everyday existence, spatiality (i.e. the spatial dimension of reality) is experienced without much interference, unlike temporality. In the latter dimension, there is no ordering principle. This can be seen most clearly looking at information conveyed by various media: the presented reality is a set of unrelated moments. In audiovisual transmissions (especially in news broadcasts) our attention focuses on events for just a moment and then shifts to something equally important or non-important. There is a strict dependence between the structure of time and the capacity (or lack thereof) to view certain states of things as important. One could posit that these are, in fact, two sides of the same phenomenon. A culture that operates only on the basis of a "short timeframe" – understood as a sequence of consecutive unrelated moment, even if it allows for distinguishing between what is more or less significant – allows for only a short-sighted perspective on what is "important" for a moment, "important" in relation to other ongoing phenomena, if at all. This relation works also the other way around (an assumption that must be made if one also assumes that the categories which organize our perception of the world are not an innate quality of our minds, but are cultural in character): culture that can offer only goods destined for quick consumption allows for the disintegration of the concept of time based on *longue durée*. This connection between the dissolution of the latter conception of time and the saturation of contemporary culture with products destined for "quick consumption" was aptly captured by Jean Baudrillard who rightly relates this phenomenon to the popularization of audiovisual mass communication:

The development of the media is precisely this fascinating format [...] which finally suspends meaning in limbo [...] Events no longer have their own space-time; they are immediately captured in universal diffusion, and there they lose their meanings, they lose their references and their time-space so that they are neutralized. And from this point on, all that is left is a kind of 'neutered' passion, a stupefaction in front of the sequences, the events, the messages, etc.¹⁵

A moment later he observes that society is no longer interested in the production of things: "it's a society where we are haunted and fascinated by the

15 Jean Baudrillard, *Baudrillard Live. Selected Interviews*, ed. Mike Gane (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 85.

disappearance.”¹⁶ Historicization of space is a practice oriented at the opposite direction, a resistance to the phenomena described by the author of *Simulacra and Simulation*.

One could posit that the discussed “artifacts of no importance” – old wall pieces, cobblestones, street signs – becoming depositories of the past, serve one more important cultural and social function. Their very presence invokes a sense of the past, continuing and passing, while at the same time stimulating emotions resulting from a sense of connection with those who used to live here, who walked the same streets, touched the same door knobs, read the same signs, with people who are long gone and who we know nothing else about. The protagonist of Wiesław Myśliwski’s novel confesses:

Come to think of it, what a multitude of human looks, sighs, heartbeats, touches, moments of sadness and [...] exhilaration and joy must all those furniture pieces, all those objects contain [...] Or all their words, just think about it. All of it gone now. But is it really gone? Take a mortar and pestle [...] they spoke to me when I touched them. I just couldn’t hear it.

A community created around such defined “sites of memory” is special, requiring no mass conformism from its members; no authorization is necessary to enter or leave it and neither act is threatened with a sanction; and a community of that kind resembling the nomadic ones described by Bauman, however fleeting, may be the only kind of community that a citizen of the globalized world wants (or can) be seriously part of.

Happenings and performances serve a similar function – that of creating nomadic communities. Historical culture of almost the entire 20th century was an intellectual culture in the sense that it consisted of the past locked in legends, stories and books, that is in signs that needed to be somehow interpreted. Experiencing the past was largely an act of reading the meanings (values, ideas, behavioral patterns) pertaining to events, objects and people. This type of historical sensitivity, even if not entirely gone, competes today with an experience of the past where it is the senses and not the intellect that play an important role. The past experienced through happenings (in contrast to the past experienced intellectually) cannot be clearly translated to behavioral patterns or norms in the contemporary world. Its basic function – apart from providing aesthetic experiences – is to enable participation in a community, particularly the community of those who participate in the happening performance. Happenings can also, to a degree, create a sense of

16 Ibid., 85.

connection to those whose stories they tell, although this does not seem to be a necessary condition.

One can conclude that visualization and theatricalization of historical culture are stimulated not only by the development of technology and devices registering and transmitting information, but also through strong, inherently cultural factors. I believe (to return to something mentioned at the beginning of this article) that both the incredible popularity of research described as investigating “sites of memory” and the popularity of the term itself have the same source. Twenty-five years ago, when I presented the concept of “sites of memory” (related to Nora’s), the article provoked criticism from Antonina Kłoskowska who had not only expert knowledge but also an excellent sense for scholarly debate. Kłoskowska, along with several other academics objected to the spatial connotation of the term, which was why no one wrote on sites of memory at the time - what was investigated instead was “historical awareness,” “collective” or “social memory,” “memory of the past,” and the like. Several significant changes needed to take place in culture for the investigation of various forms of collective memory to be labeled “sites of memory.” Considering the factors discussed above, the term perfectly corresponds to the conscious (and frequently only anticipated) hopes and fears of not only the academic community, but the broader reading audience.

Undertaking research on “collective memory,” the anthropologist or the sociologist is often under an obligation to justify the need for such research. Employing the term “sites of memory” instead to label such research, with its clearly spatial connotations, would forego the need for justification, as its merits would be obvious to both academic circles and the broader reading audience. All of this reveals the degree to which the everyday has been dominated by an exposure to the spatial aspect of culture.

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Landscapes of Postmemory

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Perturbing Names

Various perturbing geographical names always come up in my mind in the same gloomy, stubborn, and intrusive fashion. Suffice that I am to move from any point A to any point B. For other travellers, who are equipped with better histories than I am, these names are but invisible. Names displayed on plat-forms move casually behind the window, between one sip of white coffee in a bar carriage and the next. Eyes slide on their surface, with no subtexts received.

M. Tulli, *Italian Stiletto*¹

Post-Holocaust topography in the above quoted passage from Magdalena Tulli's text seems to be devoid of any landmarks or clear-cut demarcation lines. One could divide it, in any chosen way, into an infinite number of segments with arbitrarily named end points: A and B. In this space, one should travel by train, yet not all travellers will see the same things through the window. The monotonous landscape without any defining qualities gets delaminated at times, revealing to the chosen ones its perturbing layers. These views are not defined by any distinguishing landscape, nor do they attract attention by presenting something exceptional or threatening; in fact, it would be impossible to recognise them without a verbal hint. What attracts the attention of some travellers,

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1 Magdalena Tulli, *Włoskie szpilki* (Warszawa: Nisza, 2011), 66.

what makes their heads turn and their bodies shiver are the geographical names – they introduce difference into the topographical homogeneity, and tear away the safe screen of the redundant landscape. For some, between any point A and B, where A is the departure and B the destination, an unknown is always in hiding, an *x* waiting for the equation to be solved. However, not everyone will be distracted by the view of a white sign with black letters, nor will they be provoked to throw a suspicious look on the view outside. The second layer of a given landscape is visible only to a few, and Tulli makes quite clear the nature of this distinction: delamination of cognition is not determined by any exceptional sensibility or acuity of the viewer; what uncovers the unknown, what lets one see an empty spot in the passage of meadows and hills is the heritage of the “cursed chest,” “the legacy”² of the Holocaust past. The eyes of those equipped with better histories move casually on the surface, “with no subtexts received,” while the eyes of those whose present is marked by a traumatic past will repeatedly stumble upon “perturbing names.”

In Tulli’s novel, those who discern the dark undertones of the peaceful landscape are descendants of Jews, Holocaust survivors, representatives of the generation of postmemory. The scenes that provide this specific experience of landscape are the “bloodlands” of eastern Central Europe,³ a location of events that inherited memory is trying to rework. It is a “mythical territory «further to the East»,”⁴ marked by sites of collective and individual death, where, however, “there is no longer anything there to see,”⁵ as traces of historical catastrophes have sunk into the ordinary landscape of hills, forests and meadows. These territories, viewed from a posttraumatic perspective and constituting both its grounds and condition, create a particular phenomenon: landscapes of Holocaust postmemory. As I will try to show, landscapes of postmemory, construed both as a spatial disposition of an area that works as a correlative of historical experience, and as cultural representation (mostly photographic, cinematic, and literary), help rethink two problems that are crucial for studies on memory and trauma. Firstly, the spatial dimension of memory and the significance of place/landscape for the experience of postmemory; secondly,

2 Ibid., 76, 64.

3 See Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

4 Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence. The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002), 72.

5 Georges Didi-Huberman, “The Site, Despite Everything,” in *Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah. Key Essays*, ed. Stuart Liebman (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 114.

a reinterpretation of the archive of visual clichés related to representations of spaces marked by historical trauma, and hence identifying elements of this “traumatic” canon, its dynamic and cultural origin. As I will attempt to prove, in landscapes construed as figures of representation and as a cognitive matrix, categories of seeing and categories of space form especially interesting patterns and open new perspectives for an answer to the question of how we see the Holocaust.

The above mentioned geographical names, which abound in Polish landscapes and perturb some travellers in Tulli’s prose, should be given a closer look for yet one more reason. White signs with black letters, placed among meadows and hills, seem to have an unclear semiotic nature. If one tried to put them into one of Peirce’s three categories,⁶ one would quickly find them avoiding any attempts at labelling. Firstly, the perturbing white signs are indexically linked with places that had recently been sites of camps, ghettos, and pogroms. Indexes, or signs that “establish their meaning along the axis of physical relationship to their referents,”⁷ are tangibly related to what they refer to. In her analysis, Rosalind Krauss links indexes with Jakobson’s shifters that take on meaning in a deictic gesture, and are “inherently «empty», its signification [...] guaranteed by the existential presence of just this object.”⁸ Signs with names of sites of slaughter, recognised only by the descendants of the persecuted, locate their meaning in this very physical bond, with their roots in the place where they were installed. Their meaning is played out in a dialectical tension, cutting through a monotonous landscape, revealing its second layer anchored in the past, thus singling out previously undistinguishable geographical spots. On the other hand, their meaning cannot be realised anywhere else. It is topographically immobilised, ingrained in the very materiality of the Polish landscape. However, elements described in *Italian Stilettos* allow for a different interpretation as well. Seen from a train window, the white signs in the Polish landscape evoke cultural memories of a still from Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, a scene where as viewers we participate in a newly staged situation of a packed train arriving at the station in Treblinka. The still from the film, showing the conductor Henryk Gawkowski leaning from the locomotive in the backdrop of a sign saying “Treblinka” and the view of a spring landscape,

6 See Charles Sanders Peirce, “Logic as Semiotics: The Theory of Signs,” in *Philosophic Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).

7 Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Part 1,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1987), 198.

8 Ibid., 206.

has become one of the iconic images of the Holocaust⁹ and works as one of the “memory cues”¹⁰ which immediately refer us to a combination of facts and meanings collected under the umbrella term “Holocaust.”¹¹ Therefore, the iconic nature of this image, which looks like what it refers to, takes on symbolic potential (forming meaning by an arbitrary link between sign and referent) – a sign with the name of a site of slaughter does not only refer to a certain point on the map, but also refers to all other similar locations, and the linguistic nature of this medium only enhances semiotic interpretation.



Still from *Shoah*

It is this very oscillation between contrasting dynamics of meaning that invests the category of postmemory landscape with interpretative

9 See David Bathrick, “Introduction: Seeing Against the Grain: Re-visualizing the Holocaust,” in *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. David Bathrick, Brad Prager, Michael David Richardson (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 1.

10 A term coined by Barbie Zelizer, see her *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

11 This still is usually used on the cover of most editions of the film.

potential: they indexically refer to the events that took place at these sites, they iconically-symbolically expand the visual repository of “memory cues,” and finally, they redefine the notion of the traumatic.

Concentration Camp as a Site?

A disturbing experience of space is a common element of the Holocaust survivors' camp experience. In their memoirs, they refer to death camps as non-sites, unrecognisable landscapes, removed from a known territory by long journeys in a closed windowless train carriage.¹² What is clear in the attempts at working through the trauma of war is that the possibility of processes of memory and mourning depends on imbedding the traumatic experience in a concrete space. The experience of a camp as a place is inherently fractured, displaced and makes impossible any identification with the territory where events took place. The Holocaust brings a complete destruction of what the survivors identified as place; equally broken are memories of home from before the war – images of pre-war reality petrify in schematic, faded descriptions and are devoid of any dynamics.¹³

The dislocated experience of space during the Holocaust has resulted in a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenology and the dynamics of sites of memory in various fields of the humanities, working as a negative point of reference for these interpretations. For Geoffrey Hartmann, who conceptualised the notion of the memory of place on the basis of his analysis of Wordsworth's poetry, it constitutes a space transformed in the processes of recalling and describing past emotional states, which gains temporal consciousness.¹⁴ Although Hartmann relates this term also to sites that witnessed the subject's traumatic experiences, an attempt to apply it in analysing places of the Shoah

12 See for example Ruth Klüger's account: “Concentration camp as a memorial site? Landscape, seascape – there should be a word like *timescape* to indicate the nature of a place in time, that is, at a certain time, neither before nor after.” “We passed summer camp for youngsters. I saw a boy in the distance energetically waving a large flag. [...] I still see myself rushing past him: I see him and he doesn't see me, for I am inside the train. But perhaps he sees the train. Passing trains fit into the image of such a landscape (part photography, part illusion); they convey a pleasant sense of wanderlust, the urge to travel. It was the same train for both of us, the same landscape, too, yet the same for retina only – for the mind, two irreconcilable sights.” Ruth Klüger, *Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (London: Bloomsbury 2004), 73, 134.

13 See Anne Whitehead, “Geoffrey Hartmann and the Ethics of Place: Landscape, Memory, Trauma,” *European Journal of English Studies* 7(3) (2003): 288.

14 See Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 49.

proves futile – radical negativity of the spatial experience of camps makes the category (strictly Romantic in origin) impossible to be applied elsewhere. For Pierre Nora, the meaning of *lieux de mémoire* is mostly based on their community-forming potential, since they are points in space around which collective memory is organised. However, Holocaust sites are deprived of this positive value – they are rather *non-lieux de mémoire* as Claude Lanzmann describes them – residues of trauma and disrupted experience.¹⁵ Finally, Nora's analyses are used by James E. Young as a theoretical framework for his discussion of Holocaust memorial sites, focusing mainly on museum practices which, instead of creating active spaces of memory and working through trauma, often become more like agents fetishising objects, and sources of victimisation of Holocaust survivors.¹⁶

Therefore, analyses of the spatial dimension of the Holocaust experience have been dominated by interpretations of specific sites of the Shoah: concentration camps, ghettos, sites of slaughter, as well museums and other forms of memorialising. In the minds of witnesses, landscapes of the Shoah are often identified with death camps that they can remember to the minutest detail.¹⁷ The usual elements of gate, barracks, guard towers and barbed wire, especially as related by former camp prisoners who visit them later on as tourists, form a kind of affective "micro-geography," an active landscape that lets one face the trauma of the past again.¹⁸

Landscape as Memory

The experiential disruption of space of concentration camp prisoners characterises also the experience of the so-called second generation – the descendants of Holocaust survivors, who spend their childhood and youth in the shadow of their parents' traumatic memories. They are connected with

15 For a comprehensive phenomenological analysis of non-sites of memory and its history as a category see: Roma Sendyka, "Pryzma – zrozumieć nie-miejsce pamięci," *Teksty Drugie* 1–2 (2013). See also Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989); Dominick LaCapra, "Lanzmann's *Shoah*: Here There Is No Why," in *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

16 See Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 52; James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

17 See Baer's remark: "Trauma survivors may recall a particular place or area in great detail without being able to associate it with the actual event," *Spectral Evidence*, 79.

18 See Tim Cole, "Crematoria, Barracks, Gateway: Survivors' Return Visits to the Memory Landscapes of Auschwitz," *History and Memory* 25 (2) (2013).

their parents' history by the dynamic link which Marianne Hirsch calls post-memory: an active form of memory whose relation with the past is mediated not by remembering, but by the work of imagination, projection and creation, an inter-generational structure through which traumatic experiences recur. When this generation of postmemory is denied access to family history, they experience this exclusion in the spatial realm as well; for the children of Holocaust survivors, no place mentioned by their parents is in fact accessible – neither death camps, hideouts and escape routes, nor mythical hometowns from before the war. Hirsch writes that “«home» is always elsewhere, even for those who return to Vienna, Berlin, Paris, or Cracow, because the cities to which they can return are no longer those in which their parents had lived as Jews before the genocide, but are instead the cities where the genocide happened and from which they and their memory have been expelled.”¹⁹ Similar exclusion is experienced by descendants of Jews who decided to stay in places that were the settings of their youth and torments of the war – as in the quoted passage from Magdalena Tulli's *Italian Stiletos*, the postmemory experience of space is of a powerfully ambivalent nature, and attempts at dealing with the parents' past are complicated by fact that very often the children's Jewish identity remains a family secret.²⁰

Nevertheless, the second generation's disturbed, negative experience of space is marked by a kind of shift; while in the case of their parents, the landscape of camps or the inaccessible spaces of pre-war cities and towns serve as topographical points of reference, postmemory narratives and artistic projects are devoid of any stable geography. For the second generation, the space of the Holocaust becomes much more heterogenic: it is mediated by incomplete accounts of their parents, often made taboo or mythologised through nostalgic stories, and it spreads across a much wider territory than the indexical and actual memories of parents.

Scholars examining literary and artistic representations of the experience of space in works of artists who belong to the postmemory generation usually draw attention to the robust identity-forming nature of such works and their focus on the audience. Following Simon Schama's intuition, according to whom landscape is a formation deeply rooted in processes of memory and imagination,²¹ Anne Whitehead interprets post-Holocaust landscapes described in Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* as the “gradual sedimentation

19 Marianne Hirsch, “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile,” *Poetics Today* 17(4) (1996): 662.

20 See autobiographies of Ewa Kuryluk, Magdalena Tulli, Agata Tuszyńska, Bożena Keff.

21 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana Press, 1996).

of memory.”²² The materiality of geological forms, where memory is stored, supports the process of creating new posttraumatic identities for the protagonists. Jenni Adams reads landscape in postmemory narratives (again *Fugitive Pieces* and *The Winter Vault* by A. Michaels, *Wou le souvenir d'enfance* by G. Perec) with a similar lens, looking at these works for “therapeutic linkings of memory and space.”²³ In her interpretation, landscape plays, for the descendants of victims of historical catastrophes, a positive, consoling role as a screen onto which the protagonists project traumatic memories, and which becomes a substitute for memory.²⁴ Thus construed, landscape has a causative, process-based nature that enables it to interact with the experiencing subject – it oscillates between being the landscape *of* memory and the landscape *as* memory.²⁵

This approach of understanding landscape as an active agent of experience and memory is taken up by Brett Ashley Kaplan in *Landscapes of Holocaust Postmemory*. The landscape of postmemory is rooted in the memory of Holocaust survivors, a constantly shrinking demographic, and its role is that of an “unstable witness” of events.²⁶ Kaplan links the terms “landscape,” “Holocaust” and “postmemory” in casual semantic arrangements; landscape in her interpretation loses its strictly geographic or spatial nature, serving as an anthropological frame for discussing the history of a Nazi holiday resort in Obersalzberg, Holocaust-related photographs (including those taken by the American correspondent Lee Miller documenting the liberation of the camps in Buchenwald and Dachau, Susan Silas’s postmemory work *Helmbrechts Walk*, Collier Schorr’s postmodernist images of the Nazis), and finally the meaning of the word “Holocaust” in J.M. Coetzee’s work and its dissemination in contemporary culture. Kaplan understands the spatial category in a double sense – as a geographical space and its representation,

22 Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 61.

23 Jenni Adams, “Cities Under a Sky of Mud: Landscapes of Mourning in Holocaust Texts,” in *Land and Identity: Theory, Memory, and Practice*, ed. Christine Berberich and Neil Campbell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 146.

24 *Ibid.*, 154.

25 Distinction introduced by Susanne Küchler; cited in Katharina Schramm, “Landscapes of Violence: Memory and Sacred Space,” *History and Memory* 23 (1) (2011): 8. See also Susanne Küchler, “Landscape as Memory: The Mapping of Process and Its Representation in a Melanesian Society,” in *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, ed. Barbara Bender (Providence, RI and Oxford: Berg, 1993), 85–106.

26 Brett Ashley Kaplan, *Landscapes of Holocaust Postmemory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 2, 4.

taking as his subject of research the “geographical and psychological landscapes of the after-effects of the Nazi genocide.”²⁷ The other two terms get similarly dispersed: postmemory is understood here very broadly, as a type of collective cultural memory which is a repository of images of a “multinational landscape of the Holocaust,”²⁸ where the Holocaust itself becomes a global phenomenon, circulating both in discursive as well as geographical space.

What the above mentioned analyses also share is a conclusion that the spatial experience of the generation of postmemory is characterised by the incongruence of the observed landscape – the “misleading air of normalcy”²⁹ clashing with the knowledge of the events that happened in it. The landscape of postmemory is often an indistinguishable non-site of memory, where natural processes have covered the traces of tragic history, rather than a museologically preserved space of former camps. “Holocaust commemoration is not site-specific,”³⁰ writes Ulrich Baer. Locating the phenomenon of landscapes of postmemory within the pictorial tradition of landscape, Baer analyses two photographs taken by artists of the second generation: a picture showing an inconspicuous space, previously the Sobibór camp grounds, taken by Dirk Reinartz (part of the project *Deathly Still: Pictures of Former Concentration Camps*, 1995) and a similar picture of Nordlager Ohrdruf by Mikael Levin (part of *War Story*, 1996). Baer traces the tension between the artists’ romantic convention of landscape, which deludes with its explicit aura, seemingly positioning the viewer as a subject and point of reference for the observed landscape; and the exclusion of the viewer from the represented space by the implicit historicity of photography as a genre. As viewers, we have a feeling that our sight is called to identify what we already know, yet we have no access to events that the pictures seem to refer to, and the only referent is absence and emptiness that we are forced to confront. Therefore, images of landscapes of memory require the viewer to consciously reflect not only on what is being seen, but also on the how and when, and the ambivalent nature of photographs both protects us from the traumatic impact of the past, as well as exposes us to its power.

In her essay on the nature of non-sites of memory, Roma Sendyka points to the fact that Baer, in his analysis of works by Reinhard and Levin, remains in the idiom of aesthetic, modernist interpretations of singular and unique

27 Ibid., 1.

28 Ibid., 5.

29 Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, 78.

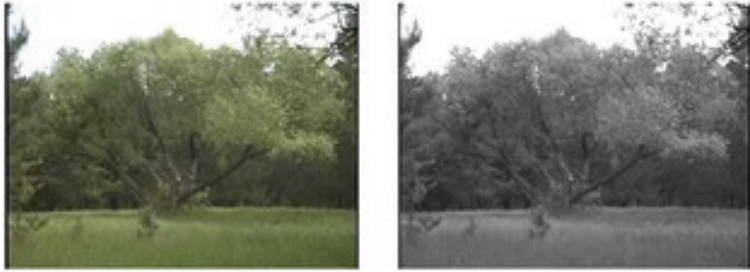
30 Ibid., 83.

black-and-white pictures, thus sacrificing the singularity and authenticity of the photographed sites and their relation with surrounding nature.³¹ Indeed, the monochromatic aesthetics of these works needs to be taken into account – especially if contrasted with Susan Silas's series of video works showing still images from four death camps: Treblinka, Bełżec, Chełmno, and Sobibór.³² The coloured video image showing grass covered parts of no longer existing camps is gradually de-saturated, and the sound of birds replaced with the sound of moving tape. This sound, added to go along with the image in postproduction, quickly changes into a metallic noise that evokes a sense of threat. In her films, Silas deconstructs what works as an unstated premise of Levin's and Reinhard's works: namely that the visual experience of the Holocaust is grounded in a common knowledge of certain codes of representation and based on a repertory of easily recognisable clichés and mental shortcuts. It is only the decoloured still, now so similar to photographs analysed by Baer, that is endowed with qualities making it readable as a representation of the Shoah. Similarly, the accompanying sound of the projector – monotonous, malicious – makes one realise the basic source of the commonly shared images of "what the Holocaust looks like," namely the reproduced images of newsreel and press photos made by American and British correspondents. Finally, the immobile frame that characterises Silas's four films, capturing seemingly insignificant piece of landscape, helps recognise yet one more visual trope: long panoramic shots known from Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. As I will try to prove in the following parts of this text, despite the director's heatedly voiced protests, they establish a separate genre of iconic representations of the Shoah.

While the above quoted accounts focus on the indexical nature of landscapes of postmemory stemming from the subject's personal experience (both the secondary witness, as well as the viewer or reader), Silas's work helps identify the other side of these spatio-representational dispositions: the iconicity of some representations of post-Holocaust space, and their deep embedment in the network of pictorial and literary tropes and traditions.

³¹ Sendyka, *Pryzma*, 327–328.

³² Films were recorded in 1998 and exhibited at Coolay Memorial Gallery in Portland. Information in Dora Apel, *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 219. See the video work online, accessed January 22, 2014, <http://www.susansilas.com/video/untitled-may-2001.html>



Stills from Susan Silas's *Untitled (May 11-14, 1998)* 2001: Sobibór

The Traumatic Canon

As Barbie Zelizer emphasises, “the Holocaust’s visualisation is so prevalent that it has become an integral part of our understanding and recollection of the atrocities of World War II.”³³ The visual archive of the Holocaust has been extensively analysed and catalogued: despite the common insistence on the fundamentally unrepresentable nature of the Shoah, it seems to remain a decidedly imaginable event. What is more, it is evoked by means of roughly a dozen clichés circulating incessantly in the cultural milieu, whose provenance however remains somewhat unclear: the boy from the Warsaw ghetto, Buchenwald prisoners staring straight at the camera, the gate of Auschwitz, piles of shoes, glasses and women’s hair, and finally the train arriving at Treblinka. Images supposedly representing the atrocities of the Second World War work in our memory “like a familiar sequence of musical notes that seems to appear from nowhere.”³⁴ The status of Holocaust photographs as indexical signs of what happened, physically linked with the past as a “result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface,”³⁵ as material traces of „that-has-been,”³⁶ is replaced by a conviction that due to incessant circulation, these images have reached a point of saturation,³⁷ and their authenticity and role as efficient markers of the past have been exhausted. These photographs have lost their spatial specificity and impact, and

33 Barbie Zelizer, “Introduction: On Visualizing the Holocaust,” in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London: The Athlone Press, 2001), 1.

34 Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 2.

35 Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Part 1,” 203.

36 See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 77, 85.

37 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

have become merely iconic representations that work as “memory cues” and “representations without substance”³⁸ – pictures showing the liberation of Dachau, Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald (whose circulation in culture has been meticulously analysed by Barbie Zelizer) powering the imagery of the Holocaust up to the 1980s, as well as the still operating iconography of Auschwitz as a symbol of the “Holocaust as a whole.”³⁹ These images, referred to by Vicky Goldberg as “secular icons,”⁴⁰ gain symbolic status because they refer not only to their physical referents, but also to the entire set of images and beliefs about the Holocaust. Memory cues work like a short circuit, an automatic recalling that refers one to superficial knowledge, with no embedding in an affective or ethical relation. Hence, iconisation of photographs of the Holocaust is interpreted as a negative phenomenon at least for two reasons: firstly, their repetitiveness and routinisation anaesthetises us to cruelty, blunts our sensibility, and the sterile, closed images make the suffering they are supposed to attest to quite invisible. Secondly, what has been selected for mass circulation after the war has been but a small fragment of vast photographic material. The small bunch of pictures, now deprived of their original context, have completely lost their contingent and singular nature. Iconic representations reduce the individual and the personal to the abstract, the non-particular, and the widely accessible form. In *After Such Knowledge*, Eva Hoffman states that “through literature and film, through memoirs and oral testimony, these components of horror became part of a whole generation’s store of imagery and narration, the icons and sagas of the post-Holocaust world. In retrospect, and as knowledge about the Holocaust has grown, we can see that every survivor has lived through a mythical trial, an epic, an odyssey.”⁴¹

It needs to be noted that this reduced inventory of Holocaust representations whose negative anaesthetic role is emphasised by Sontag, Zelizer and Hartman, consists of numerous images of strictly spatial nature. According

38 Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 200, 202. See also Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 152.

39 On the change of paradigm in images of the Holocaust see Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust. From Auschwitz to Schindler. How History Is Bought, Packed and Sold* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

40 Vicky Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991); cited in Cornelia Brink, “Secular Icons,” *History and Memory* 12 (1) (2000): 137.

41 Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge. Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2004), 12.

to Marianne Hirsch, they constitute a “radically delimited”⁴² visual landscape of postmemory, whose repetitiveness, as she suggests, in the case of the next two generations, does not have to be “an instrument of fixity or paralysis or simple retraumatisation, as it often is for survivors of trauma, but a mostly helpful vehicle of transmitting an inherited traumatic past in such a way that it can be worked through.”⁴³ It is possible thanks to the postmemory practices of repetition, displacement, and decontextualisation, which reclaim the authentic “traumatic effect” of photography, exposing the viewers anew to the disturbing work of the past, at the same time allowing for the processes of mourning and reintegration. Hirsch claims this is the essence of practices of artists belonging to the second generation, who make iconic representations of the Holocaust part of their collage-based work (Lorie Novak, Muriel Hasbun, Art Spiegelman), thus reclaiming their original authentic potential in the new context of a landscape of postmemory. Picture-collages form a peculiar relation with their viewers, one that Hirsch – following Margaret Olin – calls a performative index, an index of identification, with its power based on emotions, desires and needs of the viewer, rather than on the actual “that-has-been” of photography.⁴⁴ Similar conclusions are reached by Cecilia Brink, who in her analysis of “secular icons” states that “photographs install an ordered transition from paralysis to revival.”⁴⁵

Alison Landsberg seems to seek a comforting interpretation of the proliferation of Holocaust clichés as well. Prosthetic memories, as she refers to them, mass produced and distributed,⁴⁶ have the power to evoke empathy and widen the experience of people who do not own them, as well as offer access to knowledge often impossible to gain through traditional cognitive means.⁴⁷

42 Marianne Hirsch, “Surviving Images,” in *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 107.

43 Ibid., 108.

44 See Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” in *The Generation of Postmemory*, 48. See also Margaret Olin, *Touching Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

45 Brink, *Secular Icons*, 147.

46 See Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 20.

47 Ibid., 113.

Images Without Imagination

There is yet another debate unfolding parallel to the discussion on the increasing anaesthetisation of visual representations of the Holocaust. Its main postulate is the inherently unimaginable and unrepresentable nature of the Holocaust and, what follows, its unknowable and incomprehensible aspect. According to some scholars, the enormity of the Nazi crime and the destruction of the majority of evidence determine the fact that the Shoah is an absolutely unique event, beyond history, and any attempt at representing it would mean an attempt to create an "image of the unimaginable."⁴⁸ The aesthetic ban of mimesis in the case of the Shoah (thus interpreting Adorno's famous statement on the impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz) is, in a quasi-religious interpretation, linked with the Biblical taboo of image production from the second commandment, the so-called *Bilderverbot*⁴⁹, and hence located in a moral context. Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) – because of the director's refusal to use any archival materials, relying instead solely on the testimony of victims, witnesses and perpetrators of Nazi genocide – has worked as a central point of reference for this discussion since the year it was produced. As Dominick LaCapra has persuasively explained, Lanzmann's *Bilderverbot* is closely linked with a different kind of taboo: namely *Warumverbot*, or the ban on asking "why"⁵⁰ – thus identifying any attempt at comprehending the Shoah with breaking a moral ban, and placing the event itself in the realm of an unknowable sacrum. According to the director, *Shoah* is firstly, "not at all representational";⁵¹ secondly, it "is not made to communicate bits of information, but tells everything."⁵² According to Lanzmann, the former postulate is achieved by avoidance of any cinematic realism, as well as refraining

48 Term of Gertrud Koch. See "The Aesthetic Transformation of the Image of the Unimaginable: Notes on Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*," trans. Jamie Owen Daniel and Miriam Hansen, *October* 48 (Spring, 1989): 21.

49 See Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (2) (1996): 300–302; Karyn Ball, "For and Against the *Bilderverbot*: The Rhetoric of 'Unrepresentability' and Remediated 'Authenticity' in the German Reception of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*," in *Visualizing the Holocaust*, 163–185.

50 See LaCapra, *Lanzmann's Shoah*, 100.

51 Claude Lanzmann, Ruth Larson, David Rodowick, "Seminar with Claude Lanzmann," *Yale French Studies* (1990): 97.

52 Claude Lanzmann, "Le monument contre l'archive? (entretien avec Daniel Bounoux, Régis Debray, Claude Mollard et al.)," *Les Cahiers de médiologie* 11 (2007): 274; cited in: Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane Brendan Lillis (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 96.

from using any archival material documenting the Shoah.⁵³ Lanzmann refers to archival photographs calling them “images without imagination,” as they offer an incomplete, fragmentary image of the Holocaust, based mainly on pictures of concentration camps such as Buchenwald or Dachau, while the undocumented slaughter of European Jews took place in smaller death camps: Chełmno, Treblinka, Sobibór, Bełżec. Lanzmann opposes these images with his cinematic “monument,” the word (i.e. oral testimony) as his warrant.⁵⁴

Significantly, the oral testimony in *Shoah* is accompanied with visual material that is not limited to mere documentation of interviews conducted by the director. A separate sub-genre in Lanzmann's film, serving as a background for oral accounts, includes long shots of rail tracks, trains, the speakers' surroundings, finally – empty landscapes, often devoid of any clear geographical identity.

Stylised Unrepresentability

The extended shots of forests, clearings, meadows, and field roads spread across the entire nine-hour-long film. Usually appearing when a witness speaks about a death camp destroyed by the Nazis, they make visible what Lanzmann called a *non-lieux*, and Didi-Huberman – a site *par excellence*, a site despite everything.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it is impossible to define the role of the motionless images in each particular case – very often, they are not related directly to the story that is being told, and their work consists in both distracting and attracting the viewers' attention. When one follows the slow movement of the camera, the witness's voice is somehow detached from the person and one needs a moment to remember who is actually speaking. Sometimes remaining nameless, the stories of different camps echo in empty landscapes, making their image powerfully cast in memory. Yet, it is difficult to say what has actually been remembered as the repetitiveness and similarity of these views makes it impossible to list any distinguishable features: a field, a dark line of the forest, a clearing surrounded by trees, a path in the fields bordered by bunches of dry grass. Though Lanzmann dismisses

53 See Debates that Lanzmann participated in: on realism in *Schindler's List* and pictures taken by Sonderkommando, interpreted by Georges Didi-Huberman and included in the exhibition catalogue “Mémoire des camps. Photographies des camps de concentration et d'extermination nazis, 1933-1999.” See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, Hansen, “Schindler's List Is Not Shoah,” Ball, “For and Against the “Bilderverbot,” Claude Lanzmann, “Why Spielberg Has Distorted the Truth,” *Guardian Weekly* April 3, 1994.

54 Didi-Huberman, *Images in spite of All*, 94.

55 See Didi-Huberman, *The Site, despite Everything*, 114, 115; Sendyka, *Pryzma*, 325.

“images without imagination,” images of the Shoah from archival materials preserved in viewers’ memory, he creates at the same time his own aesthetics of “stylised unrepresentability.”⁵⁶



Still from *Shoah* (Treblinka)

It is largely a topographical stylisation, where incomplete, traumatic narratives infect the observed space, forcing one to look for symptoms of history, and to gaze suspiciously at the calm landscape. “It’s hard to see how the faces captured on the *Shoah* film could escape the status of «iconic» images,” states Didi-Huberman.⁵⁷ Indeed, seemingly Lanzmann’s trademark, this aesthetic is all but unprecedented: *Shoah*’s empty, frozen landscapes resemble equally still and heavy stills from Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog*. Made in 1955, the film begins with a famous shot of a calm Polish landscape, with a voiceover commentary written by Jean Cayrol: “Even a tranquil landscape, even a prairie with crows flying [...] can lead very simply to a concentration camp. [...] Today, on the same track, it is a daylight and the sun is shining.”⁵⁸ If Resnais’s

⁵⁶ See Ball, “For and Against the *Bilderverbot*,” 168.

⁵⁷ Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 126.

⁵⁸ Jean Cayrol, *Nuit et brouillard* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 17, 21; cited in Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 129.

heterogenic work, which combines an immobile “haunted” landscape with archival material from a newsreel, were to be seen as a source of two parallel idioms of imagining the Holocaust, Lanzmann appears as a faithful follower of the former, “non-representational” line. *Shoah*’s influence, and Lanzmann’s position within the discourse of representation of the Holocaust, contributed to the preservation of this way of seeing the space of the Shoah, a paradigm crucial for the experience of landscape by the generation of postmemory.



Still from *Night and Fog*

However, to provide a fuller picture of this experience, one needs to take a closer look at a special kind of “landscape” scene from Lanzmann’s film. One of the film’s introductory sequences is a story told by the daughter of Motke Zajdel – one of the survivors of the Vilnius ghetto annihilation who worked at the cremation site in the nearby forest of Ponari. When Zajdel beings his account, the viewers are shown Ben Shemen forest in Israel.

ZAJDEL: The place resembles Ponari: the forest, the ditches. It’s as if the bodies have been burned here. Except there were no stones in Ponari.

LANZMANN: But the Lithuanian forests are denser than the Israeli forest, no?

ZAJDEL: Of course. The trees are similar, but taller and fuller in Lithuania.

The image on the screen changes – now we can see a slightly different forest, denser and greener, with three people walking. It is a forest in Sobibór which Lanzmann, assisted by an interpreter, discusses with Jan Piwoński, a pointsman at the local station. In the preceding scene – the famous opening of the film where Szymon Srebrnik tries to discern traces of death, the death of thousands of people in the forest clearing of Chełmno – as well as in many other similar shots, Lanzmann treats space as a symptom of history, where landscape is combined with testimony into one, inseparable whole. However, in the scene featuring Motke Zajdel, the situation is slightly different: firstly, the story of the survivor is told by his daughter (one of the few female characters in Lanzmann's film and the only representative of the second generation) who, instead of recounting her father's war experience, talks about her own childhood spent in the shadow of his stubborn silence about this period. When the voice of Zajdel himself is heard, a landscape can be seen as well, but not in the role of supporting the testimony, for it is a completely different forest located elsewhere. Secondly, the death of Jews in Ponari is not recounted at all. The only thing Zajdel refers to is an Israeli landscape: "It's as if the bodies have been burned here." Ponari remains an invisible referent, an unavoidable part of the comparison. A moment later, another landscape is presented, and before the name Sobibór is displayed, the viewer is



Still from *Shoah* (forest in Sobibór)

momentarily convinced that this is the forest in Ponari – an authentic place, where there is “no longer anything to see.” The forest in Sobibór, though having its own tragic history, thus temporarily loses its exceptional identity – it is a traumatic landscape only by force of similarity. The triple order of this scene (emphatically opened by a representative of the second generation narrating) aptly illustrates the peculiar nature of the landscape of postmemory, taking into account the subject’s identification of the “innocent” landscape of Ben Shemen with the traumatic memory of Ponari, bifurcating it into the past and present. In the observed landscape, the traumatic referent is reflected like a spectre – it haunts the former, rather than recalling its source, and accompanied by a view of a different forest (a different site of genocide), we are left confused by the similarity, incapable of ascertaining its particularity.

These non-specific landscapes can be collectively regarded as the iconographic reservoir, similar to the “images without imagination,” employed by literary and visual representations of the Shoah, especially those created by members of the postmemory generation. Lanzmann’s idiom can be spotted in Reinhard’s work and Levin’s *War Story* (both analysed by Baer), in Susan Silas’s video works like *Helmbrechts Walk* (1998–2003) which includes pictures of landscapes taken during her journey re-enacting the death march of prisoners from Helmbrechts in Czech Republic,⁵⁹ as well as in Andrzej Kramarz’s photographs.⁶⁰ What is typical for landscapes of postmemory is not the uniqueness of the place, but their visual uniformity, multiplicity, and redundancy that almost deprive them of their singularity.



Fragments of Mikael Levin’s *War Story* (1995)

59 Silas’s work can be seen online, accessed January 22, 2014, <http://www.helmbrechtswalk.com/portfolio/e/helmbrechts1.html>

60 *A Piece of Land* (2008–2009).

Two Types of Arcadia

"As we get into his tiny Polish Fiat," writes Eva Hoffman on her journey to Brańsk,

Zbigniew tells me that Szepietowo was a stopping point for Jews who were being transported to Treblinka. Instantly, the pleasant station building loses its air of innocence. Instantly, I flash to the scenes that must have taken place here. (...) Instantly, the landscape in my mind is diagrammed by two sets of meanings. How to reconcile them, how not to blame the land for what happened on it?⁶¹

History invests the picturesque view of a small station in a Polish provincial town with another layer: the memory of events that took place in it. From the moment of identifying its "actual" nature, the place can only be perceived through two sets of meanings. Immediately, the affective dimension of the observed space is changed: delight in its idyllic character transforms into dumb silence, and the face of the viewer petrifies in anagnorisis: the pleasant station, the cosy coppice, and the blooming meadow will never again be the same. "As I walk around Brańsk with Zbyszek and contemplate its lovely views," writes Hoffman later, "the angled slope of the riverbank, the gentle curve of the river – I now cannot help but imagine: that flat stretch of land leading away from the river was an escape route to ostensibly safer places."⁶² The act of identification (anagnorisis) – so crucial in both Hoffman's as well as Tulli's prose – proves to be also an act of anamnesis: the past bursts through the smooth surface of the landscape, marking and distinguishing what is invisible in the present.

A similar experience is shared by other second generation authors who undertake their journeys to countries of East Central Europe with different motivations. Describing his first impressions of Giby in Podlasie, from which he begins his saga on memory and landscape, Simon Schama writes: "[...] Something about [the hill] snagged my attention, made me feel uneasy, required I take another look."⁶³ And though this moment of hesitation is explained further on when it turns out that it was the site of the death of Polish partisans, this remark applies to the entire experience of the Polish landscape which Schama here anticipates, a landscape which includes, according to his

61 Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 20, 21.

62 Ibid., 245.

63 Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 23.

famous statement, also Treblinka: “brilliantly vivid countryside; [...] rolling, gentle land, lined by avenues of aspen.”⁶⁴ In Martin Gilbert’s *Holocaust Journey* – a journal itinerary of a two-week journey in search of traces of the Shoah – every time the author stops his account to provide a description of the landscape, it is accompanied by a gloomy chorus: “The beauty of the scenery – grassy meadows in the valley, pine-clad hills above – is in extreme contrast to the grimness of the journey fifty-two years ago... We drive on through a wonderful, peaceful, pastoral scene, of gentle rolling hills and cultivated fields. To our left, just to the north of the road, runs the railway that in those days led to Belzec.”⁶⁵

Therefore, landscapes of postmemory are fundamentally characterised by incongruence and incoherence, as well as a sense of the uncanny – when the “misleading air of normalcy” is broken, when pastoral, monotonously similar landscapes disclose the knowledge of the events that they have witnessed. The discrepancy between what we know and what we see is a vehicle for this dissonance. Similarly, in Tulli’s short story, the cue comes from the “geographical names” and the landscape itself does not really insist on disclosing its past. Postmemory images – as their photographic and cinematic representations clearly indicate – are like pictures devoid of *punctum* due to their tormentingly inconspicuous nature: our gaze is not attracted by any particular detail where the process of understanding can be anchored. Nevertheless, the very confrontation leaves one full of anxiety. The meaning of these views is then formed in the dialectical split of memory and forgetting, observation and identification, the indistinguishable and the specific, the repetitive and the authentic. Landscapes of postmemory seem to yield to a basic mechanism of traumatic realism: the everyday and the trivial hides the extreme and the traumatic, escaping the language of representation.⁶⁶ Idyllic spaces turn out to be escape routes, the present is infected with the past, and the known and familiar become threatening and alien. Landscapes of postmemory are both indexical and iconic images: shifters related to overgrown sites of slaughter, as well as icons of the Holocaust referring to sequences of representational topoi.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁵ Martin Gilbert, *Holocaust Journey: Travelling in Search of the Past* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 122, 196.

⁶⁶ See Michael Rothberg, “Between the Extreme and the Everyday: Ruth Klüger’s Traumatic Realism,” in *Extremities. Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. Nancy K. Miller, Jason Daniel Tougaw (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); see also his *Traumatic Realism. The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

Sources of this iconicity can also be found in a slightly more remote tradition: "There have always been two kinds of arcadia: shaggy and smooth; dark and light; a place of bucolic leisure and a place of primitive panic,"⁶⁷ writes Simon Schama. The genealogy of the myth of Arcadia as a land originally marked by darkness is traced by Erwin Panofsky in his essay discussing the inscription "et in Arcadia ego."⁶⁸ From the point of view of syntax, he suggests that these words were not originally supposed to mean "And I as well was born in Arcadia," referring to a retrospective vision of a land of an ideal future, but rather "I am present even in Arcadia" – me, death, the dark lining present even in an idyllic scene. This dialectic in representations of Arcadia is inherent in the experience of postmemory landscape: the moment of realisation discloses the original flaw in the illusory calm of the observed space, the flaw becoming the fundamental point of reference for perceiving the idyllic scene.

The Traumatic of Landscape

The indexicality of postmemory landscapes is thus closer to performativity, as defined by Hirsch and Olin, than to any form of permanence relating the history of events that have transpired there, an inherent authenticity that Didi-Huberman seems to suggest when he writes about sites despite everything. A place takes on traumatic meaning when its traumatic aspect is discerned. However, the act of identification, the act of pointing out that "this is here," in many cases proves temporary and accidental. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's own search for the camp in Vapniarka in Ukraine, where their relatives were imprisoned, proves to be an almost futile task: "We had intended to connect memory to place... If through our visit, we brought the memory of its past back to the place, then that return is as evanescent as that hazy summer afternoon. It is an act, a performance that briefly, fleetingly, re-placed history in a landscape that had eradicated it."⁶⁹ Hirsch and Spitzer, equipped with drawings and memoirs of camp prisoners, look for a particular place, yet their experience seems out of place, and the traumatic aspect of the identified landscape is but a temporary effect. Yet, where can we locate the vehicle of transmission of this effect if we conceive of postmemory in a broader context,

67 Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 517.

68 Erwin Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego. Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition," in *Meaning and the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955).

69 Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2010), 230.

going beyond the experience of just family members of survivors and regarding “the relationship that the [whole] 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 behaviours among which they grew up”?⁷⁰

In her *Originality of the Avant-Garde*, Rosalind Krauss analyses a passage from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* where a young provincial, Catherine Morland, goes for a walk with two of her friends: soon enough it turns out she knows nothing about the nature of picturesque landscapes appreciated by her companions. As Krauss indicates, it is not the landscape that constitutes the picturesque, but “through the action of the picturesque the very notion of landscape is constructed as a second term of which the first is a representation.” Seemingly authentic and non-mediated, it becomes a “reduplication of a picture which preceded it.”⁷¹ The singular and the formulaic (the repetitive) each form two logical halves of the concept of landscape. “The priorness and repetition of pictures is necessary to the singularity of the picturesque.”⁷² As for the viewer, singularity depends on whether he or she can actually recognise it as such, and the act of identification is possible only thanks to the existence of previous models.

If in the case of postmemory landscapes, “the picturesque” is substituted with “the traumatic,” these landscapes become visual clichés of space related to historical or personal traumas, affectively linked with memory inaccessible for subsequent generations. At the same time, they serve as a repository of images whose apparent non-specificity and simultaneously uncanny nature becomes an iconic mark of the traumatic, belonging to a certain “traumatic” canon of culturally diverse provenance. This repository of landscapes would include a majority of post-Lanzmann visual representations of seemingly neutral elements of space that are invested with sinister meaning through the dissemination of the traumatic.

Nevertheless, the experience of the landscape of postmemory is not only based on a more or less intentional knowledge of iconic representations – cultural knowledge transmitted “by means of stories, images, and behaviours” – but also on a certain cognitive disposition, prone to tracing flaws,

70 Marianne Hirsch, “Introduction,” in *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

71 Rosalind Krauss, “The Originality of the Avant-Garde,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 163.

72 Ibid., 166.

to “paranoid reading[s]”⁷³ of the surrounding area, to constant suspicions regarding non-specific sights and idyllic views of the eastern Central European landscape. The Holocaust is crucial to understanding the phenomenology of postmemory landscapes not just in its own context, but more generally when it comes to other radical historic spatial ruptures in Polish history in the 20th century.

The status of landscape as an “unstable witness,” as Brett Kaplan refers to it, gains new meaning in the case of postmemory landscapes because what is at issue is the role of the viewer as one who recognises the authenticity of a posttraumatic landscape, responding to its silent call. The relation between the viewer and the space should play out more in the tension between the active “connective memory to a place” and the common tropes of postmemory which evoke and preserve memory – “the priorness and repetition of pictures is necessary to the singularity of the traumatic.”

Translation: Karolina Kolenda

73 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You,” in *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

In-Between-Space. Anthropologies of Everyday Life, of the City and of Literature in Miron Białoszewski's *Chamowo*

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1. “To Tinker with «the Obvious»”

In the introduction to one of his books, Roch Sulima suggests that Miron Białoszewski's literary output, his “spoken anthropology,” may be closest to “the ideal of anthropology of everyday life.”¹ In the *Epilogue* to his publication, the scholar openly writes that reading Białoszewski's poems and prose was to him “the school of «reading» everyday life” (A, 191).

This intuition has nothing in common with the already hackneyed discovery of the following similarity: the anthropologist, just like the writer, does nothing beside writing, i.e. creating narrative fiction which interprets the cognized reality.² There is more to this, of course; there is yet another dimension to this relation: being a specific writer – intentionally not creating fiction, but drawing

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1 Roch Sulima, *Antropologia codzienności* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2000), 8. Further quotations from this publication will be indicated by the symbol „A.”

2 Clifford Geertz, „Opis gęsty: w poszukiwaniu interpretatywnej teorii kultury,” in *Interpretacja kultur. Wybrane eseje*, trans. Maria Piechaczek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005).

from the poetics of personal documents and from everyday life; in addition, it is not so much through writing as it is through mediating between the oral nature of speech and its record, between the act of live, everyday communication and literature, that one can get closer to the ideal of anthropology of everyday life.

Sulima's introduction and epilogue only signal this equivocal intuition, but it nevertheless stimulates imagination and tempts us to think over the relation between Białoszewski's literature, the anthropology of everyday life designed and consequently implemented by Sulima, and the anthropology of the city whose everyday quality is the subject of the majority of texts collected in the latter's book; Białoszewski's biography and his spatial poetics are very much immersed in urban space.³ It should be added here that both of them speak of the same city. In short, let us recall the assumptions of anthropology of everyday life and try to think what could be the connection between them and Białoszewski's poetics and what would allow us to sense that his literature may teach the anthropologist of urban everyday life an important lesson.

"To tinker with «the obvious» that is rooted in something unacceptable. [...] The anthropologist acts against this certainty and does not acknowledge the division in the reality of the periphery and the reality of the centre because our everyday life is always where we currently are" (A, 9) – this is how, in the introduction to his book, Roch Sulima formulated the basic methodological, but also philosophical, assumption of the anthropologist of everyday life who deals with urban space. Obviously, in this case, the reality is close in proximity and known to the scholar, not "somewhere THERE but NOW and HERE" (A, 10) which corresponds with one of the main postulates of anthropology of everyday life pursued by Sulima: "The anthropologist feels both "familiar" and "strange" in everyday life, capable of being fascinated by drama and banality. To find artificiality in what is obvious" (A, 8). This also means the ability to temporarily suspend a part of the researcher's own identity – to a great extent culturally – shaped by his or her urban roots. When everything one passes by almost every day is known, obvious and unproblematic, and to such a degree that it is unnoticeable, adopting this attitude is a real challenge. Such difficulty does not concern work in remote, exotic territories: "Anthropology may begin at home, as Bronisław Malinowski implied. For the anthropologist

3 See *„Tętno pod tynkiem.”* Warszawa Mirona Białoszewskiego, ed. Agnieszka Karpowicz, Piotr Kubkowski, Włodzimierz Pessel, Igor Piotrowski (Warszawa: Lampa i Iskra Boża, 2013). On the subject of geo(bio)graphic roots of the writer see *Miron. Wspomnienia o poecie*, ed. Hanna Kirchner (Warszawa: Tenten, 1960). On the role of history of Warsaw in Białoszewski's life and literary output, particularly see Stanisław Prószyński, *Poezja, teatr, muzyka*; Irena Prudil, *Znałam kiedyś chłopca*).

of everyday life – everything is a source, everything is a territory” (A, 7). Even anthropologists of everyday life working in their own culture, for example in a city well-known to them in their quarter, must be able to look at it from the outside. Even though they are inevitably part of it themselves, they need to be “inside and at the same time “outside” of it” (A, 10). Effectively, this is always related with being suspended in the autonomous sphere of “in-between” – between the participant’s involvement and the observer’s distance, distinctly indispensable but also troublesome since, in fact, this everyday life is not strange to the scholar both existentially and culturally, so that when:

anthropologists of everyday life make “little conquests” and present “little stories”: about the home, neighbours, the nearest surroundings, they also prove it with their presence using themselves as tools of cognizing the world. (A, 11)

When Sulima (referring to Michał Głowiński’s works on Białoszewski’s everyday genres) suggested that between the poet’s output and anthropology of everyday life practiced in the city also being the “home” of the scholar who feels “familiar” in it, *Chamowo* had not been published yet, but it seems that the spatial poetics proposed in this book by Białoszewski and his artistic organization of Warsaw’s everyday reality of the 1970s let us comprehend these similarities – not only to confirm the researchers’ intuition but also to develop and complement it.

2. “They do not Acknowledge the Division of Reality into the Periphery and the Centre.”

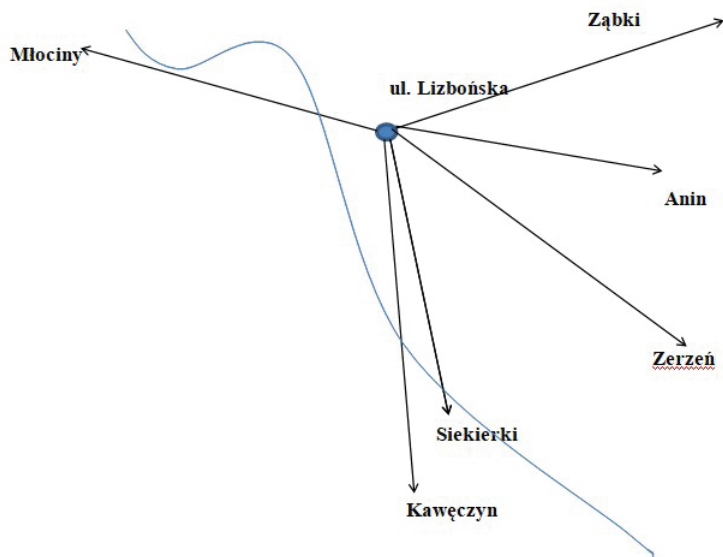
The very name of the housing estate built in Saska Kępa, the titular *Chamowo*, already indicates the provincial and peripheral character of this area: “From afar, you can see hot small factories; it’s neither the country nor peripheries, and smells like railways”⁴; and elsewhere he writes: “Desert. No view from the window. Boredom. Wasteland. Villagey. [...] The city ends, meadows” (Ch, 42). “[Łazienkowska] Avenue rustles, but poplars also rustle, they give a lot of shade, there is grass and a path, like in the country” (Ch, 57) – such images of 1970s Warsaw are dominant in *Chamowo*. There are more bushes, trees and weeds than elements typical of the city fabric. The surroundings of the title estate built on the borders of old Saskia Kępa where the narrator moved to, he calls the “steppes” (Ch, 127) or the country: “One walks in smells,

⁴ Miron Białoszewski, *Chamowo* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2009), 42. Further quotations from this book will be indicated by the symbol “Ch.”

in the shadow, like in the country. [...] It's our meadow, our village" (Ch, 15). Siekierki seen from the window of his new flat and which he personally often "checks" (Ch, 114) are particularly intriguing to him: "The turn from Czerniakowska is unexpectedly rapid, into the dust, weeds, cobblestone next to the knoll. [...] Roads, turns, houses, enclosures, trees and bushes, people waiting at bus stops" (Ch, 116).

There is no doubt that we continuously move around Warsaw as the city is defined by the names of streets, squares, roundabouts, numbers of the city bus lines. The space is embedded in specific time by means of daily notes characteristic of journal writing. We learn from them that the metropolis is observed by the poet as it undergoes modernization: Białoszewski registered the construction of the Warszawa Centralna Railway Station, Łazienkowska Avenue and modern housing estates. However, in *Chamowo* we mainly find the least urban elements of the city, as if in defiance of the metropolis' feverish modernization. Constructing space seems to be a deliberate action since the narrator rides the buses in the least expected times of day and night in order to imbibe such landscapes:

I got off on the cobblestones by the poplars. [...] Various weeds and flowers grow here. The closer to the embankment, the denser. [...] It turned out that there is another meadow of wild herbs behind the embankment, then Vistula" (Ch, 125-126).



The territories of Warsaw used by Białoszewski to build the literary space of the city are, therefore, of a similar status – they have concurrent meanings contributing to the continuity and coherence of time and space. It should be added here that this space is not typical of an urban landscape as such,⁵ especially when we talk about the capital city. The narrator's spatial practices include trailing little meadows, bushes, gardens and peripheries overgrown with weeds, even though they are sometimes located near the metropolitan centre. In other words, Białoszewski uses the city in a way that is usually associated with the suburbs or areas right outside the city and affiliated with leisure time, vacation, strolling and relaxing, identified with the weekend rather than with the everyday urban flow of life; in this way he abolishes oppositions between habitually created spatial categories. If we look at the routes the narrator chooses for his excursions, starting from his new place at Lizbońska Street, it is noticeable that he consequently omits the centre and treats it as a point of transit easing the way to other suburban sites, though most often still being within the city's borders.

Lizbońska street becomes Białoszewski's personal, private city centre, and what is important to reiterate is that it definitely has a suburban character as it is located on the edge of Śródmieście (where Białoszewski lived before), considered by the poet as a strictly urban district; that is also underlined in his earlier volume *Szумы, zlepy, ciągi* [*Hums, Lumps, Threads*]. The "eulogist of Marszałkowska"⁶ becomes here a vigilant "examiner" of the city's bushes and thickets. Moreover, these areas in fact only began to get "civilized" or urbanized in the 1970s, gaining a more metropolitan character.

Further away from Białoszewski's new place of residence, his main destinations in Warsaw (as shown in the chart above) are marked with arrows leading from Lizbońska Street. They are semantically very coherent. Looking at the map of Warsaw back then, they would indeed mark green spots, forests, fields, meadows, and what is meaningful is that to a large extent they have remained the same up to this day. Białoszewski goes to Młociny at 1 am to see the aurora:

I chose the right time but on that day I could see no streamers. There are more skyscrapers. From the side of Powązki, some unknown and remote

5 Dobiesław Jędrzejczyk, „Krajobraz kulturowy miasta,” in *Geografia humanistyczna miasta. Od architektury cyrkulacji do urbanistycznych krajobrazów* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Gdańskiej, 2006); Lucyna Nyka, „Przestrzeń miejska jako krajobraz,” *Architektura* 2 (2012).

6 Miron Białoszewski, *Szумы, zlepy, ciągi* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1989), 333.

rocks protruded. Grass and trees have grown since I came here last. But the viewpoint has still remained. (Ch, 77)

The Młociny housing estate borders with the commune of Łomianki and Bielański Forest and before the war it was one of the city inhabitants' favourite leisure sites where, in 1913, the (partially realized) plan was to create the city-garden Młociny. Siekierki, on the other hand, is a settlement which was incorporated together with the entire Mokotów district into the territory of Warsaw in 1916, but it still managed to keep its character, intriguing Białoszewski: "at night it's pretty lush, doggy, country-like" (Ch, 120). Earlier, Siekierki had been an agricultural and wickerwork base of the capital, but also a place for leisure, beach activities and recreation.⁷ Kawęczyn, incorporated into Warsaw in 1916, is of a similar character, a village on the outskirts of Rembertów and situated between Żąbki and Olszynka Grochowska, also associated with a nature reserve. The narrator of *Chamowo* visited Kawęczyn to compose his famous bouquets:

I thought that my bouquet was missing the smell of a bastard balm.
I dared to presume that they were still blooming.
– To Chełmżyńska to get bastard balms! Past Kawęczyn! (Ch, 85)

During his bus trips, the narrator also visits his friends in Anin – integrated into Warsaw after World War II and even now known for nearby forests. He sometimes goes to Zerzeń, a part of the Wawer district only since 1951, whose history goes back to being a medieval village. The particular quality of this settlement is its low-rise buildings, not synonymous with the "metropolitan style" of either today or the 1970s when the term was associated with tall blocks of flats, one of which Białoszewski lived in. For some reason, in addition to going to Dąbrowski Square where Białoszewski's former flatmate lives⁸ and visiting friends on Hoża Street, or sometimes in Żoliborz, the poet chooses very specific places: the historical or truly peripheral districts, but also places which have kept traces of their territorial affinity or obtained it due to the after-war destruction of the capital, reconstructing it, and then rebuilding it again. What is significant in *Chamowo* is that these territories are described more meticulously than the city – it

7 See *Korzenie Siekierki. Historia pisana losami rodzin*, ed. Joanna Mikulska (Warszawa: Dom Kultury Doróżkarnia, 2010).

8 I wrote more broadly about the function of these spatial practices in the article "Autobusiarz by Miron Białoszewski," *Kultura Współczesna* 2 (2012).

is the “steppes” that become the centre of the city, of the world or even of the cosmos.⁹

Młociny, Ząbki, Gocław, Siekierki and other places where Białoszewski goes to pick flowers, weeds, and twigs are not exposed in *Chamowo* by accident; they have some important features in common and they also shape the space of Warsaw. They create a metaphor of the real space and of the way it is subjectively experienced. This space is composed of sites that are peripheral, marginal, non-urban or, by definition, suburban. This makes them share one more quality: they are potential, temporary sites which may soon become (and they did become) construction sites to satisfy the accommodation needs of Warsaw residents. On the one hand, they will probably be gone soon, since during one of his night excursions to get flowers, the narrator comes across a small meadow full of cut-down twigs (Ch, 155) and notes: “They are lying there freshly pulled out, I do not know whether it’s in progress or it’s the end of the rage. Who cares about it. Huge, wet-green burdock, sorrel, horseradish. Will they cut it down too? I threw myself to pluck some. Since they are already doomed to annihilation” (Ch, 155). On the other hand, they foreshadow something they will be in the future or they have been in the past, which Białoszewski activates by the power of memory and summations in the narration, referring to the territorial specificity of the place before the war, as in the case of Kawcza Street in Grochów which he finds “peripherized” (Ch, 88).

What is important in this context is the lack of spatial identity of “Chamowo” itself – neither an entirely rural nor a completely urban construction site – emphasized by the new housing estate’s name which alludes to provinciality, but also due to the sociological profile of the residents moving there from the suburbs: “How I felt like going into the world again. Far from this province cramming up to the ninth floor” (Ch, 42). This place does not belong to *Saska Kępa*, but it is being glued to it in the process of modernization and its inhabitants pejoratively mark the strangeness and the less than stellar topographic lineage of the new residence, hence the latter’s lower social status. The main trait of the housing estates’ architecture noticed by Białoszewski is unreadiness, continuous incompleteness causing constant changes in the nearest iconosphere:

From the courtyard-in-between, common to some of our 10-story blocks, the concrete is flatted down, street lamps put up, there will be

9 I wrote more broadly on the subject of cosmic metaphors and their functions in *Chamowo* in chapters devoted to Białoszewski in my book *The Prose of Life. Speech, Writing, Literature* [*Proza życia. Mowa, pismo, literatura*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2012).

less disorder, a workers' camp is still on the left, bare ground with some trash, a stall and a hut, some wagons. (Ch, 25)

Another element of this urban landscape are people, their interactions, social relations with which the city map usually corresponds (provided that the city's fabric is architecturally and historically sustainable) and the process of modernization also tears it apart and demands its reshaping. The estate partially becomes a metaphor of the whole of Warsaw as an unstable space which is incessantly translocated and shifted, the space of changeable and uncertain categorizations, in which one cannot be sure of even the most basic categories such as "the centre" or "the periphery."¹⁰

3. "The Anthropologist Feels both «Familiar» and «Strange» in Everyday Life"

One of the book's themes is Warsaw's modernization, but it is described not by means of noticing new elements, but rather registering Białoszewski's morning and night excursions to places which disappear or are about to disappear due to this process. The author acts paradoxically: he describes the construction of new housing estates not in pursuit of recording every novelty and change, but focusing on things that are disappearing, even such ephemeral elements such as certain "views." Such an approach is endorsed in his *Secret Diary* [*Tajny dziennik*] from the same period: "The view on the left – Gocław, already half-built. Luckily, there is a wild meadow in the foreground – it will remain bare."¹¹ He focuses on the destruction of the old elements of the city, especially logging as trees are cut for new construction sites. While the city is being modernized, he is fascinated with weeds and abandoned meadows. Places spotted by Białoszewski bring to mind green isles between the proper, recognizable elements of the city which define it and symbolize its spatial identity. The narrator uses bus stops in the city centre only as transit points,¹² helping him reach what is most important: the suburbs and marginal areas – eventually, these places become central themselves. From the perspective of the urban infrastructure, meadows, brushwood and scrub, described by Białoszewski with true pleasure, are unfunctional; their earlier usefulness has

10 About problems of locating the centre of Warsaw, see especially Jerzy Jarzębski, "Zniszczenie centrum," in *Miejsce rzeczywiste. Miejsce wyobrażone. Studia nad kategorią miejsca* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 1999).

11 Miron Białoszewski, *Tajny dziennik* (Kraków: Znak, 2012), 640.

12 See the concept of non-place, Marc Augé, *Nie-miejsca. Wprowadzenie do antropologii hipernowoczesności*, trans. Roman Chymkowski (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2001).

long been lost while not having gained a new one. From a practical perspective, they exist there completely for themselves and without a clear need or interest, we could almost say that the narrator identifies with them, mainly due to the similar nature of his existential practices and his ways of living in the city.¹³ They are located:

on the verge of socially useful and are “the borderlands” of such spheres of everyday life that are usually of no interest not only to citizens but also to researchers.¹⁴

They do not belong to anyone and they are undoubtedly a marginalized element. The narrator, therefore, proposes to look at the city in a way that is familiar not only in terms of the anthropology of everyday life but also of empty spaces: “Instead of reading written text, we read its background. Instead of looking at black letters, we look at white spots between them.”¹⁵ After moving to Śródmieście, Białoszewski perceives the city as a space composed of such spots – in this case they are green and gradually disappearing.

Of course we could see it as a gesture of constructing an “anti-city” or a “social anti-space”¹⁶ of these spaces, opposing the structured order imposed by the functionalized urban space, its goal and functions. This is also acknowledged by the anti-structural and non-normative, alternative way of using the city by Białoszewski after moving (e.g. riding around the city “for a whim” or “for a half-whim” (Ch, 26) at any time of day or night) and before that as well, but with one stipulation: Białoszewski is aware of the lack of such structure because he does not notice it and if he does mention it, he is in a state of unsteadiness as deregulation brought on by modernization not so much improves the rhythm of city life, but rather disorganizes it (e. g. by fostering changes in regular bus routes). Warsaw shaped in *Chamowo* is an unobvious, interesting city as it is unstable, mysterious and unpredictable, subjected to the permanent movement of people, borders and spatial categories.

¹³ I explain this similarity more broadly in the chapters of the book *Proza życia*, which are devoted to Miron Białoszewski.

¹⁴ Jerzy Kociatkiewicz and Monika Kostera, “Antropologia pustych przestrzeni,” in *Pisanie miasta – czytanie miasta*, ed. Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji „Humaniora,” 1997), 75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

It is well known (from Ryszard Nycz's works above all) that Białoszewski is a master of noticing all that is absorbing and mysterious in what is most banal, obvious and transparent, even boring in its transparency and, as we remember, this is one of the postulates of the anthropology of everyday life, understood not even as an element of the methodology or the theory, but as a perspective, an outlook or an interpretational inclination. Białoszewski himself assesses Warsaw in the period of modernization and right after it – the same city which, in *Chamowo*, became a place of exotic conquests and exciting journeys into the unknown – as not a very intriguing place:

It seems to me that, for the first time, Warsaw is uninteresting. [...] I do not know whether this period now, these blocks, whether from [my] perspective... anything interesting will happen. It does not seem so to us. It's been 20 years like this and these are such unrewarding views. [...] Unless this tape is played once these blocks are already bombed. Some say that these blocks can be easily bombed because they would just fall apart, simply disintegrate but I feel that it's hard to bomb so many blocks.¹⁷

What is striking in *Chamowo* is the process of recognizing and checking places, records of looking at one's own city as if it was unknown. The motivation for that is the act of moving out of city centre, leaving the familiar feel of Śródmieście: "New systems. I can't find a library. I feel like being on vacation" (Ch, 25). In other words, the narrator introduces himself as someone who ceaselessly learns Warsaw, even though we know that he spent his whole life there, and his earlier works were also set in the inalienable biographical context of the city. The narrator, therefore, literally "checks" and visits sites unknown to him, a strange city whose beaten and harmonious rhythm of the landscape, unavoidably connected with habits and spatial practice, is from time to time interrupted by something new. Significantly, he does not focus on the stable, material city fabric and its structure because he has surely gotten used to the fact – living in Warsaw since he was born – that elements considered to be material, physical and stable in fact are not characterized by such features at all, and perhaps this blariness, uncertainty and instability of the "city on quicksand"¹⁸ is its invariable essence, at least as defined by

17 The recording from the collection of the Museum of Literature in Warsaw, tape no 1417, track 1, 27:30–33:05. I am grateful to Joanna Łojas for transcribing the recording and making the transcription available.

18 The expression after Marta Zielińska, *Warszawa – dziwne miasto* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1995).

Białoszewski. In one of his notes, we can clearly see the impermanence of the new space and the reason why it is impossible for it to be fully rooted in reality, even finding it necessary to keep some distance from reality:

Nearby, remnants of another one. On the corner of Emilii Plater and Jerozolimskie. Blue walls protrude, cracked, in dust, as if bombed. I will become attached to this old building, over night, at the bus stop – unfortunately – due to all the waiting. (Ch, 60)

Białoszewski's Warsaw in *Chamowo* is in fact built of many overlapping spaces from different times and from different needs, but existing here and now, simultaneously, in heterogeneous spatial collages of images of the city tied to each other – remembered, just noticed, heard, told about by someone or derived from the imagination. The poetics of loose associations, as especially observed by Jacek Kopciński and Ryszard Nycz,¹⁹ is the core of Białoszewski's literary technique, but it is often ruled by a very precise logic. And so associations, which at first seem to be random and linking completely separate phenomena, are very often based on meanings or stories related to a specific urban space.

In *Chamowo*, the most spectacular example of these associations' urban roots is a note concerning Siekierki:

I imagined that the Mother of God could appear before some children in the bushes of Siekierki, the crowd gathering in the rain, the bushes rustling, the meadow full, the Vistula river surging, everybody waiting for a miracle. (Ch, 125)

It seems that Białoszewski virtually refers to his imagination, perhaps led by some religious clichés taken from literature, painting and other widely understood texts of culture. However, if we know the history of Siekierki, the meaning of this sentence shifts somewhat. "I imagined" means: "I imagined that what people talk about could really take place"; this way he confirms that after visiting Siekierki, he is able to believe in the stories he heard. Particularly, it is about a very specific event connected with the history of the city: apparitions during the occupation period attracted masses of worshippers to a place

19 Jacek Kopciński, *Gramatyka i mistyka. Wprowadzenie w teatralną osobowość Mirona Białoszewskiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1997); Ryszard Nycz, „Szare eminencje zachwyty. Miejsce epifanii w poetyce Mirona Białoszewskiego,” in *Pisanie Białoszewskiego. Szkice*, ed. Michał Głowiński and Zdzisław Łapiński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1993).

where on 3 May, 1943, a 12-year-old girl saw St. Mary on a cherry tree visible from her window²⁰. "Checking" the place personally confirms the truth of the story about the miracle, justifies it and is an evidence of its probability. The importance of such context also reveals in a different light Białoszewski's comparison of the thermal-electric power station in Siekierki to a medieval castle. Without learning – via an interpreter – the biographical-urban context of the book, some metaphors and literary statements are not fully readable. Similarly, without knowing about the burning of the settlement by the Nazis in 1944, we would treat the word "smoke" differently when encountered in the narrative and poems by Białoszewski in the context of Siekierki.²¹ Only when we combine the knowledge about the past with the fact of the power station functioning there – as registered by Białoszewski, "smoke" obtains a meaning that is precisely contextualized, resulting from the overlapping of several periods of time with one space – all of the meanings being condensed in the word "smoke."

It is worth stressing here that by designing and practicing the anthropology of everyday life, Sulima – invoking Richard Rorty's words – acknowledged the existence of observed phenomena and things in their own context as one of the main goals of research because all of them "emerge together with the contexts they relate to." (A, 9) Recontextualization, i.e. the reconstruction of the urban context present in Białoszewski's work, would correspond here with the anthropological approach to the space of the city being something that is invisible rather than something that can be seen with the naked eye. This approach is about listening to someone's story about a place – giving him or her the opportunity to "speak out in every possible language" (A, 7). Furthermore, as we know, listening and story-telling are the most elementary practices Białoszewski uses to develop his original literary technique.

Practicing anthropology as postulated by Sulima demands the researcher to go beyond his or her own culture in order to be able to observe it from the outside. This process also inherently leads to going beyond the researcher's own "I," to the temporary necessity to suspend part of his or her identity which, eventually, is culturally motivated and co-shaped. As James Clifford wrote, in an anthropological situation, the researcher's "I" is and must be in

20 For testimonies and memories related with apparitions see e.g.: http://www.swzygmunt.knc.pl/MARYapparitionsPOLAND/HTMs/1943_MARYappPOLAND_SIEKIERKI_01.htm, accessed January 8, 2011.

21 Miron Białoszewski, the cycle „Siekierki,” in *Wiersze. Wybór* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2003).

a position to “mediate between contradictory worlds of meanings.”²² This experience was granted to Białoszewski precisely due to his urban and biographical background: first, in the afterwar period, when Warsaw was absolutely unidentifiable with the city it had been before the war in a very material, architectural and urban sense, Białoszewski tried many different methods to check whether it was possible to find its traces;²³ and second, after moving out, when the rebuilt, renewed and modernized city failed to remind the poet of the urban atmosphere which he had managed to get used to and which had seemed much truer to his earlier experiences with regards to its urban architecture. The narrator himself is fully aware of the fact that he partially belongs to all these “Warsaws,” or rather, that he does not belong to any of them, functioning somewhere in-between, trying to keep his distance to each of them and – as we remember – not to get used to the new shape of the city because it will surely change soon.

The city itself is interpreted here as a “city-in-between,” movable, changing in time. In Białoszewski’s Warsaw, one simply lives between the city which has been and the city which will be; like between the centre and the periphery. The image of “Chamowo” and its surroundings as a transitory place – the place “in-between” – bolsters Białoszewski’s comparison of his living on Lizbońska Street to being on exotic holidays, in a summer house, that is his association of this area with a place and time beyond place and time. Bearing in mind Białoszewski’s characteristic word formative power, this place could be given an expression modelled on the term “dog-in-between” [“międzypies”]²⁴ which defines a dog as running in a flash between two blocks of flats. It is a “city-in-between,” a “place-in-between” which does not resemble at all the “non-places”²⁵ because it is in endless motion, in the phase of becoming, in unreadiness, conception, and potentiality, shortly transforming into something which it is not yet.

Examining the unfamiliar and unknown city space, Białoszewski simultaneously keeps discovering his own strangeness in the face of its shifting shape and problematizes his identity by taking the position of “threatened commonness” (Ch, 68), protecting weeds and bushes from annihilation or being surprised with his reflection in a bus mirror which he does not entirely identify with himself as the younger person. The very space is strange to him,

22 James Clifford, “O etnograficznej autokreacji: Conrad i Malinowski,” trans. Maciej Krupa, in *Postmodernizm*, ed. Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Baran i Suszczyński, 1996), 268.

23 Igor Piotrowski, “Alef. Ulica Chłodna jako pustka i złudzenie,” in *Tętno pod tynkiem*.

24 Miron Białoszewski, “Na jedno tele,” in *Wiersze*, 242.

25 Augé, *Nie-miejsca*.

of course, as it knocks him out of the city centre's customary hubbub and from beaten paths of everyday life. Strangeness, old age, otherness, locality, marginality – such experiences of the urban space offer a short (and incomplete, of course) list of subjects touched upon in *Chamowo*. They are universalized on the level of details, specific topographic elements, urban features, most often marginal and not necessarily noticeable in the course of everyday life. In this way, we may suspect that this work is impregnated with the author's anthropological sensitivity.

4. "They also Prove it with Their Presence Using Themselves as Tools of Cognizing the World"

Sulima ensures that each of the texts collected in the volume *Antropologia codzienności* [*An Anthropology of Everyday Life*] was earlier "walked about" (A, 8) according to the poetic method developed by Julian Przyboś. In *Chamowo*, Białoszewski acts similarly, or at least he gives textual suggestions that walking about the city, checking it, measuring it with one's own steps and confronting memories or views of a given place from a distance while experiencing it with one's own eyes and also legs is prior to literature. Walking about as an urban spatial practice, and at the same time, a research method postulated by Sulima, is additionally connected with two other ways of practicing an anthropology of everyday life close to Białoszewski's artistic practices. Firstly, it leads to the conclusion that the anthropological text needs to have autobiographical roots; secondly, that it is impossible to be alienated from one's own experience of everyday life in the research process. Simultaneously, Sulima considers the subjects of his research to be "subjects of struggles, that is elements of real life scenarios" (A, 9) related with being the participant of analyzed events and described culture. Sulima admits that in a sense, *Antropologia codzienności* "is an autobiographical book" (A, 10).

Miron Białoszewski's literary notes are artistic and nearly daily records of his (factographically and historically proved) life in "Chamowo," and in the text, the identity of the narrator and author are brought to light with an individual, journal-like method of writing. Białoszewski notes down his physiological states and frustrations related to quitting smoking and moving out, his fear in the face of aging and death, his sensual experiences during strolls in the park, acutely scrutinizing his own illness and the process of getting old. At the same time, he creates a profound picture of the real, urban space in the time of transformation, of current social relations and distortions in reality during the 1970s which was gradually becoming alien to Białoszewski and in which he felt increasingly alienated. This is, perhaps, one of these cases when the autobiographical record easily alters and fluently turns into

an “anthropology of itself,”²⁶ also becoming the interpretation of the cultural reality filtered through the participant’s own experience and self-observation.

Between the literary technique represented in *Chamowo* and contemporary, anthropological approaches to the analyzed reality, more analogies can be found. Listening to the housing estate’s sonic landscape and earlier, to conversations and noises typical of the city²⁷ long before formulating the postulates of “devisualization” of the anthropological research on urban space, the poet claimed that the urban experience may be described by means of sounds emitted by its participants and audial experiences related with interpersonal relations – a type of social co-existence.²⁸ And even though in *Chamowo*, urban space beyond the blocks’ area is more visible than audible, it is still the space that has been experienced, not only while walking, but also while perceiving and cognizing it with all other senses through sensual and physical experiences. Walking, running and “flying about” Warsaw also has this sensual, almost physiological dimension, “but rhythmical threads agree with our physiology. They are of the same faith as blood circulation” (81). When the narrator of *Chamowo* is hurting behind the bridge [translator’s note: in Polish “mostek” means both the bridge and the sternum], it means both the fragment of his body and the place in space where the body is located. In this particular moment, Białoszewski is returning to his new home, crossing Łazienkowska Avenue by the bridge called “African” due to the name of the nearby street. The narrator sometimes seems to be organically linked with the landscape he sees:

Right away I thought that it’s me between the earth and this moon in the window – that I, taken from here to Śródmieście, will change. Because the whole system will change. It’s hanging very near, smelling like the Vistula – the moon – the distant, greenish afterglow. (Ch, 121)

Sulima’s intuition concerning the anthropological reading of urban everyday life granted by Białoszewski is most complete when it is confronted with the practices of contemporary autoethnographers²⁹ who also attempt to create

26 Magdalena Zatorska, „Uwarunkowanie lektury. Michel Leiris,” in *Doświadczenie świata, doświadczenie lektury*, ed. Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz (Warszawa: DiG, 2011), 39.

27 See Agata Stanisław, „Audiografia i dewizualizacja antropologii w badaniu miejskiej audiosfery,” *Prace Kulturoznawcze* XIII (2012).

28 I wrote about it more broadly in the subchapter *Audiosfera* of the book *Proza życia*.

29 See Douglas R. Holmes, George Marcus, *Przeformułowanie etnografii. Wprowadzenie do antropologii współczesności*, trans. Konrad Miciukiewicz, in *Metody badań jakościowych*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln vol. 2 (Warszawa: PWN, 2009).

a language of experience, itemize the analysed otherness through personal records and draw conclusions from the very well-known fact that all methods of linguistic description of the analyzed reality fail – they only give the illusion of objectivism but in fact they speak for someone else, on someone's behalf; they falsify the described reality which also belongs to someone else. Reflexive, autothematic writing becomes a sort of documentation permeated with autobiographical elements.

In many ways, autoethnography resembles autobiography. Both of them are variants of the personal essay, touching upon subjects important to human life, breakthrough moments and turning points in trajectories of personal stories...³⁰

The anthropologist's text intentionally begins to acquire the features of a diary. "What I call anthropological observation is in fact a kind of methodical, autobiographical work which I perform interacting with my own experience transformed into thoughts and words,"³¹ writes one Polish autoethnographer. Formally, these notes mysteriously begin to echo the literary language focused on locality, filled with metaphors, understatements, interpretational riddles. Autoethnography may appear as a remedy to a situation in which we already know that the experience is untranslatable to its record, to text; that the rhetorical, narrative structures of the language alter or sometimes even falsify live experiences because the text and the recording always detach the subject from the source – the voice, the source event, the fact, the element of reality to which they should refer. In autoethnographic texts, the researcher does not have to hide either his or her presence or identity, still working with traditional methods typical of anthropology and ethnography. However the very text is shaped in such a manner that researchers are often accused of not having a knack for writing.³²

30 Joanna Bielecka-Prus, "Normana K. Denzina projekt etnografii interpretacyjnej," in Geertz. *Dziedzictwo – interpretacje – dylematy*, ed. Adam Szafrński (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 38.

31 Marcin Kafar, *W poszukiwaniu straconej lokalności. Fragmenty autobiograficzne*, accessed May 25, 2013, <http://zew.info.pl/files/kafar17.pdf>

32 See Tony E. Adams, Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: an Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1 (2011); Sara Delamont, "The Only Honest Thing: Autoethnography, Reflexivity and Small Crises in Fieldwork," *Ethnography and Education* 4 (2009); Marcin Kafar, *O przełomie autoetnograficznym w humanistyce. W stronę nowego paradygmatu*, accessed May 25, 2013, <http://www.etnokolo.umk.pl/>

If we speak about “using oneself as a tool of cognizing the world” and translating this knowledge to writing, in the case of Białoszewski this tool is exceptionally sensual, physical, sensitive to dainty, almost unnoticeable tremor and vibration of urban everyday life, but most of all it is able to mediate linguistic meanings between everyday life and literary language, between experience and text. Perhaps this happens because Białoszewski’s writing brings to mind “spoken anthropology,” as Sulima noticed, taking from live speech perfectly transmitted to literature, capacious, translated to text together with the context.³³ Perhaps the autobiographical transmission of the “I” and the literary transplantation of live experiences via oralizing³⁴ the literary work is implemented to the fullest extent in Białoszewski’s literature – capable of what appears impossible, that is building literary meanings upon the context, not only upon the decontextualized meanings included in the words of text. If it is supposed to be an ideal example of anthropology of everyday life, not only due to similarity of these two perspectives but also – or maybe above all – due to capacity of literary language unfettered by any “crisis of representation” or alleged impenetrability of the world and the word that falsifies it, we should also remember that it is also connected to an ability of flexibly creating genres that are ephemeral, situational, partially created out of the momentary need or current activity.³⁵ Let us recall some of them after Sulima: “impressions” [“zanoty”], “strollings” [“spacerniki”], “reality denunciations” [“donosy rzeczywistości”], and we should also add “eavesdroppings” [“podśluchy”]. It is Sulima – occupied with the anthropology of everyday life – who suggests that as far as “reports” and “giving evidence” being exemplary to his anthropology are concerned, diary writing and “belles-lettres are most advanced” (A, 9). If we recall the aims of today’s Polish theoreticians of culture, anthropologists and sociologists examining urban space, it turns out that not only visual messages, but also field research help unveil what is invisible and unseen.³⁶ This process may also be supported by literature. Is it not true that one of the currently most popular projects of this type (the *Invisible City*) is about bringing out ignored, amateur, peripheral, “separate” or provincial places and

33 I refer here to the relations between oral messages and text in Walter J. Ong’s interpretation, *Oralność i piśmienność. Słowo poddane technologii*, trans. Józefa Japola (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2011).

34 I wrote more broadly about the role of this technique in Białoszewski’s literary output in the chapter devoted to the writer in the book *Kolaż. Awangardowy gest kreacji* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2007), and in the subchapter *Audiosfera* in the book *Proza życia*.

35 Michał Głowiński, “Białoszewskiego gatunki codzienne,” in *Pisanie Białoszewskiego*.

36 See *Niewidzialne miasto*, ed. Marek Krajewski (Warszawa: Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, 2012).

urban practices which are not always compatible with the picture of the contemporary metropolis? Is it not also an attempt of bring to light seemingly unimportant, informal, sometimes non-normative and alternative functions and methods of developing urban space?

According to the postulates of humanistic geography, the researcher: "identifying some places in the landscape [...] at the same time creates meaningful space, [...] that is assigns the «humanistic factor» to it,"³⁷ makes it an "interpreted entity."³⁸ Contemporary studies of space, especially humanistic geography, promote interpretations of the city and the place in the categories of the ways they are seen, focusing the analysis on phenomena related with activity and perception of the subject which co-shapes its surroundings, structures the place and makes it meaningful – the place observed and experienced by the subject and in which he or she functions.³⁹ On the other hand, the perspective of geopoetics and the topographic turn in the literary theory⁴⁰ legitimizes linking literary studies with urban studies and underlines the significance of literature in examining the city.

As we have seen, in given realizations such as Białoszewski's literary output, the way of perceiving the city and its specificity may also turn out to be crucial to understanding literature when we agree to grasp it anthropologically and try to recontextualize it in interpretations, for example in compliance with the indications formulated by Wolfgang Iser who states that "literature creates something that is undeniably absent in human life, however through making the absent visible, it reveals the ways culture functions."⁴¹ If decontextualization is a literary movement detaching the statement (e.g. records, texts) from the situational and cultural context, the proper interpretative step should be recontextualization of this statement. If this happens, there are no obstacles for spatially rooted literature – especially literature to creation of

37 Jędrzejczyk, *Krajobraz kulturowy miasta*, 213.

38 Ibid., chapter VII.

39 Ibid.

40 See Elżbieta Rybicka, „Geopoetyka (o mieście, przestrzeni i miejscu we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach kulturowych),” in *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. Michał Paweł Markowski and Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas 2006); Elżbieta Rybicka, „Zwrot topograficzny w badaniach literackich. Od polityki przestrzeni do polityki miejsca,” in *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2. Poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje*, ed. Teresa Walas, Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2012).

41 Wolfgang Iser, „Czym jest antropologia literatury? Różnica między fikcjami wyjaśniającymi a odkrywającymi,” trans. Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik, *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2006): 23.

which the category of “autobiographical place”⁴² is crucial – to be the right research material for humanistic geography, providing it with new interpretations and images of urban spaces.

It seems that in particular cases, and one of them certainly is Miron Białoszewski's *Chamowo*, it may even teach the humanities-oriented researchers of urban space not only the “humanistic factor” in approaching the material, real, tangible urban space, but also the “anthropological imagination”⁴³ which Roch Sulima refers to in his Epilogue of *Antropologia codzienności*. An attempt to arouse students' imagination – as he writes in the epilogue – inspired him to conduct workshops which partially contributed to writing the book. It seems that literature may arouse it as well and not only in the minds of anthropologists of everyday life or “readers” of urban space, but also of literary theoreticians. Undoubtedly, Białoszewski's literary output teaches such lessons of reading as well.

Translation: Marta Skotnicka

42 Małgorzata Czermińska, “Miejsca autobiograficzne. Propozycja w ramach geopoetyki,” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2011).

43 Andrzej Mencwel, *Wyobrażenia antropologiczna* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2006); Andrzej Mencwel, “Wyobrażenia antropologiczna,” in *Antropologia kultury. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*, ed. Andrzej Mencwel (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2005).

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