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Polish Memory

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Polish Memory

INVESTIGATIONS

Foreword

Ryszard Nycz

Polish Memory

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It was more or less a quarter century ago when the memory boom began (in the West a few years earlier, and in Poland a few years later), which is still going strong today, though there are some first signs of memory "fatigue" looming on the horizon. At the time, that is at the turn of the 1980s, many additional factors worked in its favor: the political transformation in the broader world and in Central-Eastern Europe in particular (accompanied in Poland by the abolition of censorship that restricted the knowledge about the past), the financial crisis (with the associated feelings of insecurity, which encourage searching for assurance in the past), the socio-civilizational changes (manifesting through, for example, the advent of the "risk society," the crisis of utopian thinking or, otherwise, forethought as such – the rational planning for the future), and, finally, the consequences of self-critical work within the humanities, that led to, among others, the erosion of the moderns' faith in objectivity, neutrality, and "finitude" of historical knowledge.

It cannot be ruled out that this change was also reinforced by certain traits of postmodern sensitivity or mentality, which (according to the notable diagnosis of Geoffrey Bennington from the 1970s) was based in "nostalgia for the future and waiting for the past" and, hence, in the overturning of basic human attitudes and strategies of action – acquiescing that the

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modern planning of the future based on rational criteria derived from the extrapolated properties of past experience is an inadvertently lost object of nothing more than sighs of nostalgia and opening to the returning wave of the past, the return of the suppressed, remission of repressed and unresolved collective and individual experience, as well as of rummaging, reordering, and arranging the heritage of the past in new patterns.

For the above reasons, as I see it, the three shifts or disengagements were so severe and radical: from the future to the past, from historical past to remembered past, from the conviction about the confinement and immutability of "past-in-itself" to the sense of past's openness (its meaning, hierarchy of events, practical consequences) to interpretation and the needs and desires of the present. Today this constantly rising wave of memory is amplified as much by institutional structures and actions (of the state, museums, and commemorative initiatives), social fashions (staging and reenactment, combing through the digitized resources of the past's heritage and recycling them in social media, certain kinds of board and video games, and the like), as by historical and memory politics that stir the collective emotions of smaller and larger groups, and – what is not completely without significance, as it has consequences in the abovementioned spheres – also by successive research tasks and intellectual challenges (whose number is continuously expanding) in the field of broadly defined humanities.

Among the already prolific library of studies devoted to Polish memory and research of Polish cultural memory (or Polish cultures of memory) there are nonetheless still very few works that aim to diagnose it in a synthesizing manner and attempt to define its specificity in the process.

This is exactly the kind of reflective thinking that was attempted by the team working on the project "W stronę nowej humanistyki: polska pamięć kulturowa" [Towards a new humanities: Polish cultural memory] in the course of five transdisciplinary summer schools for doctoral students (some three hundred PhD candidates participated in all editions) guided by a transdisciplinary and cross-generational faculty of some fifty Polish and foreign scholars working in the humanities. The outcomes of this multi-year project were summarized in five books published in the "Nowa Humanistyka" [New humanities] series, these were: *Literatura – teoria – życie* [Literature – theory – live] (2013), *Od pamięci biodziedzicznej do postpamięci* [From biomemory to postmemory] (2014), *Pamięć i afekty* [Memory and affects] (2015), *Historie afektywne, polityki pamięci* [Affective histories and politics of memory] (2016), and *Migracyjna pamięć, wspólnota, tożsamość* [Migrant memory, community, identity] (2016), as well as in several monographs and translations.

A particularly significant event, and a kind of summary of all the work conducted in the course of the project, was the conference titled "Polska pamięć. Ciągłość i przemiany; diagnoza i rokowania" [Polish memory. Continuity and change; diagnoses and prognoses], which was held at the turn of September and October 2016,

gathering instructors from previous years and experts invited for this very occasion. The conference papers were guided by a handful of preliminary research questions that could incite the creation of the aforementioned holistic diagnosis, a birds-eye view of the problem or a topography of standpoints, an attempt to pinpoint the specificity of the question at hand. These were questions such as: can Polish cultural memory be considered as a common habitus despite its broad diversity or rather as a gathering of disparate, oftentimes adversarial, Polish cultures of memory? Can classic anthropological categories of culture of shame, culture of pride, culture of guilt (and so forth) be useful in its descriptions, or should completely different analytical notions be sought to characterize it properly? Is their cultural memory mostly a burdensome heritage for the Poles, or is it fundamental to their agency? Does its key position among the factors determining individual and collective thinking, feeling, and acting lead to the sense of unsettledness in the present and anxiety about the future, or is this reasoning unsound? Is it just a "foreign country" for the contemporaries, or is it an inherent, emotionally and valuationally laden constituent of the here and now? Should Polish cultures of memory be considered in terms of contradictory traits (falling between, for example, the "sum of all wrongs," the traumatic memories and indecencies, and their treatment as a balance sheet of former triumphs and capital of values), or rather in terms of hybrid wholes? And, finally, what constitutes a threshold experience (and a continually relevant frame of reference) for contemporary figures of Polish cultural memory: the traditions of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Partitions of Poland, the Second World War and the Holocaust, the post-war years – all of these together or maybe something else entirely?

As is oftentimes the case when opening a democratic space of free debate, the questioner asks about what concerns him and the respondents answers as they see fit… These questions, though, I hope, neither banal nor irrelevant, were indisputably premature. The probes sent by writers into the space of Polish memory – important, revealing, and intellectually stimulating, in my opinion – revealed so many new deposits of problematic memory and of potentially incendiary matter, that any hopes of synthesis had to be laid to rest alongside the temptation to devise a formula of some absolute memory, which, as we know thanks to the Borgesian Funes, inadvertently threatens a complete epistemic and communicational catastrophe. One issue (the last one) can nonetheless be settled outright: the limits of collective experience forming collective memory are set for the contemporary by the events and experiences of the third generation (counting backwards, from the Second World War till today); forays into the interwar period or the times of the First World War were rather occasional and accompanied by explicit rationalizations. Answers to the remaining questions were also attempted, though they need to be pried from individual accounts of certain authors. Here I will forego summarizing or recapitulating them, and, instead, I only wish to point to certain specific traits of this

culture – culture of memory – that we happen to be living in, and to the methods employed in the service of understanding it.

"The past is a foreign country" – this metaphor appearing in the title of David Lowenthal's 1985 book must seem, from the contemporary perspective, like the essence of the modernist stance towards the historical past (and even more so for the Polish reader, who hears the stanzas of Cyprian Kamil Norwid, one of the nation's greatest poets, describing the countryside left behind the fleeting wheels of time). A foreign country is, indisputably, a reality that exists, in the wholeness of its "qualities," independently from us; we can be granted access to it only through painstaking efforts of learning its language and laws, or through intermediaries such as tour or travel guides that point out the way to the tourist and explain the peculiarities encountered along the way. Meanwhile memory is more of a landscape than an independent territory, the effect of interaction of the subject with the environment in which she or he functions. In writing about the landscapes of memory I follow Sławomir Kapralski's earlier studies, but I would like to emphasize certain features, inspired by research on cultural landscapes. Clearly, the most important aspect here is the abandonment of the point of view of an external, neutral observer and the adoption of (or, even more: inability to exclude) the stance of a participant, who actively shapes and forms the image of the environment, which, in turn, exerts its ("identity forming") influence on him or her.

This is how these landscapes of memory are formed; they are activated through participation in the experiences (existential, emotional, axiological, political, social...), and also the needs, fears, or wants of individuals or communities. It is then easy to imagine that the same canon of historical events will be shaped into a different landscape of memory for a Polish Jew, a Polish peasant, a victim (Ukrainian, Lemko, or Boyko) of the Vistula Operation, proponents of upholding the traditions of the Second Polish Republic, supporters of the communist change, the memories of a child, a grown-up, or the representative of a sexual minority. These differences may not necessarily be associated with the falsity of a given person's recollection and the truthfulness of another's; they are the expression of a subjective point of view combining into a constellation of different perspectives, which we can switch off and on (or, otherwise, between which we can choose...) – though without the possibility of adopting some external, supreme, "spectatorial," "objective" point of view. Whether we like it or not, we are always here "in our own company" (as Friedrich Nietzsche would have it), because we are a part of the system which we explore. And (remembered) reality does not become less real because of this, it simply requires proper methods of description.

This spatial dimension of cultures of memory should be confronted with the temporal one, which since (at least) the era of Thomas de Quincey was preferably expressed through the palimpsest metaphor. The deposits of memory, as is well known, do not constitute an inalterable substructure for the present, rather the

opposite – incessant tectonic shifts are taking place here; the work of memory and commemoration is at the same time the work of forgetting and not-remembering, excluding and repressing, but also of the returns of the repressed and the remission of memories of unwanted events and experiences. And just like from underneath the latter entries the earlier inscriptions begin to shine through, so from the latter "homogenized" (i.e., ideologically dominant or politically correct) version of events emerges a different point of view (that of the Other), demanding to be acknowledged, or at least heard. That is why the voice and fate of Polish Jews and the story of their relationship with Poles during the Holocaust and post-war years awaited its proper representation for a very long time (till the 1990s, to be exact). It was also not that long ago when the voices of Warmians and Masurians, Silesians and Kashubians began to be heard in the public sphere... We are also just now beginning to be aware that the fate of peasantry and their point of view is the matter of a still unwritten great novel of an entirely different Polish memory... Despite our tendencies to downplay and belittle, if not marginalize, the influence of the humanities on social and cultural life, it is hard not to notice that it is in the sphere of memory, where the influence of books by Jan Tomasz Gross, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, Jan Sowa, Grzegorz Niziołek, or Andrzej Leder (this is an uncomplete list) deeply and significantly changed the mentality, sensitivity, as well as the attitudes and cultural habitus of Poles; changed it at least to such a degree that the return of previous convictions, responses, and behaviour does not seem (hopefully) possible anymore – as much on the individual as on the "statistical" level, what is more.

The palimpsest metaphor of earlier inscriptions shining through later writings points to still another, though no less important, problem (and source of impasse) in this aspect of cultural memory: the lack of space for everybody on the scene of collective memory. The Romani, as is well known, have for a long time voiced their uneasiness with the overshadowing of the Romani and Sinti genocide by the Shoah in the sphere of collective global awareness. For similar reasons, former Polish prisoners of Nazi concentration camps feel cast aside and unrepresented even in Polish memory and public sphere... It seems as if collective memory was constantly "exacting" hierarchization, selection, and structuring (and therefore also marginalization, exclusion, crushing into untellable pulp) of memory narratives, which – for this is what it comes down to – must conform to undefined, but closed and finite "spaces" of memory. Maybe, then, non-narrative modes of witnessing and representing is what should be sought? In the end, if an event has not been recounted it does not mean that it did not take place; after all, not everything is speakable or can be told.

The third meta-problem of Polish culture of memory that I would like to point to concerns its homogeneity (specificity, uniqueness) or heterogeneity (divergence, propensity for conflict). It is undeniable that reflection on Polish memory oftentimes

takes up traditions (though disavowing them at the same time) of deliberation on the Polish soul, national character, core, or essence. This is clearly supported by the direct association of the problem of collective memory with the question of national identity – though it does not explain it in its entirety, nor does it legitimize it. What is interesting, is that in practice this is closest to the psychoanalytic insights focused on identifying the trans-historical problem-behavior syndrome. We also encounter descriptions attempting to catalogue these diverse aspects of Polish memory without determining their interconnectedness. Still, it is plain for all to see that Polish memory has become a battlefield – to borrow Enzo Traverso's term – of competing, conflicted politics of memory (museums, monuments and counter-monuments, narratives, theatre productions, installations...).

Extrapolating what has been said above, it is easy to fall into a gloomy state bordering on horror: when we imagine a nation of tens of millions that stubbornly tries to move forwards going backwards, as it cannot unlock its gaze from the past, and which incessantly gets in its own way, and falls over its own feet... After all, it is enough to broaden the perspective somewhat – to a more comparative vantage point – to see that in this endless giant unruly plait there is nothing truly distinctive; similar traits are exhibited by other nations in this part of Europe, and most likely in the whole world. As Maciej Janowski recently pointed out, the history of Poland has never been, and therefore should not be, told as a history concerning solely Poles, because only then (when we give up this reductionist and isolationist perspective) can the sense of our own greatness, innocence, and especially uniqueness – stubbornly promoted by some – be worked through, and cut down to its proper (verifiable) size in confrontation with the actual state of facts. It is the same, in my opinion, with Polish memory – it also never was the memory of only (ethnic) Poles. It is therefore imperative, in short, to search for an effective way of permanently integrating the Other's way of looking (at us, and in us) into the core of Polish memory.

I would like to express, through a reference to Jean-Luc Nancy's inspiring concept of "inoperative community," that Polish memory – maybe similarly to all kinds of memory (cultural, collective, and probably also individual) – is a shared memory. And in both senses of the word: that is in what is shared through and within it (as in sharing someone's fate or their opinions), as well as in what makes it a split memory, one that is broken up into distinct parts. The specificity of this agonistic (as Chantal Mouffe characterized it) connection, that is rooted in feedback resulting from conflict, is captured by the third meta-memory metaphor: the metaphor of knots of memory. It has been recently used by the editors of the collected volume ***Węzły pamięci niepodległej Polski*** [Knots of independent Poland's memory] as an interesting and productive equivalent of Pierre Nora's "realms of memory" (***lieux de mémoire***). Here I would like to point to three consequences of this use. Firstly, in this case the effect of communal unity is not

based on harmonious complementarity, aligning of facts and beliefs, but on an unbreakable bond of contradictory, agonistic views and attitudes. Secondly, just as knots do not have a stable inside, so is also the core, specific essence, of Polish memory (national identity) first and foremost the outcome of an entanglement of heterogenic threads, which disentangled and viewed in isolation possess no distinctive qualities, they rather belong to a pan-human repertoire of beliefs, affects, and dispositions. And, if indeed it is so, then – thirdly – the strife to overcome contradictions, harmonize opinions, and reconcile disagreements seems to be an unrealistic, as well as a counterproductive, endeavor. This might be the case also for the very reason that what at first glance seems as a barrier and hindrance is the actual adhesive of societal endurance, and maybe even the source of its uniqueness and singularity. Whether we like it or not, this fierce antagonism which is incomprehensible for others – just as for us are the "everlasting" conflicts in the Balkans or the near and far East – the entanglement of mortal enemies in a rivalrous embrace (left with the right, Catholics and "freethinkers," advocates of the national cause and those who fight for the global humanity or citizenry, the majority and the minorities, serfs and their masters, and so on) produces a space of communal – because they are clear to us – opposing justifications, whose agonistic affinities uphold, and in effect safeguard, the relative durability, unity, and duration of Polish shared memory.

If there is anything of value in these insights derived from three meta-memory metaphors diagnosing the effects of our submersion in the universe of communal memory, then the conclusions that are drawn from them are not at all optimistic. Landscapes of memory open up before us in ever different, novel, and intriguing forms but there is no escaping them: these are rooms without doors. The palimpsestic residues of the past eject to the surface, bring to awareness, and force the re-examination of forgotten scores of past wrongs, but the agora is usually too small for all of them to be voiced and heard. Moreover, the knots of memory are predominantly clusters of conflicts, tangles of unresolvable, and oftentimes incommensurate experiences, reasons, values, emotional ties – disentangling these knots could therefore unravel the community itself. It seems that there is no satisfactory (or maybe even any) way out of this world of memory.

Still, as an optimist who believes that there is always more than one answer to a given problem, I propose that in place of a depressing acknowledgement of the fact that there is no escaping the above predicament, we can look at it from another perspective. Because if there is no way to do away with the universe of our memory, then maybe it should finally be seen for what it is (in all its failings and shortcomings), with all the spectres and ghosts haunting it, to recognize the cultural capital that these represent, and to accept them as part of ourselves. Maybe then, without awaiting the coming of a memory-orientated ennui, our gaze, freed from

the compulsive fixation on the past, can finally be cast towards that which is in front – so that we can get a glimpse of what the future might hold for us.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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This is an attempt to characterize the Polish culture of memory by drawing on three metaphors: memory as a landscape, memory as a palimpsest, memory as a knot.

Keywords

Polish memory, cultures of memory, politics of memory, national identity, divided community

Justyna Tabaszewska

Polish Memory Revisited

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What's new? Not much. We are still using
our extremely artificial rhetoric [...][1]

Marcin Świetlicki, *Nie dla Jana Polkowskiego*
[Not for Jan Polkowski]

This is yet another issue of *Teksty Drugie*, published in recent years, that is dedicated to the topic of Polish memory. The current volume comprises papers written in diverse circumstances and with different aims in mind: some were composed for the Polish-language 2016 special issue, titled ***Polish Memory***, others are updated and revised versions of papers published throughout the last decade in ***Teksty Drugie***, and, finally, several were prepared specifically for the current volume.

This journal persistently returns to the topic of collective and cultural memory for several reasons. One of them is that, paradoxically, there was very little change in the field of Polish politics of memory. Another one is that – as Marcin Świetlicki once put it when describing the specific poetic diction of the 1980s – the artificial rhetoric purporting that Polish memory is unavoidably stretched between either the position of victim or the position of victor has grown even louder in recent years.

1 Marcin Świetlicki, "Nie dla Jana Polkowskiego" [Not for Jan Polkowski], in *Zimne kraje 2* (Warszawa: Zebra, 1995).

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This means that it is now more important than ever to critically respond to the narrow and politically charged framework of collective memory. And a lot has changed in the last dozen years in this regard: the number of critical studies of historical moments that are particularly painful for Polish memory has rapidly grown, as did the count of influential discussions regarding detailed case studies.[2] Theories and concepts systematizing collective memory have become not only more nuanced, but also garnered some unexpected public recognition, changing the topic of collective memory into a sphere of interest for the general audience.

In other words, political stagnation not only does not translate into calcification in research, but, paradoxically, provokes the further development of memory research, which has been flourishing for years (and not only in Poland) as one of the most dynamically expanding disciplines in the humanities.

This issue of *Teksty Drugie* approaches this development in a distinct manner – especially compared to previous volumes – by collecting papers that have been written over the course of seven years. What is particularly important, in my opinion, is that this is not so much the documentation of the development of research on collective memory in Poland, but rather of the Polish collective memory itself. This shift is crucial here, because we can already talk about the arrival of the fourth wave of memory studies, at least in the framework of global trends, that emphasizes such things as the role and functions of environmental memory, thinking of memory on a whole new scale (which was inspired by such theories as planetary memory[3] or planetary age[4]), or expanding research on memory through the inclusion of non-human subjects (by actively posing the question of whether and how we can speak about the needs of non-humans).[5] These changes are more opaque in the case of Polish memory studies, as the main research questions are still focused on the issues

2 See Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, eds., *Night without End: The Fate of Jews in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2022); Barbara Czarnecka, *Słabe ciała wojny. Biologie i biografie kobiet w obozach koncentracyjnych* [Weak bodies of war. Biologies and biographies of women in concentration camps] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2022); Roma Sendyka, Maria Kobielska, Jakub Muchowski and Aleksandra Szczepan, eds., *Niemiejsca pamięci 1* [Non-places of memory] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2021); Roma Sendyka, Aleksandra Janus, Karina Jarzyńska and Kinga Siewior, eds., *Nie-miejsca pamięci 2* [Non-places of memory 2] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2021); Jan Borowicz, *Pamięć perwersyjna. Pozycje polskiego świadka Zagłady* [Perverse memory. Perspectives of a Polish witness to the Holocaust] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2020).

3 Lucy Bond, Ben De Bruyn and Jessica Rapson, eds., *Planetary Memory in Contemporary American Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2018).

4 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2021).

5 Aleksandra Ubertowska, "Mówić w imieniu biotycznej wspólnoty" [Speaking on behalf of the biotic community], *Teksty Drugie* 2 (2018).

of national memory (the subject of the second wave of memory studies) and the ways in which it enters into dialogue with transnational memory (which – through categories such as multidirectional memory,[6] dialogical memory,[7] or implied subjects[8] – set the perspective of the third wave of memory studies).

However, it is difficult to categorize deep immersion in national memory as a disadvantage or backwardness, because the vast majority of texts included here more or less overtly call for certain activist actions regarding Polish collective memory and point to those areas that require immediate intervention. Importantly, the time span between this issue and the 2016 issue (and the ones following it, in which articles on Polish memory were published periodically, such as the issue on the environmental history of the Holocaust, the volume regarding establishing witnesses, the special issue on historical museums, and the issue on the memory of the future)[9] allows us to trace certain shifts and decentralizations. In the current volume there are visibly more papers concerning local memories – the ones situated outside mainstream politics of memory – and there are slightly fewer papers that undertake the sensitive task of redefining Polish memory of the Holocaust. This is a significant change, showing that although there is still a lot to be done at the level of politics of memory, the development of world-class scientific research has accelerated, while simultaneously broadening the scope of its subject matter, as evidenced by a number of highly interesting publications that have appeared in recent years. Some of them were in a way "announced" by articles previously published in *Teksty Drugie*.[10] Despite of this, the question of whether everything is going in the right direction remains open. When writing about research on the Holocaust and anti-Semitism conducted in Poland, it would be difficult not to recall the disturbing context of some political actions taken in recent years, including the plain attack on Prof. Barbara Engelking, head of the Center for Holocaust Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the co-author of the publication *Night without End: The Fate of Jews in German-Occupied Poland*,[11] among many others. The

6 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009).

7 Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011).

8 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subjects. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2019).

9 See *Tekty Drugie* 2 (2017), 3 (2018), 4 (2020), 3 (2022).

10 See, e.g., Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Bracia miesiące. Studia z antropologii historycznej Polski 1939–1945* [Brother months. Studies in the historical anthropology of Poland 1939–1945] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2021); Roma Sendyka, *Poza obozem. Nie-miejsca pamięci – próba rozpoznania* [Non-places of memory – an attempt at recognition] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2021).

11 See Engelking and Grabowski, *Night without End*.

attempt to interfere with the freedom of scientific research and to force the conduct of research that would support only predetermined theses met with strong opposition of the academic community (a letter issued by the Scientific Council of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, defending both Prof. Engelking and the freedom of scientific research was signed by several thousand scientists from all over Poland); however, it is difficult to predict whether the propensity for control and restriction will become more or less severe in the future.

I turn to this case not only to sketch the political context of memory studies and its involvement in current historical politics (regardless of the intentions of specific scientists), but also to show that in this discipline nothing is a given, as a seemingly stabilized field of enquiry can be weaponized at any time. In other words: an event (or multiple events) that slowly changed its status from hot to cold[12] and inched its way towards cultural memory may suddenly revert to the sphere of communicative memory and trigger strong affective responses.

This feature of memory contributes to the fact that subsequent waves in memory studies are – and probably always will be – cumulative. The rise of the third – transnational, or fourth – environmental, wave of memory studies does not change the fact that it is still worth examining the framework of national memories. This is partly due to their dynamic nature that allows them to oscillate between creating broader, transnational (and perhaps even posthuman) frameworks of memory and entrenching themselves in thinking about collective memory as feasible solely for the purpose of building national identity. They can also – and this is most likely the case of Polish memory – embrace the tension between these two opposites.

The Recurring Shock

In my opinion the disproportion between the increasingly bold and interesting directions of scientific research on Polish collective memory, and the increasingly conservative Polish historical policy, is invigorating the development of memory studies in Poland. Although the end of the memory boom has been predicted and proclaimed for years, it is difficult to see any signs of this in the case of Polish collective memory, which seems to grow ever more involved with matters of quite distant past, like the memory of Second World War, with each passing year.

It appears that despite the passing of time this event is far from being closed or worked through. Recent political pressure shows that for Polish national identity, the defending of the black and white image of society's involvement in the events of 1939–1945 is extremely important and politically burdened (the unequivocally and exclusively positive attitude of Poles in the face of the Holocaust is to be an

12 See Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*.

argument for Poland's special position on the international arena). At the same time, maintaining this image is, by definition, impossible without radical interference with the scope of memory studies: Second World War and the Holocaust are events researched well enough for us to know the spectrum of behavior of the Polish society,[13] including the not unblemished image of Polish involvement in the war atrocities. This complicated situation undoubtedly contributes to the phenomenon that I have previously described as the process of the looping of Polish memory: the work of memory, consisting in, for example, transforming communicative memory into cultural memory, or functional memory into memory storage, is disturbed and the memory of a specific event begins to function in both such spheres simultaneously. Moreover, the memory of Second World War shapes the memory framework of the political transformation of 1989 as much as it itself is shaped by that event (accompanied by the possible futures that the transformation unlocked).[14]

The looping of the memory of Second World War and the time of transformation is clearly visible in Polish politics of memory: the year 1989 is sometimes interpreted as the "true end" of Second World War and the date of regaining full independence (which, in turn, links the memory framework of the 1989 breakthrough with the memory of the end of First World War, transferring the expectations of the year 1918 on to 1989), and sometimes is perceived as a somewhat fake, deficient breakthrough, which needs to be "completed" through some other political change. Despite the existence of these contradictory frameworks of memory, the period of political transformation in the 1990s is significantly less researched than Second World War, and, most likely, the study of this period will be the next step in the development of memory studies in Poland. One can even speculate with a high degree of confidence that in the light of recent political events (especially the Russian attack on Ukraine), the memory of the political transformation will be of interest not only to researchers of national memory, but also to scientists interested in the broader framework of Central and Eastern European memory.[15] This direction of the development of memory studies – that is, the search for frameworks of memory that are broader than national but at the same time narrower than global – will most likely become a vital part of new trends in memory research.

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13 See Lech Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny* [Polish politics of memory. Sociological essay] (Warszawa: WAiP, 2008); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

14 Justyna Tabaszewska, *Pamięć afektywna. Dynamika polskiej pamięci po roku 1989* [Affective memory. Dynamics of Polish memory after 1989] (Toruń: Wyd. UMK, 2022).

15 See previous attempts to create a framework for European memory: Konrad Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Conflicted Memories. Europeanizing Contemporary Histories* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

The next stages in the development of memory research will therefore provoke the emergence of new challenges: the character of some of them will be cumulative (after all, there is more and more to remember, and the perspectives from which memory of specific events is reconstructed only grow in number), but the nature of others will be structural. More and more attention in memory studies is (and will be) paid to previously marginalized phenomena: from the non-human subjects of memory, through environmental and planetary memory, to research on broadly understood temporality and the function of the future in defining memory.[16] At the same time, recent years have further added some complex memory nodes: from the pandemic, through the climate crisis, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Each of these events already affects the current framework of collective memory, and their impact will be, in all probability, fundamental. What is more, it is difficult to expect that the events defining the present will not influence how the past is remembered and how it is enacted in the present. The first symptoms of this change are already visible in the fourth wave of memory studies: the reorientation towards the environment and the discovery of suprahuman scales of memory are certainly related to the sense that the climate catastrophe, although extended in time, is already happening[17] and will shape both our future and the memory of the past. The climate and ecological catastrophe is also at least partly responsible for the increasingly clear formulation of the question of how to reconcile human understanding of time, memory, and agency with the long duration of ecosystems.

Furthermore, it is becoming evident that concepts such as planetary memory or slow memory will gradually replace categories related to what, in my opinion, can be described as collective episodic memory (a type of memory that focuses on specific events such as wars or genocides). In the case of collective episodic memory the timeline is constructed from one event to another, and what is between them is perceived as context rather than as an object of interest in its own right. In the case of Polish memory of the twentieth century, a punctual structure is clearly visible: from First World War, through the regaining of independence, Second World War and the loss of independence, to regaining political independence anew in 1989. In such a case, what comes "in-between" or "after," is not yet treated as an autonomous and complex process, which should be researched with at least an equal level of interest as any of the great events mentioned above. This punctual way of constructing memory has clear disadvantages: one is the already mentioned tendency to create memory loops, another – even more serious – is the difficulty in

16 Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby and Anthony Rowland, eds., *The Future of Memory* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

17 Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm. Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London: Verso, 2018).

building a framework of collective memory for processual events. This is probably why natural or nature-related events, such as the climate crisis, are more difficult to frame within the methodology of memory studies. However, the need to deal with processual events and to capture them in narrative forms is now becoming more and more pressing, so the transformation of collective episodic memory into a new model of memory is inevitable.

This trend is already visible in certain articles published in this volume, which track the evolution of memory taking place within the frames of national memory. By identifying the numerous aberrations in the work of Polish collective memory, expressed either through forgetting about some important processes or attaching excessive importance to others, scholars such as Adam Lipszyc, Marek Zaleski, Andrzej Leder or Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, among others, clearly show how complex and paradoxical memory work actually is. Its non-linearity, as well as entanglement in political influences and current politics of history have been noticed for a long time, but currently the level of complexity of memory frames goes beyond what was expected even a few years back. This is shown with great clarity in papers by Tomasz Rakowski and Karolina Koprowska, focusing on the discovery of new perspectives of remembering, and by Ryszard Nycz and Przemysław Czapliński, who focus on the changes in the structure of collective memory.

For now, it is still too early to assess what impact the events of the last few years will have on this slow evolution in the functioning of memory frameworks. We do not know yet whether the COVID-19 pandemic will be remembered discontinuously, as a "break in normality," whether it will become one of the defining moments of the twenty-first century, or whether it will slowly fade into oblivion, as was the case with the Spanish flu pandemic which occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century. Similarly, we do not know how the war in Ukraine will be remembered in the future: as a political distortion of limited scope or maybe as the defining moment of a broader geopolitical change in Central and Eastern Europe. However, each of the mentioned events constitutes a significant shock to both national and transnational frameworks of memory, thus ensuring that research on collective memory will not run out of material in the near future. Nevertheless, it is still worth asking the question of whether grappling with collective memory still makes sense in a much less stable world (and part of Europe), than was envisaged only a few years ago?

I am returning here to the question that was posed in slightly different words some years back by Gavriel Rosenfeld,[18] who referred to the impact that the events of September 11, 2001 should have on memory studies. The thinker pointed out that in the face of the threat of terrorism, we should focus much more on the future than on the past. Although Rosenfeld's question aroused a strong response among memory

18 Gavriel Rosenfeld, "A Looming Crash or a Soft Landing?" *The Journal of Modern History* 81 (1) (2009).

researchers – and it was rather negative, pointing to the fact that preparing for the future requires detailed knowledge of the past[19] – it is worth recalling it now for a at least two reasons. Firstly, because contrary to Rosenfeld's predictions, memory studies did not lose their momentum after 9/11, although questions of their purpose are even more relevant now than they were when Rosenfeld posed them. Secondly, because orientation towards the future in memory studies is now an increasingly apparent trend, and one directly resonating with his doubts. Typically, the relationship between the past, present, future, and memory is explained in this context by reference to the ideas of Reinhart Koselleck,[20] who pointed out that our present is shaped equally by references to the past and the future. While the past is the realm of experience which gives shape to our experience of the present, the future is the horizon of imagination which, on the one hand, is defined by contemporary perceptions of the sphere of possibility, but, on the other hand – through this conceptual backward projection to the present actually influences what will happen in the future.

This means – in Koselleck's terms – that the less stable the horizon of our imaginations is, the less stable not only the future, but also the past become. Destabilization of ideas about the future affects the present, which in turn affects how and why the past is remembered. Therefore, when making cautious predictions about the future, we can assume that in the coming years we will see further waves and phases in memory studies rather than a slow disintegration of discourse.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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Polish Memory Revisited

An introduction to the new (2023) special issue of *Teksty Drugie* on Polish collective memory.

Keywords:

collective memory, Polish memory, cultural memory, forgetting

19 Cf. Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," *Parallax* 17 (4) (2011): 4–18.

20 Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002); Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia UP, 2004).

Essays

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Memory – a Pharmakon

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What is better for life: to remember or not to remember? Or is it as Jan Sowa has claimed in his speech,[1] that all memory is conservative, and therefore focused solely on the past, and as such is a hindrance to thinking about the future? Or is it the other way round, and only a properly remembered past paves the way for responsible futuristic projects? Who is therefore right: Friedrich Nietzsche, stigmatizing the detrimental influence of history on life; Mao Zedong, who commanded the destruction of historical relics in the name of a brighter future; Jan Sowa, who views the current Polish memory of communism as a muzzle placed over adventuresome utopian thinking – or rather those for whom a properly constructed memory constitutes the necessary precondition of a responsible vision of the future? These are the questions that will guide my thinking throughout this essay.

1 Jan Sowa, "Nieznane znane. Polska kultura nie-pamięci" [Unknown known. Polish culture of non-memory] (lecture, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, September 30, 2016).

The Eternal Contemporaneity of Trauma, or, On the Pathologies of Polish Memory

Let us start with the wrong kind of remembering that considerably impedes any openness to the future. This is the subject of Friedrich Nietzsche's notable treatise "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," which can be read in two ways: either as a direct attack on the "parasite of memory," which lodges itself in the human mind and sucks the vital energy out of it, or – in a more dialectical manner – as a subtle guide that illuminates the difference between pathological and nurturing memory.[2] I will follow the second reading – even if it goes against Nietzsche's intentions – as alongside the "antiquarian" memory, which overburdens the psyche with commitments to past things whose traces memory tries to preserve, there is also a kind of active remembering that is governed by a sense of responsibility for the future. When Nietzsche defines humans as beings that are capable of making promises, he does it on the grounds of their ability to properly remember those commitments – all the more so as a substantial number of those are of the negative kind: "Never again!" Therefore, only well-structured memory permits us to escape the circle of fruitless repetition and to break the bonds of harmful projects. Contrary to what Karl Marx has claimed, not every tragedy reappears as farce; it most often returns simply as another tragedy.

The idea that good memory can bring deliverance from the vicious circle of compulsive repetition shows up in Sigmund Freud's essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle."[3] In both these works – of Nietzsche and Freud – a certain paradox comes to the fore, as good, appropriate remembering turns out to be, in part, forgetting. Here the Nietzschean *aktive Vergessenheit* is above all the ability to gain some distance to the things that were, by framing them as proper past, that is, as something that no longer exists. Proper memory would therefore draw upon the dialectical power of forgetting, which distances past things from the field of the living present, preventing the specters of past events from casting a shadow on the time experienced here and now. While Nietzsche calls the ever-present past a "destructive force," Freud talks in this context of the repetition compulsion, which he also places on the side of the death instinct. The past that cannot become the future and reappears incessantly

2 Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

3 Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 18: *(1920–1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works* (London: Hogarth, 1955).

in its spectral actuality becomes the principal mechanism by which Thanatos methodically eradicates the life psyche, depriving it of its fundamental vital ability of being-in-time, of participating in its constant transformation.

The pathology of memory would therefore manifest in sustaining the past as ever present – and, it seems, herein lies the most malignant aspect of Polish historical memory. Several Polish scholars have already turned to psychoanalysis in their interpretations of the Polish social context (Paweł Dybel, Piotr Augustyniak, Szymon Wróbel, Jan Sowa) and my understanding of Polish pathological memory as a repetition compulsion fits in well with this trend. Indeed, it seems that Polish right-wing historical policy relies on the pathological mechanism of *Wiederholungszwang*, which actively opposes resolving the past as if it was the past. The thanatic system of repetition, which it proposes, directly aims to block the work of memory, as at its core lies the eternal presence of trauma. Therefore, we are dealing here not only with a memorological pathology, but also with pathology elevated to the level of methodical national propaganda, whose purpose it is to hinder the critical process of *Durcharbeiten*; this is hyper-pathology which consciously styles itself into a singular standard of well-being. There is, unfortunately, method in the madness.

Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska performed an unparalleled analysis of this deranged method in her presentation,[4] I will therefore limit myself to its psychoanalytic summary. First, as Saryusz-Wolska aptly pointed out, this memory bets heavily on i m a g e s: the covers of patriotic right-wing periodicals showcased by the scholar – such as *Do Rzeczy* or *W Sieci* – deliberately disturb the perception of the linearity of time. Jarosław Kaczyński[5] dressed in Marshall Józef Piłsudski's[6] uniform or Muslim "terrorists" substituted for German troops in a notorious wartime photograph depicting the storming of the Polish border – these are all devices employed in service of repetition, of the eternal return of the same, a reality where Poland always needs to defend itself against an external threat. The trauma of threat and the knee-jerk defensive reflex align with the model of Ptolemaic immutability, wherein Polish history is solidified, and therefore the passage of time is completely negated.

4 Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, "Historia w ikonografii prasy prawicowej" [History in the iconography of the right-wing press] (lecture, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, September 30, 2016).

5 Leader of the party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), which was the ruling party in Poland from 2005 to 2007 and then since the 2015 election. – Trans.

6 Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) – Polish statesman, one of the preeminent figures in the Polish struggle for independence at the time of the First World War, organizer of the future Polish Army during the last years of Partitions. He is considered the father of the Second Polish Republic and is especially revered in Polish right-wing circles. – Trans.

While narrated history contains tensions, incidents, and plot turns – as any intricate story does – a history frozen in images is merely the catalyst for a simple string of associations that activates automatically. If the narrative falls into the domain of the self-conscious "I," one that can be-in-time, then the series of images offered by right-wing historical policy wholly belongs to the realm of the subconscious, whose basic element is timelessness, *nunc stans*, the everlasting present.

I will adhere to the psychoanalytical method for the most part in this essay, but here I need to make a short departure from it. Though Freud gives a masterful description of temporality's negation, the communal effects of it are even better diagnosed by the phenomenology of religion – a discipline instituted by Mircea Eliade. The Romanian thinker straightforwardly defines *sacrum* as the sphere in which temporality is suspended and which is marked by *illud tempus*: "that time," a moment of a privileged event that will ritually repeat itself, thus negating the temporality of all other profane occurrences.[7] The Polish national liturgical year is built strictly according to Eliade's cyclical model, whose goal it is to deprive history of its linearity: on August 1 the Uprising begins, on September 1 the war always starts, and on April 10 the Presidential Flight[8] crashes once again (this is a new day of remembrance, one that is being constantly adjoined to earlier traditions, but it will soon achieve the same sacred status of timelessness). Besides, the juxtaposition of Freud and Eliade is more than a mere digression. In fact, their notions of eternal presentness are perfectly symmetrical. What fills Freud with dread – the engulfment of linear time by the repetitive event that acts through a traumatic force – for Eliade becomes a positive criterion of sacrality, which is exactly this negation of time. What Freud tries to change by subjecting the repetition compulsion to a talking cure – that is by attempting to rewrite static images as linear narratives, traumatically experienced time as time restoratively recounted – Eliade, in turn, tries to preserve in the primordial form of traumatic influence, from which the Event is supposed to draw its sacrosanct power. Polish national holidays align perfectly with this (in Eliade's own terms) "affirmatively pagan"

7 Cf. esp. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask, introd. Jonathan Z. Smith (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and his *Sacrum, mit, historia*, trans. Anna Tatarkiewicz (Warszawa: PIW, 1970).

8 On April 10, 2010, the Polish Air Force Flight 101, carrying Polish delegates travelling for the 70th anniversary commemoration of Second World War mass murder of over twenty thousand Polish officers and intellectuals, crashed near the Russian city of Smolensk, killing all of the ninety-six passengers on board. Among them were the Polish president and first lady. – Trans.

understanding of *sacrum*, which feasts on extreme and catastrophic events that shatter the "profane" order of everyday.

The extraordinary sculpture by Stanisław Szukalski – an artist associated before the war with the paganist Zadruga, who afterwards emigrated to California (his inheritor is no other than Leonardo DiCaprio himself, the son of Szukalski's guardians) – comes to mind in this context. The sculpture depicts general Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski[9] as the Aztec god of war. This seemingly eccentric creation, where the demonic Bór hovers above the hecatomb of the Uprising's casualties, reveals the very essence of Polish memory, which celebrates the Warsaw Uprising as a great massacre. Only Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz dared to directly speak this truth – which was universally concealed, as is anything profoundly sacred – in his fictionalized journal titled *Kinderszenen*. By drawing upon Martin Heidegger, Eliade, and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, he has basically confirmed Szukalski's intuition that great historical events can be sacralised only through bloodshed in the deeply pagan Polish memory. As in the Aztec ritual sacrifices – the more blood is spilled, the more worthy of commemoration they become.

Let us return to psychoanalysis which has this great advantage over Eliade's understanding, that it identifies the principle of sacrificial bloodshed as a traumatizing pathology. Most aforementioned scholars, especially Dybel and Sowa,[10] strongly favor the ideas of Jacques Lacan in their analyses, but in my opinion the best psychoanalytical theory capable of elucidating the hyperpathological mechanism of Polish historical memory can be found in the work of Melanie Klein. While Lacan is quite vague in this respect and his theory is just as well (or even better) suited for an apology of Polish death worship, Klein does not leave room for uncertainty. According to her, remaining in the paranoid-schizoid position, which is characterized by the repetition compulsion, is a fundamental psychological aberration and the primary "source of suffering."[11] This position characterizes early infancy, when the just emerging psyche is completely dependent upon the mother. This reliance breeds constant frustration, as no actual mother can fully satisfy all of the infant's

9 Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski (1895–1966). Polish military leader who presided over the planning and execution of the ultimately failed Uprising of August 1, 1944, which has led to an estimated 200,000 military and civilian Polish casualties and resulted in the almost complete destruction of Warsaw followed by mass exodus from the capital city. – Trans.

10 Cf. Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* [The king's phantom body. Peripheral struggles with modern form] (Kraków: Universitas, 2011); Paweł Dybel, *Urwane ścieżki. Przybyszewski – Freud – Lacan* [Broken paths. Przybyszewski – Freud – Lacan] (Kraków: Universitas, 2000).

11 Cf. Melanie Klein, "Envy and Gratitude," in *Envy and Gratitude* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

demands: she is commonly, in the words of Klein's British protégé, D. W. Winnicott, "a good-enough mother." This frustration leads, in turn, to bouts of anger and aggression, whose object is the "bad breast," that is the life-giving source of milk. Because it is not readily available at all times, and it is not always full, the infant, still possessing the trace memory of "prenatal bliss," when feeding and nurturing was interrupted, rebels against its absence. Aggression in the paranoid-schizoid phase is therefore in essence a negation of coming into the world; it is an attempt to undo the "trauma of birth" (Otto Rank's term), in the course of which the psyche abandons the *pleroma* of delightful being-in-the-womb and is exposed to the foreign influence of an external world: of others, the difference, the reality principle and – last but not least – of time. In the rebellion against the "bad breast" the whole metaphysics of the Fall is being expressed: in its desire to return to the timelessness of the womb and to its eternal pleasure principle, the psyche refuses to "fall" into both world and time. It does not wish to be confronted with difference, because – at least initially – this can cause only suffering.

The greatest discovery of Klein and her "object relations" psychoanalysis is the diagnosis of the immature psyche as frozen in the paranoid-schizoid phase. The inability to progress to the depressive stage – where the world ceases to be perceived as a black and white space consisting of either absolutely good or absolutely bad objects – precludes the possibility of maturation: the psyche becomes frozen in the infantile stage, which is characterized by the alternating repetition of pleasure, when the "good breast" reminds of the bliss of the womb, and of persecutory delusion, where the "bad breast" reminds of the fall into the world and time – one is a state of blissful, uninterrupted narcissistic phantasy, the other is a state where each coming into contact with the reality principle is experienced as outright persecution. In the Polish context this would mean that Polish historical memory, which exhibits all the symptoms of being stranded in the mental stage of infancy, is capable of producing only two kinds of experience: either ecstasy induced by "an encounter with a good object" – a leader who is trusted without reservations, an environment that offers the comfort akin to that experienced in the womb, or a historical event presented as "a virtuous chapter" of Polish history – or paranoid fear caused by "an encounter with a bad object," that is with an actively persecutory "enemy of Polishness," who poses a direct existential threat.

It is noteworthy that in the Polish sacro-political imaginarium – which could also be characterized as universalized *mariavitism*,[12] where Catholicism

12 *Mariavitism* is the theological doctrine of the Mariavite Church, which was inspired by the Polish mystic Feliksa Magdalena Kozłowska (1862–1921). It sought the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church in the spirit of simplicity guided by the life of Mary, mother of Jesus,

becomes a pagan tribal religion accompanying "the Polish Christ" on his blood-soaked journey through the ages – holidays have always carried the mark of a "return to the womb," by offering pleasure steeped in the selfness of nationalistic narcissism. Nation, Church (these nouns are superficially masculine in the Polish language, but derive from the Latin feminine *natia* and *ecclesia*) become in the Polish pomp a space of prenatal bliss, through which the miracle of suspension of the world and of all difference shines through. This is when Polishness collapses into the abyss of its monocultural inwardness, as if into its own phantasy-nightmare, producing only a private language that for others is mere gibberish. Witold Gombrowicz fittingly identified this as Polish "formlessness," having on his mind the amorphousness of direct experiences and short-lived collective innervations that are produced by the multi-headed Polish body – "Pole on Pole," kneaded into a uniform national dough that fails to rise – here no difference, no distance, and no perspective can come to life. The Polish model of community, based in infantile prenatal reminiscences is therefore a genuine proxemic nightmare: Gombrowicz's tangle of bodies that are bound so closely together that no gaze can pierce the darkness of this national orgy. Blind identity, uninterested in seeking any external representation or reflection. The deepest pathology of inwardness, where memory is tasked with a single function: to once again summon the trauma which justifies the rejection of the world and the return to the womb.

These holidays also inevitably contain apocalyptical elements, as the return to the womb requires that the world first be destroyed. Whether this is achieved through the "great war of nations" prophesized by Adam Mickiewicz, where the harmful reality will bring on its own demise, or through some other sacrificial death of Poles – brave infants offered to the Moloch of this world to be devoured – is of no consequence. What matters, though, is the apocalypse itself, that is the great Manichean "NO!" which annihilates the reality principle, being-in-the-world, in time, in *saeculum*, which is full of ambivalence and where nothing is simply good or bad. This is fairly reminiscent of the "election program" put forward by Krzysztof Kononowicz, the self-proclaimed candidate for the Polish presidency. A chaotic enumeration of various "NOES" filled the campaign video posted by him on the internet – "so as there were no hooligans, that there was no noise, that there were no gymnasiums…" – which ended with the only logical conclusion: "so that there is nothing." Sometimes you need a maniac to express the truths animating a frenzied society. Just as Stanisław Szukalski was right on the mark in his presentation of Bór-Komorowki as the thanatological demon of

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which has led to the papal excommunication of the movement in the early twentieth century. – Trans.

carnage, so was also Kononowicz in his *credo* of Polish infantile apocalypticism: let us return to the womb, and this strange thing, this horrid world, let it finally come to an end…

Klein also claims that the greater the trauma that was experienced in infancy – that is, the more difficult the process of confronting the child with "the external world" – the stronger is the tendency to stultify maturation and entrenching of the psyche in the paranoid-schizoid position. Polish historical memory, which is focused almost exclusively on historical trauma, where Polishness fell prey to the "hostile world" – one example of this can be found in the representation of foreign powers in Adam Mickiewicz's *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation* – is based on exactly the same principle. By underscoring the traumatic nature of confrontation with any kind of difference, it closes itself off in the phantasm of self-identity, which it sources from the image of primal narcissism, when the infant's psyche, experiencing prenatal bliss, did not yet distinguish anything that was other from itself. The syndrome associated with the paranoid-schizoid position is therefore defined by traits such as the bare repetition of the traumatic event, the inability to experience ambivalence, and intolerance of any, even the slightest, differentiation.

Moving Into Time: On Polish Critical Memory

Poland is a country where maturation is associated with a considerable effort, which goes against the spontaneous tendencies characterizing, in the words of Stanisław Brzozowski, "infantilized Poland." The willingness to work through traumas, where the simple opposition "enemy–friend" disappears, and the readiness to accept ambivalence and difference emerge, are characteristic of the syndrome that was described as the depressive position by Melanie Klein – in contemporary Poland it is adopted only by the critically inclined intelligentsia, for whom Brzozowski still remains a pertinent role model.

According to Klein, the depressive position amounts to the abandoning of infantile narcissism and gaining a subjective perspective, whose first stage is the acceptance of the indelible ambiguity of the surrounding world, understood as a separate and external reality that is governed by its own rules and that requires the psyche to abandon a fair amount of its demands. In the phase of decompression the child realizes that the mother, who is the embodiment of externality – for the first time appearing as a singularized object – is not, all things considered, as bad as it seemed, and the child's very survival depends solely on her: here the aggression stemming from dependency of the powerless child gives way to feelings of guilt and gratitude for the love and care that it has been shown. More than this, the depressive position gives rise to the

sense of responsibility and agency. The child starts to perceive that its own actions also have a bearing on reality, that it can wound and hurt the environment that gave it life – henceforth, the child no longer identifies solely as a victim, it stops unleashing unmitigated fury upon the world, starts to comprehend the brittle nature of things that are external to it, and finally starts to empathize and therefore to participate. It becomes a part of the world.

"To be a part of the world": this is the essence of the dream of Brzozowski, who was obsessive in his aspirations for "historical maturation." Permanently unable to come to terms with the Polish paranoid-schizoid model, Brzozowski longed for it to mature into the position of historical agency and responsibility. He wanted for the Poles to become a part of the Western civilizational process and for them to join the group of nations that cultivate it purposefully. Adam Lipszyc used very similar critical instruments, including the psychoanalytic apparatus of Melanie Klein, to talk about overcoming of the infantile position towards the European Union, which corresponds perfectly with Brzozowski's wish for Poland to finally see itself as a responsible part of the Western world, and not merely as a dependent permanent victim. Because just as infantile aggression is the flip side of powerlessness, so are current Polish attacks on the Union an expression of the certainty that no attack on the Union's "maternal body" can truly harm it. Just as the biting and kicking infant feels utterly helpless in confrontation with the mother, so will Jarosław Kaczyński hurl the worst insults at the European Union, all the while expecting that it will "keep on giving." The infant is permitted everything because, in fact, it can do nothing. Furious or not, it is at the mercy of the breast that it bites.

Maturation would therefore equal moving beyond the pathology of dependence, but this – somewhat paradoxically – would only be possible through acknowledging the state of dependence. This depressive recognition of the fact that one is not the center of the world, but merely a part of a greater whole, also has consequences for the competing model of remembering, where the narcissistic claims of Poles to represent themselves as the cosmic sacrifice or as the "Savior of nations" – that are a simple reversal and, at the same time, a continuation of the infantile feelings of omnipotence and all-importance – become fundamentally worked through and give way to a more somber feeling of *peripherality*. As far as the Polish paranoid-schizoid position inevitably places Poland at the center of the universe, the depressive position produces the image of Poland as a *peripheral culture*, which depends on patterns created by more central civilizations, or as Klein would describe it – it is destined to "learn from others." Brzozowski had no qualms about the fact that Poland must once and for all stop being all that sweet about itself for the sake of "raising the spirits," and enter into a period of study, which he

in no sense equivocated with the principle of "blind imitation" that is so effortlessly ascribed by the representatives of the political right to, as they call them, Polish "lemmings."[13] Just as a subject in a depressive position knows that learning is not a disgrace – that the child came to this world after its parents who "were here first" and have a better understanding of how to deal with its intricacies – so was Brzozowski free of the peripheral shame arising in contact with the cultures of primary modernity, especially the British. He wanted to drink from the fount of cultural self-knowledge of David Hume, William Blake, George Gordon Byron, and George Meredith – and a lot of what he creatively absorbed could aid the maturation of the Polish Romantic paradigm, for one. While absorbing a novel pattern of remembering from the British – one that is based on an intensely instrumental participation in world and time – Brzozowski also hoped to benefit the growth of the Polish soul, by habituating it to a more reflective way of thinking about its own history, wherein previously the passive dependency upon the West oftentimes found compensation in brutal colonizing aloofness exercised on nations considered even more culturally lagging.

Contrary to what the "stand tall" pundits claim these days, the depressive-peripheral position that Brzozowski recommended for the Poles has nothing to do with humiliation. Firstly, this is a "matter of fact" realization: Polish civilizations is for reasons not entirely under its control derivative in its relationship with Western modernization; and if it wants to take part in it at all, it must acknowledge this delay (unless it actually does not want to this, which would in essence lead to a secession from the Union). Secondly, it is an equally normal break with childish narcissism, when individual history stops appearing as a chain of special and extraordinary events – even miraculous ones as in the case of the "Miracle on the Vistula," or the "Miracle of Solidarity" that was prayed for by the Polish pope – and reveals itself instead as a typical history of weak nations that fall victim to all kinds of invaders. Thirdly, it is also a chance to extract that which is of true importance in Polish memory: not subsequent failed uprisings, massacres, and senseless hecatombs, but idiosyncratic experiences, unknown to the more fortunate cultures of the primary West. The most obvious example of these would be the memory of communism.

And here it is where my argument comes full circle. If I were to imagine a model of Polish mature memory, then it would be a laborious attempt

13 The term "lemming," which was first noted in the late aughts, is used in Polish public discourse as a derogatory term for (mostly) young professionals from large cities who are not interested in politics venturing beyond the short-term economic interest of their in-group. The term alludes to the supposed herd behaviors of the eponymous mammal. – Trans.

to work through the experience of communism that is not past-oriented but rather future-facing – not an attempt to redress the hurts (because justice for millions of victims just cannot be delivered), but rather a turn to our future responsible involvement in the project of Western modernization; one that would cast a critical gaze on all kinds of social radicalism. If there is one dimension where our memory can prove universally important and useful, it is in its strong-voiced *memento* against preserving the "idea of communism" as immortal and unsoiled by the dirty matter of real socialism. Because if anything is worthy of remembrance and working-through in Polish history, it is so for the sake of forewarning others – with the power of lived experience – about the consequences of travelling the path towards the very end of even the most noble utopia.

I am of the opinion that the memory of communism should become the mission of our critical intelligentsia that draws on Brzozowski's legacy – it should attest to our mature depressive position not only in the face of right-wing claims of Polish tradition, but also in confrontation with globally-inclined left-wing utopianism. Though, first and foremost, we should work hard to safeguard the trauma of communism from being completely appropriated by the pictorial pseudo-memory of right-wing rituals. If this would happen, then we would lose the probably singular chance of gaining a truly reflective self-identity. Ultimately, a measure of individual maturity is a well-structured memory that empowers the subject to narrate its own history in such a manner that allows others to draw some lessons from the story they hear.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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Memory – A Pharmakon

This essay examines the pathologies of Polish memory through Melanie Klein's psychoanalytical theory. Bielik-Robson suggests that the majority of what is seen as historical memory in contemporary Poland is no memory at all but a compulsion to repeat, reminiscent of the dark ritual of an ever-returning trauma. It is of course risky to extrapolate from psychoanalytical methods to collective subjects, but this essay attempts to describe the assumptive subject of the Polish collective as a Kleinian "angry infant" in the paranoid-schizoid position. This arrested development results in a falsely passive experience of dependency as well as a complete inability to work through trauma. To develop this ability, however, turns out to be a necessary condition for the formation of memory in the strict sense.

Keywords

individual and collective memory, repetition compulsion, trauma, Melanie Klein, psychoanalysis, angry infant

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The Autistic Chirping of Memory: Butler, Tustin, Mokry

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for my brave son, the Sparrow Wing

1. The Regimes of Polish Grievability

"I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for as by those whose deaths I disavow."[1] The "I" in this sentence is an individual I. However, the scope of what it treats as grievable and what it excludes from this realm is informed by its immersion in, and colonization by, collective patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Therefore, while there is no such thing as collective subjectivity, each member of a social group at least partly follows the group's patterns of grievability, even if always, hopefully, with a difference. Thus, with all the necessary caution and all due attention given to the possible differentiations and heterogeneities, we are allowed to use Judith Butler's formula on a collective level and state that a community is as much constituted by those it grieves for as by those whose

1 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York–London: Verso, 2004), 46.

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deaths it disavows. Looking at the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that are at work in this respect is certainly one of the best ways of knowing who we are.

Polish society – a rather large and internally differentiated bundle of communities, shot through by powerful homogenizing forces of internal colonization – is a case in point. Think of the double refugee crisis on the eastern border of Poland. Here, Polish sensitivity to the fate of the Ukrainian refugees contrasts sharply with the almost utter non-grievability of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees on the border with Belorus – a contrast which so painfully reminded us of the racist limitations of Polish hospitality and of the deeply rooted xenophobia that defines us as a society. Think of the repeated description of the Russian invasion on Ukraine as the first European war after 1945, a slogan which so swiftly excludes from our view the wars in former Yugoslavia.[2] It reminds us not only of the extent to which Polish society is still defined by Catholic identification (with Bosnian Muslim population being less grievable) and possibly of a racist prejudice against the Balkans as the Europe's "barbarian South," but also – and more interestingly – of the extent to which the mania of the end of the Cold War and the fall of the communist regime in Poland made us incapable of taking in the cruelty of the Yugoslavian disaster. Think of the recent crisis around the figure of John Paul II. What is worth noting in the present context is the striking contrast between the grievability of the victims of pedophilia, which might have become the driving force behind the ultimate fall of the most important Polish idol, and the utter non-grievability of the African victims of AIDS who fell prey to that very idol's mindless pro-death policy directed against safe sex. What comes to the fore in this contrast is, surely, racism again, but also – and more interestingly – the cult of the baby as such, which plays the key role in b o t h cases, a cult which is still a defining aspect of Polish culture: we support John Paul II's anti-abortion policy because we love kids and we are troubled by John Paul II's policy concerning pedophilia because we love kids. A new national holiday proposed by the ruling party – one that would commemorate children who fell victim of Nazi or Soviet state violence – was certainly designed to hush down the shock of the revelations

2 Konstanty Gebert, *Ostateczne rozwiązania. Ludobójcy i ich dzieło* [Final solutions: The genocide perpetrators and their work) (Warszawa: Agora, 2022), 542.

concerning John Paul II, but it feeds on the same cult of the child which made the shock possible in the first place.[3]

Much additional work is needed if Butler's useful formula were to manifest its full analytic potential. Among other complex issues, it is to be remembered that what defines us are not only the objects of grieving and the nature of the harm done to them, but also the ways and practices of how we remember them. In particular, it is rather doubtful if the aggressively monumentalist gestures of public commemoration that Polish rightwing is fond of can be really identified as part of a work of mourning. You do not mourn your lost ones as lost if you are trying to immortalize them in the national thanatic pantheon. Think of the famously infamous contrast between the Warsaw Umschlagplatz monument, an admirable attempt to mourn for the Jews sent by trains to Treblinka from that very spot, and the shockingly ugly train car full of crosses (and one matzeva) which stands nearby and commemorates deportations of Polish citizens to the East.[4] This is not only a vivid case of an attempt to make one class of victims less grievable than the other, but also an example of two radically different ways of remembering in the public space. The moving, quiet, white space of absence (designed by Hanna Szmalenberg and Władysław Klamerus) is juxtaposed here with the aggressive black monstrosity (designed by Maksymilian Biskupski), with crosses looking more like harpoons directed against all the enemies of our community rather than like signs that mark a loss. This is an extreme example, but many cases of public commemorations of the lost ones of any national community are, inevitably, marred by the element of the bombastic which viciously replaces the work of mourning. There are many ways to avoid mourning, a pompous or simply all-too smooth and ritualized commemoration being one of the most obvious and most commonly used instruments, one that lies in our collective toolbox just next to the straightforward oblivion. It is simply not an easy job to keep on facing the lostness of the lost ones and the enigmatic questions they keep on asking us, to re-open ourselves to these questions again and

3 TVN 24 Biznes (TV station), accessed June 19, 2023, https://tvn24.pl/biznes/z-kraju/nowe-swieto-panstwowe-10-wrzesnia-grupa-poslow-pis-wniosla-projekt-do-sejmu-narodowy-dzien-wspomnienia-gehenny-polskich-dzieci-wojny-6854357. The motion has been passed and the holiday is now official.

4 Elżbieta Janicka, *Festung Warschau* [The stronghold Warsaw] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011).

again – and to permanently question and redefine ourselves as a result of that opening.[5]

Now, as the example of the impressive Umschlagplatz monument clearly shows, it is often the imaginative artists who can do the job that is needed in such cases. At least sometimes they manage to break the silence of oblivion or silence the noisy drums of public commemorations that make the voice of loss inaudible or cut through the all-too smooth surface of rituals that pretend to remember the loss but in fact make it all-too present through representation. In what follows I would like to take a look at one particular and very peculiar example of such an artistic attempt at renewing and reopening Polish memory. What I have in mind is a strikingly original and beautiful book of poetry by Marcin Mokry titled *Świergot* [Chirping]. However, in order to prepare us for the reading, I would like to show my own toolbox which will be provided by the psychoanalyst Frances Tustin.

2. The Autistic Object and the Refusal of Mourning

Tustin's notion of the autistic object which is of special interest for me in the present context should be viewed against the background of two rival theories of individuation, proposed, respectively, by Donald Winnicott and Melanie Klein. Famously, Winnicott suggested that the process of separation between the mother and the child, the process thanks to which the child becomes a relatively independent entity, is necessarily mediated by what he called the transitional object.[6] The object, a soft and comforting piece of materiality, appears within the so-called potential space which grows between the two bodies, with the mother slowly distancing herself from the child. If the withdrawal of the mother is not too sudden and is not troubled by other distorting circumstances, the object can play the role of the token of both union and separation, without forcing the child into the traumatizing feeling of loss which would have to be mourned. The transitional object which is not just an object of contemplation, but is actively manipulated by the child – it is played with – is the first not-me object for the emerging subject, without being

5 Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 234–259.

6 Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 1–34.

something fully external. By re-presenting the mother, it allows the child to cope with the maternal absence.

Equally famously, Melanie Klein believed that the process of separation is inevitably accompanied by the dramatic feeling of loss.[7] The loss forces the child to move from the original paranoid-schizoid position in which it denies its separation and numerical difference from the so-called "good breast" into the more mature, but painful depressive position in which, initially, the child perceives the mother as a lost whole, while also feeling guilty of the "destruction" of the maternal object. Only gradually, through the process of reparation which is also the first instance of the work of mourning, does the child recover its trust in the existence of the maternal object. It also develops its own representations of the object, which, however, do take into account the separation and loss. On this theory, symbolization – including the development of language – is governed by the mechanisms of the act of mourning, with the symbols "knowing" they are not what they represent.[8]

Now, Frances Tustin seems to be using a theoretical framework which is a combination of Winnicottian and Kleinian perspectives. According to this model (which Tustin does not formulate explicitly), the objects of play do work as transitional objects, but the play is at the same time a work of mourning which aims at relative recovery from the feeling of loss caused by separation. This implicit model is, however, only the positive background of a relatively successful development against which Tustin analyzes what she is really interested in: the bleak world of the child with autism.[9]

In the case of autism the process of separation and individuation is radically distorted. The reasons for these distortions are partly inborn and partly to be looked for in the early relation between the mother and the child, even though Tustin is very careful not to blame the maternal carer for the situation. Whatever the reasons, however, the child with autism experiences the external world as the source an unbearable, nameless terror, as an abyss into which the child fears it will fall. It is unable to play with objects that would open for it a path to relatively successful separation from the mother. Thus, it confronts the black hole of the

7 Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* (London: Vintage, 1997), 61–93.

8 Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (London–New York: Routledge, 2015).

9 Frances Tustin, *Autistic Barriers in Neurotic Patients* (London: Karnac Books, 2003).

universe without any mediation. In order to defend itself against this horror, it resorts to contradictory but complementary strategies centered upon, respectively, autistic shapes and autistic objects.

The autistic shapes are relatively stable compositions of sense impressions, mostly of tactile nature.[10] They are perfectly private and absolutely "soft" in the sense that the encounter with them is not characterized by any resistance. They are not things or objects, but rather the impressions of the very surfaces of things, freed from the things themselves. With a set of stereotypical, self-stimulating moves and gestures, the child with autism resorts to the shapes in order to surround itself with their familiar softness which protects it from the horror of the void.

The use of the autistic object is also a form of self-stimulation, but works very differently.[11] Unlike the absolutely soft autistic shape, but also unlike the relatively soft transitional object, the autistic object is absolutely hard. It can be a matchbox car, a stone with rough edges, a piece of hard plastic. It is not a toy and it is not a symbol. In fact, it is not an object perceived as truly separate from the child's body. It is defined by its function which is to shield the child from the void into which the child should but is unable to step, as it lacks the capability to build the bridge composed of transitional objects of mourning. The autistic object bars the way out: it is a plug which screens off the void of separation, but so does it block the path to the work of mourning. It is a non-transitional, intransitive object which does not lead anywhere. It is a mock-exteriority: by stimulating itself on and on by the hard autistic object the child both confirms its own existence, pretends to be in contact with something exterior and bars its own way to the true exteriority, while remaining within the screened off, protected sphere guarded by the hardness of the object. The object blocks the way to the sphere where intersubjective linguistic representations could develop, but – at least for the time being – it is simply safer for the child to stay with it, for what awaits it on the other side of the autistic object is not the bridge of representations, but the void of nothingness. Until the therapeutic process has not reached any relative success it is cruel, dangerous and unwise to rob the child of its protection. And so it remains within the dual world of soft autistic shapes and hard autistic objects which seem

10 Ibid., 121–169.

11 Ibid., 102–118.

to be two aspects that only when dialectically combined can form the hard-and-soft objects of our external world. Incapable of this dialectical combination, the child with autism moves constantly between the two contradictory poles of softness and hardness.

When introducing his idea of transitionality, Donald Winnicott emphasized the fact that one should take into account both transitional objects and transitional phenomena. Among the latter, he mentions also vocal phenomena and sounds which can easily play this role. As we have seen, autistic objects are precisely n o t transitional. However, according to Frances Tustin, vocal phenomena, including actual words can also play the role quite well. Developing some of Tustin's ideas, Ewa Modzelewska-Kossowska has suggested that the linguistic phenomena that are to function as autistic objects are likely to contain sounds which are equivalents of tactile hardness, sounds such as "r," "g," "k" and so on.[12] Modzelewska-Kossowska focuses on the case of a patient with autism, who produced a curious, extremely suggestive neologism which she identifies as the patient's autistic object. The neologism, "krzykda," is a portmanteau word composed of two Polish words, "krzywda" (harm) and "krzyk" (scream). With the second "k" inserted in the middle, this striking word is a real scream of the hurt unconscious, a lament and protest at the same time, a meaningful-meaningless element which inhibits the all-too smooth passage of linguistic work of mourning and forces it to move in the deadly, repetitive circle from "k" to "k." And since it can be read as "krzyk da" (literally "it will give a scream"), this screaming word of refusal and protest literally and repetitively keeps on keeping the promise of "giving" a scream.

Frances Tustin pointed out that the horror of the void that people troubled by autism feel throughout their lives is sometimes given a particularly accurate expression in various works of the Romantic and Modernist poetry. This is only understandable: the poetry in question also reacts to a drastic disillusion and disenchantment of the world. Thus, Tustin supports her argument with the words of poets who both express the terrible feeling and offer some comfort by the very act of skillful expression. And yet the striking example of "krzykda," the powerful

12 Ewa Modzelewska-Kossowska, *Czy zniknie Warszawa, tak jawa jak sen? Katastrofa koronowirusa i przeklęty* świat [Will Warsaw vanish, both reality and dream? The coronavirus catastrophe and the cursed world] (unpublished). I am most grateful to the Author for giving me access to this important paper as well as for introducing me to the work of Frances Tustin in the first place.

autistic neologism with immense poetic potential, shows that the connection between poetry and the world of autism may be even stronger than Tustin suggests. Formally extreme, "krzykda" does not describe or express a feeling, but rather enacts, performs the dramatic experience in its very structure and vocal anatomy. By blocking the flow of language, by questioning the very mechanisms of transitionality and the work of mourning which should make it possible to cope with the catastrophe, the suffering poetry of krzykda refuses to gloss over loss. Paradoxically, in its repetitiveness and impotent perseverance, it preserves the truth of, the very lost-ness of the loss, which our everyday language and our everyday ways of practicing the famous art of losing work through all--too quickly. Thus, while unable to move on, it keeps on re-membering by dis-membering. And it is precisely this path that I want to follow now in reading some aspects of the great poem by Marcin Mokry.

3. The Chirping of the Inhuman

Published in 2019, *Świergot* [Chirping] is Mokry's second book of poetry.[13] His first book, titled *czytanie. Pisma* [reading. Scripture], published two years earlier, anticipated some of the gestures of the later volume in an interesting way, but it is only with *Świergot* that Mokry reached the level of radicalism and coherence that are marks of a true brilliance.[14] It is a complex, intellectually and emotionally demanding book on, as one of the reviewers suggested accurately, how the waves of universal history assault and possibly even drown our private stories.[15]

Considered as a book, *Świergot* is a very carefully and beautifully designed material object full of textual and visual effects. First 24 pages of the book follow rather strictly one particular pattern. On the left-hand page we see a title, a date and a short poem. On the bottom of the page we see fragments of entries from a dictionary, captions of illustrations from a botanical textbook or a geographical atlas, as well as fragments

13 Marcin Mokry, *Świergot* [Chirping] (Wrocław: Fundacja na rzecz Kultury i Edukacji im. Tymoteusza Karpowicza, 2019). Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are translated by the author of this article.

14 Marcin Mokry, *czytanie. Pisma* [reading. Scirpture] (Łódź: Dom Literatury w Łodzi, 2017).

15 Rafał Wawrzyńczyk "Jaskółka retroawangardy" [The swallow of the retroavantgarde], *Dwutygodnik* 3 (2020), accessed June 19, 2023, https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/8798-jaskolka-retroawangardy.html.

of advertisements and newspaper announcements. On the right-hand page we see a fragment of an alphabetically ordered list of villages, towns or cities, together with page number and a letter-number code of a given square on a map: evidently a fragment of an index from a world atlas. The list begins *in medias res* with Spanish "Oviedo" and moves on through places whose names start with O and then those whose names begin with P. Both pages are covered with a dense grid composed of tiny dots.

The poems seem to present glimpses from a life of a family composed of Marcin the father (who speaks here in first person) and his children, Antoni and Maria. Marcin seems to be a loving and caring, but troubled and sometimes distracted dad who – in one of the poems – when going away, does promise his son to reappear, but is not sure if he will be really able to keep the promise. The mother is absent, a fact which is difficult not to link to an oncologic illness suggested by some of the textual bits appearing at the bottom of the left-hand page, as well as to passages such as "with her who died" or "You do know well where you are, in the ground."

The poems are composed of broken fragments, with grammatical and semantic cuts, gaps and shifts within and between the lines. We receive only bits of stories and narratives, scraps of dialogues and soliloquies. Often we may think we are just about to grasp a more coherent whole and arrive a slightly bigger picture, but then we stumble upon one more cut and we lose again the track of understanding. The chopped, distracted nature of the discourse seems to be directly addressed by one the poems which closes with "The end / of language [or: tongue – A. L.]." Not much later we encounter the title of the whole book embedded within a powerful declaration: "nothing else but a chirping / drawn out of remnants."

And it is right after this declaration that the pattern that the book has followed so far begins to change. First, a single word "tracks" appears as a surprising addition to the list of city names. Then, the next poem confronts us with bleak images ("burnt out, cold, lifeless") and its dating moves us back in time by five years (the initial dates oscillating between 2017 and 2018). Then "tracks" again, this time twice. The next poem, titled "Maria sees a rose," is dated 05.04.94 and presents a fragmentary discourse which clearly refers to one of the massacres on the main bazaar in Sarajevo during the war in Bosnia. "The child's hand / was taken away by a dog," we read in a sudden moment of semantic coherence. On the top of the next page the word "Pokój" (peace) appears as one of the city

names and the name "Sarajevo" is reproduced on the right-hand side. Apart from two more geographical names appearing at the bottom, the rest of the page is occupied by an odd design which, indeed, looks a bit like a rose. Its middle is marked by the word "duša" („soul" in Bosnian and Serbian) which is surrounded by a circle composed of the repeated word „krv" („blood"). This circle, in turn, is surrounded by a shapeless shape composed of the onomatopeic, senseless „śriii," a chirping repeated numerous times.

From this moment on, the pattern breaks for good and the complexity of the composition becomes rather mind-blowing, so that a detailed reconstruction would be beside the point. Let us focus on the most important elements and aspects of this brilliant and deeply moving composition. Two pages after the "rose" the geographical list gets finally stuck on name which this time is dated: it is "Potočari 13 July 1995," the place and time of one of the massacres of the civilians from Srebrenica. For the next few pages the book is stamped with textual traces referring to that act of genocide. Mokry makes extensive and imaginative use of documentary evidence by quoting transcripts of dialogs from the so-called Petrović footage, a unique recording of the massacre and its aftermath, as well as a report on exhumations at Kozluk (another site of killings) by a forensic anthropologist Richard Wright.[16] However, a new motive, overlapping with the references to Srebrenica disaster, is soon introduced. With a poem titled "Maria has fever" dated 15.02.46, we move even deeper back in time and soon we find ourselves confronted with the catastrophe of the Shoah in general and with bits and pieces of textual evidence from ghetto of Łódź in particular.

The most general mechanism of this maddening progress is rather clear. Together with Marcin, Maria and Antoni we travel back in time and face outbursts of violence exerted upon not-our-own, upon people of low level of grievability in Polish collective memory. The intimate narrative of the family life gets entangled and confused with historical reports on the violence done to others. As this highly disturbing journey continues, another process escalates, that of the fragmentation of language, of chopping and reshuffling of narratives, poems and documents. What is crucial, however, is that the growing decomposition of language

16 Richard Wright, "Report on Excavations and Exhumations at Kozluk in 1999: with Appendix on Visits to Konjevici and Potocari," February 2, 2000, accessed June 19, 2023, https://srebrenica.sense-agency.com/assets/exhumations/sg-2-06-kozluk-eng.pdf.

cannot be adequately captured by the idea of fragmentation. Step by step, the chopped, scattered messages turn into, or are replaced by, textual bits whose sensuous nature, their physical placement on the page and their vocal qualities when read aloud increasingly dominate over their semantic dimension. The ultimate result is not so much a fragmented language, but a play of strange elements of post-linguistic, vocal nature.

Three rather different, but intertwined sequences of such elements run through the second half of the book. The first one is composed of various occurrences of the word that we have already encountered, the first really disturbing element in the whole book, namely the repeated word "tracks." The tracks run through much of the later part of the book, disappearing and reappearing again and again. At some point they are joined by the words "tram" and "whirr."[17]

The second sequence seems to be an antithesis to this mechanical line of deadly, noisy transport. It is composed of various names of common plants and flowers (namely: evening primrose, knapweed, pea, yarrow, fleabane) scattered here and there on some of the pages. The apparently innocent and idyllic nature of this sequence is of course rather misleading: according to Wright's report these are the very plants that used to grow on the site of the execution. More precisely, living plants of this kind were found growing around the bodies, while dead plants were found under them. By scattering their names over the pages of his book, Mokry turns the names into objects they were to represent, while turning the very pages into the killing fields of Bosnia. Moreover, consistently trying to confront the intimate story of his three protagonists with the historical violence done to the less or non-grievable, he lets his plants grow literally and literarily over his own family. In what is perhaps the most radical and most shocking juxtaposition of the whole book, Mokry puts "an example of a filled out body sheet," with the details of the state one of the bodies at Kozluk was found in, side by side with the report of the ultrasound scan of his pregnant wife, with the details of the body of the fetus in perfect shape and health (incidentally, this is also the only time when the mother and her name, Agnieszka, is mentioned explicitly in the book). Both reports are shot through with the names of the plants

17 In an insightful reading of Mokry's poem, Antoni Zając suggests an association between Świergot and Steve Reich's "Different Trains." Antoni Zając, "Z resztek wydobyty" [Extracted from remnants], *Kontakt*, December 15, 2019, accessed June 19, 2023, https://magazynkontakt.pl/z-resztek-wydobyty-swiergot-marcina-mokrego/.

growing here and there among the technical data – and so the horrifying perspective that Maria and Antoni will be also lying with the plants over and under their bodies becomes painfully tangible.

It is not only that the scattered names of the plants grow over the two juxtaposed reports. The "tracks" and "tram" of the first sequence also run through these sheets.[18] However, the third and most disturbing sequence is also present on these two pages. It is simply the sequence composed of chirping, of the weird "śriii" which made its first appearance when Maria saw the terrible "rose." In a way, the chirping line may be seen as an ambiguous synthesis of the other two: the technical whirr of tracks and trams going through the ghetto of Łódź and the organic silence of the plants growing on the site of killing of the civilians from Srebrenica meet and are transcended by the avian, organic, but strangely metallic, radically inhuman chirping of the "śriii."

Most consistently, it is this terrible sound that we hear at the very end, multiplied. Back from the time travel, we encounter what seems to be one more title of a poem: "Maria hears the chirping," marked with the most recent date in the whole book, 02.06.19. There is no poem here, though, only three "śriii"s here and there and a dictionary entry ("pożar [= fire] (*m*) Feuer (*n*)") plus a cosmic caption from an atlas ("Układ Słoneczny [= Solar System]") at the bottom of the page. On the next page we get a minute fragment of an avian narrative ("they eat, copulate and / sleep while flying") and three now-familiar names of the uncanny plants reappearing for the very last time. The last two pages of the book or, rather, one final broad page composed of two sheets facing each other, is occupied solely by numerous "śriii"s scattered over the blank paper from which even the precise grid of minute dots that accompanied us through the book has disappeared. The network of coordinates is gone for good. We do not look at the ground anymore. With no ground under our feet, we are falling forward through the air filled with the terrible chirping.

Commenting on this impressive finale and punning on Thomas Stearns Eliot's classical formula, one of the reviewers suggested that in

18 The combination of deadly tracks and the plants growing over the killing fields and then literally transplanted into the poem enables us to identify one of the main sources of Mokry's poem in Paul Celan's famous *Engführung* where a similar combination is to be found, together with an imaginative use of documentary evidence concerning war violence. Paul Celan, *Die Gedichte*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2020), 117–122.

Mokry's poem the world ends not "with a bang, but with chirping," with the inhuman voice of the metallic birds that may be identified as the military aircrafts of a coming war.[19] It may also be the case that the chirping birds should be seen (or rather heard) as the inhabitants of a world to come, beings that do not care about the humans that massacred each other and were superseded by some new natural/post-natural forces. However, more needs to be said about this brilliant ending. And this is precisely where we need to return to the idea of the very autistic object.

By moving deeper and deeper in time and passing through the waves of less-(or non-)grievable losses, by exposing his own family life to these waves, by textually amalgamating one with the other, by shifting from techniques of fragmentation and textual dispersion increasingly into what could be clumsily named "autisticization" of the text, Mokry – more and more maddeningly, but also more and more effectively – stubbornly refuses both to be silent about violence and loss and to cover it with stable representations that would offer a seeming closure of the work of mourning. What seems to be crucial in this respect is the dialectical temporality of the chirping, the vocal autistic object that both ends the book and prevents it from ending and closing in any conclusive way. On the one hand, the chirping, as the third sequence after the ghetto tram whirring over its tracks and the dispersed uncanny plants of Kozluk, is an anticipation of the final disaster and the ultimate loss. On the other hand, precisely as future-oriented, it effectively destabilizes each past--oriented narrative that would like to smoothen things up. The terrible "śriii" acts both as a sign of what is coming and as a refusal to let the lost go, as an autistic inhibition of a "normal" act of mourning and representation – and so, paradoxically, it embodies (rather than represents) the lost within the text. The sensual, tactile embodiment of the missing bodies precisely a s missing and thus non-representable, turns the text into a permanent performance of mourning which is effective precisely in its inability to mourn.

The radical nature of the autistic chirping which closes or rather keeps on re-opening the book can be seen if we compare it with the powerful "krzykda" evoked above. "Krzykda" is a seemingly senseless, but perfectly meaningful and immediately understandable, screaming expression of

19 Jakub Skurtys, "że nie porozdzielani. Szliśmy" [That undivided. We went], *Magazyn Wizje*, November 17, 2019, accessed June 19, 2023, https://magazynwizje.pl/aktualnik/skurtys--mokry/.

harm, produced by a subject who, even if terrified and on the border of losing their humanity, still defends their stance within the human word and world. The chirping goes dangerously beyond the human and is unable to re-enter it. It autistically "knows" that where we walk the bridges of stable words that claim to refer to stable objects there is only the black hole and the abyss of loss. The chirping subject stands on the other side of the linguistic and keeps on producing his terrified and terrifying sounds that both protect him from falling with their hard consonants and keep expressing his terror of the abyss and the ultimate disaster. It may well be that the terrified Marcin, the protagonist of the "story" perceived as distinct from the author, has withdrawn from language into the autistic world of chirping and so he is ultimately unable to protect his children from falling. It may well be that, not unlike the little Árpád described by Sándor Ferenczi, who imitated the screams of the rooster he was terrified by, Marcin ultimately identifies with, and gives voice to, the inhuman, metallic chirping of the coming birds of destruction.[20] It may well be that it is her father's own chirping that Maria hears at the very end. And yet, by never-really-ending his brilliant and terrifying book with the autistic chirping, Marcin Mokry the poet does what only the most radical masters of language are capable of doing: he keeps re-opening Polish memory onto the losses that we can never properly grieve and, by doing so, he keeps on formulating the necessary, if ultimately impossible, conditions of what it would mean to protect our children from the disasters to come.

20 Sándor Ferenczi, *First Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Ernest Jones (London and New York: Karnac, 2002), 240–52.

Abstract

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The Autistic Chirping of Memory: Butler, Tustin, Mokry

In the first section of the paper the author offers a quick view on the shape of Polish collective memory seen through the lens of Judith Butler notion of grievability. He argues that it is often the job of the artists to reopen closed and falsified forms of remembering and mourning. Then he introduces the idea of the autistic object borrowed from the work of the psychoanalyst Frances Tustin. This category becomes the key to the reading of Marcin Mokry's book *Świergot*, which forms the main part of the paper and which presents this brilliant work as a radical reopening of Polish memory. Paradoxically, the poetic means that are instrumental in this act reopening can be identified as having much in common with the world of autism as described by Tustin.

Keywords

Judith Butler, Frances Tustin, Marcin Mokry, grievability, mourning, autism, violence

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Undead Memory. Reading Kazimierz Wyka in Poland in 2016

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How does the relationship between history and memory change today? In what way do the phenomena of "false memory" and "false witness" figure in history? When does oral history lose its emancipatory role, and instead turns into political ventriloquism? Under what circumstances individual memory conforms to the collective one, conceding to the further loss of representation in the social world? Is the sphere of memory inhabited by its own *walking dead* and what can be done to stop them? These are but a handful of questions that have accompanied my latest reading of Kazimierz Wyka's *Życie na niby* [Make-belief life].

Wyka on Goebbels

In the essay "Goebbels, Hitler i Kato" [Goebbels, Hitler and Kato] written after the Third Reich attacked the USSR in 1941, the writer is amazed by the effectiveness of Joseph Goebbels's propaganda machine:

> It was enough to throw a bunch of pseudo-statements and pseudo-documents, for a whole nation [German, in this case – J. T. B.] to accept a new situation of unforeseen

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> significance as if it were an additional clothing coupon. This baffling leap, this incredible realignment from silence and murmurs of friendship to getting at one another's throats with howls of hysterical animosity! The truth that starts when a new assertion is made does not reach back. And it fades away just as a new statement begins.[1]

Wyka's essay analyses the epistemology of propaganda, preceding in this regard Hannah Arendt's "Truth and Politics"[2] by over a decade. The Polish author states that inflated or deprecated facts – through intentional hypertrophy of meaning introduced into a minor fact – shatter from within. "Cause and effect is being found and new wholes are being formed where previously there were none. In turn, the dependencies that truly do exist, are being blocked and culled."[3] Facts created by propaganda cast no shadow. They cannot be scrutinized from another point of view; put under a different light, they simply disappear.

That propaganda creates facts is not its only demonic aspect. It is even worse that

> individuals, societies, or nations that permanently and consequently have certain experiences removed from memory and others forced in their stead, come in the end, by the principle of psychological exhaustion, to the conclusion that the displaced facts do not exists and have never done so. Conversely, by the principles of habit and familiarization, forced and emphasized facts start to act as if they were real. Therefore, one should truly worry that after losing the war German society will still disbelieve the existence of concentration camps and instead believe in its calling as the defender of Europe.[4]

In order to explain this effect – and it was in the year 1942 when these words were written – Wyka turns to Gustave Le Bon's enduring theory, thus demonstrating what a diligent pupil the French thinker found in the author of *Mein Kampf*. Even though, from the current perspective, a better reading could be given by Klaus Theweleit than by Le Bon, it is worth quoting, after Wyka, the relevant passage from Hitler's work: "The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is

1 Kazimierz Wyka, "Goebbels, Hitler i Kato" [Goebbels, Hitler and Kato], in *Życie na niby* (Kraków: Universitas, 2010 [1957]), 166 (hereafter cited in text as ŻnN).

2 Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," *New Yorker*, February 25, 1967.

3 ŻnN, 184.

4 ŻnN, 178.

enormous."[5] The function of propaganda, and of the art on which it is modelled, is therefore to work in such a way that "everyone will be convinced that the fact is real, the process necessary, the necessity correct,"[6] irrespective of whether it truly is so.

Theweleit on the Language of Propaganda

This is how the German leader rationalized the need for manufacturing reality, in which his critic, Kurt Theweleit, sees the essence of fascism.[7] In Theweleit's view fascism is not founded on seduction or misapprehension, but rather exactly on the manufacturing of reality, in the course of which that what really is becomes suppressed by a well-argued nothingness – that which does not exist but what constitutes the object of desire. Fascist speech becomes the means of production, stripping of their qualities those parts of reality that become ingested by language.

Except for a few French scholars in the 1970s, nearly no one investigated the language of fascism. The middle class did not scrutinize the meanings it conveyed, so as not to reveal its own complacency. In turn, the communists cancelled it "set[ting] their faces in the woodcut mold of strongman Stalin, who at least could have been depended upon to wipe out these kinds of nuisances" (1:70). In consequence of this, the "glibness of formulations" in whose "cyclopean thought constructions" Walter Benjamin saw the essence of fascism (2:128) itself became a glib formulation.

The fascist speech is dangerous because retreat from reality can be proclaimed at any time and any place. It is enough to initiate "the language of occupation" (1:215), which "does not enter into the kind of relations to its represented objects that would allow them to be fairly represented" (1:87). Such language does not want to know anything about its subject. From the multiplicity of information it takes very little and, what is more, always the same elements, so that "their 'choice' appears as compulsion" (1:88). It seems as if this language had but one fictitious author, who writes a ledger of the appropriation of reality.

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5 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, introd. D.C. Watt, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 165.

6 Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 164.

7 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1: *Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 88; vol. 2: *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). All subsequent references to this book are indicated in the main text by volume and page number alone in parentheses.

The violence which this language exacts and of which it readily speaks, never appears as the object of choice or affinity, but rather styles itself as moral and patriotic responsibility. Theweleit objects to defining the mechanism of delusion that underlies this violence as projection. "What is called 'projection' is anything but mere delusion. It would be easy enough to apply the scapegoat theory here, except that the connection between the real object of aggressive intent and the substituted object is more than just arbitrary" (1:155). The scapegoat theory is also according to Theweleit somewhat of an oversimplification in explaining the target of fascist aggression. He would rather call it "a hallucinatory substitution of the object." The victim of this substitution shares certain traits with the original object, but the blows that it receives actually relate to the personal hallucination of the aggressor, to the object of his desire.[8]

The speech delivered by the leader is a basic instrument of fascist propaganda. Its external form functions as part of body-armor: it offers him evidence of his own solidity (2:128). "Although the rhetorical stance of the fascist orator is one of substantiated argument, he makes no explicit effort to substantiate anything, he simply makes assertions," says Theweleit (2:128). The fascist speech, delivered in an authoritative voice, the voice of "the master of speech," is the instrument that creates reality. Here, speech is conception, and this is not a random metaphor in this case: the community listening to the leader's speech is in the most fundamental sense homosocial, joined through the ties of forbidden eroticism within which the feminine way of giving birth is substituted by the masculine one.

> When the leader speaks and the audience moves into formation; when both speaker and audience have assumed the correct form and can anticipate mutual contact which cannot, must not be expressed as actual male love, since this is strictly forbidden, then the man [...] is permitted to cry [...]. This is the orgasm of oratory – surpassed only by the orgasm of killing.
>
> In the fascist context, persuasion is an exclusively male procreative process; what is found instead is a cerebral parthogenesis (the masculine form of the virgin birth[9]) that has little to do with any manifestation of male love, the "upper

8 Gérard Bonnet writes about hallucinations as the underlying cause of murder in his book *Le remords. Psychoanalyse d'un meurtier* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000).

9 The difference between feminine and masculine birth can be further broadened by the aspect referred to during the conference "Polska pamięć" [Polish memory] by Katarzyna Bojarska, who pointed to this passage from Susan Buck-Morss: "There is another aspect of violence, that of the historical event of insurrection itself. Hegel was quite comfortable thinking human progress and human violence as necessarily correlated. So were, for dif-

> level" of a murdering machine – a machine designed specifically to annihilate its "lower levels" in the copulatory act of state-formation.
>
> What then of the man who does not cry, who refuses to consider himself blessed by the form emerging from the mouth of the Fuhrer, who resists unification with the towering form that reaches up toward him? He is instantly expelled, for he is the "other" way inclined; an eavesdropper, a potential informer. (2:127)

The ones listening to a fascist speech are not merely the recipients of certain concepts – especially as they are already well-known and agreeable to them – but

> Their contact with the speech-as-form constitutes them as active agents; they play a greater part in the ritual than do iron filings in the magnetic field, simply because they assume their own place in the pattern, fuse themselves into the whole. It is the participant himself who says to his neighbor, "Comrade, we must stand together." (2:129)

There are two movements that occur perpetually within a fascist community: joining in a hierarchical structure of those who have been deemed worthy of unification, and the elimination of all those who cannot be included. That is why Jean-Pierre Faye characterized totalitarian speech as "a language of abortion"[10]: these "all" in whose name the leader speaks, are only those who are recognized as possessors of "a German soul." Here, "the soldierly male body is a 'unified nation' at one with itself after hard-fought battles to dam its own flows" (2:84). Violence, according to Theweleit, is a substitute of failed sexual acts and of the quelled hope of socialization.

A victory achieved on this front results in characteristic moral stupor. Sensibility is hardened and cut off. It is just as in W. R. Bion's classic study

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ferent reasons, Dessalines, Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon, and Ernest Renan. From the standpoint of universal history, however, the issue is not so clear. To argue that the birth of a new idea of humanity – whether by slave revolution, class revolution, or national liberation – must be bloody, makes a first principle out of violence, a cult of blood-letting that grants too much legitimacy to the masculinist culture of the warrior. Fanon's psychology of violence as a purging of colonial consciousness is compelling in theory, but problematic as a principle of practice. Is the blood that stains the midwife of a different order? Surely, helping to bring life into the world is qualitatively different, from a human point of view, from the blood that stains by taking life away." Susan Buck-Morss," Universal History Upside Down. Reflections on Hegel and Haiti: A Response to the Critics" (unpublished manuscript, 2013). I am grateful to Katarzyna Bojarska for sharing this citation with me.

10 Jean-Pierre Faye, *Théorie du récit. Introduction aux "langage totalitaires"* (Paris: Hermann, 1972), quoted after Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2:125.

"On Arrogance," where self-care dominated by the death drive turns into arrogance.[11] Empathy, the feelings associated with pain, fear, and mutual care constitute too great a threat for the body armor behind which, according to Theweleit, boys that were taken prematurely from their mothers try to hide.

"The more lifeless, regimented, and monumental reality appears to be, the more secure the men feel" (1:218). In light of Theweleit's analysis the monumentalism that is characteristic for all totalitarian regimes can be understood as "a safety mechanism against the bewildering multiplicity of the living." He goes on to say that "empires can be built only on, and out of, dead matter" (1:218); treating dead life as building block that can be freely apportioned for the construction of the monumental future.

Traverso: The Coming of Memory

Even if in every quarter of the globe ruling powers force people to inhabit their propagandist visions, the individual versions differ significantly from one another. Among other things, they vary in "how broadly or narrowly the power is based: is it centered in one person, or is it spread out among many different centers that exercise checks on one another? And are its subjects merely subjects or are they also citizens?"[12] There is a fundamental rift between Rwanda's history before and after the genocide, Great Britain's history before and after Eric Hobsbawm, France's history before and after Michel Foucault, and in Poland's history before and after Jan Tomasz Gross. "Gross's book – Przemysław Czapliński has said about *Neighbors* – hampered the autoerotic mourning of Polish literature over the exterminated Jewish community."[13]

Enzo Traverso claims that the political breakthrough of 1989 is the event that has modified the ways of thinking and writing about twentieth-century history to the greatest extent. Among the changes it provoked, Traverso lists

11 W. R. Bion, "On Arrogance," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 82 (2) (2013). Originally published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39 (1958).

12 Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families. Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Picador, 1999), 181.

13 "*Neighbors* present as a lethal paraphrase of the literature of little motherlands – as its deadly serious pastiche. [...] after the publication of *Neighbors* Polish literature of little motherlands turned grey overnight." Przemysław Czapliński, "Prześladowcy, pomocnicy, świadkowie. Zagłada i polska literatura późnej nowoczesności" [Persecutors, helpers, witnesses. The Holocaust and Polish literature of late modernity], in *Zagłada. Współczesne problemy rozumienia i przedstawiania*, ed. Przemysław Czapliński and Ewa Domańska (Poznań: Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 2009), 164.

the emergence of memory: "the ossified time of the Cold War has waned and many reminiscences previously censored, classified, or repressed could be unveiled."[14] Although, a converse process begun at the same time – that of freezing, solidification, and collapse of notions that have suddenly lost their significance. That is how "memory placed in a new paradigm has cast into the background the notion of society, which seemed to dominate historical studies from the 1960s till the late 1980s."[15] Traverso's book *Histoire comme champ de bataille: interpréter les violences du XXe siècle* [History as battlefield. Interpretation of twentieth-century violence] is a suggestive tale of the consequences of this event, which by capturing the emancipatory energy of small-scale narratives has managed to stifle many large-scale ones, bringing *damnatio memoriae* on still other subjects."

There is a fundamental difference between the "memory turn" of Eastern and that of Western Europe, as Traverso points out. In Eastern Europe the return to the past is almost always performed under the banner of nationalism. The scholar exemplifies this by referring to the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej), whose mission statement since 1998 was to preserve the memory of "Communist and Nazi atrocities carried out between September 1, 1939 and December 31, 1989."[16] Twentieth-century history is celebrated here, according to Traverso, "as a long totalitarian night and one colossal national martyrdom," which impedes the development of a critically sound stance towards the past.

A similar vision guides the national history inspired by the Budapest House of Terror or certain legislation passed by the Ukrainian Parliament.[17]

> By presenting themselves as "victims," Eastern European nations leave very little space for commemorating the Holocaust. Here the memory of Shoah does not play the same communal role as it does in the West. It is perceived as a kind of competing memory, as an obstacle to the complete acknowledgement of suffering experienced by other national communities in the twentieth century. This contrast is paradoxical as Eastern Europe was the space of the atrocities inflicted upon Jews: this is where the great majority of victims who perished in the Shoah have lived and where Nazism first created the ghettos and then, with the start of the war

14 Enzo Traverso, *Historia jako pole bitwy. Interpretacja przemocy w XX wieku* [History as battlefield. Interpretation of twentieth-century violence], trans. Ś. F. Nowicki (Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2014), 13.

15 Ibid., 17.

16 Ibid., 315.

17 Ibid., 316.

> with the Soviet Union, began perpetrating the massacres that have culminated in the conglomerate of death camps.[18]

A shocking – because it played out in left-leaning circles – example of the rivalry produced by the formula of nationalistic memory was the recent discussion that occurred on the pages of *Krytyka Polityczna* [Political critique]. It was started by Irena Grudzińska-Gross, who in her review of Marcin Napiórkowski's book *Powstanie umarłych. Historia pamięci 1944–2014* [Uprising of the dead. A history of memory 1944–2014] asked the author "Where are the Jews?" She was surprised that "in 2016 it is possible to write a 430-page book on memory of wartime Warsaw without the presence of Jews."[19] And an erudite book at that, one referring to Walter Benjamin but approaching the memory of the Holocaust in terms of ethnic studies. A book dedicated to the memory of wartime Warsaw, which fails to find the space for three hundred thousand of its inhabitants.

The response to Grudzińska-Gross came from Bartłomiej Sienkiewcz, former minister of internal affairs. He outright accused the inquisitive scholar of a rivalry of suffering, making a statement reminiscent of Traverso's argument. "Competition in the commemoration of victims only feeds our traumas," he warned.[20] An even more somberly feeling was sparked by Marcin Napiórkowski's piece in the same paper, which was titled "Czy wolno napisać książkę, która nie jest o Żydach?" [Are you allowed to write a book that is not about Jews?].[21]

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18 Ibid., 316.

19 Irena Grudzińska-Gross, "Powrót niepamięci" [The return of non-memory], *Krytyka Polityczna*, September 11, 2016, accessed May 4, 2023, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/historia/20160909/grudzinska-gross-powrot-niepamieci.

20 Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz, "Jak emancypować zombie?" [How to emancipate zombies?], *Krytyka Polityczna*, September 14, 2016, accessed May 4, 2023, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/historia/20160914/sienkiewicz-jak-emancypowac-zombie.

21 Marcin Napiórkowski, "Czy wolno napisać książkę, która nie jest o Żydach? [polemika]" [Are you allowed to write a book that is not about Jews?], *Krytyka Polityczna*, September 13, 2016, accessed May 4, 2023, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/historia/20160912/czy-wolno-napisac-ksiazke-ktora-nie-jest-o-zydach-polemika. It is worth mentioning that during the 2014 Schulz Festival, as the author of a study on Jewish themes in the work of Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Gustaw Herling-Grudziński i legenda o krwi, czyli czy istnieje obowiązek bycia pisarzem żydowskim" [Gustaw Herling-Grudziński and the legend of blood, or is there an obligation to be a Jewish writer], *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 3/4 [2014/2015]: 312–334, accessed May 8, 2023, https://doi.org/10.11649/slh.2015.014). I took part in a discussion on the difficulty of combining the status of a Polish writer with Herling's Jewish identity. The name of our panel

Because Marcin Napiórkowski identifies as a semiotician, I hope that he will take under consideration the following quote: "meaning lies in the manner in which semiotic objects are systematically positioned in relation to one another."[22]

The dramatism of this discussion comes from the fact that the interlocutors of Irena Grudzińska-Gross are neither nationalists nor negationists and it is obviously not their intention to question the suffering of Jews. Nonetheless, repeating the exclusionary gesture of the Polish interwar national democratic party Endecja, they assume that this is suffering associated with ethnicity and not citizenship or Polish nationality.[23] This is how the rivalry of suffering that is incomprehensible to Western Europeans, and which puzzled Enzo Traverso, comes to life.

Jameson: History Is What Hurts

There is one definition of history which while correcting this or that kind of abuse of memory could restore it for society and, at the same time, bar the return of dangerous utopias. It can be found in Frederic Jameson's *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*:

> History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its "ruses" turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention.[24]

In this definition of critical history we face – as its antithesis – the memory of desire, which cannot come to terms with the limits that have been set out for it. Confronted with it in Poland of 2016 we perceive it as a new phenomenon, while Jameson denounced it already in 1981 as a delusion of the American left.

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twisted this problem in exactly the same way as Napiórkowski's title did, it said "Is there an obligation to be a Jewish writer?"

22 Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps. Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7.

23 I have written on how this exclusion was represented in the social sphere in the paper "Incognito ergo sum. O wytwarzaniu obojętności" [Incognito ergo sum. On the production of indifference], *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 2 (2013): 394–411, http://dx.doi.org/10.11649/slh.2013.016.

24 Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981), 88.

Paul Ricoeur also wrote about this kind of memory in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, though he surely had not only the political left on his mind. He spoke of repetition-memory, manipulated memory, like the one from Wyka's essay.

> The resource of narrative then becomes the trap, when higher powers take over this emplotment and impose a canonical narrative by means of intimidation or seduction, fear or flattery. A devious form of forgetting is at work here, resulting from stripping the social actors of their original power to recount their actions themselves. But this dispossession is not without a secret complicity, which makes forgetting a semi-passive, semi-active behavior, as is seen in forgetting by avoidance (*fuite*), the expression of bad faith and its strategy of evasion motivated by an obscure will not to inform oneself, not to investigate the harm done by the citizen's environment, in short by a wanting-not-to-know.[25]

Undead Memory – The Case of the Kielce Pogrom

A particular variety of Ricoeur's repetition-memory comes to the fore in contemporary Poland, which is swept by a memorial frenzy, in consequence of the historical policy of the two previous decades. Alluding to the title of Jeffrey Cohen's paper "Undead. A Zombie Oriented Ontology,"[26] it could be called undead memory. It introduces a correction to Ricoeur's optimistic classifications, fracturing the triad: blocked memory – repetition-memory – obligated memory. He also goes on to prove, which might be of interest to Dominick LaCapra,[27] that erecting tombstones not only does not appease but rather stimulates certain kinds of memory.

Undead, this extremely negated noun, designates a negativity that "is not the same as alive, nor does it allow for the quiescence of mortality."[28] It detaches from reality and time, because it serves purposes other than those of cognition or mourning. That is also why, despite sometimes repetitive burials, it cannot achieve the state which Paul Ricoeur describes as happy forgetting.[29] This memory remains in metastasis, without the perspective of termination,

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25 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 448–449.

26 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Undead. A Zombie Oriented Ontology," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23 (3) (2012): 397–412.

27 It could also be useful to Marcin Napiórkowski, who attaches so much significance to the name-bearing headstone.

28 Cohen, "Undead," 398.

29 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 449.

and for this reason it can be likened to the phenomenon of the *undead*. As a side effect of permanent vigilance it is an aberration that was criticized by Friedrich Nietzsche in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life."[30]

I have stumbled upon this kind of memory while working on the book *Cursed. A Social Portrait of the Kielce Pogrom*.[31] This study provides a detailed analysis of the careers of the functionaries of the Provincial Office of Public Security (Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) and of the Citizen's Militia (Milicja Obywatelska), as well as the genealogy of the victims of the Kielce pogrom, their family and financial circumstances, organizational affiliations, and their war and post-war histories. After Roberta Senechal de la Roche,[32] I adopt the notion of *pogrom* as a form of self-help by a group, which is performed by a society dissatisfied in its expectations that the state will put an end to the "raucousness" of the deviant Jewish population. One could say that in the course of the Kielce pogrom this "raucousness" was halted and transposed into the form of forty-two bloody, mutilated corpses.[33]

I will list the most important principles of memory that I have identified during the query and writing of the abovementioned book.

1. Remembering (recalling = *hypomnesis*) has its own economy, variable and nonlinear in case of different actors.
2. Remembering depends upon the agency of particular persons and institutions. This means that the memory of perpetrators and victims is different. The former, after achieving release through violence, calm down and gradually gain some perspective towards the event, whose details easily fade from their memory. The latter find themselves in the compulsion of repletion or/and fall into ritualized lamentation.[34]
3. A different process occurs at the collective level, where in spite of the passage of almost three decades between the two Kielce pogroms, that

30 "Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic." Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

31 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Cursed. A Social Portrait of the Kielce Pogrom*, trans. Ewa Wampuszyc (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2023).

32 Roberta Senechal de la Roche, "Collective Violence as Social Control," *Sociological Forum* 11 (1) (1996): 97–128.

33 Here I turn to the expression of Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 1:83.

34 Stanley J. Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds. Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1996), 194.

of 1918[35] and that of 1946, an uncanny resemblance can be observed both in the unfolding of the violence and in the method of dealing with that event. In both instances one of the factors galvanizing the already ongoing pogrom was hearsay about the death of a Polish officer.[36] In both cases the violence erupted after disarming the Jews.[37] Another disquieting idiosyncrasy is the fact that likewise among the victims and the perpetrators in both pogroms there were people bearing similar surnames (e.g. Grynbaum, Furman).

4. Despite seemingly simmering down, under the influence of social factors (propaganda, authority) even memory that presented as properly resolved is susceptible to reawakening and regression. When this happens it is accompanied by what Klaus Theweleit dubbed "learned denial" – *versierten Verleugnung* – a denial that is well understood by the subject to be a smokescreen for the actual turn of events.[38] This is structurally identical to the propaganda-fueled process of producing undead memory.

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35 The first pogrom of the Jews of Kielce occurred on November 11, 1918. The political rally during which the Jews of Kielce were to choose delegates to the state-level Jewish self-government was organized in Teatr Polski [Polish Theatre] in Kielce. The gathering was opened with a prayer of gratitude for regaining independence. After counsellor Frajzynger took the stage the public demanded that he speak in Yiddish, though he did not even know the language; that is when the news broke on the city streets that "the Jews denounce Poland." A gossip was started that a Polish legionary was stabbed in front of the theatre. When the mob broke into the building, Chaim Jeger, a seventeen-year-old scout, was killed in a fistfight. Szmul Owsiany was murdered in front of the theatre. In the streets, the mob pilfered Jewish shops and smashed storefront windows. Four Jews lost their lives in the pogrom and a hundred were injured. The Polish authorities were slow in their efforts to bring justice, and it was only in 1922 when five people were sentenced to several months of imprisonment. See Jadwiga Karolczak, "Koncert na cztery epoki" [A concert for four eras], *Przemiany* 1 (1989); Marek Maciągowski, *Przewodnik po żydowskich Kielcach. Śladami cieni* [Guide to Jewish Kielce. In the footsteps of shadows] (Kraków: Austeria, 2008), 37; Krzysztof Urbański and Rafał Blumenfeld, *Słownik historii kieleckich Żydów* [Dictionary of the history of Kielce Jews] (Kielce: Kieleckie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1995), 105.

36 The motif of the presumed "murder of a Polish officer" also surfaces in numerous accounts of the 1946 Kielce pogrom.

37 Piotr Wróbel, *Listopadowe dni – 1918. Kalendarium narodzin II Rzeczpospolitej* [November days – 1918. Calendar of the birth of the Second Polish Republic] (Warszawa: PAX, 1988), 82.

38 Klaus Theweleit, *Śmiech morderców. Breivik i inni. Psychogram przyjemności zabijania* [The laughter of murderers. Breivik and others. Psychogram of the pleasure of killing], trans. Piotr Stronciwilk (Warszawa: PWN, 2016).

If one were to attempt a systematic segmentation of post-pogrom Kielce memory, it would reveal not so much a five-phase structure, but an archipelago of free-floating anachronous islands of memory, where elements of repression and anamnesis intertwine.

1. The first period, that of strictly blocked memory,[39] begins in the year 1946, directly after the first July trial, and it lasts until the 1980s. The vast archives of Kielce are entirely off-limits to historians; publications relating to the pogrom are under unofficial moratorium, and part of the source material is destroyed. This gave rise to the proliferation of conspiracy theories, which attributed the initiation of events to respectively: "andersowcy"[40] (blamed by the communist government), the communist government (accused by the "andersowcy"), and also sporadically to Zionists (named in the reports of bishop Czesław Kaczmarek, and later in the book by Józef Orlicki).[41]
2. After the weakening of the communist regime in the 1980s a fracture appears in the abovementioned blockade in the form of "obligated memory,"[42] whose manifestations can be observed in Marcel Łoziński's film *Świadkowie* [Witnesses] and in Jerzy Sławomir Mac's superb reportage "Kto to zrobił" [Who did this], published in *Kontrasty* (both works are from 1986). The finale of this phase came in October 2004, with the conclusion of the second Kielce investigation, when prosecutor Krzysztof Falkiewicz of the District Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Krakow concluded that none of the conspiracy theories can be substantiated.[43]
3. After 1989 Kielce memory was unblocked and it overcompensated. In the documentation from the second investigation, which took place in the years 1994–2004, what draws attention is the large number of hearsay and false leads, the obsession with false memory, a deluge of

39 Paul Ricoeur's term.

40 A designation of the soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the East, a fighting force that was incorporated in the territories of the USSR under the leadership of General Władysław Anders (1892–1970) and which was made up mostly of Polish prisoners of war released after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 – Trans.

41 Tadeusz Wiącek, ed., *Zabić Żyda! Kulisy i tajemnice pogromu kieleckiego 1946* [Kill the Jew! Behind the scenes and secrets of the 1946 Kielce pogrom] (Kraków: Temax, 1992).

42 Paul Ricoeur's term.

43 Jan Żaryn and Łukasz Kamiński, eds., *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego* [Around the Kielce pogrom], vol. 1, ed. Jan Żaryn and Łukasz Kamiński (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006).

psychotic cases and the fear culminating in denunciations and anonymous notes.[44] All these leads were scrupulously followed, first by prosecutor Zbigniew Mielecki and then by other prosecutors engaged in the second Kielce investigation.

4. Despite the public release of the investigation's outcomes, refuting the conspiratorial hypotheses, there was a return to conspiracy memory which can be understood as defensive mechanism sheltering from the feelings of guilt of the second phase. The hypotheses of provocation were gaining momentum since the article "Kielce, 4 lipca 1946," penned by Krystyna Kersten, was published in *Tygodnik Solidarność*,[45] and even more so after the book *Poland: Communism. Nationalism. Anti-semitism* by Michał Chęciński came out.[46] A prominent role in the strengthening of the force of this phenomenon was played by the writer Krzysztof Kąkolewski.[47] In the second volume of *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego* [Around the Kielce pogrom] published in 2008 by the Institute of National Remembrance, the open return to the hypothesis of the NKVD conspiracy was a clear break with the results of the investigation carried out by the same institution.[48]
5. The fifth stage figures here as a prognostication of post-conspiracy memory. The beginnings of such a critical local memory is associated with the activities of the Jan Karski Association in Kielce, which has

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44 See, e.g., the letter: "4/7/1996 Komisja do Badania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Poznaniu. Regarding the announcement that the case of the so-called Kielce pogrom of 1946 is currently being investigated, please contact citizen [contact details here – J. T. B.], who was there and, probably, as an employee of the Security Service, shot at the Jews. I know this because he later bragged about it to my father. My father is dead and I do not know the details. What I remember from my father's account was that such a fact occurred. Unfortunately, I must remain anonymous, because this concerns my neighbor." Case files, document folder 6, Zs.S1/93, p. 1157. The next page contains notes from the interrogation of the person of interest named in the denunciation, who testified on August 1, 1996 that he "never resided in Kielce, nor even visited occasionally."

45 Krystyna Kersten, "Kielce, 4 lipca 1946" [Kielce, July 4, 1946], *Tygodnik Solidarność*, December 8, 1981.

46 Michał Chęciński, *Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism* (New York: Kerz-Kohl, 1983).

47 See, e.g., Krzysztof Kąkolewski, "Umarły cmentarz" [Dead cemetery], *Tygodnik Solidarność*, December 16, 1994, as well as his book of the same title from 1996. Krzysztof Kąkolewski unearthed many valuable sources but the lack of scholarly competences meant that he was unable to approach them critically, and the book suffered because of this.

48 Jan Żaryn, Leszek Bukowski and Andrzej Jankowski, eds., *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008).

been overseen for over a decade by the psychologist and social activist Bogdan Białek.[49]

The Future?

Kazimierz Wyka wrote in the essay "O porządkach historycznych" [On historical order]:

> Historical logic is not a logic of suddenness. Experience, even if played out to its final form, almost never truly finds its way into the minds of those for whom it was destined on its first occurrence. [...] The logic of history is rather the logic of a returning wave. Twice, or even thrice must it break on the same surface to recede and carry away with itself the final conclusion.[50]

The Jews of Kielce have directly experienced the logic of the "returning wave" two times, but it is still not clear what conclusions have been drawn by the citizens of Kielce. Today there are no longer any Jews in the city, but on the frontlines of the battle for memory this is obviously irrelevant. The newest development in this saga is the appeal to reopen the investigation of the Kielce pogrom, which has lately been filed with the Kielce field office of the Institute of National Remembrance.[51] The signatories – among whom there is the Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny [National Radical Camp], the association Brygada Świętokrzyska NSZ, and a relative of Marian Sołtysiak, the commander of the Wybranieccy battalion, which bears the taint of committing murder on the Jewish populace[52] – demand the restitution of the "good name" of the inhabitants of Kielce accused of antisemitism.

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49 Cf. Bogdan Białek's profile in Michał Jaskulski's 2016 film *Planty 7/9*.

50 ŻnN, 197–8.

51 https://ekai.pl/diecezje/kielecka/x104220/kielce-apel-o-wznowienie-sledztwa-w-sprawie-pogromu, accessed May 7, 2023. Signatories of the petition: Małgorzata Sołtysiak – vice-president of the association Ruch Społeczny im. Lecha Kaczyńskiego in Kielce, Wojciech Zapała – president of Grupa Rekonstrukcji Historycznej im. por. Stanisława Grabdy ps. "Bem," Michał Sadko – president of the board of Odzyskajmy Naszą Historię association, Karolina Lebiedowicz – secretary of the Okręg Świętokrzyski Narodowych Sił Zbrojnych, Karol Michalski – president of Kieleccy Patrioci association, and Filip Bator – secretary of Brygada Świętokrzyska Obozu Narodowo-Radykalnego.

52 See Alina Skibińska and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Barabasz i Żydzi. Z historii oddziału AK 'Wybranieccy'" [Barabbas and the Jews. From the history of the Home Army unit "Wybraniecki"], in Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Okrzyki pogromowe. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski 1939–1946* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2012), 170–219. See also https://www.holocaus-

The role that art will play in this competition of memory is as yet undefined. For now, the Stefan Żeromski Theater in Kielce staged in the 2017 theatrical season a play written by Tomasz Śpiewak and directed by Remigiusz Brzyk, a pupil of Krystian Lupa, *1996*, which concerns the Kielce pogrom.[53] What will follow is, as always in this case, an open question.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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Undead Memory: Reading Kazimierz Wyka in Poland 2016

In Western Europe, memory studies are marked by an effort to give voice to those silenced by dominant narratives. In Poland, meanwhile, the current 'memory turn' openly flirts with post-truth and paves the way for a new hegemony. This way of framing memory takes advantage of the poststructuralist humanities' defenseless position, and it gradually appropriates its tools and yokes them to the rhetoric of propaganda. The new project of collective memory breaks with Ricœur's triad of blocked memory – memory of repetition – obligated memory. It privileges blockage and repetition as modes of commemorating ("undead memory" – a paradoxical posthumanist realization of the category of the undead). Tokarska-Bakir demonstrates this tendency in a case study on the development of public discourse on the Kielce pogrom of 1946.

Keywords

undead, memory propaganda, fascist culture, Jameson's critical history, manipulated memory, memory of the Kielce pogrom of 4 July 1946

tresearch.pl/index.php?mod=news&show=310&template=print, accessed May 7, 2023.

53 See https://dzieje.pl/kultura-i-sztuka/premiera-spektaklu-1946-w-teatrze-im-zeromskiego -w-kielcach.

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The Compulsion of Our Failure to Remember the Holocaust

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Controlled Amnesia

I would like to clarify the terms used in the title. I understand the intrusiveness of oblivion as a compulsion to construct forgetfulness. This forgetting is a form of controlled oblivion occurring as a defensive reaction. Thus, it is not simply forgetting, but a relegation to silence, often a s c r e e n m e m o r y that serves the collective memory of the past. However, it does serve a particular purpose insofar as memory is a sign of an ethnic identity that is allegedly under threat. Let me add without delay: it is the catastrophe of this memory and its pathogenic mechanism. On the other hand, this compulsive defense active here is an affectively enforced reaction but simultaneously complemented by a range of directed procedures, undertaken in the name of the manipulation. After all, in the process of remembering, there are constant transfers between the unconscious and consciousness and a redistribution of meanings emerging from both these orders. This insistence on compulsive but also consciously fabricated oblivion interests me as a mechanism active in constructing Polish memory of the Holocaust, that is the destruction of Poles' fellow citizens, Polish Jews, which took place in the years of Second World

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War. In dismantling this mechanism, it is worth considering Sigmund Freud's words about the purpose and chances of therapeutic proceedings. Freud was a pessimist and was guided by the belief that his patients would cope better with their neurosis if they transformed it into an ordinary sense of bad luck or unhappiness.[1] Why is it worth bearing in mind this aloofness of Freud as a therapist? The analysis leads to self-knowledge, which can be bitter knowledge, just like studying the historical past. Rather than looking for a reason to be proud, dealing with one's disasters and misfortunes is more critical so that the traumas associated with them do not recur. It is better to exist in the modern world as a sovereign, albeit unhappy subject, than to compensate for one's misfortunes at the cost of living in a false imagination.

In his study *Jews in Polish Culture* (1961), Aleksander Hertz analyzed the "Jewish question" as a "Polish question," that is as a problem that the Polish community had and has, in his view, with itself. This approach still seems appropriate. The emotions active in the word "Jew" seem to attest to the fact that, along with its use, strongly repressed contents come to the fore creating a tangle reminiscent of the infamous elf-lock (*plica polonica*). As is usually the case with such entanglements, they can only be dealt with indirectly.

"If a community's victim can be said to be its symptom, it then becomes evident that the community holds itself together by means of a vital attachment to an intense negative pleasure – or *jouissance*,"[2] notes Renata Salecl. However, "psychoanalysis has always held the subject responsible for his or her *jouissance*, beginning with Freud, who spoke of one's choice of neurosis."[3] It is a Polish delight to cast oneself as a victim. Not only a victim of foreign violence but also a victim of a sinister conspiracy. And today, Poles are held hostage to their phantasmagorical condition more than they should be because they are still on the rope of their dark *jouissance*. To free themselves from

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1 Freud concludes his essay *Psychotherapy of Hysteria* (1895) with an imaginary dialogue with a patient in which he says: "No doubt fate [meaning the "circumstances and events" of the patient's life – M. Z.] would find it easier than I do to relieve you of your illness. But you will be able to convince yourself that much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness." Quoted in Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Works*, ed. Ivan Smith (ebook, https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf, 2000; 2007; 2010), 269. Jay M. Winter uses this remark by Freud to polemicize with Paul Ricoeur's conception of happy memory as a memory free from the trauma of hostility towards the former oppressor. Cf. Jay M. Winter, "Thinking About Silence," in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev et al. (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3-31.

2 Renata Salecl, *(Per)Versions of Love and Hate* (London–New York: Verso, 1998), 123.

3 Ibid., 123.

it, they must recognize their symptom (which encodes their *jouissance*) and take responsibility for it. To become aware, therefore, of the reason why they choose "Jews" as their symptom, why they remain in the power of such reactions and behaviors and not others, and speak about it in the way they do.[4]

And these attitudes towards their fellow Jewish citizens seem to have remained unchanged since the end of the war. They consist of the memory of the Holocaust, which has been repressed and erased from the very beginning,[5] the lightning-fast way in which Polish society succumbed to the propaganda of March '68, the outcry against Jan Tomasz Gross's books and the scandalization of his speeches and articles,[6] and the history of reactions to the Jedwabne

4 Sociologists sometimes point here to the rivalry of Poles in the race of victims. Antoni Sułek notes that "underestimating the martyrdom of the Jews is not a matter of ignorance because Poles know very well that almost all Jews were murdered. Poles – and this is Ireneusz Krzemiński's thesis – are supposed to compete with Jews for priority in suffering; it is supposed to give them a sense of moral superiority. Perhaps Poles do not so much want to be first in this race of victims as they do not want to be second, but in any case, their martyrdom during the war belongs to their social identity." "Europe should recognize our right to this separate sacrifice, without speaking of it in the language of the competition," wrote Paweł Śpiewak in a review of Tony Judt's acclaimed book *Postwar*. In its epilogue, Judt concludes that "Jews were the main and almost the only victims of the war in Europe." Antoni Sułek, "Zwykli Polacy patrzą na Żydów" [Ordinary Poles look at the Jews], *Nauka Polska* 1 (2010): 20–21.

5 See Zofia Wóycicka, *Przerwana żałoba: Polskie spory wokół pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady 1944-1950* (Warszawa: Trio 2009) [English edition: *Arrested Mourning. Memory of the Nazi Camps in Poland, 1944-1950* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013)]; Grzegorz Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady* [Polish theatre of the Holocaust] (Warszawa: Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute and Krytyka Polityczna, 2013); Barbara Törnquist-Plewa's article "The Use and Non-use of the Holocaust Memory in Poland," in *Painful Pasts and Useful Memories Remembering and Forgetting in Europe*, ed. Barbara Törnquist-Plewa and Niklas Bernsand (Lund: Lund University, Centre for European Studies, 2012). It is worth mentioning here important publications on the topic which appeared after the publication of my article: Piotr Forecki, *Po Jedwabnem. Anatomia pamięci funkcjonalnej* [After Jedwabne. Anatomy of functional memory] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018); Tomasz Żukowski, *Wielki retusz. Jak zapomnieliśmy, że Polacy zabijali Żydów* [The great retouch. How we forgot that Poles killed Jews] (Warszawa: Wielka Litera, 2019); *Opowieść o niewinności. Kategoria świadka Zagłady w kulturze polskiej* [A tale of innocence. The category of the witness to the Holocaust in Polish culture 1941-2015], ed. Maryla Hopfinger and Tomasz Żukowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2020). Even earlier, however, an important contribution in this field was Joanna Tokarska-Bakir's book *Rzeczy mgliste* [Vague things] (Sejny: Wydawnictwo Fundacja Pogranicze, 2004).

6 Particularly notable is the Polish reception of Gross's column (posted on ProjectSyndicate and reprinted by, among others, *Die Welt*, in which Gross assumed that on the territory of Poland during the war the Poles killed more Jews than Germans, cf. Aleksandra Pawlicka and Jan Tomasz Gross, "O uchodźcach i polskim antysemityzmie," *Newsseek*, September

crime, culminating in the aberrant speeches of the director of the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej) and the education minister questioning the findings of historians, or, finally, the attempt by the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in 2018 to criminalize accusations by Poles of complicity in crimes against Jews.[7] One would have to write here about the hate speech flooding online forums, but it is worth mentioning that even in the pre-internet era the situation was no different: after the publication of Błonski's essay "Biedny chrześcijanin patrzy na getto" [A poor Christian looks at the ghetto], the editors of *Tygodnik Powszechny* were inundated by a wave of disapproving, unprintable letters from outraged readers. If surveys are to be believed, antisemites are in the minority in Polish society.[8] At the

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22, 2015, accessed July 19, 2016, http://www.newsweek.pl/polska/jan-tomasz-gross-o-tym-dlaczego-polacy-nie-chca-uchodzcow-debata-w-kp,artykuly,370968,1.html.

7 Cf. "Kandydat na szefa IPN o Jedwabnem: Wykonawcami tej zbrodni byli Niemcy, którzy wykorzystali – pod przymusem grupkę Polaków" [Candidate for head of the Institute of National Remembrance on Jedwabne: The perpetrators of this atrocity were Germans who used a group of Poles under duress], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 19, 2016, accessed July 19, 2016, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,20424470,kandydat-na-szefa-ipn-o-jedwabnem-wykonawcami-tej-zbrodni-byli.html; "Minister of Education Anna Zalewska on *Kropka nad i*" (TVN), TV-program, accessed July 13, 2016, http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/anna-zalewska-w-kropce-nad-i-o-jedwabnem-i-pogromie-kieleckim,660799.html, These speeches renewed the political and media debate on the Jedwabne and Kielce pogroms and their commemoration (not only Minister Zalewska's speech but also the protest of a group of historians and teachers, cf. "Wybitni historycy zajmujący się Zagładą protestują: Szokujące słowa o mordzie w Jedwabnem kompromitują Polskę" [Prominent Holocaust historians protest: Shocking words about the Jedwabne massacre bring Poland into disrepute], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 22, 2016, accessed March 2, 2022, http://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,20437437,wybitni-historycy-zajmujacy-sie-zaglada-protestuja-szokujace.html; and Justyna Suchecka, "Nauczyciele przeciw manipulowaniu historią. Ostry list po słowach Zalewskiej, Szarka, Chrzanowskiego" [Teachers against the manipulation of history. Harsh letter after the words of Zalewska, Szarek, Chrzanowski], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, accessed July 19, 2016, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,20483524,nauczyciele-przeciw-manipulowaniu-historia-ostry-list-po-slowach.html. On the forthcoming law criminalizing accusations of Poles of complicity in crimes against Jews, cf. Dariusz Libionka and Michał Okoński, "Niepamięć narodowa" [National amnesia], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, February 6, 2018.

8 A 2015 Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) survey report shows that Poles' attitudes toward Jews have improved over the past 20 years. While in the first half of the 1990s more than three times as many people declared aversion to them than sympathy, the percentages have been similar for several years now. "Despite the improvement in attitudes towards Jews, they are still not among the nations most liked by Poles," it added. "Today, 32% of respondents refer to Jews with dislike and 28% with sympathy." Quoted by Joanna Guzik, "CBOS: Żydzi w czasie II wojny światowej doznali od Polakow wiecej

same time, respondents declare that Jews did not suffer more during the war than Poles did.[9] One does not need to be an antisemite to follow such a view.

dobrego niz złego" [CBOS: Jews experienced more good than bad from Poles during World War II], *Rzeczpospolita*, August 14, 2015, accessed July 13, 2016, http://www.rp.pl/Historia/308149916-CBOS-Zydzi-w-czasie-II-wojny-swiatowej-doznali-od-Polakow-wiecej-dobrego-niz-zlego.html#ap-1.

9 As we read in the January 2008 issue of the weekly *Wprost*, "the discussion around Prof. Jan T. Gross's controversial book helps to understand the history of difficult Polish-Jewish relations, according to opinion polls. The Pentor Research Center, commissioned by *Wprost*, asked Poles about the wartime experience of both nations. We compared the results with a similar poll conducted by Demoskop in 1995. Thirteen years ago, almost half of respondents (49%) believed that Poles did enough to help Jews during Second World War, while 26% said they did as much as they could under the circumstances. Today, the proportions have reversed. Only 24% of respondents surveyed by Pentor have an unequivocally positive assessment of the scale of Poles' assistance to Jews. [...] Over 13 years, there has been little change in Poles' response to the question of who suffered more during the war: Poles or Jews. As in 1995, most of us believe that both nations suffered equally (in 1985 – 40%, in 2008 – 52%)," Katarzyna Nowicka, "Co myślimy o historii Polaków i Żydów?" [What do we think about the history of Poles and Jews?], *Wprost*, January 19, 2008, accessed July 13, 2016, https://www.wprost.pl/forum/121842/16642/Pan-Gronomen-omen.html. According to a 2015 CBOS survey, "currently 26% believe that Jews have suffered more good than bad from Poles. 44% believed that Jews have experienced as much good as bad, and 11% believe that they have experienced more bad than good. 19% have no opinion. [...] The dominant view was and still is that Poles have experienced as much good as bad from Jews – 49% think so today." CBOS also asked about reactions to "reports of crimes committed by Poles against Jews." These included: sympathy for the victims (36% of indications); condemnation of the perpetrators (34%); agitation that "people brought such a fate upon people" (29%); "shame that such crimes took place" (26%); indignation that "so much is said about the crimes of Poles against Jews, and not enough about Poles who saved Jews" (25%); anger at "those who slander the good name of Poland and Poles" (13%); indignation that "so much is said about Poles' crimes against Jews and nothing is said about Jews' crimes against Poles" (13%); doubt over "whether Poles were the perpetrators of such crimes" (11%) and ignorance "that Poles murdered Jews during the occupation" (9%). 5% expressed the opinion: "I don't care." The majority of respondents, 55%, are convinced that during the war, there were more "cases of Poles hiding and helping Jews than denouncing and murdering them." 22% believe that both attitudes were equally frequent. 7% are convinced that there was more "denouncing and murdering." 15% have no opinion. According to the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), in the opinion of 71% of respondents, one should not forget "the murders and pogroms committed by Poles against Jews during and just after the war." At the same time, however, the prevailing view (48%) is that these were incidents that "should not be generalized." 23% believe that such incidents should be revealed and publicized, "so that we know the whole truth about ourselves." 22% believe that it is "ancient history" and "there is no need to open up old wounds." 7% "have no opinion." Quoted in: Guzik, *CBOS: Jews during World War II*.

Still, an observer of public discourse in Poland may wonder why the reactions of an aggressive "neurotic minority" are not met with more pronounced disapproval.

The Neurosis of Victims

The repetitive reactions make one think of their compulsive character, inherent in obsessive neurosis. In this case, the anger reflex seems to result from an internal compulsion. The subject feels compelled to act or think in this way, and even if he fights this force, he punishes himself for his lack of anger and feels that he is inevitably causing anxiety.[10] This is the neurosis of a victim living in fear of facing accusations of being an abuser, and the shame turned into aggression. The affectivity of this defensive reaction stimulates the intoxication of the fatality of the Polish plight (the condition of the victim due to the conspiracy of strangers), reinforcing the obsessive structure and working toward self-victimization. Perverse victimization, after all, because pathos provides gratification. The role of the victim and the sense of injustice elevates. Defensive behavior becomes ritualized, especially in moments of presumed danger. The compulsiveness active here that enforces the refusal to accept historians' findings as defamatory and untrue. Sigmund Freud, in his treatise "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" (1914), identifies the blocking of memories as the main reason for the difficulty in recalling traumatic experiences: the repetition compulsion causes a denial, a process originating in the unconscious whereby the subject exposes himself to unpleasant situations, thus repeating past experiences, but without recalling the original; on the contrary, he has the irresistible impression that current circumstances entirely condition his situation.[11] Freud says that the patient, instead of remembering and thus working through the content of the traumatic experience, merely repeats it, fixating on the pathological position. In the case of the outraged neurotic minority, the repressed "probes back into the present" in classic textbook mode: not only in the form of anguishing thoughts and images but also in the manner of acting-out actions – for example, in the form of discursive engagement with traumatizing content, in hate speech, in statements in defense of Poland's allegedly defamed good name, and so one. These behaviors have the typical character of a repetition of trauma in "transference" (the Big

10 See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Compulsion," entry in *Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Karnac Books, 1996), 77.

11 Freud, *Collected Works*, 2496–2507.

Other plays the role of the analyst here, anyhow selectively identified with the community they affirm or with the – as much demagogically as simplistically understood – high court of public opinion, which will not remain deaf to the injustice of the unjustly accused). Thus, they are more a symptom of the disease than they belong to the therapeutic process, that is true transference, identified with working through the trauma. All the more so because the affective economy is still active here, according to which – as Freud also wrote in later works – underneath the publicly manifested suffering of the "unfairly" accused is the fulfilment of a desire (here: the dark *jouissance* of being a victim). The obsessively repeated ritual of defiance becomes a pathological mechanism that preserves the victim syndrome and the phantasm of victim-harm paralyzing communication. Further working in favor of its impossibility is the politics of memory, which is defensively chosen by the collective due to an aggressive, neurotic minority. The official version of collective memory promotes a particularistic interpretation of the past and blurs the truth of historical experience. And it is precisely the case that in Poland recently an ethnic interpretation of the memory of the Holocaust, serving national interests, has been staged and pushed. What we are dealing with is the Polonization of the memory of the Holocaust, which is part of the "frenzy of commemoration" leading to the "confiscation of memory" and abuses consisting of "placing oneself in the position of the victim" – to use Paul Ricoeur's phrase, which for us takes on a familiar content.[12]

Meanwhile, in Europe and the world, precisely when it comes to the memory of the Holocaust, we observe, according to researchers, the opposite tendencies: particularistic historical policies are weakening, and "the new space of Holocaust memory is slowly becoming a cosmopolitan" and universal space.[13] In the case of Poland, however, that is not the way it is. As we read in Michael Rothberg's book, histories of victimization of various ethnic groups, in which rival collective memories come to the fore, often – especially where there are post-colonial dependencies (and this is the situation we faced in the People's Republic of Poland, a state under foreign domination) – "take the form of a zero-sum struggle for pre-eminence."[14] The multidirectional remembrance Rothberg seeks is that representations

12 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 86.

13 Cf. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Holocaust jako polityka historyczna," in *(Kon)teksty pamięci*, ed. Kornelia Kończal (Warszawa, Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2014), 171 [original printout: Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im Globalen Zeitalter der Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 134–146.]

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

of the Holocaust transcend the time and space of what they represent, begin to live their own lives, become the basis of post-memory-dominated collective remembering, are pluralistic and constitute a polyphony of interpretive communities, while in Poland, not counting academic centers such as the Holocaust Research Center of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IFIS PAN), the Jewish Historical Institute, the Museum of Polish Jews, and – until recently! – the Institute of National Remembrance, the public discourse is dominated by repetitions of competing narratives. So after a period of pluralized discourse on the Holocaust, culminating in 2002 with the official commemoration of the victims of the Jedwabne massacre, with the participation of the then Polish president, not only is this beginning to look disturbingly reminiscent of the "separate" and "nationalized orders of remembering" (the "Polish" and "Jewish" mourning) already initiated immediately after the war, of which Wóycicka wrote, but it also threatens to create an inter-generational memory gap, furnished by worn-out phantasms. Collective memory inhabits a landscape of controlled forgetting. But this does not mean it constitutes a space submitted to total control. According to Freud, the imperative of nonmemory does not remove traumatizing events from the unconscious, where memory resides. Forgetting, therefore, does not erase what outrages members of the community, who inherit memory by acquiring identity through a process of identifying with the national past. And most importantly, it is not at all relevant whether these experiences are personally lived by or whether their content is absorbed secondarily in the process of participation in the life of the community. After all, as is well known, representations of traumatic memories are not associated with past events or objects of memory, but with their present experience. Those taking part in the conversation about the emotionally stirring past are in the position of participants in the performance who, in the words of Jill Bennett, act out their feelings toward each other.[15] Precisely because of this, the memory of those of the second and third generations has so much affective character as that of the generation of participants and witnesses. They too, therefore, are being subjected to a compulsion for compulsive repetitions.[16]

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15 Jill Bennett, *Emphatic Vision. Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 24.

16 "So-called traumatic memory carries the experience into the present and future in that the events are compulsively relived or re-experienced as if there were no distance or difference between past and present," writes Dominick La Capra in his book *History in Transit. Experience, Identity, and Critical Theory* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 55–56.

Shame Transformed into Aggression

"The rule in history seems to be that one protects one's pride after disasters," notes Christian Meier.[17] But why is knowing an infamous and embarrassing past so difficult to accept? We do not choose individual memory, but we join collective memory. However, we do it on terms most often not set by ourselves. As Wulf Kansteiner emphasizes, "Collective memory seems to reside not in the perceiving consciousness, but in the material, in the practices and institutions of social and psychic life that function within us, but, strangely enough, do not seem to need either our participation or our loyalty."[18] These practices and institutions that furnish collective memory embody the lacanian Big Other. We make accession to collective memory precisely in the way that our engagement is a response to the interpellation of the Big Other and an attempt to answer the question of who I am. An attack on the content sanctioned by collective memory arouses fear and horror because it attacks the Big Other. If we are accused and shamed, then by the same token, the Other in us is charged and the Big Other in us is shamed. As Renata Salecl notes, shame is the effect of the subject's insecurity and confusion and the undermining or crashing of authority, the specter of the Big Other's shortcomings… "When I feel ashamed, it is not simply that I am trying to avoid the disapproving gaze of the Other in front of whom I feel humiliated. By averting my own gaze, I am also trying not to see the fact that the Other is itself also inconsistent, or, better, that the Other, in the final analysis, does not exist."[19]

No wonder, then, that we defend ourselves against accusations and try to avoid the feeling of shame. With shame comes anxiety, which, as Salecl points out, concerns the most important things to us: the subject no longer experiences himself as the fulfilment of the Big Other's desire, so we become helpless and abandoned: what furnished our world collapses into rubble. Such a situation leads to important consequences. Although the question of responsibility considered on the grounds of collective memory does not abstract from individual causality, for the community, the memory of its crimes becomes particularly acute as it touches on national identity. The community participant accused of the crime, the descendant of the culprits of that crime,

17 Christian Meier, "Pamiętanie – wypieranie – zapominanie / Erinnern – Vendrängen – Vergessen," in *Das Verschwinden der Gegenwart:* über *Geschichte und Politik* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), 709.

18 Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41 (2002): 179–197. See https://orbankat.web.elte.hu/emlekezet/Kansteiner.pdf.

19 Renata Salecl, "Nobody home," *Cabinet* 31 (Fall) (2008), accessed July 20, 2016, http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/31/salecl.php.

henceforth the depositor of collective guilt, is put in a situation that forces him to question his own identity and – in the case that interests us here – the identity of the community of the innocent victims of history. Confronting the accusation forces the accused community to "shatter the phantasmagorical scenario that sustains its identity."[20] The threatened object is "the unsymbolizable kernel in the other: *object a* – the object cause of desire [here: eternally threatened by history Polishness as the foundation of community identity – M. Z.]. It is around this object that the subject forms its fantasy, its scenario of provisional wholeness," Salecl says. Its kernel, therefore, remains that which, being difficult to symbolize and articulate, refers to the endless array of its substitutions appearing in public discourse. The conversation is difficult precisely because "each person's identity has its roots in the *object a*, so the slandered person cannot offer a defense through recourse to the 'truth' or to critique of the ideology that underpins the slanderer's attack" – rational and affective orders are mixed in the discourse. As we read in Salecl, the reason that accusatory speech that harms the *object a* as the foundation of identity is so hurtful and so insidious, in the opinion of the accused, because it takes advantage of his structural vulnerability, so to speak: he feels stabbed in what is dearest to him and difficult to articulate.

Such a situation seems to be how the arguments of those who describe the situation in a way not to the liking of the community's defenders are received – see the reaction to the books of Jan Tomasz Gross, whose theses are, after all, supported by some historians in Poland.[21] But that's just it – only some

20 Salecl, *(Per)Versions of Love and Hate*, 120.

21 Marcin Zaremba wrote: "The authors [Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, authors of *The Golden Harvest. Events on the Periphery of the Holocaust* – M. Z.] estimate that tens of thousands of Jews were murdered by Poles after 1942. We know, and it is documented, that they killed at least a thousand Jews and handed over several thousand to the Germans. The Polish Holocaust historian community shares the belief that these numbers are only the tip of the iceberg. Research is ongoing. We know that about 200–250,000 Jews escaped from ghettos and train cars bound for the death camps. About 40–60,000 survived. So what happened to the rest? Did they all die at the hands of Poles? [...] Some percentage must be put down to a natural cause of death. [...] Even if as many as half (which is improbable) of the hiding Jews died of exhaustion, disease, and lack of medicine, it would not change the meaning of the crime. [...] Let's assume, however, that the Grosses are right and that, indeed, tens of thousands of Jews were killed by Poles with pitchforks and axes or handed over to the Germans. This number exceeds the German personnel losses in the September campaign (17,000 killed) and – significantly – the number of fallen Wehrmacht soldiers in the Warsaw Uprising (more than 2,000). I do not know the estimates of the losses suffered by the Germans in occupied Poland from October 1939 to the summer of 1944, i.e. until Operation "Burza" [Tempest]. However, it is impossible that they exceeded 3,000. What are the implications of the numbers cited by

of them. Immediately there were other historians (not to mention columnists) who treated his books as biased, academically worthless, and written under foreign inspiration, leading a Polish minister to say on TV that the participation of Poles in the Jedwabne crime was just a "liberal interpretation." More relevant is the reaction to the books of those who, while making a description, try to provide tools to help disarm the trauma and, at the same time, the phantasm. I am referring to Andrzej Leder, who, in his book *Prześniona rewolucja* [The Sleepwalkers' Revolution] and interviews given after its publication, emphasized that for historical reasons, there is a sense of injustice in Poles, both those with their origins in post-noble culture and those derived from post-peasant culture, and this sense is an identity-building factor and a major political emotion: "two events from which, in addition, a large part of society profited": that is "the unworked-through witnessing the Holocaust of the Jews" (which experience "was much more common than, for example, participation in the Resistance"), as well as the experience of "witnessing what happened after 1945, that is, the shattering of the old social structure by the Communists and Russians, the civil war, the annihilation of the landed gentry, the terror" "left a residue of guilt, paradoxically fueling a sense of injustice."[22] The mechanism of these traumatizing events, fueled by the fantasy of historical justice, explains why forgotten acts of physical and symbolic violence continue to take their toll today in the form of the persistence of a persecutory antisemitic phantasm. At its root, according to Leder, we find the past of a large part of today's Polish middle class sent back into oblivion: the denial of its involvement in the Holocaust, experiencing it as "transpassive" and therefore unreal (experiencing one's action as occurring through the mediation of someone else action, and action undertaken not on one's behalf).[23] So other evil-doers were active there: the responsibil-

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the Grosses? No more and no less, such that we were, or at least the peasant part of our society, not on the side we thought we were on, since we killed more Jews than Germans [...]. The Grosses force us this time to admit that Poles had blood on their hands during the war. And in the name of what? Golden teeth. It discredits our heroic story of sacrifice." Marcin Zaremba, "Biedni Polacy na żniwach" [Poor Poles at the harvest], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 17, 2011, accessed July 20, 2016, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8951226,Biedni_Polacy_na_zniwach___Recenzja__Zlotych_Zniw_.html,

22 "Nasze krzywdy i winy. Andrzej Leder o polskiej duszy i poczuciu skrzywdzenia. Jerzy Baczyński, Edwin Bendyk, Ewa Wilk w rozmowie z Andrzejem Lederem" [Our wrongs and guilt. Andrzej Leder on the Polish soul and the feeling of being wronged. Jerzy Baczyński, Edwin Bendyk, Ewa Wilk in conversation with Andrzej Leder], *Polityka*, October 6, 2016, accessed August 10, 2016, http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1635741,1,prof-andrzej-leder-o-polskiej-duszy-i-poczuciu-skrzywdzenia.

23 This experience is "accompanied at the same time by a peculiar sense of passivity and resembles the situation of someone in a dream. Everything happens, but as if by itself,

ity for active participation in the murder, a forbidden pleasure and, at the same time horror, was delegated to the Germans, which relieved the guilt of Poles. As Leder says, speaking the language of Lacan, the native perpetrators transferred their desire to the Germans. They transferred it at the same time to the Other, being the instrument of historical justice, which does not mean that the real position of co-perpetrators and witnesses, however passively experienced, did not remain a function of the affects deposited in the phantasm of the Jew – the figure of the sinister stranger. By someone else's endowment we came into possession of what was, as it were, due to us and from which we were deceitfully deprived of in the course of history. After the war, many quoted a phrase: "What we suffered is what we suffered, but Hitler at least freed Poland from the Jews" – it seemed to express this attitude. In this process of historical adjustment of accounts of wrongs, we used to qualify our faults as involuntary and marginal (allegedly, the "criminal fringe" that was active in the persecution of fellow Jewish citizens). Still, the constantly repressed memory of it did not cease to be an issue. Another obscured our adventure: the Polish community regarded the post-war seizure of German property and taking the place of the Germans, at large, as an act of historical justice, a fair punishment for bringing about the war. Leder's readers claiming to be representatives of the national majority generally did not engage in scholarly polemics; they simply belittled the book as a rambling, obscure argument of dubious authority relying on fabrications.[24] It did not become a topic of conversation in right-wing newspapers and websites.

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apart from subjective control, which involves a sense of the agency of one's actions, which is called will": Andrzej Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja* [The sleepwalkers' revolution] (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna Publishing House, 2014), 21–22.

24 Cf. Andrzej Horubala, "Nieświadome zbrodnie Polaków" [Unconscious crimes of Poles], *Do Rzeczy* 3 (2014), accessed August 10, 2016, http://dorzeczy.pl/kultura/id,3482/Nieswiadome-zbrodnie-Polakow.html. A reviewer for *Teologia Polityczna* found Leder's book, "which the right lacks" – as he wrote, found it both "rambling" and "not free of ideological bias." Cf. Pawel Rzewuski "Na marginesie. Andrzej Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja*" [In the margins. Andrzej Leder, *Prześniona Rewolucja*], *Political Theology* 6 (2014): 20. A more insightful polemic was also published, yet this concerned not the criminal but the economic aspect of the transfer described by Leder. "Leder failed to see the elephant in the room, failed to see that the annexation of eastern German lands, the forcible, violently carried-out displacement of 10 million Germans and the enfranchisement of their property was a great national-social and geographic-spatial revolution! And it was not an 'overhyped revolution.'" Cf. Tomasz Gabiś, "Polska klaso średnia, *erwache*! Albo co prześnił Andrzej Leder [Polish middle class, erwache!, or what Andrzej Leder oversaw], accessed August 10, 2016, http://nowadebata.pl/2016/07/29/polish-middle-class-erwache-albo-co-przesnil-andrzej-leder/.

How to Get Out of It?

Is there, then, any way out of a no-win situation? Is it possible to get out of the vicious circle of compulsive repetition? Vicious because compulsive repetition of unpleasant or painful situations, considered an indisputable fact visible in analytical experience, has its inexhaustible sources in collective unconsciousness.[25] As the Lacanists say, there is no end to repetition. However, one can add that the recommendation "Enjoy your symptom" sounds here somewhat inappropriate and at odds with the line of thinking of Freud himself, who, in the aforementioned text on recollection, wrote: "young and childish people in particular, are inclined to make the necessity imposed by the treatment for paying attention to their illness as a welcome excuse for luxuriating in their symptoms." In his article, Freud considered nothing less than the courage with which the patient is willing to resist his illness as a condition for successful treatment. It is easier to get out of the vicious circle of repetition for the individual who decides to undergo labor-intensive (not to mention: costly) therapy than for the collective fixated on victim positions and driven with anger and fears.[26] Social psychologists draw attention to the persistence of the long-standing psychological trauma of war. They mention the memory of the daily threat to life, the frequent confrontation with another person's death – the trauma which has not been healed in Poland. They claim it is responsible for the career of paranoid thinking, social mistrust, and the ease with which hate speech manifests itself. A significant role is therapy via public discourse. But here, too, a lucky therapeutic "transfer" is a requirement: put into the realities and conditions of debate, this means, at the very least, a willingness to talk and a shared appreciation of the standards for evaluating the arguments used in it. In this case, public therapeutic discourse appears to be a work of Herculean proportions, and it seems doomed to failure: it is assumed today as an attack and a lie, recently completely unsupported by state institutions, even disavowed by them as a defamation of the national community. In effect, we witness the rejection of the discourse as a platform for agreeing on perspectives and arguments. Is it because "it is not fair to talk to people who call themselves Poles, but are no longer Poles"?[27] Meanwhile,

25 See Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 77.

26 See Paweł Holas and Maja Lis-Turlejska, "A w głowach wojna trwa" [And in their heads the war continues], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 14–15, 2016. The psychologists' diagnoses did not find in Poland any implementation of a therapy program on a societal scale (just as the Polish historians' declared knowledge of the Jedwabne crime long before the publication of J. T. Gross's book never turned into a debate initiated by them).

27 "Rymkiewicz w bardzo ważnej rozmowie z Lichocką: Polacy zrozumieli, że są wynaradawiani, że to wszystko zmierza do likwidacji Polski" [The Poles understood that they were

discourse is crucial here, as it is an instrument for changes in social memory. It is an acknowledged truth by scholars that "public handling of memory also affects individual memory, repression can therefore contribute to forgetting" and "nations can repress the past with impunity, their collective memory can be changed without the 'return of the repressed'"[28] – although that latter thesis is already questionable. Regardless of its unconscious entanglements, the public memory healing process depends on representations of the past constructed by centers of power in such a way that individuals "perceive them as their own." The role of institutions of public trust in particular, such as academic or educational institutions, is therefore of great importance here, especially since the specific representations of the past that permeate the public sphere "embody the social, political or institutional intentionality that supports or enables it."[29] In his book *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur devoted much attention to the resolution of the affective conflict of blocked and manipulated memory. And also the conditions under which the assimilation of repressed contents can occur, so that this process serves to settle the dispute of conflicting memories. At the center of his considerations is the capacity to forget, albeit as the actual outcome of a whole process. In place of institutionalized memory, which is therefore often exposed to the risk of abuse, Ricoeur proposes the instauration of the work of memory as understood by Freud. This work of memory, exposed to the risk of not being

being denationalized, that all this was heading towards the liquidation of Poland. Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz in conversation with Joanna Lichocka], *W polityce*, accessed August 20, 2016, http://wpolityce.pl/kultura/280770-rymkiewicz-w-bardzo-waznej-rozmowie-z-lichocka-polacy-zrozumieli-ze-sa-wynaradawiani-ze-to-wszystko-zmierza-do-likwidacji-polski-calosc. One might add here that one of the effects of the Law and Justice government's remembrance policy is that there is no change in attitudes when it comes to the issue of antisemitism in Poland. See research by the team of Michał Bilewicz from the School of Social Sciences and Humanities (SWPS): Dominika Bulska and Mikołaj Winiewski, "Powrót Zabobonu: Antysemtizm w Polsce na podstawie Polskiego Sondażu Uprzedzeń 3" [The Return of Superstition: Anti-Semtism in Poland based on the Polish Prejudice Survey 3], accessed March 3, 2022, cf. http://cbu.psychologia.pl/wp-content/uploads/sites/410/2021/02/Antysemityzm_PPS3_Bulska_fin.pdf "Our research – shows that the percentage of people with antisemitic beliefs is not changing. What is changing is the expression of antisemitism. Those who hold such views are less ashamed of them, which is facilitated by social media," says Prof. Michał Bilewicz of the University of Warsaw's Center for Research on Prejudice in Wiktor Ferfecki, "Antysemicki problem w Polsce," *Rzeczpospolita*, April 21, 2021, https://www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art8610461-antysemicki-problem-w-polsce UW. Author's note of April 3, 2023.

28 Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 9.

29 Ibid.

free from pressure and manipulation, must – if it is to achieve its goal – be accompanied by the work of mourning, identified here with remembering, mourning that is the acceptance of the loss of an object dear to us (the words of Freud quoted earlier about accepting the feeling of unhappiness can also be understood in this sense). When doing our work of mourning, we should therefore develop the capacity to empathize with our opponents to move towards reconciliation, culminating in – as he calls it – "happy forgetting." Thus, forgetting is not amnesia or oblivion. It is an amnesty, an "amnesty-ing pardon," but the conditions under which it takes place are essential. The work of memory/mourning should produce tangible results. "The question of forgiving arises where there has been an indictment, a finding of guilt, and sentencing," says Ricoeur.[30] "The salutary identity crisis that permits a lucid reappropriation of the past and of its traumatic charge" is also important, and this is done precisely through the work of memory, "which work is completed by the work of mourning and guided by the spirit of forgiveness."[31] It is, therefore, a forgetting that is not the forgetting of wrongs, but "as a duty to silence evil but to state it in a pacified mode, without anger," a forgetting that is the will for reconciliation. This process would undoubtedly prove easier and would have a greater chance of success if the world morally compensated Poland for the enormous suffering in Second World War and for the losses it sustained.[32] Unfortunately, the forgetting and ignorance we face in the West in this regard does not herald this: the words cited above (see footnote 4) by Tony Judt, after all a significant historian and intellectual, are symptomatic here. But if we were finally to stand in the limelight, would this not this just reinforce the Polish victim syndrome? One probably does not have to be as much of a Freudian pessimist to conclude that, under the conditions in which the discourse on memory is taking place in Poland today, Ricoeur's project, or one such as that of Michael Rothberg, is proving impossible. As readers of philosophers, we are used to failure. The w o r s e thing is that the Pole will remain a sick man of Europe; the w o r s t thing is that he will enjoy it.

30 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 453.

31 Ibid.

32 Poland lost 17.1% of its citizens; the number of Polish Jewish victims is roughly equal to that of other Polish victims. By this measure, as well as in destroying of material property, Poland ranks second, after the USSR, among the countries involved in the war. Poland and the USSR accounted for as much as 71% of the damage on the continent. Cf. Mirosław Maciorowski, "Ile milionów zginęło?" [How many millions died?]," *Gazeta Wyborcza – Ale Historia*, May 4, 2016, accessed August 26, 2016, http://wyborcza.pl/alehistoria/1,121681,17844725,Ile_milionow_zginelo__Ofiary_II_wojny_swiatowej.html.

Abstract

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The Compulsion of Our Failure to Remember the Holocaust

Zaleski describes the pathogenic mechanisms that come into play in Polish society: in the processes of forgetting the extermination of our fellow citizens, Polish Jews, during the Second World War, as well in the reasons behind the construction of a false historical imagination/imaginary of collective memory. In the Polish affective memory, "the Jews" are a symptom that allows a noisy "neurotic minority" to cast the collective in the role of victim, to give permanence of phantasms and pathological structures in our collective identity. Zaleski also expresses his alarm at the fact that official public discourse is now once again sanctioning these practices.

Keywords

Antisemitism, affect, phantasm, collective memory, identity

New Perspectives

Przemysław Czapliński

Revolt in the Framework of Memory. "Solidarity," Revolution, Rebellion

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"So it's not short memory that's at stake here, but another opportunity?"[1]
Krzysztof Siwczyk

We give our attention to memory because we assume – not without good reason – that it acts as the scaffolding for both individual and collective identity. Memory does not merely concern the past, but it intertwines with present experiences, imposing patterns that are sourced from the past upon the world as it is seen and experienced. It interferes with the way we perceive the world, influencing our participation in life and the planned future. To investigate memory is to reach deep into the matrices of meaning, which codetermine the range of questions that can be directed at the actual world, it is to search for those images and narratives that still exert influence. Memory is therefore not so much a depository of history, but more of a co-creator of each and every present.

1 Krzysztof Siwczyk, "Zdania z treścią" [Sentences with content] [2003], in *List otwarty 1995–2005* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2005), 202.

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Contrary to how it may seem, memory is not an easy object to study. On the face of it, access to its archives is sparsely defended, as it permeates almost every aspect of everyday experience – testimonies and letters, works of art and daily routines, monuments and street names, collective acts of foundation and destruction. But even though one cannot utter anything that would not be in some way indebted to memory and cannot perform any act that would not be bound to it, there is an endless capacity to occlude or distort each and every memory. The memory recounted through the verbal testimony of the witness – with which this paper is concerned – does not add up to any neat whole, it is composed rather from matters that are important than from ones that are true, it is nothing like a static archive but is in constant flux, it is a form of action, of incessant renegotiation of meaning conducted by the subject with the self and with the community of which it is a part. Memory is therefore not a storage of some comprehensive version of the past, it is not objective and it is not settled. These three defining traits present with striking force at pivotal moments of public life. At such times society clashes over memory not in order to establish how things really were, but to strengthen partisan positions in the struggle to define the present. The disagreements about the past are not about objective truth but about myth – about the story which will lend sense and structure to the present moment.

The fight over memory, even if it extends to the farthest reaches of the past, is always about arranging the present. The one who determines memory – that is, the direction which memory has set for the present – is the one defining the current situation.

The Point of Contention

The paper "'Im się zdaje, że zapomnimy. O nie!' Rodowody rewolucji" ["They think we'll forget. No way!" Origins of the revolution] by Marcin Zaremba deserves praise for its unhurried archaeological work as well as – or, maybe, especially – for the vastness of presented sources. In it, the author introduced letters censored or confiscated by state functionaries, which were probably never analyzed before. On this basis, further strengthened by an interesting reappraisal of the mass culture of that era, the author posits that the year 1980 accumulated within itself the memory of all previous rebellions against Communism and that, in addition to this, it activated the blueprint for insurrections known from previous epochs.

The assertion that the memory of insurrections shined through the actions of the "Solidarity" years is indisputably truthful. Together with this truth we also need to acknowledge the veracity of the belief that the memory of insurrections could become intertwined with the "Solidarity" movement only

through subsequent juxtapositions and reductions. The differences between the November, January, or Warsaw Insurrections and the "Solidarity" movement needed to disappear in a chain of substitutions, if the events of the years 1980–1981 were to become another link in the tradition of the struggle for independence. Stacking up members of a workers union against insurgents could only be done at the cost of simplifications and radical omissions. The axis of similitude has in this case taken over the axis of equivalence.

Taking all this into account, the assertion that the memory of insurrections appeared at the time of "Solidarity" is at the same time self-evident and inadequate. It is self-evident, if we only recall the sheer number of references to the insurrectionist traditions made at the time. It will prove inadequate, if we claim the insurrectionist memory to be the social, political, and historical dominant of the "Solidarity" era. I am ready to go as far as to claim that if the memory of insurrections was to be the principal factor in the origin of "Solidarity," then the independent trade union would never have been created.

The Heroic Dominant

When we research the memory of the participants of the "Solidarity" movement from the early 1980s, we attempt to learn what people remembered because we assume that it had some bearing on individual and collective action. Analyzing documents in search of metaphors, associations, analogies, and comparisons should aid in the reconstruction of a modelling framework – that is, a quasi-system responsible for structuring reality on both the individual and collective plane, and therefore shaping the actions and the perception of reality at the time.

From among the numerous methods of analyzing memory Marcin Zaremba had chosen the one that – paraphrasing Maurice Halbwachs – relies on reconstructing the insurrectionist frames of memory. For the French author of the study *The Social Frameworks of Memory*,[2] individual memory is never truly individual. Remembering is, in his opinion, a deeply societal action that is embedded within frames of memory; that is, in "the instruments used by collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society."[3] Therefore, individuals remember that which is important for communication within the bounds of the small-scale society to which they belong – the family, social

2 See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago–London: Chicago University Press, 1992).

3 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 40.

class, or religious community. Hence, individual memory not only retains the particular information required for interpersonal communication but it is also shaped by that very act of communication. As members of a family, class, or religious community we build concrete memories that allow us to become embedded in a given group and, in the process, we also become sensitized to certain issues and desensitized to other ones. Halbwachs assumes that "the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group."[4] Memory and the individual's co-existence within a community influence and support one another: individual memory is a carrier of collective identity, while collective identity is a cache of behaviors and definitions that ground an individual. An individual human being remembers not that which happened, but that which strengthens group cohesion. A change in identification – with class, family, or religion – is accompanied by the adoption of a new sensibility in the sphere of memory. Memories from the previous stage are not lost in the process, of course, but the conviction about their importance for the current social position is.

Zaremba also mentions other scholars, who introduced such terms as "cultural frameworks" (Jack Goldstone), "tradition" (Jerzy Szacki), "collective memory of the past" (Barbara Szacka), or "historical culture." What all these notions have in common – Zaremba writes – "is that they speak of the same thing: of a system of values, meanings, symbols, convictions that was inherited from the past and which dominates and shapes the social, economic, religious, and political mores and strategies of action."[5] This leads to the conclusion that tradition – in the same sense in which Halbwachs spoke of the "community" – is the framework of individual and collective memory: we learn to remember not by the virtue of direct participation, but in the course of incessant repetition performed by the community to which we belong; we articulate not memory in its completeness, but those fragments of the past which help us identify our place in a given group and a course of action that is adequate to it.

The methodological construct defined in such a way is highly inspiring and, at the same time, very treacherous. The author analyzed the collective memory of the participants of the "Solidarity" movement, extracting from it the memories of national insurrections, with the visible prominence of the Warsaw Insurrection. This was accompanied by an assertion that collective memory is – exactly as Halbwachs claimed – selective and one-sidedly

4 Ibid.

5 Marcin Zaremba, "'Im się zdaje, że zapomnimy. O nie!' Rodowody rewolucji" ["They think we'll forget. No way!": Origins of the revolution], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2016): 153–203.

accumulative: such memory radically and unceremoniously edits out anything that is not deemed essential, retaining only that which will help nurture collective identity. This assertion helps the scholar corroborate another presupposition, which claims that societies differ in their collective behavior: Polish society is rebellious, while other communities are rather prone to negotiation or obedience. According to Marcin Zaremba, the source of behaviors that dominate Polish culture is the insurrectionist framework, which through the elimination of a more nuanced view of the past shapes the message about the collective heroic position. This gives rise to a distinct feedback loop: the insurrectionist message upheld by the community forms individual memory, which sources and retains from the entirety of experience those fragments which fit with the heroic whole. That is how Zaremba explains the conditions that made "Solidarity" possible – the memory of past insurrections recalled by the society of the 1970s provided the kindling for igniting another one in the year 1980. Meanwhile, the history of the 1980s – that culminated in the Polish Round Table Talks – seems to prove that not every act of resistance turns into an insurrection, and that not every insurrection liberates all of its participants and, furthermore, that there is no such tradition which could not be constructed anew by a given society.

Revolt Against Insurrection

At the beginning there was a strike. It broke out in Świdnik on July 8, 1980, and afterwards it spread to the whole land of Lublin; it lasted until July 25. It was sparked by the announcement on July 1 of an expected rise in food prices. The workers at the aviation works in Świdnik, Polmozbyt in Lublin, the agricultural machinery works, truck assembly plant, nitrate production facility in Puławy, and the rolling bearings manufacturer in Krasnik,[6] as well as in many other enterprises, demanded improvement of working conditions and the termination of numerous privileges (such as the shops operating beyond the state-regulated market, or conducting domestic commerce in foreign currency) for state apparatchiks and the well-off.

Without this wave of protest there would be no "Solidarity," though the hasty signing of agreements with the crews did not bode well for its continuation. The worker's demands were twofold – economic and political – and, therefore, this would indicate that the strikes did not originate in the

6 Świdnickie Zakłady Lotnicze, Polmozbyt – Polish motor vehicle retailer, Fabryka Maszyn Rolniczych [Agricultural machine factory], Fabryka Samochodów Ciężarowych [Truck factory], Zakłady Azotowe w Puławach [Nitrogen factory in Puławy], Fabryka Łożysk Tocznych w Kraśniku [Rolling bearings factory in Kraśnik].

insurrectionist memory but rather were rooted in working class consciousness. In response to the experience of poverty, hopelessness, and disorder, this consciousness gave rise to a desperate need for change:

> During a later conversation a friend recalled that she also spoke with other colleagues, and we will not work, to put things simply, there can no longer be such disorganization as there is now.[7]
>
> We've had enough.[8]
>
> In the early phase it [...] was a purely emotional approach, that something has to change, that someone finally started to do something about it, and maybe it will be better. Though, nobody yet knew why it would be better, or who would be the one to do it. All in all, it was a feeling of the kind that something should finally change in the country.[9]

The revolutionary "Things cannot go on like this anymore" leads at first to a strike. Throughout the entire postwar period the Communist governments did not allow the word "strike" to enter the official language, substituting it with such euphemisms as "holdups" or "standstills" at work.[10] Permission to use the word "strike" would be tantamount to acknowledging that the relationship between the employers and workers in a socialist country are still capitalist in their nature and that they are based on capturing and withholding added value. Admitting that the strikes broke out in defense of dignity would mean something even worse – this would be synonymous with a declaration that a socialist country humiliates the social class for which it was constructed, and in whose name it exercises power. Meanwhile, at the very core of the strikes lay an intuitive understanding that in a socialist state economic exploitation is fused with the dispossession of dignity. Józef Tischner was

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7 Ireneusz Krzemiński, *Solidarność. Projekt polskiej demokracji* [Solidarity. The project of Polish democracy] (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 1996), 52–53.

8 Ibid., 53.

9 Ibid.

10 See Michał Głowiński, "Nowomowa tuż po Sierpniu" [Newspeak just after August], in *Nowomowa po polsku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PEN, 1990), 96. "It would not be an overstatement to say that the record of the usage of the word 'strike' reflects the history of newspeak – its use in the description of internal events, which broke one of those linguistic taboos that were safeguarded with utmost consequence, marked its collapse. It was not yet used in *Sztandar Ludu* that was published in Lublin on July 19, 1980 [...]. It was used only once in Edward Gierek's address delivered on August 18, though still rather shyly, with palpable unease, after a whole series of 'holdups' and 'standstills.' It entered common parlance only at the very end of August."

right when, voicing the spirit of the times, he characterized the "Solidarity" movement – through a metaphor combining both these spheres – as "rebellion against moral exploitation."[11]

This expression aptly describes the sudden advancement in self-comprehension. Furthermore, it also reveals its processual nature: the more efficient the organizational processes became, the greater was the growth in self-understanding, the deeper the understanding of accompanying conditions, the more efficient the results of undertaken actions. And in the course of actions, and through them, it was gradually revealed that nothing is given as a complete whole – starting with language and ending with ever shifting goals. Therefore, the self-knowledge of the rebellion's participants was only minimally indebted to memory because there was nothing in memory that resembled a "solidary strike" or an "independent labor union." The key difference between the events of the year 1970 and those of 1980 was therefore not derived from memory, but it appeared somewhat in opposition to it – as a result of comprehending the insufficiency of preceding experiences. It was no accidental choice of words on the part of Dariusz Kobzdej – a physician and activist of the Młoda Polska [Young Poland] movement – when in 1979 he called out to others to join the activities commemorating the events of December 1970:

> Remember that the lack of self-organization of society against the government diminishes the efficacy of our demands, diminishes the possibility of realizing our individual rights as well as the rights of the nation, that it entails sacrifices that could be avoided even if we did not demand them here, underneath the shipyard gates, but in burning committees.[12]

"Self-organization," "efficacy," "realization of rights," "sacrifices that could be avoided" – this is not the vocabulary of an uprising but an ethical plea to engage in pragmatic action. From this vantage point, September 1980 – even if it was a successor of December 1970 – was more of a grand experiment, which progressed by going beyond the frames of memory.

Memory appeared very sparsely – whether in implied or thematized form – in the interviews conducted in January 1981 by Ireneusz Krzemiński with the founders of independent labor movements. Insufficient knowledge, imagination, improvisation, haste – these were the key factors in establishing the unions:

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11 Józef Tischner, *Etyka solidarności oraz Homo sovieticus* [Ethics of solidarity and Homo sovieticus] (Kraków: Znak, 1992), 34.

12 Zaremba, "Rodowody rewolucji."

> On September 1 we went to the director and told him that we are establishing independent labor unions. On September 5, we showed him the statute of "Mazowsze."[13]
>
> What it essentially came down to was that from the very start it wasn't clear whether the agreements signed in Gdańsk were limited only to Gdańsk itself, to the whole coastal region, or were they valid in the whole country. […] everything [i.e. the creation of an independent labor union at the Polish Academy of Science – P. C.] developed at breakneck speed, because on the 1 [September – P. C.] the agreement was signed and already on the 4 […] the first meeting took place.[14]
>
> Everything sprang to life in a bafflingly spontaneous manner.[15]

Dozens more of similar testimonials could be found and quoted, though the historical comparisons or parallels found in memory are here of least importance. That which unfolded at the time drew upon many sources, but channeled all of them into a new current. As a result, "Solidarity" appears as a collective task of inventing and developing historical difference. That difference – that is, a new methodology of collective action – emerged in the course of three phases: the sit-in strike, the work of inter-company committees, and the emergence of country-level structures. The sit-ins reflected the tradition of proletarian struggle against capitalism, inter-company committees drew upon the legacy of communist proletariat, and the country-wide structure – resembling the workers' councils of 1956 Hungary – created an antimodel of the state.[16] This structure was a system of relations between all members and committees, and at the same time it was a democratic mechanism for selecting delegates authorized to conduct negotiations with the government side and to make crucial decisions. The enlargement of "Solidarity" was conducted in such a manner so as to reconcile the fundamentals of direct democracy with the republican representative order.

Participants in the movement were therefore well-aware of the significant difference between these two types of democracy: they had independently developed a practice that minimized the alienating effects of delegating power to others and that obliged delegates to consult both the councils and the

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13 Krzemiński, *Solidarność*, 47.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 48.

16 For a reading of "Solidarity" as an "antimodel of the state," see Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity. A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 113.

collective. Neither the memory of the uprisings nor the imperative of rebellion dictated these solutions. Bronisław Świderski – the author of one of the most important analyses of "Solidarity" – is correct when he says that:

> The way this union was organized and operated was the first non-insurrectionist – that is, non-romantic – effort on the part of Polish society conducted on such a grand scale during the last two hundred years. "Solidarity" was a democratic organization because it managed to simultaneously abide by the current constitution, which guaranteed citizens freedom of "conscience and religion" (article 82), freedom of "speech, print, assembly" (article 83), and the right of association (article 84) and recognized these rights as natural rights, ones that are independent from the interests of the state. "Solidarity" was also a democratic organization because it programmatically did not resort to violence, treating the tradition of the romantic uprising as a political metaphor, not as a strategic instruction.[17]

Only in official statements, formulated with the awareness of the difference that had been won and with the uncertainty of the future in mind, did social remembrance turn to earlier rebellions and uprisings:

> social and moral protest [of 1980 – P. C.] was not born overnight. It contained the bloody legacy of the workers from Poznań of 1956 and those from the coast of December 1970, of the students' revolt in 1968, of the June in Radom and Ursus in 1976. It encompasses the heritage of the independent workers' movements, the actions of intelligentsia and the youth, the efforts of the Catholic Church to preserve values, the legacy of all the struggles for human dignity in our country. Our union grew out of these struggles and it will remain faithful to them.[18]

We can see in this document how effortlessly – with reverence for previous rebellions, with the pride associated with following in the footsteps of predecessors – collective memory delimits and reinforces the line of its own tradition. "Protest," "blood," "rebellion," these are words which embed "Solidarity" in the tradition of struggle and preparedness for making sacrifices. At the same time, the notion of "dignity" also appeared in the above quoted

17 Bronisław Świderski, *Gdańsk i Ateny. O demokracji bezpośredniej w Polsce* [Bronisław Świderski, Gdańsk and Athens. About direct democracy in Poland] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 1996), 78–79.

18 Introduction to the "Uchwała Programowa delegatów na Krajowy Zjazd Delegatów" [Program Resolution of delegates to the National Congress of Delegates], *AS, Biuletyn Pism Związkowych i Zakładowych* 41 (1981).

statement, pointing in a different direction – towards agreement, respect, compromise, and dialogue.[19] In 1980, these concepts opened a whole new historical lexicon. Instead of the insurgent alternative: "this is the day of triumph or death," an inclusive approach emerged – one acknowledging "dignity" (of living conditions) as a value of equal importance to freedom, and therefore requiring solutions other than "dying for the homeland." The pursuit of an agreement implied long-term thinking, whose rationale was based on involving subsequent entities in a cooperative network that would remain open even to party members.

This inclusivity also went on to encompass the socialist order itself. The "Solidarity" movement aimed to collectivize the means of production and to the democratization of decision-making processes. The guiding principle of all undertakings was the notion of the "common good" – in relation to both governance and production. A clear reference to this intention can be found in the words of Lech Wałęsa, who, while commenting the events of 1980–1981, stated that: "During the socialist era most social stratums have grown accustomed to its certain achievements, we take as a given things such as social welfare, hospitals, schools. In short, in order for socialism to be acceptable, we have assumed that the best things that economy offers in terms of social services is a socialist achievement, even if it greatly surpassed its previous boundaries."[20]

The crucial point for the current argument is exactly this "surpassing of previous boundaries," that results from the ongoing discovery that neither the uprising nor any other past formula is sufficient for solving present-day contradictions. Collective memory offered skeletal guidelines and at the same time proved inadequate, as the problems at hand "surpassed the boundaries" of the past. Therefore the participants of the social movement tried to act in a manner that would prevent memory from dominating over the present, and the imperative of rebellion would not overpower realism.

It was not about equality of fighting, dying, suffering, or killing, but about equal participation in creating a different living order. It was about regaining the feeling of being at home. Perhaps – and in this respect Marcin Zaremba

19 This is evidenced by, i.a., the letter addressed on August 20, 1980, by the intelligentsia and writers from the Warsaw circle to the workers of the striking Gdynia Shipyard, which called for settlements to be reached "by way of dialogue, [...] way of compromise. [...] Everyone – the ruling and the ruled must be guided by Poland's best interest. [...] Let us all learn to mutually respect our dignity." *Zapis rokowań gdańskich. Sierpień 1980* [Record of the Gdańsk negotiations. August 1980], ed. Andrzej Drzycimski and Tadeusz Skutnik (Paris: Editions Spotkania), 213; quoted after: Świderski, *Gdańsk i Ateny*, 134.

20 Lech Wałęsa, *Droga nadziei* [The path of hope] (Kraków: Znak, 1990), 207.

is right – if it were not for the insurrectionist memory, the activists of "Solidarity" would not have struggled for impractical "dignity" and would not have shown such steadfastness. At the same time – and this is where our paths diverge – if the collective memory leading to the birth of the "S" movement had been dominated by insurrectionary clichés, then there would have been no talks in Gdańsk, no dialogue between the protesters and the authorities, no signing of agreements, and, finally, no free trade union. The key concepts of that time – dialogue, consultations, understanding, settlement – emerged from traditions other than the insurrectionist one, or were even hostile towards it. The extraordinary tension that pervaded the entire social life of that period resulted, as one might assume, from the fact that social invention drew various suggestions from memory, limiting their applicability and adequacy. Revolutionary thinking inhibited insurrectionary associations, and thinking in terms of a trade union countered the desire to create a political party. What was at stake at the time was not defeating the enemy, but inventing a new model of collective life.

Insurrection Against Revolt

Within countless analyses, "Solidarity" is variously framed as either a revolution, trade union,[21] political party, or as an insurrection.[22] The more competent the study in question, the more probable is some merger of two or three of the above characteristics.[23]

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21 "Solidarity," was "a total social movement," which fused "union action and struggle for free labor unions with a movement for democracy and national insurrection." See Alain Touraine, Jan Strzelecki, François Dubet and Michel Wieviorka, *"Solidarność." Analiza ruchu społecznego 1980–1981* ["Solidarity." Analysis of the social movement 1980–1981], trans. Andrzej Krasiński (Warszawa: "Europa," 1989), 9.

22 " [...] Several important elements that clearly refer to the Polish insurrectionary tradition can be found in the events of 1980–1981. First, the "Solidarity" movement had a clearly defined enemy, who fiercely defended the old order. [...] Secondly, like the Kościuszko Uprising or – to a lesser extent – the January Uprising, "S" had a charismatic leader [...]. Thirdly, and finally, the idea of national solidarity was a very important element of the union's program. See Antoni Dudek, "Rewolucja robotnicza i ruch narodowowyzwoleńczy" [The workers' revolution and the national liberation movement], in *Lekcja Sierpnia. Dziedzictwo "Solidarności" po dwudziestu latach*, ed. D. Gawin (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2002), 150–151.

23 "The Poles in fact produced a quite original mixture of ideas drawn from diverse traditions. In politics, they clove to the central principles of liberal democracy, but they combined this with proposals for a kind of radical devolution, social control and local self-government which did not exist in the West. [...] For culture and education, their ideals

The two extreme categories – revolution and insurrection – are closely related, because the events to which they point are elemental, mass movements, which are very hard to control. The middle categories – trade union and political party – share common traits because they both denote forms of organization (though ones with different goals and methods of action). Nonetheless, they were listed here in this particular order for a reason, as in the course of the "Solidarity" revolution paved the way towards a trade union and insurrection led to the formation of a political party. The strength that comes from such an ordering is that it allows to explain the peculiar trajectory of a movement that needed to develop a unionized organizational structure, and which – after the failure of attempts to change the structure of power – turned into an underground conspiratorial network that reverted to the model of a political party. To state things differently: the first period of "Solidarity," encompassing the years 1980–1981, was rather revolutionary, and the second, which followed the introduction of martial law in Poland (on December 13, 1981), was rather insurrectionist.

The analyses referring to the revolutionary nature of the first period clearly underscore that this category cannot be applied here in its strictest sense. This is highlighted by the use of oxymoronic expressions, such as, "slouching revolution," "self-limiting revolution," "revolution without violence," or "ceremonial revolution." From the point of view of Marxist tradition all these characteristics contain an internal contradiction: a revolution cannot limit itself, slouch, or do away with violence. But it is exactly these paradoxes which offer a deeper insight into the first period of "Solidarity," when the union, party, or insurrectionist goals slowed down the revolution and endowed it with its slouching quality.

For these very reasons, the ownership structure of the means of production did not change, the leadership role of the party was not stricken out from the constitution, and the military and political treaties binding the Polish People's Republic to the USSR were not terminated. Nonetheless, if there are still many valid arguments that back the thesis about the revolutionary nature of this initial period of the "Solidarity" movement, it is mostly due to the changes in social communication. This sphere experienced what could be described as communicational enfranchisement, which became possible through the creation of circumstances favouring polyphonic communication that was equitable and referential, that became the basis of the revised model of participation

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could best be characterized as conservative-restorationist. In economics, they wished to combine the market, self-government and planning." See Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 352.

in decision-making processes.[24] Within the bounds of thus redefined communication, anyone and everyone held the right to be heard and to demand an answer to the question that was posed.

Social communication changed after the introduction of martial law – and this change was so significant that it transformed a revolutionary movement into an insurrectionist one. The above statement seems to make me switch sides and join Marcin Zaremba. Nonetheless, even if I do agree with him, it is only temporarily, as I see the influence of insurrectionist thinking in different spheres than he does, and, moreover, I do not perceive that influence to be positive.

The analysis of public discourse – especially on the day-to-day basis – provides us with ample proof of insurrectionist radicalization of the collective mood. After December 13, 1981, a certain militarization of imagination becomes apparent, which finds its release through themes of insurrection, war, and occupation. The walls of city tenements – I will examine this subject shortly in greater detail – became adorned with the letter "S" inscribed into the anchor symbolizing the wartime Polish Underground State, as well as with the phrases "Pamiętamy" [We remember], or with drawings depicting a turtle, which during the time of Nazi occupation, between 1939 and 1945, was tantamount to the injunction "Pracuj wolniej – pracujesz dla okupanta" [Work slower – you work for the occupant]. During street protests and fights with the security services – which took place on every thirteenth day of the month – the chants "ZOMO[25] – Gestapo!" were heard, shortening the temporal distance between the martial law period and the wartime German occupation. At the same time, the underground structures of "Solidarity" were being created – there were clandestine teaching courses and screenings of films, discussions and artistic shows were organized, political parties and associations were formed, and independent publishing was responsible for producing several hundred titles per year. Underground culture reached a level of development comparable to that of the wartime underground cultural activity.

At the same time this insurrectionist militarisation of imagination reshaped the rules of public communication. The revolution outlined in the previous paragraphs rested on the attempt to flood the political sphere with communication that was referential, differentiated, and equal. It remained

24 Bronisław Świderski writes about this convincingly in his study devoted to the subject of direct democracy; see Świderski, *Gdańsk i Ateny*, esp. chap. 2, "O porozumiewaniu się Polaków," 87–139.

25 Zmotoryzowane Odwody Milicji Obywatelskiej [Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia] – elite units of state police, notorious for their brutality especially towards anti-government protesters during the communist era in Poland. Disbanded after 1989. – Trans.

functional after December 13, 1981, but only in spasmodic acts – during street clashes. In turn, conspiracy which regained its legitimacy only as preparation for a future uprising, sanctioned one-sided communication, monologic and hierarchical, which denigrated dialog and autonomy. In the mid-1980s, Adam Michnik in his book *Takie czasy* [Such times],[26] did not diagnose new social divisions, but he cautioned against the authoritarian ambitions of local "Solidarity" leaders, and he suggested to consider the advisers of "Solidarity" as the sole representatives of the social movement. Therefore, the conspiratorial syndrome paved the way for centrally shaped communication.

Insurrection – seen as Marcin Zaremba would have it, as Polish cultural tradition – appears here not as an "act," but primarily as an intellectual structure that orders reality. It holds a decisive role in the way that social relations are shaped and perceived. In the 1980s, these relations were shaped in such manner that the social structure began to closely resemble the military structure – with a distant command centre, clandestine flow of orders from the top to the lower ranks, irrelevance of dialog, and the commonness of unexpressed but agreed upon belonging to particular units. Within the framework of this division – into elite decision-making units and the egalitarian activist masses – the "command" issued appeals to the masses for them to turn out in the streets in order to pressure the government, which will in consequence concede and either agree to ease some particular law or, as the ultimate goal, will enter into negotiations with the opposition. This is how the insurrectionist logic of the 1980s paved the way for the Round Table talks and for the representative democracy, that is, that form of governance wherein citizens express themselves in four-year voting cycles, transferring the decision-making to their delegates.

Throughout the entire decade – from the introduction of martial law until the contract election of 1989 – society simulated insurrection, therefore forcing the government to make further concessions. All the while, within the confines of that simulation, the fundamental questions were not asked – such as those related to the ownership of the means of production, participation in the exercise of power and its control. The more successful was the performance of that insurrection, which was never meant to break out, the lesser the chances for joint negotiations of a new social contract became. If there was an insurrection underway in the 1980s, then certainly the masses were not victorious.

The conspiratorial-insurrectionist imagination, which dominated the political culture of the 1980s, also played a role in the upholding of the gender division. This was not a recent phenomenon, as the memorable inscription

26 Adam Michnik, *Takie czasy* [Such times] (Warszawa: NOWa, 1985), esp. pp. 26–31.

– "Women, go home, we are fighting for Poland here" – adorned the wall of the Gdańsk Shipyard already in August 1980.[27] The conservative perception of sexual dimorphism with its social consequences was not influenced by the fact that the Gdańsk protest broke out in defence of Anna Walentynowicz, among other reasons, and that all of the collectives on strike had substantial female representations. During the one-and-a-half-year period of freedom, women were still perceived as "guardians of the domestic hearth," and as persons who by virtue of their endowments should not participate in civic life. Therefore, patriarchal protectionism held strong, and it pushed women out of the "masculine struggle" for power and distinction.

The martial law only strengthened this way of thinking, adding to it a military-insurrectionist rationale. When society demanded freedom for the Poles, the universal expression "Poles" camouflaged the male gender of the collective's representative. In consequence, a socially important space became embroiled in a state of permanent and ethically dubious schizophrenia: after the introduction of martial law, that is, after the internment of over five thousand men, the underground remained active mostly due to the efforts of women, but the system of conspiratorial-insurrectionist imagination made women invisible.[28] And yet without women:

> There would be no advisors of TKK, no *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, the region, the Poznan Radio, nor the network of social contacts. There would be no runners, typists, safe houses, there would be no one to run errands for the activists in hiding. Women either continued doing that what they did before, or they initiated completely novel forms of resistance. They organized ephemeral publishing houses and informal groups, they managed them, and worked in them. Until 1988 two women became representatives of their regional commissions – Ewa Kulik and Barbara Labuda. […] Nonetheless, the value system adopted by the movement did not undergo change and did not correct for the transformation that was already underway. Actions were speedy and the development of theory could not keep up. Therefore, the system of values did not evolve in a way that would recognize the substantial input of women.[29]

27 See Agnieszka Graff, *Świat bez kobiet. Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym* [A world without women. Gender in Polish public life] (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2001).

28 This theme often surfaces in the testimonies gathered by Ewa Kondratowicz in *Szminka na sztandarze. Kobiety Solidarności 1980–1989. Rozmowy* [Lipstick on a banner. Women of Solidarity 1980–1989. Conversations] (Warszawa: Sic!, 2001).

29 Shana Penn, *Podziemie kobiet*, trans. Hanna Jankowska (Warszawa: Rosner & Wspólnicy, 2003), 160–161. English edition: Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (An Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

The division into "us and them," reinforced by the feeling of alienation from the political order and the government, successfully blocked critical thinking and obscured the truth about how much power, symbolic violence, and everyday exploitation is hidden in the interactions of women and men. The "Solidarity" revolution had, or it at least could have, brought meaningful change into that relationship. The martial law preserved the insurrectionist phantasy of the importance of the male role and the necessity of forceful participation in history. This entailed catastrophic results for the democratic order of the Third Polish Republic: among the sixty oppositionist seated at the round table, only one was female, and in 1993 the Women's Commission [Komisja Kobiet] was disbanded and the abortion law was tightened. The ruling power after 1989 proved to be masculine: it disenfranchised women and it turned the female body into the object of political bargain. If there was an insurrection underway in the 1980s, then certainly women were not victorious.[30]

The Fifth Element

In early January 1982 the inscription "Zima wasza, wiosna nasza" [Your winter, our spring] appeared on the wall of a Poznan tenement. A simple and ingenious phrase: rhythmical, logical, and suggestive. The prediction of victory was associated here with the seasons, directing the associations of its readers to the cyclicality of nature's calendar. Insurrection will break out just as blossom in springtime; society will take spring into its possession and will overpower those who have imprisoned Poland in cahoots with winter. Prediction, prophecy, and threat in one, greatly strengthened the clear distinction between "we" and "you." State power is on the side of winter, of dormancy, downtime; it succeeds not through its own strength but through the alliance with frost, which confines people to their dwellings. "We" is backed by the rationale of life, standing on the side of light, development, and growth; therefore this "we," temporarily absent from the public sphere, will emerge from homes and will triumph, just as germination and growth triumph over frozen soil.

30 "At the end of the 1980s, I maintained that Solidarity must first win independence and democracy for the entire society, and only then it will be able to calmly deal with the women's cause and improve their condition. And so it did, with obvious results, by sending women back to their traditional life not as individuals but as 'family beings' and by passing repressive decisions on abortion. It took some time before I understood that 'democracy in Poland is masculine.'" (Maria Janion, "Ifigenia w Polsce" [Iphigenia in Poland], in *Kobiety i duch inności* [Warszawa: Sic!, 1996], 326–327).

The spring of 1982 came but the balance of power remained unchanged. In June someone amended the phrase to read: "Zima wasza, wiosna nasza, lato muminków" (Your winter, our spring, Moomin summer).[31]

Making allowance for the substantial brevity, this addendum can be viewed as the pinnacle of public communication in the 1980s. The solidified dichotomy of "us–them" was suddenly enriched here, as the last part of the inscription came neither from the authorities nor from the "Solidarity" movement. Its sender was someone else – someone who did not fit into the binary logic that dominated thinking and speaking after the introduction of martial law. This third party did not introduce a distinct language and did not speak for a clearly identifiable social group. This was the clearest communicational dissimilarity from the two other entities present in this exchange. The capacious "them" referred to the authorities – the regime, Moscow, Asia, the commies, traitors, Gestapo members, or the Soviets. The even broader "us" meant "almost anyone" – society, Poles, "Solidarity," the nation. But this Third belonged to no one and came from nowhere. Still, this unexpected appearance in the public sphere signalled something more than a mere tripling: it shattered the belief in the completeness of the "them–us" division, in that it encompasses the whole social map, and that it had exhausted the list of possible identifications.

The playful addition was also a signal that this Third party has no distinctive language. Unlike the ideologically loaded language of power – a narrow idiom of lies and cynicism – and also unlike the rich language of "us" – full of sublime slogans, phrases, moral reasons, wise theories, and rich traditions – the language of the Third existed only in the abstract, as a tradition lacking apparent public respect. "The Moomins," although widely known, did not belong to the archives of legitimate culture from which one could draw the tools needed for a moral and reasoned fight with the regime. It took some courage to put oneself between the opposing sides alongside the Moomins. The tactics of a wide-eyed simpleton signalled a debunking of the linguistic struggle: martial law was framed by its supporters as the only salvation from civil war, and by its critics as a "war waged upon the nation" – as partition, gulag, or occupation. A "Moomin summer" added to the "spring (of the people)" unmasked both the language of the dispute and the fictitious nature of the entities behind it. A ludic postscript changed the meaning of the whole. The joke was wielded as a shield against despair, but it also dispelled the faith in the magical power of words.

31 The added phrase "lato muminków" (lit. summer of the Moomins) is the Polish title of Tove Jannson's fifth novel in the Moomin series, which was translated into English as "Moominsummer Madness." – Trans.

When the summer of 1982 drew to an end, the inscription on the wall was enriched with a fourth phrase. This time it read: "Zima wasza, wiosna nasza, lato muminków, jesień średniowiecza" [Your winter, our spring, Moomin summer, autumn of the Middle Ages]. The game went on – finding its own momentum, disengaged from the rhetorical struggle of state power with the "Solidarity" movement. Subsequent persons and groups positioned themselves ever further from the centre of the dispute.

Did the new participants of public communication enter the stage only after the introduction of martial law? It does not seem likely. The Third party added another voice to the dichotomised debate and, through this single action, opened it up to the possibility of accommodating an uncountable multitude of speakers. A quip drew awareness to the fact that the history of Communism is also the history of humour, which existed in its myriad of forms – street, graphic, print, song, or cabaret – even in the considerably darker times of Hitlerism and Stalinism. And through its sheer existence it subverted any and all notions of unification, irrespective of whom should they concern – society, history, or state power.

Humour acted as a fifth element. It did not belong to any existing order, because even though it borrows something from each of them, it feels indebted to none. It responds to both dread and common officialdom, it takes aim at people and situations, it arises from stilted idioms and rituals. It respects nothing, speaking on behalf of the dispossessed, which happen to be the silent majority. It wants more life, therefore it celebrates casualness; it praises ease, so it sneers at practicality; it favours serendipity, therefore it frowns upon plans and order. It is active, arising from within itself, and reactive – vulgar in response to forced pleasantry, feral in the face of superficial refinement, ribald and lewd in the company of high society. It knows no rules but for the principle of verbal insubordination.

If we examine in isolation the social movement from which "Solidarity" was born, we will notice that humour was present there alongside all the solemn and serious efforts. It functioned as a form of realignment, a tool safeguarding from calcification in moral solemnity, messianic unity, in a missionary pose. Humour unmasked the absurdities of socialism, but it also ridiculed insurrectionist phraseology. Miron Białoszewski[32] diligently reminded readers that falling onto one's knees and bowing the head to the floor exposes the

32 Miron Białoszewski (1922–1983) – Polish poet and writer active from the 1950s to the early 1980s. Author of *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, translated from the Polish by Madeline G. Levine (New York: NYRB Classics, 2015), which gives a vivid account of the 1944 insurrection from a civilian's point of view. – Trans.

prominently bulging "counter-head."[33] Tadeusz Ross paraphrased the national epic *Pan Tadeusz* in a song with the memorable refrain "they will step in, they won't step in," articulating in the guise of a ribald joke, based on a scene from Adam Mickiewicz's work, the commonly shared fear of Soviet encroachment on Polish soil. Ultimately, the same comical impropriety, which halts the transformation of commonality into pathos, could be found in Lech Wałęsa's memorable gesture during the historically significant moment of signing the Gdańsk agreements, which he ratified with an enormous pen.

Whatever the "Solidarity" movement ultimately proved to be, the formulaic memory enlivened in its course – suggesting patterns of a collective experience of unity – was continuously countered by a comical imperative derived from cultural tradition. The jest that blossomed during the years of Edward Gierek, has truly exploded after August 1980. It proliferated in papers, bootlegged cassettes, improvisational comedy and cabaret, in drawings, songs, and street humour. Nonetheless, it appeared not only as a weapon in the struggle against the regime, but also as a redemptive mockery of the unwavering sense of self-righteousness. Miron Białoszewski was very deliberate in his stanzas from one of the first episodes of the Kici-Koci cabaret: "I exercise my right / to free speech my dears / Separateness is at an end. / We are slain by the chain reaction of community,"[34] where he jokingly cautioned about the unity that can subdue individuality, which was so important to him.

The poetics of Białoszewski's cabaret, full of folksy adoration and puerile impropriety, became much more unusual and harder to maintain with each passing month of martial law. Humour thickened after December 1981, turning into sarcasm, lampoon, and bitter irony of the defeated.[35] If memory suggested some similarity between the "Solidarity" revolution and national uprisings, then martial law must have brought to mind the post-insurrectionist periods – with the era of Paskiewicz, collaboration, collective tepidness. It was exactly because the circumstances have been radically simplified, that humour was facing the task of splitting discourses, finding multiplicity in dichotomy, disturbing seriousness. For the above reasons, after the introduction of martial law, the publishing underground reinterpreted modernism by

33 Miron Białoszewski, "Wybuch stanu" [Explosion of the state], in *"Oho" i inne wiersze opublikowane po roku 1980* (Warszawa: PIW, 2000), 213.

34 Miron Białoszewski, "Odczyt Kici-Koci" [Kici-Koci's reading], in *"Oho" i inne wiersze*, 210.

35 The poetics of lampoon, an important tradition of underground communication after December 13, 1981, was heralded by one of the most famous texts of this nature that was aimed at collaborationist attitudes; see Piotr Wierzbicki, *Gnidzi parnas* [Nits Parnassus] (Warszawa: NOWa, 1980).

"decidedly appreciating humorous texts,"[36] through the publication of works such as Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, Witold Gombrowicz's *Trans-Atlantyk*, or George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

This kind of humour, which pricks the balloons of nationalistic pathos, can be traced to the very roots of counterculture. Its traditions were revived by *Puls* – a periodical edited by Jacek Bierezin, Witold Sułkowski, and Tomasz Filipczak, and published from 1977 to 1981 by the NOW publishing house, and from 1982 in London by Jan Chodakowski. If *Zapis*, the most earnest of literary magazines of the first period of independent culture, was an alternative to state-approved cultural production, then *Puls* was an alternative to the alternative, an underground of the underground. It defended against official and unofficial censorship, siding with the right to independent expression.[37] Where *Zapis* turned to the traditions of Polish realist and political novel – Bolesław Prus, Stefan Żeromski, and Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski – there *Puls* chose Witold Gombrowicz and post-modernist literature. *Zapis* valued solemnity, *Puls* – the grotesque. *Zapis* battled propagandist lies, siding with the truth; *Puls* duelled with the socialist mass culture and practiced multiplicity of truths. That is why in the first issue of *Puls* the editorial board published the morally outrageous poems of Antoni Pawlak, the work of counterculture radical Allen Ginsberg, and the antiheroic, foolish, and absurdist novelistic grotesque titled *Dysiek* by Witold Sułkowski.

The Orange Alternative referred to this tactics – different from one-sided satire aimed at the regime or state power[38] – in its own actions. The "Orange" drew from the traditions of the Dutch Provos, French situationism and Polish street demonstrations.[39] Their originality was determined by the courage to be funny, which was foreign to both the authorities and to Solidarity. It required the use of a different tactic – not insurrectionist, based on a readiness to fight, not conspiratorial, requiring concealment of identity, but campy, the

36 Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, "'Sytuacja jest groźna, ale nie poważna' – komizm w literaturze drugiego obiegu," ["'The situation is dangerous, but not serious" – comedy in second-circuit literature], in *Nić śmiesznego. Studia o komizmie w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2007), 268.

37 *Niezależność najwięcej kosztuje. Relacje uczestników opozycji demokratycznej w Łodzi 1976–1980* [Independence costs the most. Accounts of participants of the democratic opposition in Łódź 1976–1980], (Łódź: IPN, 2008). Here, see especially the testimonies of Tomasz Filipczak, Zdzisław Jaskuła, Bartosz Pietrzak, and Ewa Sułkowska-Bierezin.

38 See, e.g., *Szopki satyryczne 1982–1983* [Satirical nativity scenes 1982–1983] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "Słowo," 1983).

39 See Łukasz Kamiński, "Krasnoludki i żołnierze. Wrocławska opozycja lat osiemdziesiątych" [Dwarfs and soldiers. Wrocław opposition in the 1980s], *Pamięć i Przyszłość* 2 (2008): 7–19.

starting point of which was a sensitive, wonderfully ambiguous, and from the point of view of the authorities unbelievable, declaration of faith in socialism: "The Orange Alternative was probably the only case when we dared to go back to our own childhood and speak in the language of socialist realist fairy tales and this unique camp, which characterized local imitations of Western films and songs."[40] The streets of Wrocław, Łódź, and Katowice were filled with crowds of people dressed as gnomes. The participants of these happenings were not hostile, they did not shout angrily or throw stones, but instead they celebrated the most hated holidays – such as, Militiaman's Day or the anniversary of the October Revolution – thus bewildering the security services and confounding state authorities. In the mid-1980s, no one – including the party members – believed in socialism any longer, though the propaganda would never allow such statements. The Orange Alternative, professing love for real socialism – as the source of a strangest reality – lured the authorities into a trap of bad or even worse choices: to arrest people celebrating Militiaman's Day was to admit that it was a bogus holiday, and to let people have their fun in the street was to admit that society itself defines the circumstances independently from state power.[41]

The gnomish jest did not disarm the weaponized state apparatus but it did incapacitate its discourse and it neutralized the division into the "brave society" and the "immoral regime." The happenings – during which toilet paper or sanitary pads were handled out, the gathered chanted "No freedom without gnomes!" or ran around the main square of the old city to illustrate the term "galloping inflation" – sucked everyone into a vortex of ridiculousness: their participants adorned with red gnome hats, state power that sent intimidating militiamen to suppress the gnomes, as well as the insurrectionist masses readying themselves for another march under the slogan "Away with Communism!" Within the space reclaimed by the Orange Alternative – as much communal as not regulated by normal rules, as much threated by the intervention of state militia as it was exterritorial – a community of truly equal individuals emerged, if only for a brief moment.

The first phase of "Solidarity" proposed a revolutionary equality of worthy people, aiming to create conditions for egalitarian participation in decision-making processes. The second phase, occurring after the revolution's defeat,

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40 Agata Bielik-Robson, "Straceni inaczej. Dziwni trzydziestoletni i ich kłopoty z samookreśleniem" [Lost differently. Weird thirty-year-olds and their problems with self-definition], in *Wojna pokoleń*, ed. Piotr Nowak (Warszawa: Prószyński, 2006), 62.

41 See Waldemar "Major" Fydrych and Bronisław Misztal, *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa Rewolucja Krasnoludków* [Orange alternative dwarf revolution] (Warszawa: Fundacja "Pomarańczowa Alternatywa," 2008).

limited itself to achieving independence; it offered equality on a national basis but failed to acknowledge exclusion affecting women, non-heterosexual individuals, or members of the lower classes. The Orange Alternative, like a pataphysical culmination of Hegelian historical dialectics, proclaimed equality in ridiculousness. The gnome rebellion grounded its protest in everyday life, restoring people's memory of their ordinariness. It was neither an alternative to revolutionary imagination, nor to insurgent imagination, but rather a momentary victory of carnival, which suspended history for a few hours.

"Solidarity," Power, Remembering

After 1989, successive governments implemented their own memory policies, using the experience of "Solidarity" to legitimize pluralistic democracy, neoliberal transformation, and the healing of the decommunized Third Polish Republic. Simultaneously, various labour union authorities delved into their own archives, fighting under the banner of "Solidarity" for further restriction of abortion law or the inclusion of a religious confession in the preamble to the constitution. As a result, the memory of "Solidarity" – in case of both its original participants and subsequent interpreters – is always at risk of being instrumentalized by mainstream culture, media discourse, or governments supported by church–party alliances. The best evidence of this is that "Solidarity," a movement that fought for direct democracy, local autonomy, social ownership, and decentralization, can now be remembered as a right-wing Catholic national uprising.

Therefore, it is worthwhile, in my opinion, to consider memory as a tool for legitimizing resistance against authority. Ever more open interference in the remembering of memory – and, therefore, the shaping of the past – is currently the hallmark of power, as "he who controls the past not only determines the shape of the future, but also defines who we are."[42] James V. Wertsch[43] writes in *Voices of Collective Remembering* that collective memory is a dynamic multitude of voices used by members of society. The specificity of this dynamic multitude lies in the fact that it emerges and enters the public space solely through communication. From this perspective, "to remember" means not only "to know that something existed," but also "to communicate that it existed." Therefore, according to Wertsch, there is no static "memory"; instead, there exists a processual act of remembering.

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42 David Middleton and Derek Edwards, "Introduction," in *Collective Remembering*, ed. David Middleton and Derek Edwards (London: Sage, 1990), 10.

43 See James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

From what was said above a rather straightforward question arises in the context of discussions about "Solidarity," namely: how do we examine that memory in a way that would avoid transforming the multitude of voices from the past – those advocating for greater equality in decision-making – into a single, dominant voice? As long as we keep in mind that multiplicity, we hinder the instrumental use of the past by those in power. Furthermore, by remaining loyal to the myriad ideas of a fairer life embedded in the history of "Solidarity," we extract from the past the conditions necessary for understanding ourselves today. Perhaps, that is exactly what is at stake here: not merely the short- or long-term memory, but another opportunity for achieving self-awareness.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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Revolt in the Framework of Memory. "Solidarity," Revolution, Rebellion

Entering into dialogue with M. Zaremba, Czapliński argues that the collective memory of the Solidarity movement (an aggregate of knowledge about the past and a search for justifications for current activities) was produced and reproduced; the dynamic supported revolutionary efforts in the period 1980–1981 (when memory turned out to be insufficient) and rebellious activities in the period from December 13, 1981 through 1989 (when the matrix of revolt suggested misguided solutions). Czapliński looks for the differences between these two periods not in the ideals that were proclaimed, but in the forms of communication that were elaborated – inclusive in the first period, hierarchical in the second. An important factor in "S" memory, according to Czapliński, is the "comical imperative" that undermined both the official language and the pathos of the opposition's activities.

Keywords

collective memory, rebellious frameworks of memory, revolt against memory, revolution, rebellion, comical imperative

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The Unwritten Epic. Remarks on a Forgotten Liberation

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> This enormous labor undertaken in the shadows comes to light in dreams, thoughts, decisions, and above all at moments of crisis or of social upheaval; it forms the great common ground, the reserve of peoples and individuals. Revolution and war, like a fever, are best suited to get it moving.
>
> Dr Pierre Mabille

1.

It is sometimes argued that the most popular genre of German nineteenth century novel was *Bildungsroman*, which depicts the protagonist's journey through time and space, from immaturity to self-determination. However, it seems that Polish cultural history lacks narratives of this type: cycles or collections of stories, films or images that would present emancipation, comprising its signs, or more specifically – *signifiers*.

When it comes to indicators or *signifiers* of emancipation, the few Polish novels, studies or television productions addressing this topic are rather insufficient and usually attract only academics. No such texts of culture circulate widely enough in Polish discourse to become narratives that organize the collective imagination. Indeed, they are not *signifiers* in the sense of being able

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to organize subjective self-representation and regulate how Poles perceive themselves.

For a text of culture to become a *signifier* in the Lacanian sense, it needs to establish a self-representation of the collective subject, allowing it to wander through a vision of its own history. On this journey, *signifiers* function as road signs that help to stay the course. Such fantasy routes constitute the backbone of imaginary identity. Determined by family life and education, they are also evoked during countless state holidays, celebrations and commemorations, as well as reiterated on these occasions by millions of voices and discussed in feature or popularizing programs. Finally, they are depicted on posters and graffiti that adorn cities, or elaborated in myriads of memes that circulate in social media.

Since images are inevitably replacing text today, these *signifiers* have to be pictorial, for example cinematic, in order to imbue themselves in the visual domain. Further, they need to be reflected in street names and holidays, or anchored to sites of commemoration such as monuments or museums established around crucial nodes in the space of collective memory.

Obviously, in Poland there does exist a narrative that organizes the self-representation of the collective subject: the epic of the gentry, which tells the story of this particular social group. Thematically, it encompasses control over the vast Intermarium during the First Republic, loss of this position during the Partitions, subsequent struggle with Russia, failed uprisings unsupported by peasants, recovery during the Second Republic – in the form of a hegemonic caste comprised by the intelligentsia, the military and the administration – Nazi and Soviet occupation that culminated in the heroic bloodshed of the Warsaw Rising, and finally – the ambiguous era of the Polish People's Republic. However, this epic is martyrological in character and not emancipatory at all.

At the same time, the last hundred and fifty years was a time marked by large-scale migration and social mobility, leading to the empowerment of the subjugated, the humiliation of the high and mighty, and the emergence of the middle class. Nevertheless, this epic story remains unrecognized and few traces of it can be found in Polish collective consciousness.

One additional difficulty is posed in this respect by the necessity to present social movement. The point is not to depict forms of peasant life, as preserved to this day in pockets of authentic folk culture or recorded in former days by ethnologists in accounts of peasant habits and dialects. Nor is it crucial to develop sociological analyses of *Pamiętniki młodych chłopów* [Memoirs of peasant youth], although unlike other texts they certainly document the evident cracks in Polish class society during the interwar period. Finally, the goal would not be to reconstruct the genesis of the working class, along with its

rise and fall. Instead, the representational challenge concerns depicting the mighty stream of emancipation and personifying the slow yet unstoppable liberation from social, material, political and mental enslavement. The purpose is thus to demonstrate the ambivalence of loftiness and pettiness, cruelty and vigor that have accompanied this epic, as well as to lift its protagonists from anonymity.

Is such a representation even possible? Can a historical process be rendered as a protagonist of an epic poem?

In the essay "The Legend of the Monster City," Czesław Miłosz describes in this way Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*, where the rise of capitalist society in nineteenth century Paris is captured in the metaphor of city as a monstrous organism. Importantly, Miłosz does not attempt to naturalize social reality but to grasp the process of ceaseless transformation and dissolution of all identity – both individual and collective – in the melting pot of modern society. "Where the layers intermingle," he writes, "where new forces are forever swimming up from the depths, and where, in turn, former oligarchs sink to the ranks of the proletariat; where one must constantly become accustomed to seeing new faces and their images obscure the faces of friends, separating the friends seen today from those seen the day before yesterday – there the rush to transformation and the interest in transformism are understandable."[1]

Unfortunately, Polish culture cannot boast any such "human comedy" or even works comparable to films by Woody Allen, which describe the condition of globalized bourgeoisie in the second half of the twentieth century, regardless of whether set in New York, London or Barcelona. All we have is *Lalka* [*The Doll*] by Bolesław Prus and *Ziemia obiecana* [*The Promised Land*] by Władysław Reymont. Notwithstanding the acuity of these works, they are simply too far removed in time and too static.

Contemporary literature, which indulges in self-referential play with subjectivity, narration and form is not really interested in the epic. The 2013 novel *Ości* [Fish bones] by Ignacy Karpowicz, one example of such writing, confirms the thesis formulated by Marcel Reich-Ranicki, namely that Polish literature after 1989 has been incapable of telling the story of how the new society was formed, although it certainly could satirize it.

Perhaps before literature presents the history of emancipation as a relentless stream flowing along (and often against) historical circumstances, historiography could approach this subject. Certainly, however, it cannot be properly addressed by scholars preoccupied with the political history of the

1 Czesław Miłosz, "The Legend of the Monster City," in *Legends of Modernity. Essays and Letters from Occupied Poland, 1942–1943*, trans. Madeline G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2006), 21.

"gentry-nation" with its parliaments, uprisings and underground state. Instead, the angle of social history could help to demonstrate how the hegemonic culture of Catholic nobility, landowners and large parts of the intelligentsia deeply opposed the powerful current of social emancipation. This task could also benefit from engagement of historians who document transformations of mentality and culture – researchers sensitive to the above conflict and eager to pursue its traces in material culture. It would require writing history with awareness of the famous thesis formulated by Walter Benjamin: "There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain."[2]

How many historians of this kind are there in Poland today? It comes as little surprise that important research in this area was done by a Frenchman, Daniel Beauvois.[3]

2.

Let us begin with the granting of freehold in the Kingdom of Poland. This event is notable since Tsar Alexander II issued his edict on March 2, 1864, shortly after a similar decision was made on the other side of the Atlantic by Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Final Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. This concurrence facilitates tracing intriguing parallels. For example, both acts were passed in the context of conflict with the local gentry – Polish nobility and Southern plantation-owners in America, respectively. Moreover, these steps concerned areas where rebellion was fomenting. Finally, both met with virulent yet reticent opposition from former "slave-owners" – a fact that continues to shape the imaginary of affected communities in both places.

This raises the question whether the liberation of peasants could become the subject of a new historical epic, similarly to the remembrance of the January Uprising of gentry. Although granting freehold was a blow to insurrectionary nobility, Polish historians must face the fact that achieving freedom

2 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings. Volume 4: 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392.

3 Daniel Beauvois, *Trójkąt Ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793–1914* [Ukrainian Triangle. The nobility, the tsar and the people in Volhynia, Podolia and Kiev region 1793–1914], trans. from French Krzysztof Rutkowski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2011).

is always laudable, even when enabled by the Emperor of Russia. The Edict of Emancipation issued by Alexander II decreed that landowners could no longer make decisions for peasants as well as punish or relocate them. Moreover, the latter received the right to buy property from landlords and were to additionally obtain portions of land for a part of their nominal value, scheduled in long-term redemption payments.

Does anyone reflect in Poland today on the actual meaning of the fact that landowners were formerly legally enabled to "manage peasants," for example punish or resettle them? That not so long ago one person could brutalize another by the power of the state in order to "discipline" them? Or that people could lose their homestead and property due to resettlement, which could even involve separating them from their families? Will there be a Polish Quentin Tarantino, who could tell a modern story of the cruelty, expulsion and hunger entailed by serfdom? Back then, one could of course appeal to the local panel of judges, but it was presided over by the same person who was responsible for violence, exploitation and relocation, or their plenipotentiary. Few would empathize with the plight and humiliation of serfs, except for the likes of Leon Kruczkowski. Ultimately, the fierce rage invoked by all of the above accumulated over the years and still haunts Polish minds.

The moment when fetters dropped must have marked a profound change in mentality, sensibility and social relations. However, we lack the image of the first emancipated generation – the people who still knew well what the pillory was but could now decide about their fate. I wonder whether their mindset has not been expressed in words cited by Józef Chałasiński: "There must be a lord and you shall obey him, earning your living by winning his grace. It's just like in the army. What would happen without a general? An ignoramus like you would issue orders and nothing wise would arise from this. God created the world in this way and so shall it be. This is the eternal and preestablished order of things. It should not be broken. When we had serfdom, the nation was more obedient and better."[4] Is it the case that the internalized serfdom, or the vision of lordly grandeur brightening up the misery of peasant life, explains the lack of peasant rebellions in those parts of the Republic where Catholicism dominated? After all, the Galician Peasant Uprising (also known as the Galician Rabacja, or Slaughter) was an exception rather than rule. Defenders of the nobility's Sarmatian culture would explain this phenomenon by referring to an idyllic vision of social relations at the manor. It is striking, however, that no such rebellions occurred in slavery-driven southern

4 Quoted after Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga. Polska 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* [Great fear. Poland 1944–1947. The popular reaction to the crisis] (Kraków–Warszawa: Znak, Wydawnictwo ISP PAN, 2012), 103.

states in North America. Perhaps this was due to the scale of enslavement, which would corrupt even mental resources. Indeed, Ruthenian peasants living in eastern parts of the Polish Republic would regularly rise against their lords, finding inspiration in Orthodox Christianity and the Cossack tradition. The scale of these rebellions and the dead silence in ethnically Polish territories suggest the need for a closer examination of the role played by Counter-Reformation in the Polish Church.

When and how has peasant mentality changed? How have the first emancipated generations embraced their newly-found individual subjectivity, which was necessary to manage farms on their own? How have the social relations described by Reymont in *Chłopi* [*The Peasants*] developed during the thirty-five years separating the tsar's edict and the writer's account?

The key element here is the right to purchase land. The tsar never delivered on the promise to sell the nobility's lands for a fraction of their cost. This raises the obvious question about the specific history of the landowners' resistance to parcellation. Do we know the names of those who were able to weasel out of these changes by hindering or evading them? We know the names of heroes who fell during numerous risings because they could not have been forgiven by Russian authorities. Still, who (and how) has been able to ensure that as little as 8% of the gentry's land was actually parceled? Polish historical sources, which offer highly restrained accounts of agrarian reforms, usually emphasize the good intentions of subsequent Polish progressives. Tadeusz Kościuszko and Uniwersał Połaniecki, the "red" wing of the January Uprising; but their well-meaning (and that of others) typically had little overall impact. Sources remain tongue-tied about the fierce opposition among most landowners, or the bribes, the balls for tsarist officials, and the practice of marrying off daughters to "influential figures" – in short, all the efforts made to weasel out of dividing the land.

How do we know then that this was the case? It would be better to ask: could it really be any different? It is a matter of logic, not history. The latter is silent in this respect.

More sources are available on questions of the misery caused by the resistance of landowners, and by the emergence of countryside social relations portrayed later by Reymont. It is thanks to his novel that we can begin to imagine the ruthlessness of life conditioned by hunger for land. At the same time, this work of literature seems almost ahistorical, as if the discussed deep transformations were meticulously purified from it. Like an old photograph where smiling or despairing faces reveal nothing about the actual relations among the portrayed, Reymont's saga-like novel constitutes a section through time, disclosing a certain structure but ignoring its genealogy. In fact, this may actually be the reason why it won the Nobel Prize: the Norwegian committee

could identify in it truly universal features of raw peasant existence. At the same time, however, the oppressive genesis of relations described by Reymont – entirely dissimilar from the situation in Scandinavia, where peasants enjoyed freedom for centuries – is almost entirely suppressed in *Chłopi*.

Has anyone in Poland commemorated the first moments of freedom? Tsarist authorities understood the necessity to do so, and received support from vast numbers of peasant benefactors who sponsored the monument of Alexander II in Częstochowa. Why has this story fallen into oblivion? Perhaps in order to avoid reflection about the inscription on this memorial: "Erected in 1889 by peasants in the Kingdom of Poland. Let the Edict of February 19, 1864 remain forever enshrined in the memory of Polish peasants as the day when their prosperity was restituted." This initiative of Russian authorities received mass support from peasants. Thus, perhaps the "active forgetting" of their gratitude to tsar – the vanquisher of patriots – on the part of hegemonic Polish culture is symptomatic of the reluctance to consider who was supposed to benefit from the struggle for independence in the nineteenth century, and who feared it.

The history of the monument to tsar is both dramatic and telling. It suffices to say that there was a botched attempt to blow it up in 1904 before it was finally demolished by the ever-efficient Germans in 1917.

It is equally fascinating to recount the history of granting property rights to peasants in Galicia. All it takes is to "picture" the collection of documents published by Professor Kieniewicz as *Rewolucja polska 1846* [Polish revolution 1846].[5] This history includes the Kraków Rising and the 1846 Slaughter, the suppression of peasant movements by Austria, the Spring of Nations, and the decree issued by Governor Franz von Stadion on April 22, regarding emancipation "in the name of the Emperor."

Some villages welcomed the decree with appreciation. In eastern Roztocze, which was then part of Galicia, people would erect "freedom crosses" made of stone from Brusno.[6] They could constitute a place of commemoration, but in fact became forgotten fossils. Blocks or crosses standing in important parts of villages have overgrown with moss and the inscriptions made after emancipation are now mostly illegible. One that is still readable can be found in Huta Różaniecka and commemorates "liberation from serfdom by His Highness

5 *Rewolucja polska 1846 roku* [Polish revolution 1846], ed. Stefan Kieniewicz (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1950).

6 Maciej Piotrowski, "Zapomniane pomniki wolności. O pamiątkach zniesienia pańszczyzny z bruśnieńskiego ośrodka kamieniarskiego" [Forgotten monuments of freedom. About the memorabilia of the abolition of serfdom from the stonemasonry center in Brusno] (unpublished article).

Ferdinand."[7] Some, however, have been covered with lime. What do we know about the stories behind these stones, their placement and the experiences connected with it? What is left of the pride that filled the first generation of the liberated, and of the shame felt by those unwilling to cultivate the memory of the humiliation experienced by their forebears? What remains known of the social genesis of Galician poverty and the Straw Man's dance in *Wesele* [*The Wedding*] by Stanisław Wyspiański?

3.

Częstochowa, Sosnowiec, Łódź. After slavery formally ended in USA, black citizens migrated to northern cities like Chicago or Detroit. Where have Polish peasants gone? Industry was booming in several urban centers in Congress Poland. Luckily, thanks to Reymont's *Ziemia obiecana* – and especially its film adaptation by Andrzej Wajda – we can sense the throbbing beast of rising capitalism, which swallowed up legions of people, transporting them into a new era and turning them into proletariat, even though moments ago they were migrants from hungry peasant villages or small Jewish towns. Possibly most of them really had nowhere to go, despite the existence of several industrial cities, and were caught in the vicious circle of mutual hate that led to pogroms.

Ziemia obiecana is perhaps the only work in Polish culture, which accurately pictures the above-mentioned throbbing beast, or what Marx and Engels famously described as the "constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation [that – author's note] distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones."[8] After all, this beast does not emerge in *Lalka* – an ostensible apologia for the rising bourgeoisie. Widely accepted as the emancipation story of the Polish middle class, the novel indeed records the arrival of capitalism, but it lacks something crucial: an account of how Wokulski, a tough merchant, really amassed his fortune. Why would Prus consider his business adventures in Russia to be unworthy of presentation? The vast open spaces he must have traversed, the negotiations with Russian wealthy men, and the scale of transactions he made must have been unimaginable for Poles. This story surely featured vodka, champagne and caviar, as well as glimpses of non-Slavic peoples living alongside Russians: Mordovians, Tatars, Tajiks and Kazakhs. Naturally,

7 Piotrowski, *Zapomniane pomniki wolności*.

8 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. William Reeves (Utrecht: Open Source Socialist Publishing, 2008), 10.

Henryk Sienkiewicz could not describe Andrzej Kmicic tricking Muscovites due to Russian censorship, but the story of a Pole enriching himself in the Empire could have been regarded differently.

James Clavell used the fate of an English merchant known in Chinese as Tai-Pan to tell the story of establishing the British colony in Hong Kong. This narrative continues to shape the Anglo-Saxon imagination by evoking vast oceans, deals with Chinese mandarins, and large sums handled by monopoly-owners who controlled almost the entirety of tea trade in the mid-nineteenth century. Clavell's novel features Chinese feasts, pirates and courtesans, but all the while the monster of capitalism is lurking in the background, breathing down the necks of all protagonists. In contrast, the story of Wokulski does not feature this beast, which is slayed in the Polish novel by the monster of lordly arrogance.

Balzac also elaborated on the unhappy love life of his protagonists, but was well aware that their feelings are subject to the frenetic logic of capitalism, or the city-Moloch. Emotions experienced by Wokulski, however, pay homage to the imaginary of the Polish hegemonic class – the gentry. Desperately craving recognition, he tries to find a place for himself in this narrow-minded and vain social stratum, consequently forgetting about his own calling and truth, namely that he "personifies the capital" and should love in line with its principles. This is indeed the reason why he perishes, and his main weakness, that is lack of faith in himself, remains the heritage of the Polish middle class.

One could also ask about the memory of probably the strongest expression of capitalism in Poland – Jewish entrepreneurship. Large trading companies ran by Jews operated throughout the tsarist world. From Białystok to Vladivostok, these business ventures contributed to the Empire's financial bloodstream. However, Jewish history only partly overlaps with the Polish epic of emancipation because the Shoah violently separated these peoples' shared fate.

In fact, it was the consequence of a specific "education to Polishness." Out of understandable reasons, Poland had no republican education of the kind found in the French Third Republic and contributing to the development of civic identity. Stripped of independence, the gentry-nation and its ally the Church strove to incorporate liberated peasants into its project of nostalgic identity, never really bothering about civic formation. This is aptly described in the well-known book *Polak i katolik* [Pole and Catholic] by Michał Łuczewski. The simplest way to rekindle Polishness among the peasants was to draw on their everyday experiences: life led in the configuration of dependence comprised by peasant cottage, lordly mansion, priestly church and Jewish inn. Against this background of relations it was easy to point to the Jew as the alien element without which everything would be so much different.

This reveals the logic that one is a Pole insofar as one is not a Jew. American historian Robert Blobaum confirms this, arguing that "even though not every national identity bases on anti-Semitism, each and every one is to a degree founded on excluding Otherness. National identity is not based on who one is, but who one is (or is not) in relation to the Other. For Czechs these can be Germans or Jews, while for Croatians – Hungarians. For Poles these were not so much Germans or Russians as Jews."[9] Interestingly, this is yet another vital point elucidated by a historian "from outside."

Few contemporary intellectuals explore the area of national education, which may partly explain the success of the book by Łuczewski. Obviously, the novel *Syzyfowe prace* [Sisyphus's works] by Stefan Żeromski (1897) may seem historically distant but it aptly describes education in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the school was the crux of nationalism and politics. However, it is a story of educating the nobility. Even the more contemporary novel *Zmory* [Nightmares] by Emil Zegadłowicz (1935) is limited in scope to this class. What should we know about the vagaries of educational institutions in the autonomous Galicia, in the Russified "country at the River Vistula," or in Greater Poland, under Prussia?

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, mass society emerged in Poland but it had a different face in each part of the country's annexed territory. In Congress Poland under Russian rule the most interesting aspect is industrialization. The situation was completely different under Prussian rule, primarily owing to the fact that Bismarck's policy aimed to politically activate the masses, including Poles. Finally, in Galicia it primarily had the character of a peasant movement because all industry in the Habsburg Empire was located on Czech lands. At the same time, the modern Jewish society was forming in large Polish cities.

Importantly, the emergence of mass society entailed the rise of politics, which was the condition of revealing the subjectivity of the masses. This process began with the formation of modern political parties which strove to achieve mass participation in political life. In 1892, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) held a convention in Paris; in 1893, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) was founded, and the National League (Liga Narodowa) was established in all partitions, while in 1895 the People's Party (SL) was created in Galicia. Once again, these pivotal events are entirely missing from Polish collective memory.

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9 Robert Blobaum, *Rok 1905 to początek nowoczesnej polityki* [The year 1905 marks the beginning of modern politics], interview by Wiktor Marzec and Kamil Piskała, in *Rewolucja 1905. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej*, ed. Kamil Piskała and Wiktor Marzec (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), 77.

And then, suddenly, the explosion of the 1905 Revolution invited the people to the political stage, putting socialists in the limelight of public eye. Is there any cinematographic trace of this apart from *Gorączka* [Fever] by Agnieszka Holland? Despite weak industrialization limiting its base, the socialist party played a huge political role, but is it commemorated today in any form?

Prior to this period, the Church appeared to oppose the political emancipation of the people, siding with the paternalistic culture of the gentry, which embraced Counter-Reformation and thus opposed broader liberation tendencies. However, the revolution caused the episcopate to change its position on mass politics. In the countryside, the National Democracy rallied around the Church in the effort to foster national identity in opposition to Jews and the peasant parties that strove to forge class consciousness against "masters."

These processes appear to have fallen into oblivion. However, just like today, no political party, sovereign power or traditional culture was able to deal with these forces. To this day, Poles seem incapable of coping with the awakening of the people. In the Second Republic, authorities ordered to shoot at striking peasants, while the Polish People's Republic tried to plough through Solidarity with armored vehicles. Today, the stirring of the people is associated with the glow of pogrom fires.

4.

The First World War is virtually nonexistent in Polish imagination. Two million citizens serving in the partitioners' armies have no legend of their own – only around sixteen thousand serving in the legions are enshrined in collective memory. However, the Great War brought intense drama and fundamental change. From the Polish perspective, the year 1918 meant primarily the collapse of empires that annexed Poland, making it possible for the century-old dream of regaining sovereignty to finally come true. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that this hope was largely formulated in nostalgic terms and filtered through a Romantic vision of history, which idealized the First Republic and its pre-modern character. Aside from several exceptions such as the destruction of Kalisz, Poland was left largely untouched by the global conflict, which in turn shaped the character of the Second Republic.

In Western Europe the situation was entirely different; before these societies the Great War revealed its hypermodern face: mass industrialized killing and meaningless instrumental action. Indeed, Verdun prefigured later death factories. In response, a large-scale rebellion swept through armies and societies in Germany, France and Russia. Revolutionary dissent against the order that paved the way for WWI, and then the reaction to the revolution, shaped the cultural and political trajectory of Western countries, which kept "escaping

forward" throughout the twentieth century – a strategy that appears entirely incomprehensible from the Polish perspective.

Only the aforementioned destruction of Kalisz by the German army in August 1914 evokes experiences similar to those of Western Europeans: out of 70,000 citizens only 5,000 survived. This event is depicted in the novel *Noce i Dnie* [*Nights and Days*] by Maria Dąbrowska but never made it into the canon of Polish imagination, just like most things originating in Western Poland. Dramatic changes in peasant life during the war include Bieżeństwo – the evacuation of two million people, primarily Orthodox Christians, expelled from Eastern Poland deep into the Empire by retreating Russian forces.[10] Most of them never returned. How has this affected ethnic and religious proportions in these regions? Finally, as is typically the case during war, there were rebellions, attacks on manors, and instances of seizing land from the gentry. Was this an echo of the Galician Slaughter?

When the socialist government formed on November 7, 1918 in Lublin Ignacy Daszyński promised parcellation but then went back on it, causing great disappointment. Then the year 1920 brought the Polish-Soviet War and turned focus on peasant reaction to it. The Land Reform Implementation Act of July 15, 1920 was passed just as the frontline was breaking. Do texts of culture that recount these events even acknowledge these circumstances? Russians and Ukrainians have Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* – the story of politicizing the Cossacks during the revolution. Does the Polish collective imagination have any narrative about peasant engagement in 1920, which some argue to be the first moment when they identified with the Polish state? The only account of these developments is limited to the perspective of military and intellectual elites, with gentry looming in the background.

The March Constitution of 1921 was middle-class in character as it guaranteed the inviolability of property rights. The film *Śmierć prezydenta* [Death of a president] by Jerzy Kawalerowicz perfectly captures the era's political conflict at the parliamentary level. But what about the failed promises of the Second Republic – primarily the halting of agrarian reform – and the political class emancipation of peasants in the 1920s? What about the split of subjectivity into national and revolutionary in the 1930s? Events like the pogrom in Przytyk or the peasant strikes of 1937 certainly demonstrate some kind of turbulence in this swelling wave. Do they not have enough dramatic potential to become the basis for a novel or narrative in some other medium?

The period 1939–1956 as well as later years are discussed from the perspective of the emancipation process in my book *Prześniona rewolucja* [Sleepwalking the revolution]. The crucial event in this time frame – the Shoah

10 Aneta Prymaka-Oniszk, *Bieżeństwo 1915* [Escape 1915] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2016).

– entered the collective imagination primarily thanks to films such as *Ida*, *Pokłosie* [Aftermath] and *W ciemności* [In darkness]. However, the experience of peasant entrepreneurship or "business" of hiding Jews, trading food, and occupying abandoned places in the broken social tissue has never been visualized, just like the civil war after 1945 and the land reform implemented under the gun barrels of the NKVD. It is characteristic that these agrarian policies are not discussed by contemporary historians. The craving for vengeance and the sense of injustice – which accumulated over the centuries and revealed themselves in this period – are also glossed over today, perhaps except for the film *Wołyń* [Volhynia] about the massacres of Poles, which is nevertheless stripped of larger historical context.

5.

Collective identity is a bundle of fantasies or stories that subjects are telling about themselves as well repeating, enacting and using as a mirror for self-examination. All of these stories need to be ripe in dramatic tension and full of ups and downs in order to reflect the subject's inner dynamic. At the same time, they must be morally coherent, or capable of being inscribed within some ethical framework. For this reason, in every identity-bundle individual narratives create tensions that offer valuable "lessons." Among these fantasy stories there is always one that becomes hegemonic. It dominates the imagination, pushing all others into the shadows by hindering the development and meaningful unification of various elements, perspectives and images stored in the unconscious.

In the social i m a g i n a r y the unwritten epic, which I demand here, exists precisely in the unconscious mode. All episodes recounted above have many representations and forms of documentation dispersed in archives, book and film libraries as well as university offices occupied by "specialists in a given area." As such, they remain in the dark, unable to return the gaze of the Polish collective subject and thus failing to provide it with a future-oriented trajectory or scenario. Crushed under the weight of the phantasmal lost Republic and "victory through failure," these histories live on as scraps, shreds and pieces – the material for future historiography according to Walter Benjamin. Perhaps even their sheer number creates a situation that can be likened to supersaturated solution. It would take some kind of a crystal nucleus to furnish collective memory with a new structure and give all elements their place for expression within a meaningful whole. However, none of this can happen as long as the dominant fantasy remains martyrological in character, or as long as the meticulous work of deconstructing the hegemonic position remains unfinished.

At the same time, however, effort needs to be repeatedly made to reconstruct this "unwritten epic." It is not the point to explicate in minute detail all stages of the emancipation process, nor even to show their dramatic tension or individual gravity. The goal would rather be to display the great stream of history that transformed Poland during the last one and a half century by advancing emancipation and leading Poles to the maturity requisite for freedom, despite the fact that the memory of this has been entirely repressed.

Translated by Grzegorz Czemiel

Abstract

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The Unwritten Epic. Remarks on a Forgotten Liberation

The author addresses the issue of the history of Polish emancipatory movement and its lacking epic. When it comes to indicators or *signifiers* of emancipation, the few Polish novels, studies or television productions addressing this topic are rather insufficient and usually attract only academics. No such texts of culture circulate widely enough in Polish discourse to become narratives that organize the collective imagination. Indeed, they are not *signifiers* in the sense of being able to organize subjective self-representation and regulate how Poles perceive themselves. For a text of culture to become a *signifier*, it needs to establish a self-representation of the collective subject, allowing it to wander through a vision of its own history. On this journey, *signifiers* function as road signs that help to stay the course. Such fantasy routes constitute the backbone of national identity. Determined by family life and education, they are also evoked during countless state holidays, celebrations and commemorations, as well as reiterated on these occasions by millions of voices and discussed in feature or popularizing programs. The author shows, what could be the backbone of such a narrative of liberation in Poland.

Keywords

Polish history, emancipation, liberation, untold narrative, serfdom, slavery, postcolonialism, signifier

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Ethnography, Memory, Experiment: Towards an Alternative Social History of Poland

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Despite numerous attempts to explore the experiences of villagers and rural workers in People's Poland, including those of so-called worker-peasants, their full anthropological recognition remains elusive. What also remain unclear are the senses of these experiences for what could be called the process of state formation and, more generally, the overall political landscape during the years of the People's Republic of Poland and state socialism. In fact, these experiences are still difficult to recognize, and despite recent advanced studies,[1] they remain hidden in as-yet unknown stories. It is therefore necessary to reexamine the rural-worker experience while, at the same time, integrating it into the ambitions, desires

1 Andrzej Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej* [The sleepwalkers' revolution. An exercise in historical logic] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013); Ewelina Szpak, *Mentalność ludności wiejskiej w PRL. Studium zmian* [The mentality of the rural population in the Polish People's Republic: The study of changes] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2013); Agata Zysiak, *Punkty za pochodzenie. Powojenna modernizacja i uniwersytet w robotniczym mieście* [Points for social origin: Postwar modernization and the university in working-class cities] (Kraków: Nomos, 2016).

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and difficulties, on the one hand, related to social inequalities and the necessity of labor migration, and on the other, the creation of a stabilizing structure, that is the state as imagined and practiced on a daily basis.

As an illustration, young people from rural areas in central Poland migrate to other countries of the European Union for work, thus forming fresh identities and communities. For instance, a cohort of young people from the village of Broniów, as mentioned by Paula Mikołajczyk,[2] create elements of their identity around electronic club music, jumpstyle and hardjump, which they discovered while working in construction in the Netherlands. This is the integrating stimulus, which they listen to in their cars, which they drive around the villages near Radom after returning for a few months' break. At the same time, through these experiences of leaving and returning, utterly detached from immediate rural needs, new senses of social activities emerge related to the local community, rural commune, and ultimately the locally practiced state. Nowadays, however, these also include actions related to local political competition, internal conflicts, or ambitions. These are, for example, frictions between rural activists in several villages near Szydłowiec – on the one hand, people who have returned from migrant work full of energy and want to manifest their success and prosperity, and on the other hand, those activists and village leaders with long-standing visions of community development. What is therefore needed here is a method of understanding the political through a gradual immersion in history, in the everyday work of these people, their ambitions, anxieties, economies, thriftiness, and ultimately the creation of microcosms of collectivities and relationalities of people, farming, factories, public buildings, knowledge, and also quiet, informal skills.

Within such processes, therefore, it is possible to uncover an alternative rural history, which can reveal entirely different political and anthropological meanings. To achieve this, we need to develop a fresh outlook on what we consider to be an alternative or even potential history,[3] a history of different citizenship or a different social and political subjectivity. The image of a decolonized history, free from the established dominance of historians-as-intellectuals, calls for its own redefined understanding of history. What is most significant, however, is that these phenomena are burdened by an unyielding form of memory that, as Ariella Azoulay has shown in her

2 Paula Mikołajczyk, *Rap, hardstyle, disco polo. Słuchanie muzyki a wytwarzanie tożsamości, grupy i wspólnoty doświadczeń wśród młodych mieszkańców wsi Zaława i Cukrówka* [Rap, hardstyle, disco-polo. Listening to music as identity creation among the youth of the villages of Zaława and Cukrówka], Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Ethnographic Laboratory Term Essay, 2016.

3 Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (New York: Verso, 2019).

works,[4] removes historical facts and events and pushes them into the deep, existential shadow of non-existence. Here, this shadow is the prevalent tradition of Polish sociology – actually local public sociology – which had long asserted through its historical and sociological studies that communities of peasants and worker-peasants who migrate to cities are inherently unable to develop a mature society on their own.

This image was developed in the form of the theory of "sociological vacuum" or "anomie"[5]: the idea here was to demonstrate that during the communist era, small groups often gained benefits illegally and informally within their closest circles, which was considered a certain value. There were descriptions of society as a collective of family and kinship networks, sharing privileges and illegal access to goods, taken and in some ways stolen, for example from production facilities. The 1990s were also said to be characterized by close relationships among peasant and peasant-worker groups, guided by a concept known as "amoral familism."[6] These descriptions refer to the informal and unspoken methods of handling work-related problems and maintaining social status within a close-knit family or small neighborhood group, and such practices were often viewed as being at odds with the principles of a properly functioning society. Furthermore, this was accompanied by a sense of shame deeply ingrained in post-war society during the People's Republic of Poland era. The insights of such profound social shame related to the process of modernization appeared, among others, in the studies of sociologist Jacek Wasilewski.[7] He discusses the creation of a deeply rooted social belief or superstition, a form of collective memory, and suggests that this displacement and social history has burdened Polish society for decades,

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4 Azoulay, *Potential History*.

5 Mikołaj Pawlak, *"Jak przemieszcza się próżnia? Wędrówka tezy Stefana Nowaka między obszarami i kontekstami"* [How can the vacuum move? The journey of Stefan Nowak's concept amidst areas of thought and contexts], *Stan Rzeczy* 1 (2016).

6 Elżbieta Tarkowska and Jacek Tarkowski. "'Amoralny familizm' czyli o dezintegracji społecznej w Polsce lat osiemdziesiątych" ["Amoral familism" or the social disintegration of Poland in the 1980s)] in *Socjologia świata polityki*, vol. 1, *Władza i społeczeństwo w systemie autorytarnym*, ed. Jacek Tarkowski (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1994); see also Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: Free Press, 1958).

7 Jacek Wasilewski, "Społeczeństwo polskie, społeczeństwo chłopskie" [Polish society, peasant socjety], *Studia Socjologiczne* 3 (1986): 40–56; "Jesteśmy potomkami chłopów. Z prof. Jackiem Wasilewskim rozmawia M. Duch-Dyngosz" [We are the descendants of peasants. An interview with Prof. Jacek Wasilewski, by M. Duch-Dyngosz], *Znak* 684 (2012): 14–17.

causing a significant defect, incompetence, or even cultural immaturity. This is believed to result from the fact that people came *en masse* from communist villages.

The Polish social memory, as depicted by the press and academic publications of the 1980s and subsequent transformation period, gives an incessant impression that rural dwellers, new groups of workers and labor migrants did not contribute their own perspectives on the past to the historical consciousness. During the post-socialist transformation, the initial development programs supported by international institutions focused on "civic reconstruction" and promoting the growth of the third sector, seen as forms of extending and consolidating the achievements of the democratic opposition during the communist era, that is a "proper" social life, as discussed, among others, by Elżbieta Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka.[8]

In this article, I aim to examine the communalities of rural and working-class groups from a fresh perspective. I look closely at social history, particularly of rural areas, during the late 1960s, 1970s and even 1980s, as a time of critical transformations. For rural residents, this was a time of exceptional development and historical transformation, for example the relaxation of compulsory quotas and food deliveries. Above all, however, it was a period when agricultural associations, cooperatives, and machinery centers operated relatively well; pensions were introduced (in the early 1970s), also for land ceded to the state.[9] All of this is accompanied by community elements, such as volunteer fire brigades, informal meetings, neighborhood gatherings, Saturday dances, and village festivals. Moreover, this was a period of increased construction activity, when individuals took it upon themselves to build houses and outbuildings. People from rural areas, who had completed vocational training in construction and were working on building sites and factories in the cities, began constructing their own single-family, cuboid-shaped houses.[10] They used new technologies they acquired in the city and knowledge gained via technical and vocational education that was widely available at the time. At this time, the very foundations of shared social subjectivity were

8 Elżbieta Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka, "'State Bureaucrats' and 'Those NGO People'. Promoting the Idea of Civil Society, Hindering the State," *Critique of Anthropology* 36 (4) (2016): 341–362.

9 Mariusz Gomuła, *"Zastał Polskę drewnianą a zostawił murowaną…", czyli wpływ dekady gierkowskiej na życie społeczne wsi polskiej* (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2004); Ewelina Szpak, *Mentalność ludności*, 42–43.

10 Marian Magdziak, *Od chłopskiej chałupy do domu współczesnego rolnika* [From peasant cottage to the house of the modern farmer] (Łódź: Wyd. Politechniki Łódzkiej, 2018), 167; Szpak, *Mentalność ludności*, 63.

gradually arising, which were also located in each individual's rural background, migration experience and urban life.

A Different Perspective: Bottom-up Practices, Self-Organization

During my research with the field collective team[11] in villages near Radom, I discovered that community spaces such as the local fire station, school, and village community center play a significant role in consolidating informal organizational activity. These buildings, built in the 1960s and 1970s by the people with their own hands as part of a "social deed" (*czyn społeczny*),[12] have a symbolic significance here. In order to recognize this type of organization as a unique and valuable social structure, it is important to acknowledge the informal and exclusive nature of their collaboration. Examples of community involvement can be seen in the form of volunteer fire brigades, village sports clubs, village halls, and schools. These are informal, historically continuous, and formally informal social institutions.[13] For example, in the 1990s and beyond, virtually all men, then often either permanently unemployed or migrating circularly for casual work, were a part of the voluntary fire brigades, which for them was a source of identity and socio-existential stability. In the same vein, Weronika Najda highlights the wide range of activities within the Hubal sports club in the village of Chlewiska[14]: organizing football teams and matches, club activists, supporters and even the families of footballers from local villages. The village community center in Zaława, which hosts the Country Housewives' Club, was established through social action despite being

11 See e.g. Tomasz Rakowski, "A Cultural Cyclotron: Ethnography, Art Experiments and a Challenge of Moving Towards the Collaborative in Rural Poland," in *Experimental Collaborations: Ethnography Through Fieldwork Devices*, ed. Adolfo Estalella and Tomás Criado (New York: Berghahn, 2018), 154–178.

12 "Social deeds" [czyny społeczne] or "production deeds" [czyny produkcyjne] were basically actions of common building, widespread in socialist Poland, both forced and enthusiastic, and embodying quite intriguing affective qualities. Initially, they were a continuation of the Soviet form of common labor called *subbotnik* or *voskresnik*, standing for voluntary and unpaid work for the public, held at weekends, and initiated by the Bolsheviks as soon as 1919.

13 Weronika Plińska, "Ochotnicza straż pożarna – klub kultury" [Voluntary fire brigade – a cultural club], in *Lokalnie: animacja kultury/community arts*, ed. Iwona Kurz (Warszawa: IKP UW, 2008), accessed February 20, 2023, http://www.wpek.pl/pi/85047_1.pdf.

14 Weronika Najda, "'Królowie boiska.' Samoorganizacja wiejskiego klubu sportowego" [Kings of the playground. Self-organization of a village sport club] in *Oddolne tworzenie kultury. Perspektywa antropologiczna*, ed. Piotr Cichocki et al. (Warszawa: Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej UW, 2016).

part of a state-run institution. The village head and his friend found radiators in a scrap yard and used them for heating, while the villagers rebuilt the premises with their own efforts. There is a solid grassroots element to what might initially appear to be a state-run institution. People create institutions and their infrastructure in their free time, often using materials that are typically considered waste. State institutions are thus filled from the bottom up. Such an approach is at odds with the sense of "entitlement" of villagers, often attributed to them by journalists and researchers. Of course, conflicts, arguments, and strife may arise, but the idea that state institutions should give or provide something is alien to this logic of action. Thus it seems that rural communities are developing their own spontaneous, unrecognized social activities that, in a way, fill the memory of recent decades, the communist era and the period of transformation. The time of the modernization of the People's Republic, the socialist state, especially in the 1970s, did not represent for rural Poland just some inert, external force. On the contrary, it revealed a new sense of the events and experiences of villagers. It turns out that their history was completely different, that is it was the time of developing their skills, technical imagination, methods of experimentation with equipment, action, and rural activism.

The dominant interpretations of social life and social vacuum consider the informal rural structures of self-organization as flawed, marked by a circle of "acquaintances," tight groups, and unregulated ties. I believe, however, that it is possible to hold an opposing view, pursuing the phenomenon of bottom-up rural activities that may be harder to grasp but still crucial. On the one hand, there are dominant interpretations of social life with images of a "sociological vacuum," which consider rural informal structures of self-organization as flawed: a circle of "acquaintances," tight groups, and unregulated ties. Yet I believe that it is possible to construct an opposite perspective, seeking the phenomenon of bottom-up rural activities, which are difficult to grasp fully. This is where the movement to "reclaim" the history of social thought, also known as the "decolonization of minds" (as coined initially by the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o), begins.[15]

However, the problem is that the attempt to reclaim a "bottom-up" or "local" organizational sense is hindered by its own underlying assumptions. This is due to the problematic division between the dominant (colonizing) and dominated (colonized), central and peripheral, "academic" and "popular" domains. The boundaries and tension between discourses are fluid and can draw on and derive from each other. This approach ensures that informal and

15 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi and Kampala and Dar es Salaam: East African Educational Publishers, 1986).

grassroots efforts receive special attention. However, this knowledge can be opened up in various ways. One way is to view these processes as a "heteronymous shift," a term coined by Alexei Yurchak.[16] This means a specific social act of reproducing the forms of social institutions and the state, while reinterpreting their social meaning. This "shift" even transcends what might be called a form of resistance, simulation or "feigning action," but rather continues the social ideals of "state life" (in Yurchak's research, the former "Soviet life"), only in a spontaneous, bottom-up manner. In this way, the situation also turns out to be very complex. On the one hand, we have a model for understanding modern society (civil society) as a normative model defined by certain ideals. On the other hand, we have a research and theoretical practice that finds processes of continuous, bottom-up fulfilment and state formation through social, spontaneous or civic processes. This second process – a bottom-up "capture" of the state – is crucial here and can help identify what is crucial for future actions. Moreover, in this view, the process of creating a state from the bottom up is not just about establishing a specific institutional framework, a legal and organizational apparatus, with an institutional network, but it primarily involves a certain mental "subjective dynamic" of local social actors, as Begoña Aretxaga put it.[17] Such bottom-up realizations of the state may involve situations of resentment towards non-existent or dysfunctional structures, that is the state "abandoning" citizens, but also its subjective, daily and even "mad" production. This strange proximity between the people and the state structures is therefore essential here; it sets the state apart from other hierarchical systems that are centralized and characterized by power dynamics. Instead of a capillary, disseminated power, what we have here is primarily a form of affective state[18] that functions on multiple levels of the imaginary, creating a certain quasi-fictional entity – that of a virtual psychic power.

An example of such an "inner state" can be seen in the way Elżbieta Szewczyk from the village of Broniów, an agricultural pensioner and former cow breeder and long-time councilor, remembers and understands the changes of the last few decades. During our conversations, I noticed that she had her own social theory which she developed and updated daily. Her story would begin, circle back to the start, and then expand. It was coherent, albeit repetitive. Roch Sulima called this "necessary literature," which includes writing

16 Alexei Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3 (2003): 480–510.

17 Begoña Aretxaga, "Maddening States," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (2003): 393–410.

18 Mateusz Laszczkowski and Madeline Reeves, *Affective States. Entanglements, Suspensions, Suspicions* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2017).

with passion when drafting letters for official purposes, such as applications, complaints, and wills of peasants.[19] Elżbieta's creativity was a combination of verbal, imaginative, and memorial aspects, tailored specifically to her own world. Her creativity was more "on demand" rather than "for sale," as noted by Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev when comparing the work of folklore and the work of literature.[20] Usually, her thoughts revolved around small post-enfranchisement farms of the former "Congress Poland," where it was not profitable for individual farmers to buy large agricultural machinery. What fascinates her are the places where, as she says, "there must have been farmers' associations" communal cooperatives and purchasing centers. She is confident that she could easily see these places from her current residence, which she shares with her family. In fact, she and her husband constructed a state-subsidized modern cowshed in the 1980s that can be viewed from their kitchen window.

The windows on the other side of her house overlooked the road and bushy fields. And this, conversely, is the place that Elżbieta hates. In her vision of the world, this overgrown field is perhaps the most decisive negation of what was supposed to be there: a village square and a functioning purchasing center. Elżbieta finds the shrubbery bothersome; it is something that she has fought against all her life as a long-time councilor, deputy mayor and member of the Rolmlecz company's supervisory board. This vision proposes that the "compact villages" of the southern Mazovia region should prioritize the establishment of relatively small farms instead of large multi-hectare ones. Despite the prevailing trend in industrial farming, farmers may only have one or a few cows. However, thanks to farmers' associations and cooperatives, they can still operate effectively. According to Elżbieta, individuals can sell small quantities of milk, receive necessary payments, and cultivate small plots of land and pastures. "The villages start working! This milk is not useless. It is the best for the internal market," she says. Elżbieta pointed out that the changes in the 1990s led to this overgrown shrubbery and the destruction of potential and past cooperation. "This is where the bushes come from," Elżbieta told to me over and over again. Her vision of the disastrous changes of the 1990s is complete. Conversations often revolve around the transition from well-maintained fields to abandoned and overgrown pastures, ultimately resulting in empty spaces, unfulfilling lives for those affected, and disenchanted smallholders often found drinking near local village shops. However, the loss highlights

19 Roch Sulima, *Słowo i etos. Szkice o kulturze* [The word and the ethos. Essays on culture], (Kraków: Fundacja Artystyczna Związku Młodzieży Wiejskiej "Galicja," 1992).

20 Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev, "Folklore as a Special Form of Creation," trans. John M. O'Hara, *Folklore Forum* 13 (1980): 1–21.

the ideal picture of a complete and appropriate dairy job. It is represented by images of a multitude of small-scale dairy farmers with their milk cans, the so called "canners," who find it profitable to operate small farms.

According to her system, their opposite and the cause of their lack of profitability is due to the new farms and production standards, which involve large-scale production and being a "tanker," that is, using tanks to cool the milk immediately after milking. At the same time, she emphasizes that the best milk comes from the "canners," and although its production "will not pay off," it is ideal "for the internal market" and, above all, it keeps people occupied on the farm. It brings a kind of widespread social "healing" – "deshrubberying." Elżbieta's vision is coherent and, simultaneously, almost intrusive, repeatedly evoked. What is perhaps most significant here is a particular way of thinking, remembering and acting that does not fit into the frame of collective memory, a very different perspective on what happens outside the mainstream of communist memory and is a form of affective relationship with the state, also realized as a bond with an inner, psychic entity, as depicted by Aretxaga.[21]

Social Art Experiment: Self-updating Stories, Alternative Forms of Memory

In my opinion, such knowledge can transcend the contradictions of the center-periphery system and take us to an entirely different world – one shared by many other local figures building their knowledge and their unique social theory. Such distinctive perspectives on history and collective memory can be found in many other sources, such as, even in their meanings, the works of the renowned Polish rural artist, Daniel Rycharski, and his collaborator Szymon Maliborski. Some notable works include the Pomink Chłopa [Monument to a peasant], which gained widespread attention during its journey across Poland. It travelled from northern Mazovia to Krakow in the south, then back to Warsaw, and finally to several villages near Lublin and the city of Lublin itself. This is a statue of a distressed Kurówko village headman, inspired by Albrecht Dürer's unrealized artwork to commemorate the peasant revolts and wars of the sixteenth century. The statue shows Adam Pesta, the village headman and former "canner," sitting on an empty, useless milk can that he found in his yard (when he still had a cow, he collected the milk in cans while working as a stoker at a school). The figure of the "canner," placed on a lift platform constructed by Stanislaw Garbarczuk, an outsider artist from Rycharski's father's home village, attracted stares and drew visitors' attention during this journey. Most importantly, however, it needed to be integrated into

21 Aretxaga, *Maddening States.*

the agricultural self-organization, as the trailer with the statue was towed by tractors from village to village, decorated with sprays, and painted. It was thus a kind of inscription of a unique peasant history into the broader peregrinations throughout the Polish collective memory, also in cities, where the monument stood in the shadow of Warsaw's skyscrapers. Meanwhile, another project was simultaneously underway – to relocate a dismantled cottage in which a village woman had lived alone on the edge of Kurówko village and turn it into a museum of alternative social histories called "Village People: Museum of Alternative Social Histories."[22] The house, assembled as a metal scaffolding covered with plexiglass sheets, with brick walls, and banners from farmers' protests spread out on the ground and the austere artwork of Stanisław Garbarczuk, was erected on Krakow's embankments, across from Wawel Hill. The contrast between the old, dilapidated cottage and the majestic Wawel Castle in the same view was striking.

Such memory is perhaps even more evident in the banner of the martyr, St Expedite, designed and made by Rycharski for the trade union farmers. It features the image of a Roman legionary, surrounded by a wreath of fire, with a raven at his feet ("what you have to do tomorrow, do today") and the statuesque face of the artist himself. The banner was handed over to agricultural activists from the Solidarity trade union at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. It became a very important, albeit intimate, political meeting with a small group of representatives of the struggle for farmers' rights. The chairman of the agricultural Solidarity union from Stopnica loudly raised slogans such as "Poland Is Not Yet Lost." However, it was explicitly intended to commemorate the forgotten dramatic event from 2013, when an impoverished pensioner from Kielce committed suicide in protest against the abandoning of people like him (sick, eking out a living, experiencing poverty). Thus, alongside other events, the village's political circles created their own patron and historical event. This topic was often discussed by activists, who decided to pass a resolution to this effect in May 2015. They had it with them at the museum on the day the banner was handed over (May 2016). It is, therefore, yet again, a unique and emotional story that came into being in an intimate performance. As researchers of grassroots (oral) history have pointed out, it

22 See Weronika Plińska, "Lekcja historii. Pomnik Chłopa i Muzeum Alternatywnych Historii Społecznych Daniela Rycharskiego i Szymona Maliborskiego" [A history lesson. The Monument to a Peasant and the Museum of Alternative Social Histories by Daniel Rycharski and Szymon Maliborski], *Magazyn Szum*, accessed May 9, 2023, https://magazynszum.pl/lekcja-historii-pomnik-chlopa-i-muzeum-alternatywnych-historii-spolecznych-daniela-rycharskiego-i-szymona-maliborskiego/; Tomasz Rakowski, "Ethnography and Art Experiments in Rural Poland. Beyond the Culture of Shaming: Coevalness, the Inward Turn, and Proto-sociology," *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2017): 91–110.

is significant because it is created by individuals whose lives are considered "politically" important enough to be documented in official history. Perhaps, then, these stories convey more "truthful" elements since they do not aim to promote any particular knowledge perspective and, in the words of György Lukács,[23] they lack substantial authority as they "have nothing to lose by telling the truth."

However, I do not think alternative stories should be regarded as quiet, voiceless or at all devoid of privilege. It is clear that such experiments, which foster knowledge and "necessary creativity" in general, can develop effective existential empowerments and skills to achieve goals. Hence, relying on the concepts of "being unentangled" and "speaking the truth" by peripheral and marginalized communities alone may not provide a satisfactory explanation for the benefits of embracing the grassroots. So the point is for this other form of memory, emerging amidst the activities, prints, images, and peregrinations of Pomnik Chłopa, to be taken seriously and trusted again. It is also essential to be able to turn information about other cultural senses and socio-biographical experiences into reliable data – through, for example, the contextualization of situations and the repetition of recognitions. The analogy with Dipesh Chakrabarty's[24] methodological reflection from his well-known text on subaltern histories may serve as a helpful guide here. The "other" histories present in the oral transmission that Chakrabarty writes about concern the Santal people in India, who were considered "indigenous" and held a lower social status during British colonial rule. As it turns out, in the accounts and versions of historical events, the motivation for rising against the British Crown differs greatly from the typically recognized motivations present in historians' studies. These reasons can include beliefs in supernatural powers and other non-human factors. The reasons behind the Santal rebellion against the British were not simply dismissed as merely bottom-up, muffled, and voiceless. Instead, the rebellion tells a story of disparate epistemologies and logics. Chakrabarty goes beyond regarding subaltern history and its oral transmission as simply "other" history. He also incorporates a different perspective, a history of the "potential," as described by Ariella Azoulay[25] which

23 Cf. Marta Songin, "Z podporządkowanego punktu widzenia. Roszczenia poznawcze klas podrzędnych" [From the view of the subaltern. Epistemic demands of the subaltern class], in *Humanistyka i dominacja. Oddolne doświadczenia w perspektywie zewnętrznych rozpoznań*, ed. Tomasz Rakowski and Anna Malewska-Szałygin (Warszawa: Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011), 34.

24 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

25 Azoulay, *Potential History.*

is not confined to the official discourses of those in power. Thus, one can see these bottom-up, alternative histories as knots, poking out from under the linear European understanding of cause and effect, understood in the light of "bound" materials and facts. As Chakrabarty writes, "Subaltern pasts are like stubborn knots that stand up and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric."[26]

We encounter something very similar in the case of alternative social histories, the "Village People" museum, other imaginations, or the Elżbieta Szewczyk village history project. This historical material not only carries a story about local cosmology, a different ontology of events, and mythicized images, but at some level it also tells a story of real historical experience. Therefore, I daresay that informal, spoken, experiential data about the past, extracted from ethnographic conversations or artistic projects, may yield knowledge that significantly alters the existing historical knowledge, and therefore also the framework of Polish collective memory. Moreover, I see these grassroots, alternative and sometimes rebellious collections of knowledge as uniquely essential in "cementing," "binding" and understanding history. To put it another way: I believe that the memory forged in dominant historical discourses is based on written records that can still be analyzed and interpreted. It thus contains a shift into the past, depositing and identifying sources, and as long as these are past sources, cognitive distance also provides a "security" of thought; it refers to an archive – to a space of detachment, distance, manipulability, comparability of data. Rebellious, other or alternative history works in precisely the opposite manner. It speaks of the coeval, present here and now, reconstructed in a different way that is necessary, remembered, incomplete, but highly intense.

Conclusion: Alternative Social History and Fragile Agency

When it comes to the past, we often have to piece together history from incomplete sources. With this particular case, however, we have a unique approach to historical data from the very beginning. There is neither the illusion of "full access" to contemporary data, nor the illusion of incomplete and indirect access to "how things were" in the past. Instead, this reveals a heightened awareness of perceiving reality as actions that are fundamental for constructing historical memory. However, these actions are often diverse and distinct, influenced by one's experience of a theory of "how things were." It is not merely a plea for oral or alternative histories and, as in Chakrabarty's case, "subaltern histories." It is not about filling in the existing map of history,

26 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 106.

nor is it about archiving the statements of witnesses to history, creating digital repositories of oral knowledge – for such "archiving" can lead to the neutralization of what is remembered, or even devaluation of oral history or as merely a specific addition to the knowledge of historians. The starting point here is alternative memory, developed through the ideas of Elżbieta Szewczyk and the experiments of Daniel Rycharski. It is the account and encounter of a person carrying transformative knowledge, more as "witnessing history" than oral history. It is an "elementary particle" of oral history – an account of "how things were" and what is of real significance. In Chakrabarty's work, such alternative, "subaltern" pasts are often in opposition to the dominant historical narratives; in the cases discussed here, these forms of memory take on yet another form. They are not just an "addition" to oral history, independently found and collected; they are not a historical source neutralized right from the start.

It may be valuable to consider the role of agency in history within the framework of its unfinished and "uncertain" nature, which only becomes clear in hindsight. Instead, it will be agency (or rather efficacy) in the sense of the ability to achieve goals and shape experiences. This concept is akin to an anthropology project, as it begins and ends when the proximity and engagement of understanding begin to transform the known world, when it is "discernible," which means that it puts up "resistance." This agency (or "fragile" efficacy) in the past becomes apparent when, in anthropological research, as well as in the work of artists and oral history activists, past actions gradually gain significance as their meaning evolves from literal to historical. A kind of "inner liminality" arises, a very intimate and subjective understanding of social and historical experience, captured in Johannes Fabian's[27] ideas of unicity and coevalness, that is a situation of experimental and unsettling nature of sharing social experiences. It is a form of knowledge that Tim Ingold[28] recently wrote about more as an act of "doing" than as ready-made, accumulated knowledge or projected future; the future here is merely an imagined point tying together the threads of action. This is a radical shift: instead of an "accumulated past," which was usually at stake in anthropological method – in the study of identity, memory, and all other areas – the focus is now on a future that is co-created and co-predicted in the present. This improvisation, the co-creation of the conditions of understanding, is an irrevocable shift towards that which is anchored in a collectively cultivated future (although each time,

27 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

28 Tim Ingold, "To Human is a Verb," in *Colloquia Anthropologica*, ed. Michał Buchowski and Arkadiusz Bentkowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2014).

simultaneously also – in a certain imagined, remembered past). Therefore, it reaches towards the possible and, as such, is a form of revealing new, evoked and quite spontaneous areas of contemporarily remembered history.

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Abstract

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Ethnography, Memory, Experiment: Towards an Alternative Social History of Poland

Research on the self-organization and creative potential of rural communities in Poland suggests several decades of unrecognized conflicts of knowledge and social identity. This article demonstrates how work that is experimental both ethnographically and artistically can help reveal unfixed or absent elements of Polish identity conducted in contemporary village spaces. The author suggests that ethnographic and artistic work can uncover unfixed cultural memories, enabling a new perspective on the formation of Polish society. This process paints a different, alternative social history, and at the same time it suggests a new perspective on issues of citizenship, social subjectivity and our understanding of history in a theoretical and methodological sense.

Keywords

history, memory, experiment, countryside, ethnography, art

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Clichés and Overexposures: Gaps and Surpluses of Polish Memory

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1.

When we examine Polish memory as it is painted in the papers presented at the conference "Polska pamięć. Ciągłość i przemiany; diagnoza i rokowania" – which were later developed into the articles presented in the current issue – we will easily notice the two main problems with the functioning of Polish memory, that were identified by the researchers. The first of these is associated with the indisputable gaps in memory, certain points or even whole gray areas, which we do not want to remember, and which were either expunged from our memory or have never truly been a part of it.[1] The second

1 Without doubt, this category encompasses a broad part of Holocaust memory, and especially those of its facets that keep score of the assent to the Shoah and of the involvement of some part of society in particular acts of genocide, or that point to the lack of any kind of opposition to those acts (these aspects are explored in the papers authored by Dorota Głowacka, Przemysław Czapliński, Jacek Leociak and Marek Zaleski). However, not only the memory of events that could be a source of shame or guilt is overlooked, but also all those forms of memory, which do not fit into the oversimplified blueprint of memory that is considered safe for building national identity.

problem – and this might seem quite obvious – is the excessive tendency to remember other events vividly, in spite of the passage of time, and even in certain defiance of it, that is associated with the repetition and replication of certain strictly determined forms of memory in an almost unchanged and possibly simple manner.[2]

Forgetting and reminiscing seem to be two aspects of a single process; a process of unifying memory, of rearranging it in such a way that it becomes a convenient tool in the construction of a certain collective identity. The dynamics between these two phenomena resembles the swing of a pendulum, which sways to one side just to return to the other in an instance. The events and problems indicated and commented upon by the authors seem to match quite strictly the aforementioned simple blueprint – either collective memory refuses to cooperate, when it comes to remembering events that are too complicated, damning, or inconvenient (The Holocaust heads this list, followed by the convoluted memory of the Polish People's Republic, and, finally, by the memory of regime change), or it reproduces subsequent memory clichés, when it touches upon events that carry identity building potential for a certain community.

This state of affairs – especially pronounced in the case of the Second World War – can be, in my opinion, interpreted as a specific kind of looping of memory. Attempts at unifying memory, of bestowing a definite shape on the past, though they are repeated regularly, do not seem to increase its uniformity at all. On the contrary, at a time when our memories of events that occurred seventy years ago should – as was suggested by Jan Assmann – gradually transition from the area of communicative memory to the field of cultural memory,[3] something goes astray. Remembrance of the Second World War, as well as the memory of the subsequent traumatic experiences of the twentieth century, seems to be still open, susceptible to change and manipulation, and ready for transformations engendered by omissions as well as repetitions.

Polish memory, especially that pertaining to the traumatic and still affective events of the twentieth century, is therefore not dynamic but rather unbalanced. However, constant returns to events that have not yet been properly

2 These kinds of memory clichés can be easily identified in the narratives of the Second World War, which are still – if we were to base our survey on the media context or even on history handbooks – based on a very simplistic model of presenting Poland as the principal victim of this nevertheless global event. An account that would reach beyond a strictly local perspective (or, at most, beyond the European context) in presenting the Second World War, is still very rare.

3 Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

assimilated into memory do not bring forth any promise of resolution. Even though, it seems, these were initially attempted in the hope of demystifying the past, of telling what r e a l l y happened, and how it happened – which always seems like a rather illusory endeavor – it, nevertheless, always fairly quickly turned out that what was really at stake was not the return to some unexpressed or uncomfortable events, but rather an attempt to construct some different, possibly coherent, version of the past. And this is possible only through persistent omissions and compulsive repetitions.

Though the matter, which I touch upon in this article, is very well analyzed on the level of particular cases in the papers presented by the participants of the aforementioned conference, it is also worthwhile to study it as a specific process that regulates the circulation of Polish memory, and to consider what, despite the passage of time, is at the root of the difficulties in constructing that type memory which – in the convenient terms proposed by Aleida Assmann[4] and Michael Rothberg[5] – could be characterized as dialogical or multidirectional.

2.

Disregarding the memory of certain events and attaching excessive importance to others or – in a scaled down form – preferring particular versions of the past is nothing new in Polish culture, and it is not unfamiliar to other cultures as well. The initial imbalance of collective memory, following difficult and traumatic occurrences does not seem particularly surprising. Similar challenges were faced by – not to stray too far from the subject – German cultural memory after the Second World War,[6] neither are they unfamiliar to collective memories of those communities, which only now try to reconsider

4 Aleida Assmann, "Europe's Divided Memory," in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 25–41.

5 Cf. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory was compellingly analyzed by Katarzyna Bojarska in the paper "Polska pamięć wielokierunkowa? (Kto nie pamięta z nami, ten nie pamięta przeciwko nam)" [Polish multidirectional memory? He who does not remember with us, does not remember against us either], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2016): 312–325.

6 An in-depth analysis of the subject can be found in the writings of, among others, Aleida Assmann. Cf. Aleida Assmann, "Re-framing Memory. Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past," in *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 35–50.

their colonial past. However, the one element setting Polish memory apart from the abovementioned examples is its extreme instability, which not only does not subside with the passage of time, but it seems to increase even further.

The sources of this instability lie, in my opinion, precisely with that chronic looping of memory, which causes certain events from the quite distant past to function as still novel, pertinent, and contemporary. The Second World War is one of such events – speaking in terms proposed by Lauren Berlant[7] – which being not fully apprehended, constantly influence the present affective structure. As such, this event vanished from the sphere of public discussion before it was experienced in its entirety, becoming suppressed, though certainly not erased by another event – the change of the political regime. After the year 1989, the previously suppressed, although still affective in its character, memory of the Second World War resurfaced and became a challenge for Polish identity.

The specific character of this challenge is well described by the dialectics of pride and shame, which is used with success by various memory discourses. Its workings – in this case, on the example of Polish culture – are very compellingly analyzed by Przemysław Czapliński in an article tellingly titled "War of Shames." This passage cuts to the core of the problem under discussion:

> Polish culture currently partakes in the war of two legitimate shames. The first, fragmented, internally incoherent and conflicted, grows from the ethical concern for minority rights; the second, rather narrow and combative towards any difference, refers to the ethics of majority rights, the first was not capable of satisfying the longing for respect felt by the masses, the second is generous in bestowing accolades, but only upon "comrades." The first lives by the Christian principle "Be proud, for you know how to feel ashamed!" The second champions the tribal maxim "Shame on you, if you do not know how to be proud!"[8]

Two types of shame, described by Czapliński, are responsible for the two utterly different attitudes guiding the approach of individuals and societies towards the future. The first, demands taking responsibility also for those events that do not contribute to the positive image of a given community; it treats memory not as a simple reservoir of events and behaviors that can be positively appraised from the present point of view and that can be the

7 Lauren Berlant, "Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event," *American Literary History* 20 (4) (2008): 845–860.

8 Przemysław Czapliński, "Wojna wstydów" [A war of shames], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2016): 44.

object of identification, but as a task and challenge that requires a great deal of work. The second attitude requires retaining the memory mostly – if not exclusively – of what is a source of pride, of what can serve as the building block of a favorably assessed identity.

It is evident that the first of the maxims mentioned by Czapliński is not representative of the Polish approach to memory. This was also noted by Andrzej Leder, who points out that:

> The capability of feeling such shame, the shame for atrocities that were committed by our ancestors – by the bearers of the same tradition, who have nevertheless neglected their duty to account for them themselves – had become the measure of a new sort of pride. A pride, which from a position of the future, a common future of free and equal people, bestowed judgement upon the terrible past that was hiding in the present.[9]

Analyzing the mutual relations of shame and pride and the role they play in contemporary societies, Leder recognizes that their functioning is fundamentally different among weak and strong societies. Pride arising from the ability to experience shame is characteristic of those societies which were once strong enough to force their will, through coercion and violence, upon other societies, and at the present time are self-conscious and disciplined enough to take responsibility for their past wrongdoings; thus protecting their own identity and agency that is associated with it:

> The process of confronting the faults of the preceding generations was – and still is – most tumultuous in those societies which quite recently – that is, in the nineteenth century – were historically strong enough to be able to severely harm whole communities, nations, civilizations…. Ultimately, these societies had to possess a particular kind of sovereignty, one that dictates saying: it was us! Taking responsibility also for the difficult and bad circumstances. The experience of agency of these societies all but barred the soothing words: it was someone else. Words that are typical for weak societies.[10]

In contrast with strong societies, which build their pride on the acceptance of shame, weak societies – according to Leder – want the pride, but without the shame; in essence, they strive for the recognition of pride that is rooted

9 Andrzej Leder, "Pole symboliczne. Przemieszczanie, niewczesność. Humanistka jako wybór między pamięcią a nadzieją" [The symbolic field, mixing, untimeliness: The humanities as a choice between memory and hope], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2016): 247.

10 Leder, "Pole symboliczne," 248.

in their own impotence. This deepens even further the divide between weak and strong societies, between the influential that are ready to take responsibility for their deeds and the passive that avoid the consequences of their actions at all cost.

To a certain extent, the dialectics of pride and shame aptly describes the aforementioned phenomenon of both forgetting and reminiscing about the past. That Polish society chooses pride without shame over pride that finds strength in acceptance of guilt, is clearly noticeable at present. Nonetheless, it seems worthwhile to broaden or even restate the question about the aversion towards pride that comes from acknowledging shame, to investigate the reasons behind its fervent repression. In my opinion, this is associated not only and not as much with the desire to transfer the guilt onto others, but is mostly associated with the growing difficulty with determining national identity, with recognizing who "we" really are?

3.

The division into weak and strong societies, as it was proposed by Andrzej Leder, rests not only upon the ability – or the lack thereof – to find pride in shame. It also depends on – the scholar states this clearly – the specific use of the simple distinction into us and them, us and others. The ability to admit guilt and accept shame requires, as Leder writes, a clear declaration of how things are, that is saying: it was us who did it. What, however, happens in the case when this straightforward and fundamental distinction in the construction of communal, national, and social identity is not as simple? What if the whole difficulty comes down to the simple fact that it is very hard to find a perspective that would give a clear view of who stands on which side? The history of colonial powers is easier to grasp in this regard, as it is difficult to confuse the colonizer with the colonized or to contradict the responsibility for starting the Second World War of a country that clearly pursued it. The position of strong societies, namely those which have a centuries-long history of domination and expansion, is in this respect straightforward in comparison with that of societies characterized by Leder as weak. The past, for which responsibility should – or even must – be taken, one that is shameful, can form a much more solid base for national self-identity than a past that must be constantly explained and retold, as, in that case, it is impossible to claim complete agency or to shed all responsibility – at least not if that past is not to become corrupted by falsehoods. Clearly, the past of weak societies is not only marked by the experience of violence, but also – to a greater or smaller extent – by its application, by being on the side of the weak at one time, and on the side of the strong at another.

The memory of weak societies is therefore much more complicated and seems much less tolerant to omissions and silencing than the memory of the strong. It is also much more fragile than those collective memories that can conceal themselves behind the figure of a great empire: the political and ethical responsibility of states for specific actions is something qualitatively different from the shame experienced by a society for the actions of its individual members.[11]

If we concede – as Leder does – that Polish society is weak, it will become clear that certain incendiary elements of Polish memory, the points of overlooking or reminiscing, are mostly concerned with those moments in history when the functioning of the Polish state was hampered to a larger or smaller extent. And this means that they burden the society itself and cannot be transferred onto some more or less abstract nation-like entity.

The shame of strong societies, namely those whose culpability for certain actions is clearly acknowledged on the national and not merely social level, is – as Sara Ahmed pointed out – much less complicated. It separates individuals from the nation and the state, therefore allowing pride to be restored by, sometimes, merely superficial acts that do not lead to any kind of restitution.[12] Meanwhile, the responsibility of societies that cannot hide beyond the figure of nation or government is much more personal, much more burdensome and sensitive. The situation of Poland during the Second World War is

11 This is well illustrated by, for example, the intricacies of German collective memory relating to the Second World War. Acknowledging Germany's – as a particular national entity – responsibility for WWII was fairly easy. Nevertheless, turning that responsibility into acceptance of collective guilt on the part of German society for allowing the war to break out and for active participation or endorsement of Nazi politics was a much longer process. At a certain point a revealing dissociation of guilt occurred, where the guilt of a state as an abstract, political entity was keenly admitted, but the guilt of society as a collection of individuals was not, and overcoming this duality was not easy. Cf. Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, *"Opa war kein Nazi." Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002).

12 Cf. Sara Ahmed, "Shame before Others," in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 119–120. "The expressions of national shame […] were problematic, as they sought within the utterance to finish the action, by claiming the expression of shame as sufficient for the return to national pride. As such, they did not function as a return address; they blocked the hearing of the other's testimony in turning back towards the 'ideality' of the nation. It remains possible to express shame before others without finishing the act, which refuses this conversion of shame to pride, in an act of shame that is not only before others, but for others." Ahmed points out that not all forms of public display of shame are an act of opening to dialog with those who have been wronged. On the contrary, shame oftentimes serves as a kind of public closure of debates on a given subject.

a good example of this. Since October 1939 the Polish society became stateless and found itself under total control of a foreign power forcing it to conform to a particular political and legal order. The existence of the Polish government-in-exile did not change this situation – although this government was able to represent, on a small scale, the interest of an abstract state entity at the international forum, it had little actual power over the events taking place within the borders of the pre-war Polish state. This remains true even when we account for the functioning of military formations within the country or of the Polish Underground State – their presence was important, for various political and some social reasons, but it did not counterbalance the influence of the German Reich (the influence of the Polish Underground State on citizens who were not directly involved in its operations was minimal). What all this means is that the responsibility for actions – both right and wrong – committed by Poles during the Second World War cannot be easily dismissed by attributing it not to the society, conceived as a collection of individuals, but to some abstract body politic that would act as its substitute.

All of this fundamentally changes the perception of shame and pride. Pride arising from the actions of a handful of individuals easily achieves collective or national dimensions in the eyes of the general public. In turn, shame is either completely erased, becoming something experienced individually, at the most, or turns into something much more sensitive – if it becomes a part of the collective consciousness. Such shame and such pride make the already unbalanced process of constructing national self-identification even harder. For shame to grow into a source of national pride it needs to be experienced as part and within the boundaries of a defined identity – one which is not subverted by it, but, on the contrary, which it itself supports through the affirmation of its centuries-long duration. Though, if that continuity is broken at any time, then things get much more complicated.

4.

In my opinion, it is worth considering contemporary processes occurring within Polish memory, especially that which refers to the twentieth century, as an attempt to reconstruct such an identity which would be rooted in the belonging to a particular nation state rather than to a certain society or nationality. What is at stake in this game is the image of "Poland" as a national entity even in those periods when Poland could not be considered an independent state. It is therefore an attempt to rewrite history and its memory in such a way, as to be able to maintain the continuity of Poland and, consequently, a connection with a particular country and collective identity. In terms proposed by Leder, this would be an attempt to create a coherent "we,"

even though – and maybe for the very reason that – it was very unclear in certain periods of history, who "we" are and if there even is a "we" of any kind to speak of.

The construction of a particular community, of this supreme "we," which is moreover legitimized through belonging to a concrete nation, is currently underway with the aid of a rather simple mechanism, one which was mentioned at the beginning of this paper. What I have in mind is the incessant repetition, the returning to events that can easily be classified in an unambiguous way. This one-sidedness entails, on the one hand, the need for a clear and firm delineation of the difference between "us" and "them," and, on the other, an equally strong need to feel proud of what "we" have managed to achieve. For this reason, the most important role in the memory of the Second World War is played by those events which were initiated by "us" and which – and I view this as equally important – can be associated with the workings of the state.

The growing stature of the Warsaw Uprising as a particularly important event for the building of Polish memory is a direct result of the two aforementioned factors. This was one of the handful of moments in the Second World War when "we" were potent, and "we" made the decisions. Although opinions on those decisions – not to mention their consequences – are varied, the Uprising itself occupies a special point in memory, connecting the phantasy of agency and potency of Polish society with the illusion of the functioning of a Polish state during the occupation. This Uprising is contemporaneously interpreted as a form of military action, and therefore as a manifestation of the nation state, while also being an embodiment of the societal, grassroots, striving for action, arising from the spontaneous need to resist the oppression.

The memory of the cursed soldiers – which recently became prominent in the public discourse – is similar in character, though it is smaller in scale. The very notion of "cursed soldiers" points to a certain meticulously hidden paradox of memory. A soldier is always a member of an army of a particular state, he is a part of the armed forces, and not – as in this case – a partisan, someone who opposes the power of the state. The fact that we are currently talking about cursed soldiers and not, for example, about the members of the anti-communist guerilla, is also telling. According to the logic of this designation, the post-war underground – not supported, at least officially, by the government-in-exile – constituted a "state" to a greater extent than communist Poland ever did. Therefore, the creation of the mythology of the cursed soldiers, as well as that of the Warsaw Uprising, evidently serves the construction of a strong, easy to grasp, and potent Polish "we," which endures despite political turmoil.

This way of constructing identity and collective memory has, nevertheless, some quite clear downsides. The most important among them is its extreme

selectivity. History of societies which I would define not so much as weak but as unstable – partly borrowing from Andrzej Leder's terminology – does not mainly consist of acts of power, dominance, or even agency. Resignation and attempts to deal with domination are much more prevalent here, there are also more numerous and nuanced responses to subservience and therefore the scope of the relationship with the "other" is infinitesimally more complicated. Nevertheless, not much is left, when the memory of the past is cut down in order to conform to some pre-defined blueprint.

The selectivity of such a memory results, on the one hand, in the inhibition of all that does not fit the model of the potent and active Polish "we" and, on the other, in a stubborn repetition of the invariable cognitive schemata, returning to certain clichés and truisms that can be useful in filling the empty places in memory deprived of non-acceptable memories. Even the introduction of subsequent memories is oftentimes done not in order to fill in holes and gaps, not to bring nuance to oversimplified versions of memory, but to substitute one cliché for another, which is constructed in a similar manner. This mechanism guarantees that even if an event that was previously absent in public discourse becomes part of collective consciousness, then it is swiftly made to conform to already existing memory clichés. This is what happened, for example, in the case of the Volhynian massacre that has been swiftly incorporated into a rather simple narrative of the subsequent misfortunes of the Polish people, instead of becoming a basis for a deeper examination of the problems of national identity and conflicts resulting from ill-conceived nationalism.

Collective memory constructed in this manner and the identity which is based upon it is – despite intense attempts at its unification – extremely fragile. A narrow, rigorous pattern of memory necessitates treating anything that goes beyond it as endangering the delicate balance. In such a vision of history each new event, which does not fit neatly with the already established memory clichés, might force a reconstruction of the whole, still unstable, social and national identity; it is not so much treated as a challenge, but simply as a threat. This kind of memory is the opposite of dialogical or multidirectional memory, it is a specific kind of paradigmatic memory, which constructs an identity around a specific event and its interpretation, subjecting visions of the past to its requirements, and not a memory that is a nexus of various events and which can be a source of diverse models of identity. This is why Polish memory reacts in such a nervous way to other than paradigmatic versions of memory. For example, the memory of the Holocaust is not considered as a parallel memory or a memory that fills the obvious gaps in the ways of remembering war during the time of the Polish People's Republic; rather, it is seen as a conflicting memory which substitutes the memory of the Second

World War as a destructive event for the Polish nation and statehood with a version of memory which burdens, to a higher or lower extent, Polish society with an unwanted and incomprehensible shame.

The only way to overcome this specific stalemate, where both the collective and individual memory are held hostage to the need of producing a coherent identity, is through the acceptance of the fact that diversity and multidirectionality of memory need not lead to chaos and instability, and that diverging versions of the past must not necessarily be contradictory. Nonetheless, this requires – paradoxically – undertaking work not so much on the past and its memory but on the present and the future, which should become a more prominent point of reference for the construction of collective identity.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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Clichés and Overexposures: Gaps and Surpluses of Polish Memory

Tabaszewska examines two key issues in the functioning of Polish memory, namely forgetting and contemplation. They can be seen as two aspects of the same process of standardizing memory, of constructing memory in a way that is supposed to turn it into a comfortable tool in the construction of a given collective identity. Forgetting and contemplation can therefore be read as a memory loop of sorts, rooted in the need to reconstruct an identity based on belonging to a given state. The selective and stereotypical aspects of collective memory largely result from attempts to produce an image of the past that would legitimize a sense of belonging to a stable state organism looking back on hundreds of years of continuity.

Keywords

collective memory, cultural memory, affect, forgetting, shame, pride

Investigations

Maria Kobielska

The Righteous Exhibited. Self-affirmative Memory in Polish Museum Culture

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The boom in museums which Poland has been experiencing since the turn of the millennium offers a significant opportunity to regard the dynamic museal landscape as an observation field for memory studies. The boom concerns historical museums in particular; multiple newly opened or reopened institutions of this kind offer spectacular exhibitions, express a variety of mnemonic agendas, and powerfully influence remembrance patterns and visions of the past. They can thus serve as touchstones of Polish memory culture and its recent developments.

Although museums' messages are not limited to the articulation of national memory politics being fostered by the "mnemonic warriors" allied with the right-wing government,[1] especially those which are state-sponsored

1 Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, eds., *Twenty Years After Communism. The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Ljiljana Radonić "'Our' vs. 'Inherited' Museums. PiS and Fidesz as Mnemonic Warriors," *Südosteuropa* 68 (1) (2020): 44–78.

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institutions often, and understandably, tend towards "mnemonical security."[2] In terms of exhibitions, this means offering narratives and experiences that promise to secure an already established positive self-image and self-memory of the national community and therefore aim to guarantee its stable identity. It can be said that such museums contribute to developing the nation's infrastructure for self-affirmative remembering. Self-affirmation of this kind can be founded on multiple, intertwined narrative schemes (typically, of heroism and the utmost patriotic merits on the one hand, and of suffering and martyrdom on the other) and works to generate a sense of dignity and remove any possible doubts concerning this dignified self-image.

Polish self-affirmative memory unfolds in various contexts, concerning in particular – but of course not limited to – narratives of resistance in the times of the breakthroughs of twentieth-century history. Amongst many themes that support this kind of memory, a particular version of the discourse on the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust intensified in Polish memory culture at roughly the same time as the museum boom was developing (although its roots date back to the 1940s, as researchers have shown[3]). Within this discourse, the histories of the rescue overshadow, if not substitute for, the Holocaust as such, moving the focus from Jewish suffering towards the heroism of Polish rescuers. Typically, the discourse in question also moves towards a formula of "Poles saving Jews" rather than the "Righteous Among the Nations,"[4] relaxing the criteria for inclusion in the group and stressing the rescuers' national identity. By this means, remembrance of rescuers, indispensable as it is, is also being used to ensure precise management – or concealing – of the difficult past. In historical reality, Poles assumed various stances towards the Holocaust, including indifference, but also facilitation of the Nazi persecution of Jews; the issue of complicity of some Poles is then inseparable from the memory of the benevolence, and heroism, of others. However, the latter often serves as a national alibi.

In the most articulate cases of the discourse, commemoration of the rescue therefore comes close to historical distortion. Nevertheless, it is a vital element of the "mnemonic warriors'" historical policies, and recent examples of

2 Maria Mälksoo, "'Memory Must Be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security," *Security Dialogue* 46 (3) (2015): 221–237.

3 See, for instance, Tomasz Żukowski *Wielki retusz. Jak zapomnieliśmy, że Polacy zabijali Żydów* [The great retouch. How we forgot that Poles killed Jews] (Warszawa: Wielka Litera, 2018).

4 Alina Molisak, "Sprawiedliwi w kaplicy" [The Righteous in the chapel], in *Pomniki pamięci. Miejsca niepamięci*, ed. Katarzyna Chmielewska and Alina Molisak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2017), 36–43.

violation of freedom of research on the Holocaust highlight the topic's importance for these mnemonic actors. It was precisely the public breach of the rules of the discourse, in which Poles are generally associated with the rescue and never with the complicity, that resulted in unprecedented attacks on Barbara Engelking.[5]

The mnemonic tendencies discussed here seem in line with the more general framework of Polish memory concerning the Polish and Jewish past, which can be seen as an example of what Michael Rothberg identifies as "competitive memory": memory culture perceived as a battlefield, on which distinct and separate groups compete for limited resources – such as attention, justice, satisfaction, reparation, commemoration or recognition.[6] As a result of this "competition," Holocaust topics have been persistently obscured in the Polish memory by the suffering of the Poles; when museums are concerned, this is clearly visible in the context of appropriation of Jewish heritage.[7] The framework hinders the possibility to move beyond self-affirmation and embrace a more complicated memory of the past (including Polish community being implicated in past violence and injustices[8]). It does not mean that this possibility is blocked as such; as the examples will show, in Polish memory culture there is a space for a more nuanced, critical approach. Yet the conditions of Polish "mnemonical security" discussed above may significantly limit the power and influence of such projects, for which it will be more difficult to get a positive public reception (not to mention funding or patronages).

I argue that, given the circumstances discussed, both museum research and study of remembrance of the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust offer particularly useful viewpoints for observing Polish memory culture. New historical museums, understood as mnemonic infrastructure in development, test possible ways of remembering, both supporting established memory

5 See "Naukowcy i naukowczynie w obronie prof. Engelking: 'Niebezpieczne i niedopuszczalne zapędy cenzorskie'" [Scientists in defense of prof. Engelking: 'Dangerous and unacceptable censorship tendencies'], *Oko.press*, April 27, 2023, accessed June 14, 2023, https://oko.press/naukowcy-i-naukowczynie-w-obronie-prof-engelking-niebezpieczne-i-niedopuszczalne-zapedy-cenzorskie.

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

7 Erica Lehrer, "Material Kin: 'Communities of Implication' in Post-colonial, Post-Holocaust Polish Ethnographic Collections," in *Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial*, ed. Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), 283–316.

8 On the concept of implication see Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

forms and negotiating with the default mnemonic standard. The topic of the rescue of Jews, sensitive and prone to problematic formulations, is in turn a litmus test of self-affirmative Polish memory. Overlapped, the two perspectives create a particularly sensitive research area. Along these lines, it was my goal to examine the ways in which the topic of the wartime rescue of Jews by Poles is presented in five historical museums opened in Poland within last two decades: the Warsaw Rising Museum (opened in 2004 in Warsaw), Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory (2010, Krakow, a branch of the Museum of Krakow), POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (2014, Warsaw), the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War Two (2016, Markowa) and the Museum of the Second World War (2017, Gdańsk).[9] Rather than making an institutional analysis of the museums, I focus closely on their permanent exhibitions. Taking into account the design and narratives and the use of media in the respective displays concerning the rescue of Jews, I analyze them in the context of their positioning and function in the whole exhibitions. These five cases, juxtaposed, allow several mnemonic strategies in question to be distinguished, and, eventually, reveal various paths that self-affirmative memory can take, but also challenge simplistic perceptions of memory culture.

From Marginalization to (Mis)use Strategy: The Warsaw Rising Museum and the Ulma Family Museum

The Warsaw Rising Museum (WRM) is widely identified as a founder and pioneer of the boom – the first institution representing the new wave of historical museums in Poland, which itself had a huge impact on developing perceptions of Second World War, and particularly the importance of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. This early instance of the discourse emerging from the landscape of new Polish museums will be discussed here briefly, as a reference point for more comprehensive strategies.

9 Zofia Wóycicka has comprehensively analyzed Polish and European museums dedicated specifically to the theme of rescue of Jews during the Holocaust: Zofia Wóycicka, "A Global Label and its Local Appropriations. Representations of the Righteous Among the Nations in Contemporary European Museums," *Memory Studies* 15 (1) (2022): 20–36. According to her research, various museums representing the Righteous Among the Nations explore similar images, forms and symbols, but these "recurring elements [...] transmit divergent worldviews and ways of looking at history" (33), to an effect of glocalization (rather than globalization) of memory. In particular, commemoration of the Righteous in museums in various European countries tends to be (mis)used "to neutralize difficult debates on the past" (22). See also Zofia Wóycicka, "Global Patterns, Local Interpretations: New Polish Museums Dedicated to the Rescue of Jews during the Holocaust," *Holocaust Studies* 25 (3) (2019): 248–272.

Within the museum's exhibition, the issue of the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations during the wartime, if present, serves as a kind of a background for the main narrative, which concentrates on the Polish fight for independence. Persecution of Jews is framed as a special case of the overall German terror directed against all inhabitants of the occupied territories. Help for the Jews therefore found no particular place in the main narrative, except for brief mentions about the risk of the death penalty that the act of helping was subjected to. Such "mnemonically securing" comments somewhat in advance ensure that there is no suspicion of any Polish complicity and are echoed in virtually all contemporary texts concerning the topic (be it exhibitions, articles, textbooks, documentaries, speeches etc.). Together with a clichéd mention of the "record" number of Poles among the Righteous Among the Nations, they seem to be in a way obligatory in mainstream Polish war memory discourse today.

The only moment when the topic is explicitly brought to light in the WRM seems particularly meaningful. In this section of the exhibition, a story about Polish insurgents liberating Jewish inmates from the slave labor Gęsiówka camp in Warsaw is repeated over the speakers and dominates the testimony of Marek Edelman displayed on a small screen nearby. Edelman, who challenges the idealized picture of Polish-Jewish relations, becomes scarcely audible, overpowered by the uplifting story of the rescue. The topic of the rescue is thus virtually absent from the museum narrative, and if it occurs, it is used (or, rather, misused) to shape an unblemished image of the Poles.

The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in Markowa could also serve as a clear example of this, while also showing a more complex version of the strategy. The museum's particular position within the Polish museal landscape has already been described by researchers.[10] The only one of the "new museums" located outside of a big city, it makes the local history only a starting point for an ambitious, yet highly controversial narrative[11] that adheres to the "mnemonic warriors'" historical policy in an unparalleled way. All members of the Ulma family, including the children, were murdered in 1944

10 Wóycicka, "A Global Label"; for an overview of the museum: "Global Patterns," 251–252; for an analysis of the discourse on the opening of the museum: Piotr Forecki, "Muzeum zgody w Markowej" [Museum of reconciliation in Markowa], *Zagłada* Żydów. *Studia i Materiały* 12 (2016): 643–652.

11 Jan Grabowski and Dariusz Libionka, "Bezdroża polityki historycznej. Wokół Markowej, czyli o czym nie mówi Muzeum Polaków Ratujących Żydów podczas II Wojny Światowej im. Rodziny Ulmów" [The wilderness of the politics of history. Around Markowa, or what The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II does not talk about], *Zagłada* Żydów. *Studia i Materiały* 12 (2016): 619–642.

together with the Jews whom they were trying to hide in their house in the village of Markowa. In 1995, the Ulmas were honored as Righteous Among the Nations, and in September 2023 they were beatified by the Catholic Church. In recent years, they have been promoted as symbolic representatives of all helpers and become remembrance icons of the discourse on the rescue of Jews, governed by principles of self-affirmation and mnemonical security.[12]

The museum's exhibition is strategically organized to serve the discourse in question in several important steps.[13] Firstly, the exhibition narrative focuses consistently on Polish rescuers and not on the persecuted Jews whom they were helping. In the Ulmas' case, this may be illustrated in a nutshell by the fact that a life-sized, walk-in mock-up of their house, featuring some furniture, family souvenirs and so on, does not include an attic, where the hiding place was located. The exhibition design encourages the visitors to assume the Ulmas' perspective and put themselves in their position, while the Jews in hiding remain almost anonymous (the names of the Goldmans, Grünfelds and Didners are barely mentioned). As I have argued elsewhere,[14] Jewish trauma appears here somewhat for the sake of Polish heroism, as a necessary context – and not in its own right.

Secondly, the history of the Ulmas – like multiple histories of the rescue of Jews – is generalized in the museum's message, in an effort to translate the heroic actions of individuals into the characteristics of the whole Polish community. It is more or less explicitly suggested multiple times in the exhibition, but also by the way in which the area surrounding the museum is structured, with several commemorative spaces and monuments. Significantly, the name of the museum is itself persuasive. Not only does it apply the aforementioned meaningful phrase of "Poles Saving Jews" and leave no doubt about the museum's protagonists, but it also hinders any critical approach to the issue.

Thirdly, the museum develops a particular mechanism of dealing with difficult (or, so to speak, mnemonically insecure) elements of war histories, such as antisemitism among the Poles and denunciations of the rescuers by their fellows – with the purpose of maintaining mnemonical security, but at the same time creates an alibi for accusations of whitewashing the past. "Insecurities" are acknowledged within the exhibition, but underexposed due

12 See Alicja Podbielska, "Święta rodzina z Markowej: kult Ulmów i polityka historyczna" [The Holy family of Markowa: Ulma cult and politics of history], *Zagłada Żydów* 15 (2019): 575–606.

13 The Ulma Family Museum was researched within the project "New Polish historical museums" by Sara Herczyńska. The following analysis at some points draws on her observations.

14 Maria Kobielska, "The Touchstone of Polishness? Suffering Exhibited in 'New Museums' in Poland," *The Polish Review* 64 (2) (2019): 121–131.

to the exhibitive techniques employed. The "difficult" content (be it general information on a board or, for instance, a troublesome part of a testimony) is present somewhere in the exhibition and, in theory, possible to access, but the exhibition does not direct the visitors' attention to it and lets it blur among the other contents provided.

The Ulma Family Museum exhibition, apparently providing an extensive presentation of the wartime reality, in fact substitutes the rescue of Jews for the Holocaust. Paradoxically, the Holocaust (and Holocaust trauma) is on the margins of this narrative, dropped by the exhibition in favor of the tragic but ultimately uplifting stories of the extraordinary dedication of the Poles. As Zofia Wóycicka aptly put it, "Although the Holocaust seems to be the main theme of the exhibition, in fact its key objective is to rebut allegations of collaboration in and profiteering from the Holocaust by the local population and to reinforce a narrative of Polish heroism and solidarity."[15] The aforementioned substitution contributes to this shift in perspectives. Using a variety of techniques, the presentation of the rescue of Jews unfolds as an argument justifying Polish self-affirmation (if not self-praise) and preventing it from being compromised.

Recognition and Contextualization Strategy: Polin

At the opposite end of the spectrum of possible strategies, activities typical of critical historical museums would be located. This can be observed, for instance, in the permanent exhibition of Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews (while a narrative presenting the history of Polish Jews – or, in a way, a Jewish history of Poland – by definition forms an alternative to the mainstream Polish memory scheme) and in the original version of the Museum of the Second World War (MSWW; on which more below). Such a strategy, in its most balanced version, would comprise two equally important steps: firstly, the recognition and acknowledgement of the helpers, secondly, the contextualization of their actions by showing how rare they were and in what circumstances occurred. In this vein, the rescue of the Jews becomes part of a larger narrative and, at the same time, the specificity of the Holocaust history can be preserved.

The permanent exhibition in Polin, one of the biggest and most spectacular of the "new museums," is huge, covering a long history dating back to the Middle Ages. As a result, my analysis here can only refer to small fragments of the whole presentation. The topic of the Polish wartime help for the Jews has its place in the vast Holocaust gallery and is mentioned, on occasion, in

15 Wóycicka, "A Global Label," 28.

the gallery entitled "Postwar Years." In the former, there are two such sections. The first discusses the institutional help for Jews in the agenda of the Polish Underground State. The activities of the Council to Aid Jews (Żegota) and of the Jewish National Committee are described here, with a detailed diagram visualizing how the help was organized and some excerpts of Żegota's reports. Żegota is acknowledged here as "the only organization of this kind in occupied Europe."

As a general rule, visitors to Polin's permanent exhibition are led by brief quotations from historical documents, such as accounts of witnesses to history, which are prominently exposed on the walls of every exhibitive space. In the analyzed section, there are two: an excerpt from Żegota's report ("The Council's task is to aid Jews") and text from a diary entry by a Committee activist, longer and emotional, which meaningfully describes it as "this most clandestine of clandestine communities" – suggesting the need for double and multiple conspiracy.

Importantly, the section's nearest context problematizes the whole subject and allows for a better understanding for the latter quote. In a previous section, Polish attitudes towards the Jews are discussed with emphasis on their diversity: while "few chose to risk their lives and the lives of their families by trying to save Jews," most remained indifferent, and "some Poles denounced Jews to the Germans or murdered them themselves." This is confirmed by leading quotes from diaries by Polish witnesses to the ghetto uprising of 1943: expressions of grief and solidarity are mixed with reports on the antisemitic remarks that could be heard. This is demonstrated persuasively in the "tramway carriage" installed here, in which visitors may assume the positions of passengers and listen to excerpts of such comments.

All these elements build the background for the most important section, which includes the topic of the rescue of Jews, following the Żegota part and devoted to the experience of Jews hiding "on the Aryan side." The perspective is vital here: as Wóycicka puts it, "rather than focusing on the Polish rescuers, the exhibition tries to convey what it was like for a Polish Jew trying to survive outside of the ghetto."[16] Visitors are confronted with several briefly described stories of specific individuals, modestly illustrated with photographs, documents and a few objects. Only to some extent is the presentation systematized by curatorial text. What counts here rather is a consistent micro-perspective, which entails narrowing the view in order to make the visitors reflect deeply on very specific cases that metonymically stand for so many others. This is supported by the design of the section space: the room is dark and quiet, alluding to the conditions in hideouts, and the availability of materials is

16 Wóycicka, "Global Patterns," 253.

purposefully limited to some degree. Placed in niches in the walls, below the line of sight, partially covered, they force visitors into uncomfortable positions when examining them. The discomfort may enhance their focus and make them think about secrets and dangers.

The chosen perspective means that the stories of rescue neighbor those concerning denunciations and betrayals – there cannot be a separate, distilled "section of the Righteous" (and only of the Righteous) within a narrative that closely follows Jewish experiences. While many rescuers are included throughout the presentation, their actions and relations with the persecuted are not idealized. Idealization and heroization would require simplification; on the contrary, the exhibition signals the entangled motivations, interpersonal tensions and difficult decisions that are inherent in convoluted rescue stories. Importantly, the relations between the hiding Jews and their helpers are shown as mutual, complicated and multi-layered.

Generally speaking, the helpers – be it in the context of the actions of the Polish Underground State or individual hiding stories – are recognized and acknowledged within Polin's exhibition in a very factual, non-emotional, almost neutral way, and this recognition is structured in terms of historical (and micro-historical) description, rather than of a homage. The help for the Jews is accurately shown as a rather small fragment of Holocaust history. This is enhanced by the fact that the parts of the exhibition analyzed here are preceded by a comprehensive – and particularly moving – section devoted to life in ghettos (and specifically the Warsaw ghetto), with no further mentions of the topic, and followed by a section concerning the killing of the Jews, including pogroms.

To sum up, the core of Polin's strategy is to contextualize the help by providing a detailed presentation of its circumstances. The rescue of Jews is presented as a part of history of the Holocaust and of Jewish history – contrary to the previous cases, in which it was an intrinsic part of the history of Polish heroism and resistance. Interestingly, the very term "Righteous Among the Nations" is virtually absent from the exhibition. As I mentioned in the introduction, in the self-affirmative discourse the phrase is replaced by "Poles saving Jews," in a gesture of generalization. Here it is avoided for the opposite reasons: to build a micro-perspective focusing on the "here and now" of rescue stories, and not to look ahead to future tributes paid to the rescuers.[17] Contextualization prevails here over other elements of the discourse, yet recognition and acknowledgment of the helpers is also implied.

17 It is worth noting that when the topic of Poles who saved Jews returns in the post-war gallery, it is not about celebrating them, but mentioning the decision of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland to organize financial help for former rescuers and its social context.

The general overview provided above allows us to distinguish the main variants in which the rescue is exhibited in Polish historical museums, namely, the strategies of (1) partial marginalization, (2) recognition and contextualization, (3) use and misuse – sometimes, of course, intertwined. It seems that all the strategies, within the Polish memory culture, contribute to perceiving the rescue in view of the topic of "Polish-Jewish relations" not solely as a part of the Holocaust history; the Righteous may play a role of a benchmark of the discourse of Polishness. The analysis can be refined using the further case studies by demonstrating the dynamics of mnemonic processes involved here. The case of the MSWW problematizes the possibility of a shift between the discussed strategies, whereas Oskar Schindler's Factory is a museum in which they turn out to be destabilized and negotiable.

The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk: Shift of Strategies

The Museum of the Second World War (MSWW), once perceived as a liberal (or pluralist) answer to "national memory museum" projects, is now widely known as an example of forcible intervention by the mnemonic warriors in power in Poland in the activities of a critical historical museum. The museum was taken over in 2017, soon after the inauguration of its spectacular and huge permanent exhibition, and since this time over 20 changes have been introduced to the exhibition. As Stephan Jaeger aptly put it, the changes were made with the "intent of creating a more Polish, heroic, battle-oriented museum and a less civilian-based, transnational museum."[18]

In the original form of the exhibition, the topic of the rescue of Jews was primarily present in two sections: the one devoted to the Holocaust and the one entitled "Resistance."[19] Importantly, no original content was removed from either. In the former, various attitudes of "non-Jewish Poles" towards Jews are contrasted, including indifference, facilitating the Holocaust, as well as help. A board summarizing the story quotes the number of the Polish Righteous, and is accompanied by an exhibit: a washing bowl belonging to the Jews who were hidden by Poles living in the vicinity of the Treblinka death

18 Stephan Jaeger, *The Second World War in the Twenty-First-Century Museum. From Narrative, Memory, and Experience to Experientiality* (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 183.

19 The following paragraphs present a shortened version of a more developed argument which I articulated in my forthcoming article focusing specifically on the changes in the MSWW: Maria Kobielska, "Narrative and Resilience: Museum Exhibitions under Forced Change. A Case Study of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, Poland," in *Museums, Narratives, and Critical Histories: Narrating the Past for the Present and Future*, ed. Kerstin Barndt and Stephan Jaeger (Berlin: De Gruyter, expected 2024).

camp. All this was designed as an element of a bigger section focusing on the extermination of Jews and leading the visitor to a moving "space of reflection," filled with panels presenting thousands of portrait photos of the victims.

The second room in question, included in the "Resistance" section, is devoted to the Polish Underground State. To highlight the conspiracy, the whole space is designed with reference to the shape of a basement, with pipes and other equipment placed on the walls and periscopes showing official life on the ground. In the furthest corner of the cellar room, partially hidden by the bend of the wall, a display space covering the topic of help for the Jews is located, consisting of Irena Sendler's portrait, a film about rescuing a baby girl in which she was involved, and several exhibits accompanying the story. A board states that "thousands of Poles" helped, "both individually, outside the underground organization, and within it," mentioning the risk of being blackmailed at the same time. This once again highlights the number of Poles among the Righteous. However, the meaningful location and design of this part of the exhibition suggests – accurately – that helping the Jews must be perceived as "a conspiracy within conspiracy," a special, if not exceptional case in the activity of the resistance movement.

It was precisely this design that was used as a pretext for intervention in the exhibition; it was interpreted as a conscious decision to conceal the topic's importance. It was therefore decided to cut a small window in the bended wall, certainly making Irena Sendler's portrait more visible to the public, but weakening the original meanings at the same time. The intervention may seem small and rather innocent, making it easier to recognize the information provided originally. However, it indicates a general principle of a new strategy, emphasizing heroes and heroines and not permitting them to be subjected to other principles or goals, such as showing the broader picture of people's attitudes and actions.

The interventions made in the Holocaust section clearly support this observation, contributing remarkably to the description of the shift between strategies. A large-scale photograph of the Ulma family now covers one of the walls of the exhibition space, close to the passage from its informative part to the "space of reflection," which uses the well-known strategy of showing the countless faces of victims. Before entering it and meeting the victims' eyes, visitors are now confronted with yet another board on "Poles in the face of the Holocaust," accompanied by a database of Polish rescuers.

This decision has several substantial consequences. Firstly, the "Ulma wall" has been placed in the position of concluding the whole history of the Holocaust in the exhibition. Secondly, it produces an incoherent story, with the original nuanced narrative emphasizing the victims and covering the various attitudes of non-Jewish people – Poles as well as others – overshadowed by

the image of Polish martyrs who, as the headline puts it, were "rescuing their neighbors at the cost of their life." Thirdly, it clearly gives priority to commemorating the Righteous over producing a somber atmosphere of meditation on the tragedy of the Holocaust, which was the original purpose of the photo passage. Feelings of respect and admiration are now supposed to compete with those of horror or pity.

The changes introduced in both sections offer an exceptional opportunity to trace in detail the desired shift of narrative on the rescue of the Jews. The MSWW's original mode was a variant of the critical strategy of "recognition and contextualization"; in comparison with Polin, more emphasis was placed on acknowledging the helpers, with the use of recurrent memory themes such as the number of those honored by Yad Vashem. The new strategy, revealed by the changes introduced after 2017, uses the Righteous as a kind of antidote for mnemonical insecurities in a story originally told by the exhibition; they thus become a tool of what can be called a "Polonization" of the museum. It is important to note, however, that it is questionable whether unsystematic, disjointed changes of this kind may significantly affect the general message of the exhibition, taking into account its size and complexity.[20]

Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory: Negotiations

With this in mind, a further example should allow us to enhance the analysis of the power of memory patterns sketched above. To move towards the conclusion, I will briefly examine Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory in Krakow, a museum which is challenged by the schemes in a particular way. First and foremost, the museum bears the name of one of the most famous – perhaps the most renowned worldwide – of the Righteous Among the Nations, who happens to be a non-Polish rescuer. It may thus introduce a certain incoherence to the template, in which the Righteous tend to represent Polishness. Secondly, to intensify the effect, the museum is located in the space of the former Schindler's factory, attracting particular attention of international visitors who follow the Steven Spielberg film route. Thirdly, however, the permanent exhibition aims at covering the topic of Krakow under Nazi occupation during Second World War – not focusing on the rescue, on the figure of Oskar Schindler or on the history of the space, although including the history of both Polish and Jewish inhabitants of the city confronted with the German perpetrators.[21]

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20 See Kobielska, "Narrative and Resilience."

21 Zuzanna Bogumił, "Miejsce pamięci versus symulacja przeszłości – II wojna światowa na wystawach historycznych," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 4 (2011): 149–167. About Schindler's Factory as a museum which presents antagonistic memory and one-dimensionally casts

The rooms devoted to Schindler himself form an enclave in the exhibition space, differently arranged and somehow interrupting the impressive, multi-sensual story about wartime Krakow. Contrary to most of the interior museum space, they are filled with daylight and preserve, although only partially, the original arrangement of Schindler's office. The concise way in which Schindler's story is told suggests a presumption that it is already known to the visitor. It is described on information boards, supplemented by video testimonies and a special commemorative installation by Michał Urban: a cube made of enamelware containing the names of those saved thanks to Schindler's actions. After paying a visit to Schindler's office, visitors continue their tour and discover the changes of daily Krakow life under occupation, narrated chronologically.

In the context of Schindler and the topic of help for the Jews, it seems significant that the narrative is regularly interspersed with the presence of Polish rescuers; this seems to be a necessary supplement to the story about the German savior, narrated within "his" space. Not surprisingly, Tadeusz Pankiewicz, a pharmacist from the Krakow ghetto who was recognized as a Righteous Among the Nations in 1983, is one of the most important witnesses whose words are cited throughout the exhibition. In the section devoted to the Krakow structures of the Polish Underground State, help for the Jews, obviously, is mentioned, while the contribution of the Catholic Church is also highlighted. It is important to note that this is accompanied by an extensive description of the risks of hiding "on the Aryan side," including denunciations and blackmailers. Close to the end of the exhibition, visitors find an evocative reconstruction of a hiding place, arranged for the fugitives from the Krakow ghetto by a Pole, a member of the resistance movement, in his house in a village nearby. Finally, the discourse on the Righteous plays a paramount role in the concluding parts of the exhibition, where visitors are placed in an ambivalent position to judge the choices people were making during wartime. In the last exhibition room, two databases are displayed in the form of huge volumes of people's good and bad deeds; the former are gathered under the title of "Righteous" and the latter as "Informers." The "Righteous" formula therefore serves as an umbrella term for those who behaved virtuously in a liminal situation.

The museum's strategy on the topic of the rescue seems rather unstable. Firstly, it tries to contribute to the commemoration of its patron and take advantage of his fame at the same time. Secondly, it surrounds his figure with

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Germans as villains and Poles as positive protagonists: Anna Cento Bull, Hans Lauge Hansen, Wulf Kansteiner and Nina Parish, "War Museums as Agonistic Spaces: Possibilities, Opportunities and Constraints," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25 (6) (2019): 611–625.

a circle of Polish rescuers and Polish *lieux de mémoire* associated with rescue stories. Finally, it ambivalently seeks a more general exhibition frame with the use of the Righteous formula. In my opinion, this volatility is linked to the fact that this is a relatively early (2010) exhibition in the history of the museum boom and that the museum faces the challenge of negotiating with the more stable strategies of marginalization, recognition and (mis)use of the Righteous in the Polish memory culture, while examining its special situation at the same time.

The cases analyzed prove the power of the self-affirmative pattern within Polish remembrance, in line with which commemorating the rescue of Jews may serve national mnemonical security. Different approaches to the topic, however, complicate the picture by showing dynamics of remembrance and mutual interferences between the identified strategies. The strategy of marginalization reveals the self-centeredness of the Polish discourse about the past. The strategy of use and misuse redefines memory of the rescue of Jews in the service of national self-affirmation. It involves a set of mechanisms intended to secure the established self-perception of the community and its past. The strategy of recognition and contextualization, in turn, seeks to introduce critical thinking about the past, challenging the principles described above. Although this analysis identified diverse strategies of presentation of the rescue of Jews, national self-affirmation remains a "default" option that must be addressed directly or indirectly in every case. This is particularly visible in the context of critical exhibitions: to polemically refer to the mainstream pattern, they perform complicated balancing acts between acknowledgment of rescuers and contextual presentation of their actions. In terms of memory research, my argument shows that historical museum exhibitions can be interpreted as useful and sensitive indicators of remembrance tendencies, demonstrating in their operation not only established mnemonic patterns, but also their developments and negotiations.

Abstract

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The Righteous Exhibited. Self-affirmative Memory in Polish Museum Culture

The article analyzes the permanent exhibitions of five new Polish historical museums in terms of their presentation of the rescue of Jews by Poles during Second World War. It identifies strategies of marginalization, recognition and contextualization, and use and misuse of the topic, placing them in the context of the diverse mnemonic agendas present within the Polish memory field (and of national mnemonical security in particular). The comparison shows the self-affirmative core of Polish memory culture and proves that museums can be interpreted in memory research as indicators of remembrance tendencies.

Keywords

museums, Polish culture of memory, self-affirmation, rescue of Jews, Righteous Among the Nations

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The Bystander Complex: The Holocaust in Relation to Peasant Witnesses

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The category of the Polish witness to the Holocaust has recently become the subject of striking research, diagnosing its awkwardness, unsuitability or insufficiency as an instrument to describe the attitudes of Polish society toward the Holocaust. These studies are dominated mainly by revisionist concepts with a stake in both revising Polish culture's long-maintained self-image of martyrdom, as well as unmasking Poles' various forms of involvement in the extermination process targeting Jews. A noteworthy study that stands out is the research of Maryla Hopfinger's research team, reconstructing how Polish narratives of the Holocaust have been shaped, beginning as far back as the 1940s, along with what is viewed as the lead figure of the witness as outsider and indifferent observer.[1] Her findings correspond with the

1 See *Zagłada w „Medalionach" Zofii Nałkowskiej. Teksty i konteksty* [The Holocaust in Zofia Nałkowska's *Medallions*: Texts and contexts], ed. Tomasz Żukowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2016); *Opowieść o niewinności. Kategoria świadka Zagłady w kulturze polskiej (1942–2015)* [A story of innocence: the category of Holocaust witness in Polish culture: 1942–2015], ed. Maryla Hopfinger and Tomasz Żukowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018); *Lata czterdzieste. Początki polskiej narracji o Zagładzie* [The

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work of Tomasz Żukowski, who investigates mechanisms of "retouching" in Polish self-image, visible in cultural texts and their reception.[2] Another figure who returns to the issue of the formative meaning of the position of witnessing the Holocaust – that is of being placed in sight of violence – is Grzegorz Niziołek, who in his pioneering study "Polish Theater of the Holocaust" analyzes the consequences of collective denial of the experience of seeing the Holocaust for the shape of Polish cultural identity.[3]

The various perspectives on reconceptualizing the "Polish Holocaust witness" seem linked by a basic terminological dilemma: whether it is justified to use the very concept of "witness" – which in Holocaust discourse is mainly reserved for Jewish survivors – in the context of Polish experience.[4] Taking this recognition as their point of departure, Elżbieta Janicka and Ryszard Nycz, in an implicit polemic, formulate two separate approaches that, combined, mark out two main lines of thought about Poles' attitude regarding the Holocaust. On the one hand, Janicka proposes rejecting the category of "witness," which, in her opinion, connotates an objective and disengaged perspective, therefore allowing Polish society to be situated outside the field of violence playing out between perpetrators (Germans) and victims (Jews). As such, this becomes an argument fetishized in public discourse and one that upholds the myth of Polish innocence. Yet the attitude and behavior of the Christian majority created a socio-cultural framework that conditioned the situation of Jews at every stage of the Holocaust – not only in its final phase, but also during the period of ghettoization and mass

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forties: the beginnings of Polish Holocaust narrative], ed. Maryla Hopfinger and Tomasz Żukowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2019).

2 Tomasz Żukowski, *Wielki retusz. Jak zapomnieliśmy, że Polacy zabijali Żydów* [The great retouching: how we forgot that Poles killed Jews] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018); Żukowski, *Pod presją. Co mówią o Zagładzie ci, którym odbieramy głos* [Under pressure: What those whose voices we take away say about the Holocaust] (Warszawa: Wielka Litera, 2021). Cf. Bożena Keff, *Strażnicy fatum. Literatura dekad powojennych o Zagładzie, Polakach i Żydach. Dyskurs publiczny wobec antysemityzmu* [Guardians of fate: Literature of the post-war decades on the Holocaust, Poles and Jews: Public discourse on anti-semitism] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2020).

3 Grzegorz Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady* [Polish theater of the Holocaust] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013).

4 Polish does not possess the (useful) distinction that exists in English between "witness" and "bystander." In the Polish translation of Raul Hilberg's *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945*, the translator Jerzy Giebułtowski proposed, for the author's chosen term "bystander," the familiar Polish term "świadek," meaning "witness." This translation choice seems to reflect well the aforementioned terminological difficulty.

extermination. Therefore, as Janicka shows, Polish society also held a position toward the Holocaust of "participant observers."[5] On the other hand, Nycz – while conscious of the hesitations expressed toward the category of witness – remains an advocate for it. He sees Jan Błoński's gesture, in his essay "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto" [Poor Poles look at the ghetto], of separating out the witness as a research category to be fundamental to today's discussions of the Polish witness of the Holocaust. Nycz also claims, contrary to Janicka, that this gesture has made it possible to situate Polish society within (and not outside) the extermination process. It also indicates the potential of the witness category as a figure with agency, constituting themselves in a position of inclination toward another person or who – to put it another way – makes the experience of another into part of his or her own "self." To be a witness means experiencing a situation of entanglement in what – as Nycz puts it – has become shared, while "what we share – unlike a 'participation' that presumes an intentional choice, a conscious decision, engagement – we do not want nor do we choose, yet we must acknowledge, take responsibility for, because it is part of the reality we live in […]."[6] This perspective directs our attention toward those attitudes situated on an axis between assisting and murdering Jews, attitudes that are therefore more difficult to classify unambiguously by only considering the dimension of action (or the renunciation thereof).

Regarding this divergence in thinking about the "Polish Holocaust witness," illustrated by the juxtaposition Janicka and Nycz's diagnoses, I take an intermediary position. I claim that the experience of a "third party," as was the role of Polish society during the Holocaust, qualifies the co-dependency of both positions – both of "bystander" and of "witness." The position of bystander is situational and contextual, meaning that a person becomes

5 See Elżbieta Janicka, "Obserwatorzy uczestniczący i inne kategorie. O nowy paradygmat opisu polskiego kontekstu Zagłady" [Participant observers and other categories: On a new paradigm of describing the Polish context of the Holocaust], in *Świadek: jak się staje, czym jest?*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza and Karolina Koprowska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2019), 32–60. A similar point of departure comes from Roma Sendyka, who adapts the English term "bystander" into Polish and proposes translating it as "postronny" ("outsider"). See Sendyka, *Od świadków do postronnych. Kategoria bystander i analiza podmiotów uwikłanych* [From witnesses to outsiders: The category of bystander and analyzing entangled subjects], in *Świadek: jak się staje, czym jest*, 61–82. I write more on this subject in the book: *Postronni? Zagłada w relacjach chłopskich świadków* [Bystanders? The Holocaust in peasant witness accounts] (Kraków: Universitas, 2018).

6 Ryszard Nycz, *"My, świadkowie…"* [We, the witnesses], in *Świadek: jak się staje, czym jest*, 137–150.

a bystander as a result of a defined event taking place in direct proximity.[7] Meanwhile, witnessing is based on the intersection of experience and articulation – a witness is therefore one who has not only experienced something and has a certain knowledge of it, but also can in some way (verbally or extra-verbally) express this experience.[8] In this sense, the condition of bystander is conditioned by existential happenstance, since it emerges more from inadvertently finding oneself within the scope of events than from conscious individual choice. The condition of witness meanwhile indicates a perspective of potentiality; this means the bystander may become a witness, if they themselves offer testimony of their internal and external experience or if they are called to present such.[9]

I am inclined to accept these propositions because of a selection of research material in the form of peasant accounts of the Holocaust. In this article I utilize two collections of sources: firstly – pieces submitted to the "Descriptions of my Village" contest, organized in the first half of 1948 by the Czytelnik Press Institute,[10] and secondly – oral histories collected and recorded by Dionizjusz Czubala in his ethnographic research in the 1970s and 80s.[11] These accounts are vestigial, fragmentary, and full of gaps and oblique statements, often illustrating

7 Mary Fulbrook proposes a similar definition of bystander. See Mary Fulbrook, *A Small Town near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.

8 Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 15.

9 For more on the context of interrogating the process of witnessing, see Agnieszka Dauksza, "Ustanawianie świadka" [Establishing a witness], in *Świadek: jak się staje, czym jest*, 164–197.

10 See Krystyna Kersten and Tomasz Szarota, *Wieś Polska 1939–1948* [The Polish village 1939–1945], vols. I–IV (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1967–1977). In preparing this text I have used both this edited version as well as – inasmuch as was possible – the original materials collected in the PAN Institute of History. In citations from the publication I give the volume number, reference number and page; from excerpts of original accounts, only the reference number and, if applicable, the page number.

11 See Dionizjusz Czubala, *O tym nie wolno mówić… Zagłada Żydów w opowieściach wspomnieniowych ze zbiorów Dionizjusza Czubali* [We can't talk about that… The Holocaust in oral histories from the collections of Dionizjusz Czubala], sel. and ed. Piotr Grochowski (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2019). Another source preserving the peasant perspective on the Holocaust are the materials from the August Trials, used by Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking. See Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Barbara Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień… Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945* [It's such a beautiful, sunny day… The fates of Jews seeking aid in the Polish countryside 1942–1945] (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011).

the effort of articulating the difficult memory of the Holocaust. Yet they provide an account of the experience of rural bystanders delivered from a peasant perspective and conveyed in a peasant voice – and as such they are a valuable source that allows us to research how peasant witnesses characterize their position toward the Holocaust. The texts analyzed here are distinguished by their provenance – the contest materials are written accounts, while the ethnographic materials are a record of oral histories and conversations. At the same time we can treat them as commissioned sources – in the first case, for the sake of an advertised contest, in the second, by an ethnographer taking on the role of a mediator of memory, who makes witnessing possible.

The Local Dimension of the Holocaust

The specificity of peasant bystander experience is influenced by the local context of the Holocaust, taking place in close socio-topographic surroundings. Spatial proximity turns the inhabited surroundings into a dynamic field of violence, involving everyone within it in different ways. Therefore I also propose examining the position of peasant bystanders – as well as how we understand their involvement in the process of the Holocaust – in relation to the concept of the n e i g h b o r h o o d. From an anthropological perspective, this is defined as the space of life, action and experience, as created by human settlement practices. Tim Ingold points out the constitutive significance of an inhabitant's activities in shaping their living environment, by describing the neighborhood as a t a s k s c a p e, meaning an agglomeration of interlinked actions or tasks undertaken in a defined space.[12] The neighborhood is not limited merely to its physical and ecological configuration, but also encompasses a whole string of social, cultural, affective and sensory contexts. In this conception, the bystander becomes "a local," meaning one who functions in the surrounding environment and whose activity co-creates it; meanwhile, these activities derive their meaning from the inhabited place. The local dimension of the Holocaust as it occurred in the countryside therefore formats the outside involvement of peasant bystanders, which results from both their intentional actions and their very presence at the events (i.e. ending up in one situation and not another), which becomes the source of various affective stimuli.

12 Beata Frydryczak, *Krajobraz. Od estetyki the picturesque do doświadczenia topograficznego* [Landscape: From the aesthetics of the picturesque to topographic experience] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2013); Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," in Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), 189–208.

Peasant accounts convey a sense of entanglement in what is taking place in their nearest surroundings and what then becomes the object of their experiences. In one of the contest's "descriptions of my village," the author portrays the time of the occupation as a prolonged condition of anomy, in which not only were all sorts of moral principles suspended, but the boundaries of the safe space of familiarity were also constantly disrupted by wandering refugees bringing potential danger, such as partisans, Russian POWs or Jews:

> A few months after the Germans came in, divisions of Polish partisans started to turn up. After the outbreak of war with Russia, Russian refugees from German captivity appeared. Jews, tormented by the Germans all over the cities, partially armed themselves and fled to the forest and of course into the village. […] Russians and Jews needed to clothe and feed themselves in the village; the partisans also often abused their power, and bandits went robbing. At that time we got a literal Sodom and Gomorrah in the village. When night fell, everyone would get the shivers, because it was hard to predict who'd come visiting and what laws they would dictate. (WP, vol. III, no. 105[1535]: 169)

In wartime conditions, the closeness experienced in the countryside and the directness of these accounts form the main source of mutual tensions, intensifying uncertainty, fear and suspicion. The feeling of being entangled in the Holocaust is similarly visible in an oral history from Miernów, taken from the collections of Dionizjusz Czubala:

> All over the village, they hid like that, they hid. There was Jews at Rusiecki's, and here, yeah, at Adamczyk's. That's what people said, there was Jews. But who saw 'em? Who showed their face? All at night, they didn't go out in daytime. Nobody knew, they kept 'em secret. […] The Jews wasn't scared, I mean, we knew them Jews from Wiślica. We did, we called 'em bakers, them that came here, they was familiar. Once they knew they come rollin' into the stable, and they brought others along too. They kept sayin': "Come on, lock up. [We're staying – author's note] by the road, if them Germans [came – K. K.] they'd take us an' kill us," they said. "Nah… They [won't – K. K.] kill us… Get some sleep and get out of here," my boys [sons – K. K.] often laughed, "and sure enough, they get some sleep and get out into the fields."[13]

Both of the accounts cited here allow us to distinguish two main groups of Jews seeking refuge in the countryside: Jews from the cities, and local Jews,

13 The Polish transcription maintains the speaker's rural dialect, which is hard to preserve in English translation. Czubala, *O tym nie wolno mówić…*, 80.

who were born and/or lived in the village and small-town neighborhood. Being oriented in the local topography and local relations allowed the latter a certain freedom in organizing hiding places and greater ease in maintaining contact with Polish inhabitants.[14] From the perspective of one woman living in Miernów, familiar Jews were marked out by great agency: they were not hidden, but were hiding (the aid they were given was ephemeral in nature and consisted of being allowed to spend the night); they were therefore taken as less of a threat, while their survival was "someone else's problem."[15] In truth, their hiding involves the entire village – the speaker emphasizes that Jews were "hid[ing] all over the village," meaning spending a little time with everyone. At the same time one might get the impression that the diffuse nature of the help freed bystanders from a feeling of responsibility, distancing them, as it were, (on a psychological level) from the Jewish refugees. The cited statement also shows such an attitude is additionally supported by the topsy-turvy mechanism of wartime, according to which mutual relations are structured by the principle of invisibility (both sides accept that those in hiding lead a nocturnal lifestyle). On the basis of these diagnoses, rural bystanders can be characterized using a dialectic of closeness and distance, showing a basic tension between closeness to (peasant) Polish and Jewish fates (in respect to space) on the one hand, and the attempt to maintain distance (in respect to experience) on the other.

"It Happens Before My Eyes…"

Peasant bystanders – as their stories show – experienced the proximity of the Holocaust influenced both by widespread knowledge of what was going on in the neighborhood, and also by direct somatic-sensory experiences that permitted them to recognize the field of violence. In their accounts, formulations like "we all knew about it"[16] recur again and again. With regard to the closed circulation of knowledge typical in rural society, knowledge of Jews hiding in the area or of extermination activities was universally available: either passed on within neighborly or familial circles, or supposed, guessed at, on the basis of rumors overheard or of one's own suspicions. Peasant bystanders also

14 For more, see Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień*, 50–52.

15 See Marek Czyżewski, Kinga Dunin and Andrzej Piotrowski, *Cudze problemy. O ważności tego, co nieważne. Analiza dyskursu publicznego w Polsce* [Someone else's problem: On the importance of what's unimportant, an analysis of public discourse in Poland] (Warszawa: Łośgraf, 2010).

16 Czubala, *O tym nie wolno mówić…*, 76.

learned about the course of the Holocaust by identifying topographical traces and changes to the landscape.

They also confronted deadly events directly, which Feliks Tych considers a specific dimension of Holocaust witnessing in the countryside. As he emphasizes: "perception of the Holocaust is one thing for witnesses from large towns and cities, and another in small ones and villages, where the Holocaust or portions of it were carried out as a rule before the eyes of the local Polish population and it was impossible not to notice."[17] Peasant bystanders defined their own attitude toward extermination activities most often by referring to looking, seeing or observing: "I saw it, the German killed [the Jewish woman – K. K.] before my eyes. […] [I]t happens before my eyes."[18] People who found themselves in the vicinity of an execution of Jews emphasize: "So I was looking at it," "I saw it, I was there at the time,"[19] "I was living up there on the little hill, I look, they're leading that Jewish woman along. And him, that Abram – Abram he was called – they killed him in the pasture, right from a rifle."[20] Peasant witnesses, in commenting on their own position relative to the event they are describing, referred to the visual context to legitimize their telling, to confirm the truth of the experience they were conveying: "They was leadin''em out, against the wall and shot 'em in the back of the head. It was older Jews. The young'uns got taken away and these'uns got left behind. Well I saw it. […] This rich Jew's one lady, they nabbed 'er too. […] Sure enough, I saw it an' heard it. She was askin': 'Mister Hunc, please, let them still see the world'."[21]

Yet the above quote shows that in the rural context, sight is not the only instrument situating bystanders within the Holocaust, but instead it

17 Feliks Tych, *Długi cień Zagłady. Szkice historyczne* [The long shadow of the Holocaust: Historical sketches] (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1999), 24. Cf. Jan Tomasz Gross, "'Ten jest z Ojczyzny mojej…', ale go nie lubię" ["This one is from my homeland…" But I don't like him], in Gross, *Upiorna dekada. Eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców, komunistów i kolaboracji 1939–1948*, new edition, corrected and expanded (Kraków: Austeria, 2007), 44.

18 Czubala, *O tym nie wolno mówić…*, 68.

19 Both excerpts: Ibid., 73.

20 Ibid., 111. Notable in this account is the speaker's citation of the name of the murdered Jewish man (in peasant oral histories, victims are most often anonymous). The speaker does not directly identify the perpetrators of this crime, but this story is preceded by the words: "And there were these partisans, too, who were shooting Jews, and the [collaborationist – K. K.] police."

21 Ibid., 72.

co-exists with others, creating a neighborhood of sensory experiences,[22] which are perceived as symptoms of extermination. Here, memories of olfactory impressions predominate: "in late spring or summer you can't smell anything except the stench of burning bodies" (WP, ref. no. 1461), "They burned millions of Jews here from all over Europe. When the wind was coming from Sobibór you could smell an acrid stench like burning horn" (WP, ref. no. 295), or aural ones: "from morning to evening, packs of a few hundred SS dogs would be howling" (WP, ref. no. 1461). Sounds and smells intrude, reach bystanders from the outside, evoking a sense of danger and constant proximity to death. In another account from Nowy Korczyn, we find a striking dependency between what is heard and what is seen. Hearing gunshots leads to the necessity of seeing their results: "A German military policeman was leading along this elegantly dressed gentleman and this little girl. In a moment, gunshots. I race there to see if it's possible; after all, they were just alive. I look, and there in a ditch, the man is lying in a puddle of blood, and that girl further along. Only then did I grasp it…"[23] The attitude of the bystander depicted in this account establishes the intentionality of the gaze (which is meant to confirm the alleged crime). It also seems that this action additionally motivates a behavioral imperative that overtakes reflexivity and awareness of the macabre sight.

Another influence on peasant witnesses' experiences, as determined by the topographic and sensory proximity of the Holocaust taking place in the neighborhood, is what was felt affectively and corporeally. In their accounts, some speakers evoke memories of the emotions or somatic reactions that the sight of another person's suffering and another person's death provoked in them. This is how one speaker talks about the extermination of the Jews in his village:

> Well and the awful day finally arrived, it started to drizzle a little in the east. And now the Germans and Ukrainians had surrounded Okrzeja with automatic weapons. They chased everyone onto the market square, because that's what we call the middle of our village, with the big square. […] Then they told them to lie face-down on the ground; once they'd laid down on the ground, then a single collective moan went up, a horrible moan, as if from the grave, from underground, until something tightened inside, sending shivers all over a person standing to one side. (WP, vol. III, no. 106[1437]: 172)

22 For more on sensory perception of the landscape, see John Urry and Phil Macnaghten, "Sensing Nature," in Urry and Macnaghten, *Contested Natures* (New York: SAGE, 1999).

23 Czubala, *O tym nie wolno mówić…*, 81.

"A person standing to one side" here describes only the bystander's place in the spatial system, for in a corporeal and affective respect they situate themselves within the event. The Jews' suffering affects them internally (they feel an internal tightening and shivers on their body). The moaning of Jews sentenced to die, horrible and nearly apocalyptic, seem in this story to materialize, to become nothing but a moan – "single" and "collective" – which, as it were, separates itself from those emitting it. Attempting to capture the intensity and horror of this moan, the author situates its source in the earth, in the grave – this overwhelming sound therefore now comes from the underworld, from people already dead.

Activity in the Neighborhood

Villagers became bystanders by performing concrete tasks for the Germans, facilitating both their oversight of the rural community and the processes of exterminating Jews and expulsion operations. Finding oneself in the role of assistant stemmed from the Nazi-initiated means of organizing rural society, based on authorities such as a village council chairperson, police officer or volunteer fire department chief, who were distinguished by their degree of responsibility for the collective. Villagers were selected (usually by a village council chair carrying out a German command) for specific tasks, for example they were to provide horses and carts for deporting Jews, join night guards or village watches that were launched after the deportations and were meant to defend the village "from bandits and vagrants," which in reality meant capturing Jews hiding in rural areas; they could also be chosen as "community hostages," using their lives to guarantee the success of "Jew hunts," or village couriers who (when there was no telephone in the village) delivered information to the police station.[24] Another activity involving peasants in the Holocaust was burying the corpses of Jewish victims, usually at the scene of the murder.

Peasant bystanders perceived active participation in the Holocaust – on the one hand – as contrary to their own convictions; they felt forced into a morally ambivalent position, making them share responsibility for the extermination of the Jews. But on the other hand, the imposed role of assistant gave opportunities to seize the initiative and permitted independent action leading to the death of Jews, such as denunciation or committing murder. Here it is worth emphasizing that an essential factor in bystanders taking on the role of perpetrators was often feuds between Polish inhabitants. In Czubala's collection we can find accounts showing that one factor motivating

24 See Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews*, 71–86.

denunciations of peasants concealing Jews was the desire for revenge.[25] Bystanders' various motivations and ways of acting permit us more precisely to investigate the following excerpt from the recollections of a woman from the village of Stoczek:

> The year 1942 brought the mass destruction of the Jews. One September morning, it was still gray out, the German military police and soldiers surrounded the settlement the Jews had been driven into from several townships, and a mass roundup started. They used help from the Volunteer Fire Department, which skillfully assisted the Germans. The tormented Jewish population was beaten, tortured, poured over with water, kicked. Most were deported that very day to Treblinka, and the few who escaped were slowly caught and shot in the local Jewish cemetery. Not only Germans, but Poles also threw themselves into looting Jewish possessions. Some Poles, after capturing a Jew hiding out somewhere, not only stripped them of their gold and clothing, but even young Jewish ladies of their honor, and only afterward did they hand them over to the Germans. Others promised to conceal them for large sums, and after taking everything from them, gave them to the Germans. There were also some who didn't want anything from the Jews, but did not they want to hide them either, which the Jews did not hold against them. (Ref. no. 847: 4)

In her account, the speaker describes the operation of capturing and deporting Jews as the shared activity of Germans and ethnic Poles, the specific character of which is revealed in one sentence of this story: "They used help from the Volunteer Fire Department, which skillfully assisted the Germans."[26] The participation of peasant assistants (and particularly the fire department) is based on the fundamental paradox of compulsion and free will – they acted on German orders (they were "used" for help), which at the same time does not exclude their spontaneous and unforced activity ("skillful assistance").[27] In

25 Czubala, *O tym nie wolno mówić…*, 109, 121.

26 It is worth mentioning that the excerpt of the cited account in the edition of Krystyna Kersten and Tomasz Szarota is shortened right in the middle of this sentence (due to the year of publication we can guess at the influence of censorship or self-censorship). Information about voluntary activity by bystanders in the countryside is thereby erased, and the story is kept in the mode of justification and limiting the participation of peasants in the Holocaust.

27 From testimony and materials from the August Trials, we know of events indicating the voluntary action of local Volunteer Fire Departments in capturing Jews. Tadeusz Markiel (an eyewitness) and Alina Skibińska tell the story of the shocking act of torturing and murdering local Jews in Gniewczyn, initiated by firefighters. See Markiel, Skibińska, *"Jakie*

portraying the specific actions of participants in the event, the speaker uses two verb forms: the impersonal, when she speaks of attacks of beating, torture and murdering Jews (e.g. "The tormented Jewish population was beaten, tortured, poured over with water, kicked," "Most were deported," "were slowly caught and shot in the local Jewish cemetery") and personal, when she is describing the plunder of Jewish possessions and the handing over of Jews. It seems that the involvement of bystanders is in this way differentiated and nuanced: that of the fire department taking part in direct violent attacks infringing the boundaries of life, that of peasant looters violating dignity, and also that of those who wished to remain in a neutral position (who refused to help and did not loot). Behind stripping Jews of their gold and clothes, raping Jewish women and handing them over to Germans, there is permission for those captured to suffer and a belief in their inevitable deaths, ultimately dealt to them by another subject hidden behind the impersonal forms. In a narrative like this one, responsibility for ending Jews' lives is muddied, perpetration remains unspoken and unnamed.

Peasant Memory of the Holocaust – Features

Based on analysis of peasant narratives we can formulate several primary conclusions typical of peasant memory of the Holocaust. Firstly, it is a memory of the initiated, mainly exchanged in private or among neighbors and family. The only people who have access to it are those who share the secret (i.e. have available specific knowledge of the event that took place in their neighborhood, or have preserved in their memory a recollection of what they took part in), or those who make the effort to resurrect the pass and have been allowed into the secret of the past.[28] Secondly, memory of the Holocaust is not the collective and community memory of the countryside, but shared memory, for it does not influence the creation of group identity (in that it is not sustained in public discourse or for the sake of collective commemorative rituals). Nonetheless it

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to ma znaczenie, czy zrobili to z chciwości?" Zagłada domu Trynczerów ["What difference does it make if they did it out of greed?" The massacre of the Trynczer household] (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011).

28 Here it is worth mentioning the particular position of Dionizjusz Czubala, who started collecting stories about the Holocaust with the inhabitants of the village where he was born. Since he was playing more the role of a "one of ours" than an ethnographer, he found it easier to gain the trust of his interlocutors. Antoni Sułek writes similarly about this process when he comments on his research in his home region in the countryside, referring to himself as a "researcher-local": "In this area I'm 'one of ours' – I'm a person from there, but at the same time a professor of the University of Warsaw." See Antoni Sułek, "Badacz i świadek drugiej generacji. O ratowaniu lokalnej pamięci zagłady Żydów" [Researcher and witness of the second generation: on rescuing local memory of the Holocaust], *Więź* 4 (2017).

is a type of memory constellation for individual members of the village community, a collection of memories they share because these memories belong to events that took place in the neighborhood, and in which the villagers themselves were present as bystanders. Invoking Jeffrey K. Olick's two concepts of collective memory, we might say that memory of the Holocaust in the countryside situates itself in the order of "collected memory," not "collective memory."[29] Thirdly, this memory focuses around experiences of proximity to death, tightly linked with the rural topography. Accounts are dominated by recollections of macabre events: executions, mass murders, manhunts or uncovering hiding places. This local dimension of the Holocaust influences the spatial conditioning of memory and the placement of these recollections in the rural landscape.

Translated by Sean Gasper Bye

Abstract

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The Bystander Complex: The Holocaust in Relation to Peasant Witnesses

The article investigates experience of Polish peasants during the Holocaust in relation to two categories of "bystander" and of "witness." The author analyzes two collections of peasants' narratives: firstly – pieces submitted to the "Descriptions of my Village" contest, organized in the first half of 1948 by the Czytelnik Press Institute, and secondly – oral histories collected and recorded by Dionizjusz Czubala in his ethnographic research in the 1970s and 80s. It is emphasized that the specificity of peasant bystander experience is influenced by the local context of the Holocaust, taking place in close socio-topographic surroundings. The author focuses on peasants' various forms of involvement in the extermination process as well as on their memory of the Holocaust.

Keywords

peasant bystander, witness, Holocaust, village

29 See Maria Kobielska, "Pamięć zbiorowa w centrum nowoczesności. Ujęcie Jeffreya K. Olicka" [Collective Memory in the Center of Modernity: Jeffrey K. Olick's Concept], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2010): 181. See Joanna Wawrzyniak, "Pamięć zbiorowa" [Collective memory], in *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska and Robert Traba, coll. Joanna Kalicka (Warszawa: Scholar, 2014), 346–350.

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The Crisis of the Modern City: Counterculture in Wrocław

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Counterculture impulses, practices, and influences not only shaped the cultural identity of Wrocław at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, but also had an effect on the topography of how it was imagined as an open city, joined by an unusual network, a playing field with changing rules. In no other Polish city did counterculture inspirations weave such a tight fabric of innovative and interconnected institutions, projects, and ideas. Wrocław's location played a part here – it was isolated from the national narratives and located in the sphere of transnational influence, with a potential to challenge prevailing views. This sudden, abrupt, and ephemeral bloom occurred in a city whose history is perhaps postwar Europe's most remarkable social laboratory.

As Ewa Rewers contests, the urban space "stimulates our cognitive activity, opens prospects of new streets leading in unfamiliar directions."[1] The city creates a condensed space, in which multitudes of social, ideological,

1 Ewa Rewers, "Gdańsk jako narracja: nawarstwianie czy modyfikacja" [Gdańsk as a narrative: Layering or modification], *Ars Educandi* 2 (2000): 109. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are translated by the author of this article.

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and cultural conflicts are expressed, recorded, and resolved. The history of postwar Wrocław is an example of a fierce intensification of these kinds of cognitive processes to overcome the experience of disorientation: being and moving about in a city whose topographical logic was thoroughly disrupted by the ravages of the war, and where social memory found itself in a place of emptiness and ignorance. This city, whose wartime destruction was comparable to Warsaw's, whose population was entirely swapped over the course of two postwar years, and which turned from a German city to a Polish one at lightning speed, had a political status which, owing to the resolutions of the Potsdam Agreement, remained uncertain for decades to come,[2] preventing its new inhabitants from feeling entirely secure. This city, whose support for the Nazi Party was greater than in other German cities, was to become a world center of leftist politics. In this city, the network of connections, in both a literal and figurative sense, was utterly broken, and had to be reorganized, produced once more, in all due haste. Small wonder, then, that the reconstruction of the transportation network, readily mentioned in written reports and in oral family stories, was of special significance in the city's postwar history.[3] The launch of bus and tram lines was always a big social event – they were obstructed by the rubble littering the streets and the destruction to the transport infrastructure, as well as the lack of staff with knowledge of the transit layout. In the reports of the first inhabitants, there are also tales of letters that took weeks on end to find their way from the post office to their recipients, or of wandering through debris and labyrinths of alien streets in a lengthy effort to get home.

After the war, Wrocław was seen as a city that was foreign, hostile, inhospitable, and inflexible; its topography was indecipherable, and its buildings did not generate the popular enthusiasm of Warsaw's. Bricks were carried from here to Warsaw and Gdańsk, and the city was plundered and destroyed for many months after the war. We could continue to list the factors that made Wrocław a social laboratory with special conditions and parameters: bearing in mind, for instance, that its postwar population came here from very different parts of Poland, often culturally foreign to one another. It is little more than a myth that the city was mainly settled by exiles from the eastern parts of the country which were absorbed by the Soviet Union after the war (known as the "Recovered Territories," they were meant to serve as compensation for the lost lands in the east).

2 The course of Poland's western border, according to the Potsdam Agreement, was meant to be established during a future peace conference, which never came about.

3 B. Jankowski, "Śladami wrocławskich tramwajów i autobusów" [In the tracks of Wrocław trams and buses], *Kalendarz Wrocławski* (1971), 133–38.

The degree of destruction here, the total break in the continuity of its pre-1945 history, and the complete exchange of the population inspired and encouraged utopian dreams, projects for a new, model socialist city. These projects were created in response to the numerous competitions, most of which never came to fruition, and some only in part.[4] The reasons for this were meant to be the high investment costs, the city's uncertain status, and the poorly integrated social resources. Wrocław was the largest city that Poland acquired with the postwar border shift; in 1944 it numbered nearly a million inhabitants, but in the first years after the war it was more a complex of isolated semi-rural settlements than an integrated urban fabric. Many of its new residents were closer to a rural life than an urban one.

The clash between the utopian, propagandist reconstruction plans and the chaotic process of restoring Wrocław's urban life largely set the pace of the city's cultural development. As Padraic Kenney phrased it, "Wrocław grew without an organizing force. [...] The reach of the state and the parties was severely limited by the extensive damage to Wrocław's infrastructure by the war, the chaotic influx of people into Wrocław, and the city's distance from Warsaw."[5] Thus, Wrocław became an arena for a spectacular crisis of the modernist concepts of city-building and a stage for somewhat uncontrolled, improvised actions, which began increasingly to affect its identity. This state of crisis and failure was fittingly captured during a discussion held by artists invited to the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium, which made the city a "gigantic playing field"[6] and was planned as an attempt to mark out new points of reference in the city's topography. Antoni Dzieduszycki, a Wrocław critic with ties to the local avant-garde society, described the situation as follows: "We have to admit that, for the time being, Wrocław has practically no spatial or urbanistic structure. The old one has been destroyed, and no new one has been created, it is shattered and broken to pieces. [...] Wrocław looks awful with these chunks bitten out of it, with these places where nothing is happening, where the space is a mess."[7] As we can see, a sense of temporality,

4 The history of these competitions is described by Agata Gabiś in *Całe morze budowania. Wrocławska architektura 1956–1970* [A whole sea of building: Wrocław's architecture 1956–1970] (Wrocław: Muzeum Architektury, 2018), 373–403.

5 Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Working and Communists 1945-1950* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 145.

6 Aleksander Wojciechowski, *Młode malarstwo polskie 1944-1974* [Young Polish Painting 1944–1974] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975), 137.

7 *Sympozjum Plastyczne Wrocław '70* [Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium], ed. Piotr Lisowski (Wrocław: 2020), 206.

instability, and disorientation haunted the city's inhabitants long after the war. And although Edward Stachura, on a visit in 1960, was delighted at the landscape of the city under reconstruction ("A sea of scaffolding. Or maybe less a sea than whole flotillas of scaffolding ships. This is construction. A sea of construction"),[8] two decades later, in 1978, Tadeusz Chrzanowski made this summary of the effort: "All these years after the war, this is a city that still needs rebuilding. It is a city of pits and scrub, notches and neglect, its planning on paper, and not in the space."[9]

Outlining her "introduction to the philosophy of the postmodern city," Rewers calls attention to a few characteristic phenomena. First, the postmodern city is primarily a fabric of events, not a stable architectural and social structure. Second, it is inhabited not by citizens, but by strangers arriving here from other cultural spheres. Third, the ontology of the city is determined, above all, by the sites of discontinuity: the transitions, bridges, the in-between spaces. It is the event, foreignness, and discontinuity – not permanence, familiarity, and continuity – that determined Wrocław's development after 1945. As such, we might take the first three decades of the city's postwar history as a series of initiatives, failures, and compensatory, reparative actions. Rewers makes the post-*polis* an intrinsic part of the city's philosophy: "the postindustrial cities of the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are increasingly breaking free from their root – the *polis* – and drifting in directions which many disciplines of study are at a loss to describe."[10] The postwar history of Wrocław is a warped, historico-materialist prefiguration of this phenomenon. The core of the city was destroyed in 1945, and the reconstruction processes drifted in many different directions. The specter of a non-existing Wrocław that haunted the everyday lives of its new inhabitants created a virtual space which, according to Rewers, typifies the postmodern post-*polis*.

The aforementioned Wrocław Symposium '70 was a hybrid undertaking, joining modernist intentions with postmodern impulses. The initiative was taken up by various local communities on the "25th anniversary of the return of the Western and Northern Territories to the Motherland" – and although it gained the support and patronage of the city government, it was not managed

8 Edward Stachura, *Moje wielkie świętowanie* [My big celebration] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2007), 40–43.

9 Tadeusz Chrzanowski, "Stary Wrocław – książki i rzeczywistość" [Old Wrocław – Books and Reality], *Odra* 3 (1978): 16.

10 Ewa Rewers, *Post-polis. Wstęp do filozofii ponowoczesnego miasta* [Post-polis: Introduction to the philosophy of the postmodern city] (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), 5.

from above, with the key theoretical premises being formulated by representatives of the radical Wrocław avant-garde. Thirty-nine artists from around Poland were initially invited, and later the list was expanded. The first point of the regulations stated the chief mandate:

> The aim of the Symposium is an attempt to contrast various contemporary ways of thinking in the visual arts, effectively leading to the creation of outstanding works of art in the city fabric. The organizers anticipate that the proposed solutions will create a new spatial-urbanistic structure for the city.[11]

It is not hard to see that this idea was, to a large degree, a response to the crisis of the modernist projects to reconstruct Wrocław. The artists were brought to the city to find locations for their future works. The impressions they took from this journey were generally dismal; everyone pointed out the empty squares left behind from the demolished houses, the sudden gaps in the lines of buildings, the jumble of different urbanistic structures. These negative emotions, I believe, were meant to drive creativity, but the artists felt at once that their task was beyond them: "The city is thoroughly destroyed and to salvage it, to truly begin to speak of a city, this would be a long and expensive undertaking."[12] The mission to "salvage" the city, or, as Wiesław Borowski put it, "to cover up certain shortcomings,"[13] met with resistance, and the concept that new works would serve as new markers and create a coherent structure to organize the city space where this structure had been destroyed seemed quite unrealistic, even utopian. The Symposium idea did not come out of nowhere, however; it arose from a certain praxis visible to one and all. It was not by chance that Antoni Dzieduszycki mentioned Jerzy Grotowski and his theatre in Wrocław during one Symposium discussion as a presence creating the city's new identity, connecting Wrocław with world culture and the main movements of counterculture theatre.

At a certain point, culture and art began serving to make quick bonds and links in postwar Wrocław, or, as Anna Markowska suggests, a network of ephemeral performances, "physical experiences and somatic rituals,"[14] as a response to historical trauma. An openness to counterculture movements in the mid-1960s gave new life to these processes, recalling Wrocław's "western"

11 *Sympozjum plastyczne Wrocław '70*, 18.

12 Ibid., 197.

13 Ibid., 199.

14 Anna Markowska, *Sztuka podręczna Wrocławia. Od rzeczy do wydarzenia* [Handy art of Wrocław: From objects to events] (Wrocław: Uniwersytet Wrocławski, 2018), 277.

location and modern profile. Here we might well recall Michel de Certeau's distinction between "the concept of the city" and "urban practices."[15] In the history of postwar Wrocław, the tension between "designing" and "producing" a city through concrete cultural practices acquired special expression, dynamics, and dramatism. My focus will be this "drifting" process of producing a social space and complex planes of cultural mediation through art, not cataloguing the organizational and artistic achievements of Wrocław's arts community or describing its broad horizons.

The second half of the 1960s brought a radical reimagining of Wrocław's artistic image and potential, wherein counterculture movements began to gain the upper hand. "In the late 1960s, Wrocław was a seething cauldron of often conflicting concepts, views, and standpoints."[16] The local institutions (The Theatre Laboratory, Pantomime Theatre, Festival of Student Theatres, swiftly renamed the Festival of Open Theatre, PERMAFO Gallery, the Recent Art Gallery and many others) bound the city with an international art movement, creating parallel, often semi-official ties with Western counterculture and avant-garde. In 1970, Józef Kelera wrote of the "delayed beginning of Wrocław's theatres": "Around 1965 several events of historical importance coincided: put together, they caused the radical acceleration of the long-term, persistent, transitionally delayed, and slow revival. The results exceeded the wildest imaginings."[17] The year 1965 is not a time that is singled out as a watershed moment or a time of creative upheaval in any narrative of Polish culture. On the contrary: it is more the dreary decline of the Gomułka era, a period of the defeat of hopes and illusions that came with the political breakthrough of 1956.

It was in 1965 that Grotowski came to Wrocław. His two Wrocław premieres (*Książę Niezłomny* [The constant prince] and *Apocalypsis cum figuris*) might be seen as an initial culture shock that opened the city's arts scene to new and radical world art. Tadeusz Różewicz, who moved to Wrocław in 1968, wrote on *Apocalypsis* a year later in Wrocław's *Odra* magazine: "The howls of the birth agonies spread through the theatre (or maybe operating) room."[18]

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15 Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London–New York: 1993), 156–63.

16 Jerzy Ludwiński, "Strefa wolna od konwencji" [Convention free zone], in *Epoka błękitu* (Kraków: Otwarta Pracownia, 2009), 216.

17 Józef Kelera, "Teatry wrocławskie" [Wrocław theatres], in *Panorama kultury współczesnego Wrocławia*, ed. Bogdan Zakrzewski (Wrocław: Ossolińskich, 1970), 353.

18 Tadeusz Różewicz, "'Apocalypsis cum figuris' (W laboratorium Jerzego Grotowskiego)" ["Apocalypsis cum figuris" (in Jerzy Grotowski's laboratory)], *Odra* 7–8 (1969): 107.

The same magazine soon published a poem by Rafał Wojaczek titled "Apocalypsis cum figuris," whose connection to Grotowski's play was rather unclear, apart from its transgressive images of violence.[19] Zbigniew Kubikowski, soon to be editor-in-chief of *Odra*, talked the poet into giving the piece this title. We ought also to mention that, like Grotowski, Wojaczek appeared in Wrocław in 1965; we know that he saw the play and befriended the actors, and their late-night Wrocław escapades often crossed paths.

The rhythms and periods of the postwar transformations of Polish culture fail us when we speak of Wrocław's first decades after the war. For the first two decades, the arts community did not participate in the key breakthroughs in Polish art, connected to such political events as the thaw of 1955–56. On the other hand, in the following decade it provided a significant alternative to the other centers when it came to the very notion of a national culture. Wrocław's culture stood up to narratives that held onto a national perspective. The first postwar decades saw an intensive propaganda campaign to make Wrocław a Polish city. Street names were changed, signs linking Wrocław with German history too prominently were removed, monuments were torn down, and the Piast Dynasty history of Lower Silesia was foregrounded; the Gothic monuments were reconstructed, and permission was given to demolish the nineteenth-century buildings that were built when the city flourished under Prussian rule. The counterculture tropes, on the other hand, point to entirely different identification processes, ones that were unplanned and had their own diffuse and capricious dramaturgy. Without appreciating the city's historical catastrophe in 1945, it is difficult to understand its cultural blossoming two decades later, extraordinary in its character and profile, with a feel so unlike other centers of culture in Poland. The degree of the city's destruction in 1945 and the total resettlement of its inhabitants made Wrocław a "free-spirited city,"[20] a space open to various possibilities, unconstrained by tradition or fixed social identities. Writing on the activities of Wrocław's avant-garde Sztuka Najnowsza Gallery in the 1970s, Anna Markowska points out that these young artists' lack of local art traditions was a strength, not a weakness; they stressed the distinctiveness of the city, comparing it to New York, where "various views, traditions, and cultures blended together."[21] We might say, with a nod to Pierre Bourdieu's

19 Rafał Wojaczek, "Apocalypsis cum figuris," *Odra* 10 (1970): 26.

20 Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*.

21 Anna Markowska, "Trzeba przetrzeć tę szybę. Powikłane dzieje wrocławskiej Galerii Sztuki Najnowszej (1975-1980) w Akademickim Centrum Kultury Pałacyk" [This glass must be wiped clean: The complicated history of the recent art gallery (1975–1980) at the Pałacyk

concept of the field of cultural production,[22] that here we have a weak field with an erased past and a shattered social structure, with fragile and contradictory habits of various social groups and strong artistic practices permeating the fabric of the city. The weakness of the field and fragility of the habits facilitated a surge in new practices.

According to research, in Wrocław's population in the 1940s a mere 18% came from large cities.[23] This means that the culture of inhabiting a large and modern city had to be produced out of nothing. In 1965, the city was largely inhabited by those born after 1945, however, and a higher-than-average natural growth rate was noted. This demographic structure and dynamic favored the absorption of countercultural impulses. The counterculture was chiefly based on the revolt of a young generation, who sought to break with the social modes of behavior that were passed down. The young people growing up in postwar Wrocław, with its weak and damaged identity, wanted to break free from their parents' generation, from their nostalgia and ressentiments, and often from the models of rural life the postwar settlers took with them. This phenomenon was captured by director Stanisław Lenartowicz in the film *Spotkajmy się w niedzielę* [Let's Meet on Sunday, 1959],[24] one of few whose action takes place in Wrocław, and where Wrocław appears as Wrocław, and does not merely provide a backdrop, as it does for war films meant to be set in Warsaw.

Wrocław became an exceptionally fertile scene for counterculture movements to express themselves. We can trace their presence on the microscale of the city, show points of openness and resistance, a network of links with local history, and also explore counterculture not in terms of isolated phenomena and movements, but in its concrete social situations, its ties with various institutions and social environments, grasping its hybrid, misshapen, "weaker" forms carried outside its "natural environment," and also track the intersecting paths of counterculture nomads.

Although the concept of counterculture has been variously defined and has often been critiqued as too wide, embracing too many and often contradictory

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Academic Cultural Center], in *Galeria Sztuki Najnowszej*, ed. Anna Markowska (Wrocław: Muzeum Współczesne Wrocław, 2014), 88.

22 Cf. Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London–New York: Routledge, 2014), 40–64.

23 Irena Turnau, *Studia nad strukturą ludnościową polskiego Wrocławia* [Studies on the population structure of Polish Wrocław] (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1960), 74.

24 In one thread of Lenartowicz's film, we observe an intergenerational conflict in a family occupying a villa left by a wealthy German owner after the war. The daughter, who works in the cinema and lives by the rhythm of the reawakening city, forces her mother to get rid of the cow she is keeping in the garden.

phenomena, I would like to restore its use by rejecting overly rigid definitions and shifting my remarks from ideology to praxis. I am treating counterculture as a process that took shape in the 1960s, creating radically new forms of social communication (often based on identifying with a generation), practicing alternative interpersonal relations (as a protest against the lifestyles prevalent in a given society), and forming networks of interaction that engender utopian impulses. From this approach, a counterculture is not a group of abstract ideas; it is produced through practice. I appreciate Baz Kershaw's concept of counterculture with regard to British alternative theatre, stating that we ought to speak rather of countercultures in the plural, not in the singular. He focused less on ideology than on institutional practices interfering with spheres of hegemony, drawing from Theodor Roszak, who defined counterculture as a form of participatory democracy with a clearly localized scope: "On this principle the movement formed itself into a multiple series of 'communities', able to operate independently, but also overlapping to form a network of more or less loose associations whose boundaries are defined in broadly similar ideological terms."[25] The notions of the network and overlap are of key significance here.

We may of course ask if it is appropriate to speak of a "participatory democracy" in a communist context. It does seem that many informal art initiatives of an institutional nature attempted to enact this model, creating open alliances and places to exchange ideas. Formulating the concept of the Center for Artistic Research in 1971, Jerzy Ludwiński wrote:

> The structure of the center should be as unlike formalized and hierarchical institutions as possible. It should be a flexible organism, replicating the constant changeability of the arts. The center will be an institution conceived not as a building with a complex of venues and a constantly expanding personnel, but as a process taking place in various environments.[26]

During this same time, Jerzy Grotowski suggested abandoning the idea of theatre as a disciplined and hierarchical structure in favor of an active culture, collapsing the division between artists and viewers, in favor of ephemeral utopian communities venting anxieties and shame in shared contacts with others. The body of theoretical works by Jerzy Ludwiński and Jerzy Grotowski from the turn of the 1960s and 1970s was perhaps the most

25 Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London–New York: Routledge, 1992), 39.

26 Jerzy Ludwiński, "Centrum Badań Artystycznych," in *Epoka błękitu*, 174.

radical postwar effort to change the paradigms of Polish culture, proposing new and revolutionary institutional solutions based on participation and ideas of post-art,[27] breaking down boundaries, tying art with everyday social life. Their utopian projects did not exist strictly on paper. Both Grotowski and Ludwiński tried to carry them out in practice, creating conducive environments, using existing institutions, and joining them in new constellations. The political nature of these activities did not have much in common with the mandates of the anti-communist political opposition created at the time. Much has already been written about the differing natures of the 1968 protests in the capitalist West and in the Eastern Bloc countries.[28] Western counterculture activists often accused the oppositionists behind the Iron Curtain of ideological and political conservatism. Anti-communist rebels, in turn, accused their Western peers of political naivety. The model of countercultural activities I am describing, on a micro and not a macro scale, represented another model of politics. These were politics more in the sense of Foucault than Marx or Mao: scattered and subversive operations, avoiding confrontation, yet non-conformist, radical, anti-bourgeois, physical, sensual, sexual, conceptual, transgressive, feminist, queer, irreverent.

The project that determined the integration of Wrocław's arts communities was the Open Theatre Festival, initiated in 1967, hosting many counterculture groups from around the world, including such legends as Bread and Puppet and the Performance Group, a South American political-artistic collective fighting their countries' military regimes, and the now-legendary Japanese avant-garde ensemble Tenjo Saiki, whose performances produced wild responses in shocked audiences. These groups' performances often provided a clear window onto political protests in the West, as with the Danish Den Danske Studenterscene collective:

> Three girls and three boys play out and comment on the student riots in Denmark, Holland, and France. They use extracts from newspaper articles and reportage. The screen has slides showing demonstrators, barricades, street fighting, wounded victims. The actors recreate parts of events, conversations with university professors, clashes with the police.[29]

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27 Cf. Jerzy Ludwiński, "Sztuka w epoce postartystycznej" [Art in the Postartistic Era], *Odra* 4 (1971); Jerzy Grotowski, "Święto" [Holiday], *Odra* 6 (1972).

28 A series of articles in *Slavic Review* 4 (77) (2019) was devoted to this issue.

29 M. Dzieduszycka, M. Budzyńska, "5 teatrów w kreacjach zbiorowych na 5-ciu festiwalach wrocławskich" [5 theatres in collective creations at 5 Wrocław festivals], in *Sztuka otwarta. Wspólnota, kreacja, teatr* (Wrocław: Kalambur, 1977), 57.

The medium of theatre became an effective tool for transmitting counterculture practices, political stances, behavior, fashions, and sexuality. The performers' physical freedom made a powerful impression, and journalists often wrote about shock and surprise, scrupulously noting the boldness and the nudity of the performers, especially the men. The plays were not translated: they often worked by their energy, vibrations, and rhythms alone. As Rebecca Schneider would have put it, the communication was "body to body."[30] Bogusław Litwiniec, the creator and director of the festival, got nearly the whole city involved in its organization: students, factory workers, bureaucrats, city transportation, and Wrocław artists. He always arranged the festival dates with Grotowski, as his talks and presentations of the Laboratory plays were a staple of the program. The visits from such diverse and numerous foreign guests mobilized the local hippies[31] and the highly emancipated Wrocław gay community. Plays were held in theatre, non-theatre halls, and in the open air. The festival and its guests were highly visible, they often stood out with their clothing and behavior. Charles Marowitz gave his in-depth *New York Times* report on the third edition of the festival in 1971 the heading: "From All Over the World They Came to Poland."[32]

The attempt to define the place of Wrocław in the counterculture history of art demands that we introduce decolonial apparatus. This perspective lets us go beyond the traditional distinctions between center and periphery. Restoring local knowledge and memory, it undermines the very concept of localness, if it is subject to colonial processes of evaluation and hierarchization. In the traditional narrative, Wrocław had to be treated as a peripheral place, compared to the American centers, for instance. Yet the very presence of Jerzy Grotowski and his ensemble in Wrocław compels us to see and tell this story differently. Grotowski's theatre exerted a well-documented influence on the world's counterculture theatre. The Laboratory Theatre's visits to New York not only generated hype; they had a real impact on the trajectory of the progressive art of the day:

> Grotowski and his leading actor of that epoch, Ryszard Cieślak, gave their first workshop in New York in November 1967, an event that had an enormous influence on the emerging experimental theatre. [...] Americans understood Grotowski's technique as a means of discovery that could be used in the service of truth

30 Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 6 (2001).

31 Cf. Kamil Sipowicz, *Hippisi w PRL-u* [Hippies in the People's Republic of Poland] (Warszawa: Cyklady, 2015), 453.

32 Charles Marowitz, "Only the Playwright Was Absent," *New York Times*, November 21, 1971.

about history, society, government, the law, and the self as a social and political agent.[33]

The presence of Grotowski's ensemble was a powerful magnet, drawing an international arts community to Wrocław (as well as groups invited to the Open Theatre Festival). Study of Wrocław's counterculture from a decolonial perspective allows us to take into account local knowledge about the experiments of the avant-garde and counterculture art without verifying it through reference to narratives considered dominant and normative, which seek to correct the local narratives. When it came to Wrocław, which could have been regarded a liminal phenomenon in a political, geographical, and cultural sense, such concepts as "center" and "periphery" lose much of their operative nature. The decolonial gaze lets us move beyond the necessity of subordinating local traditions and histories to stabilized narratives about the world counterculture. We ought also to note that this type of non-hierarchical gaze is close to the ideological premises of the counterculture itself.

This city is also special in that it stood as a scene of contact between the capitalist West and the communist East, or, less dualistically, between young artists from various parts of the world. It is especially important to explore the relationships between counterculture ideologies and their practical situation within the communist state, and also between the political protests of Polish students in 1968 (in which Wrocław took part) and the political resources of the Western counterculture. These relationships are fraught with many contradictions – in Wrocław, they seem to be of special importance. Thus, here the decolonial perspective allows us to move beyond the ideological contradictions between "Western" and "Eastern" countercultural phenomena. Using the distinction made by decolonial scholars between colonialism and coloniality, Madina Tlostanova demonstrates that it is the matrix of coloniality that allows us to suspend the ideological oppositions that divided the world into two hostile camps during the Cold War.[34] To her mind, there is much common ground between postcolonial, postcommunist, and postimperial discourses – and interestingly enough, the similarities are easier to grasp in works of art than in academic discourses.

We will hazard the hypothesis that countercultural actions took the place of an unrealized, though designed utopia of the modern socialist city, to make Wrocław a forum for meetings between the leftist communities of the West

33 Carol Martin, *Theatre of the Real* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 30.

34 Madina Tlostanova, "Postsocialist = Postcolonial? On Post-Soviet Imaginary and Global Coloniality," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48 (2) (2012): 130–42.

and the communist East; it suffices to recall the founding events for the city's new identity, such as the Exhibition of the Recovered Territories and the Congress of Intellectuals in 1948. These were swiftly blocked by the state authorities, revived two decades later in a swath of countercultural activities. Countercultural Wrocław significantly expands our knowledge about the history and crisis of Polish modernity.

Translated by Soren Gauger

Abstract

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The Crisis of the Modern City: Counterculture in Wrocław

The text analyzes the relationship between the crisis of modernity and the counterculture movement, using the example of the history of post-war Wrocław. The city has become a scene of counterculture movements, unique in its dynamics. Their presence can be traced in the microscale of the city, in the system of connections with local history. The decolonial view allows us to go beyond the need to subordinate local traditions and histories to the already established narratives about the global counterculture. The medium of theatre in particular has become an effective tool for transmitting countercultural practices, political attitudes, behaviors, fashion and sexuality.

Keywords

counterculture, modernity, urban studies, Wrocław

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Infrastructures of Holocaust Mass Graves: Work-in-Progress in Tylawa

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In summer 2021, I was hiking in the Low Beskids, a mountain chain in the Polish part of the Western Carpathians. In the village of Tylawa, I noticed a road sign saying, "Jewish grave 500 m." I turned into a sandy road and soon saw another road sign: "Jewish grave 100 m." It pointed to a path leading to a monument that indicated a mass grave with a plaque in the center informing about over 500 Jews from the towns of Dukla and Rymanów whom the Germans had murdered there on August 13, 1942 (Fig. 1). What might be considered a mere coincidence was certainly more than that: ever since the 2000s, Polish scholars, most prominently Ewa Domańska, Zuzanna Dziuban, Jacek Małczyński, and Roma Sendyka, have pointed our attention to the epistemic consequences of living in landscapes of violence, filled with human remains.[1] Knowing their works, I – at first rather intuitively

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1 Jacek Małczyński, "Drzewa 'żywe pomniki' w Muzeum – Miejscu Pamięci w Bełżcu" [Trees as "living monuments" in the Bełżec site of memory], *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2009); *Mapping the "Forensic Turn." Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond*, ed. Zuzanna Dziuban (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2017); Ewa Domańska, *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała* [Nekros. Introduction to the ontol-

Fig. 1. Monument in Tylawa, general view, April 2022, M. Saryusz-Wolska.

– recognized the importance of the place, which made an immediate impression on me. Since then, I have visited Tylawa six times, analyzed archival sources, and conducted interviews.

Tylawa is just one of many places like it in Poland. At the time of writing (April 2023), I have examined 12 other monuments of Jewish mass graves in the Low Beskids, and there are still hundreds (it is hard to estimate how many hundreds) more mass graves to study across Poland. The 12 mass graves, which I have been working on in the last months, are the burial sites of at least 5,000 people.[2] Despite the desideratum to study mass graves from the Holocaust in Poland, this essay is only about my initial encounter with the topic,

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ogy of dead bodies], (Warszawa: PWN, 2017); *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2) (2020), special issue "The Environmental History of the Holocaust," ed. Jacek Małczyński, Ewa Domańska, Mikołaj Smykowski and Agnieszka Kłos; *Nie-miejsca pamięci* [Non-sites of memory], vol. 1 and 2, ed. Roma Sendyka, Maria Kobielska, Jakub Muchowski and Aleksandra Szczepan (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2020); Roma Sendyka, *Poza obozem. Nie-miejsca pamięci – próba rozpoznania* [Beyond the camp. Non-sites of memory. Diagnosis] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2021).

2 Apart from Tylawa, among the places under my scrutiny are mass graves in Biała Niżna, Bobowa, Brzozów, Grybów, Hałbów, Jasienica Rosielna, Jasło, Kołaczyce, Przeczyca, Rzepiennik, Stróżówka, and Warzyce.

which happened to be in Tylawa. At the same time, it is evidence of an ongoing work-in-progress rather than an evidence-based journal article. The research is part of a larger project about "infrastructures of memory." Within this approach, mass graves can be considered multilayered funeral infrastructures.

Inspired by Jacek Leociak's concept of the "post-ghetto-site," Sendyka advocates for the notion of "post-camp-site," while scrutinizing the nature and matter left from KL Plaszow in Krakow. In a broader sense, she means "places that are marked by a traumatic past,"[3] which also applies to places such as Tylawa – they can be referred to as "post-killing-sites." In Poland, small and mid-sized "post-killing-sites" remain poorly visible, especially against the backdrop of many research projects devoted to post-camp-sites and post-ghetto-sites and of some work done on non-sites of memory (i.e. sites not/hardly commemorated).[4] Unlike the latter, the post-killing-sites I am investigating a r e marked in space by means of monuments or memorial plaques. Their rather simple and unspectacular aesthetics may be among the reasons for overlooking them in memory studies. Only the (not so recent) "turns" towards the matter, forensics, environment, and climate resulted in the rediscovery of killing-sites. At the same time, however, the mere existence of a monument or plaque does not mean that anyone really commemorates the pertinent events.[5]

Who Remembers What and How (and Where)?

Following Reinhart Koselleck's idea that memory scholars should answer three questions – Who remembers? What is remembered? How is it remembered?[6] – I soon realized that in Tylawa I had no good answers for any

3 Roma Sendyka, "uGruntowana pamięć" [Grounded memory], *Krzysztofory* 38 (2020): 271; Roma Sendyka, Andrzej Stępnik, Bogusław Szmygin, Robert Traba and Anna Ziębińska-Witek, "Debata wprowadzająca: Czym jest miejsce po obozie? Znaczenia, funkcje, konteksty" [Introductory debate: What is a post-camp-site? Meanings, functions, contexts], in *Historia w przestrzeniach pamięci. Obozy – "miejsca po" – muzea* [History in spaces of memory. Camps – "post-sites" – museums], ed. Tomasz Kranz (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2021).

4 Sendyka, *Poza obozem*, Chapter 1 ("Zrozumieć nie-miejsce pamięci").

5 In the context of southeastern Poland, see Sławomir Kapralski, "(Nie)obecność Żydów w krajobrazach pamięci południowo-wschodniej Polski" [The absence of Jews in the mnemonic landscapes of southeastern Poland], *Sensus Historiae* 9 (4) (2012); Jacek Nowak, Sławomir Kapralski and Dariusz Niedźwiecki, *On the Banality of Forgetting: Tracing the Memory of Jewish Culture in Poland* (Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang, 2018).

6 Reinhart Koselleck, "Formen und Traditionen des negativen Gedächtnisses" [Forms and traditions of negative memory], in *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit*

of them. Later, I concluded that a fourth question should be added: where is it remembered? Ever since the publication of Tim Cole's book *Holocaust Landscapes*, we know that the Holocaust was not just a historical but also a spatial event.[7] The same applies to the memory of the Holocaust. It makes a difference whether a mass killing is commemorated in the forest, where it actually took place, or in another place – for example on the road to the forest, which is the case of the monument in Brzozów, 45 km northeast of Tylawa.

The answer to the question "What is remembered?" in Tylawa proved challenging, although the inscription on the plaque provides the basic information: on August 13, 1942, the Nazi Germans killed over 500 Jews from Dukla and Rymanów. However, as in the case of many other mass shootings, the specific circumstances of this murder remain unclear. August 1942 was the peak time of Operation Reinhardt, whose objective was to murder all Polish Jews. Whilst most of the Jews from the Low Beskids were deported to Bełżec, some others were shot on the spot. In her book on the Holocaust in the Krakow district, Elżbieta Rączy mentions the massacre in Tylawa: "On August 13, the Germans resettled the Jews from Dukla. After the selection, 100–400 people were taken to the Błudna [name of a local hill – author's note] forest, nearby Tylawa, and shot there; over 200 people were designated for two work camps. Others, i.e. about 1,600 people, were deported to Bełżec."[8] Given the fact that Rączy's monograph covers the whole Krakow district, where dozens or even hundreds of similar events took place, it is understandable that she devotes only three sentences to this particular massacre. Other overview publications, among them a book by Dariusz Libionka, do not describe particular mass shootings at all. Writing about Operation Reinhardt, Libionka states: "The scenario of all deportations was the same everywhere: the brutal concentration, selection and finally deportation to Bełżec or to a forced labour camp. […] The final deportation took place after a couple of weeks, sometimes a couple of months. The Jews were murdered on the spot or deported. […] Auxiliary work was delegated to firefighters and the *Baudienst*. Their role was especially significant in smaller towns."[9] What is certainly true from the macro-perspective, as adopted by Rączy and Libionka,

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Holocaust und Völkermord [Remembering crimes. Coming to terms with the Holocaust and Genocide], ed. Volkhard Knigge and Norbert Frei (München: Beck, 2002). I am grateful to Katrin Still for reminding me of this seminal text some years ago.

7 Tim Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

8 Elżbieta Rączy, *Zagłada żydów w dystrykcie krakowskim w latach 1939–1945* [The Holocaust in the Krakow District from 1939 to 1945] (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo IPN, 2014), 273.

9 Dariusz Libionka, *Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie* [The Holocaust in the General Government] (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2017), 161.

raises many questions when analyzed micro-historically, at the level of one particular place.

Even more challenging are the answers to the questions "How is it [the mass shooting – M. S.] remembered?" and "Who remembers it?" In the governmental database listing places labelled as "war graves"[10] we read about Tylawa: "In the Błudna forest there is a mass grave of Jews, inhabitants of Dukla and Rymanów, murdered by the Nazis. A concrete frame surrounds the grave which is filled with soil. In the center, there is a large pedestal with a marble plaque […]. The inscription is written in two languages. The current form was made in 1984, during a general renovation."[11] Except for the last sentence (which, by the way, I could not confirm), the database offers only information that is visible on site anyway. There is even an error, as the plaque is made of granite, not of marble. Characteristic is the use of the passive voice and impersonal verbs: the grave i s f i l l e d (Pol.: *wypełnione*) with soil; the inscription i s w r i t t e n (*wyryto*); the form w a s m a d e (*wykonano*) in 1984. We receive no information about the people who f i l l e d the grave with soil, who w r o t e the inscription, and who m a d e the form. Even more difficult to investigate is the monument's later history. I am still in the process of finding out who (how and why) renovated it and who (how and why) took care of it.

Excursus: Infrastructure Studies

In their groundbreaking essay "How to infrastructure," Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker suggest that "infrastructures" are more than just pipes, cables, or transmitters, that is structures "beneath" (Lat.: *Infra*) other systems.[12] They are practices (hence their use of the word "infrastructure" as a verb) rather than objects. As with other concepts from Science and Technology Studies, such as "network"' or "black box," the role of the researcher is to disclose the hitherto invisible systems of actions. The encounter between individuals and infrastructures is mutual: individuals determine infrastructures, not least because they design them, but infrastructures also determine individual actions. Star and Karen Ruhleder therefore point to the following "dimensions" of infrastructures: they are a) transparent and usually b)

10 For southeastern Poland (Subcarpathian Voivodeship) see https://mpn.rzeszow.uw.gov.pl/.

11 War Graves Database, accessed May 3, 2023, https://mpn.rzeszow.uw.gov.pl/?resting_place=barwinek-mogila-zbiorowa-zydow-ofiar-terroru.

12 Susan L. Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker, "How to Infrastructure," in: *Handbook of New Media*, ed. Leah A. Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone (London: Sage, 2002). Many thanks to Gabriele Schabacher, Tom Ullrich, and Franziska Reichenbacher who taught me how to infrastructure.

become visible under breakdown; they are c) linked with "conventions of practice," and d) standardized; they e) reach beyond one-site practices and are therefore f) embedded in other infrastructures, social arrangements and technologies.[13]

Especially in German humanities, the notion of infrastructures is often discussed along with the concept of "cultural technique" (*Kulturtechnik*). The term itself is rooted in agriculture and appeared first in the late nineteenth century to mean "environmental engineering."[14] In the 1970s, "cultural technique" became one of the central notions of German media and culture studies. In the early 2000s, Thomas Macho added a temporal dimension to the debate: "Cultural techniques – such as writing, reading, painting, counting, making music – are always older than the concepts that are generated from them. People wrote long before they conceptualized writings or alphabets."[15] Recently, Bernhard Siegert expanded the concept by arguing that cultural techniques are practices that reach beyond media. "They concern cultural-archaeological processes describing culture in layers far below the discourses of pedagogy, the university, and techniques of reading and writing; [...] the concept of cultural techniques concerns the primary process of articulation as such."[16] Memory work therefore seems an elementary cultural technique. Following Macho, we can say that people had commemorated the past long before they conceptualized commemoration.

Similarly to theoreticians of cultural techniques, infrastructure scholars also focused at first on media technologies, before their concept developed towards a more general model. In their book *Sorting Things Out*, Bowker and Star think of infrastructures as means of organizing human activity.[17] For example, filling in the sections on ID cards becomes a practice of racial classification; the questions, which Bowker and Star raise in relation to apartheid, are

13 Susan L. Star and Karen Ruhleder, "Steps Toward an Ecology of Infrastructure: Design and Access for Large Information Space," *Information System Research* 7 (1) (1996): 113.

14 Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, "Cultural Techniques: Preliminary Remarks," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30(6) (2013): 5.

15 Thomas Macho, "Zeit und Zahl. Kalender- und Zeitrechnung als Kulturtechniken," in *Bild – Schrift – Zahl*, ed. Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp (München: Fink, 2003), 179; English wording quoted from Winthrop-Young, *Cultural*, 8.

16 Bernhard Siegert, "Attached: The Object and the Collective," in *Cultural Techniques. Assembling Spaces, Texts & Collectives*, ed. Jörg Dünne et al. (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

17 Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan L. Star, *Sorting Things Out. Classification and Its Consequences* (Boston: MIT Press, 2016).

equally relevant for Holocaust studies. Bowker therefore suggests adopting infrastructure studies for memory studies: "memory is a hyphenated phenomenon, a material-semiotic one," he says.[18] He invites us to "think about the phenomenology of forgetting/remembering both the material and the semiotic in the same moment" and explains: "this is where the hyphenation comes in." He further expresses his "standard regret in memory work that the natural world is left more or less untouched by the analysis – so that the material-semiotic analysis can too easily drift into phenomenology and avoid ontology."[19] Written in 2009, these words sound too harsh now, as numerous memory scholars have worked on the environmental aspects of forgetting/remembering ever since.[20] However, I argue that infrastructure studies, especially the approach which Bowker and Star call "infrastructural inversion," may still prove useful. "Infrastructural inversion" is a "struggle against the tendency of infrastructure to disappear (except when breaking down). It means learning to look closely at technologies and arrangements that, by design and by habit, tend to fade into the woodwork (sometimes literally!). Infrastructural inversion means recognizing the depths of interdependence of technical networks and standards, on the one hand, and the real work of politics and knowledge production on the other."[21]

What is the value of adapting infrastructural inversion for my research on post-killing-sites? The method directs attention towards the material circumstances in which the Holocaust and its remembrance took place. Infrastructural thinking requires looking at things in a microscale – in the case of Holocaust studies, radical zooming-in at objects helps us to understand "the processes underlying how it [the Holocaust – M. S.] unfolded."[22] Analyzing the memory of the mass shootings as a cultural technique includes questions of locating the monuments at particular places or transporting stone plaques. Who made the effort to carry these extremely heavy materials, and how? Following the premises of infrastructural inversion, I trace the "technologies and arrangements" of the mass shootings and their remembrance

18 Geoffrey C. Bowker, "Afterword (Memories Are Made of This)," *Memory Studies* 2 (1) (2009): 119. See also Geoffrey C. Bowker, *Memory Practices in the Sciences* (Boston: MIT Press, 2008).

19 Bowker, *Afterword*, 120.

20 See works listed in footnote 1, among others.

21 Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 34

22 Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttmann, "Introduction. Toward a Microhistory of the Holocaust," in *Microhistories of the Holocaust*, ed. Claire Zalca and Tal Bruttmann (New York–Oxford: Berghahn, 2017), 8.

backwards. Especially important in the context of my research are spatial arrangements.[23] I apply a reverse reading of the places from their present condition to their initial moment in 1942. In addition, this approach is inspired by Koselleck's idea of the "sediments of time."[24] I proceed top-down (starting with the youngest layer), instead of bottom-up (from the oldest layer onwards). As in any multilayered structure, the monument in Tylawa is one entity with its continuous history reaching from the mass shooting in 1942 until today. The division of my arguments below into "infrastructures of mass shooting" and "infrastructures of memory" is therefore only for analytical purposes. In fact, they build one network.

Infrastructures of Memory

In Tylawa, a path paved with concrete blocks leads from the sandy road to the monument, marked by a 25 x 5 meter rectangle surrounded by a concrete wall around 30 cm high. In the middle stands a trapezoidal prism of about 80 x 40 x 120 cm and covering a black granite plaque. For the visitor, the wall and prism demarcate the borders of the commemoration space. It is within this space that standardized cultural techniques of remembrance, such as placing stones (by Jewish visitors) or laying flowers (by Christian visitors), take place. In this context, the close relationship between "cultural technique" and "environmental engineering," that is taking control over the natural environment, becomes best visible – the spatial organization of the mass grave enables us to immediately

Fig. 2. Monument in Tylawa, side view with visible cracks, April 2022, M. Saryusz-Wolska.

23 Gabrielle Schabacher, "Mobilizing Transport: Media, Actor-worlds, and Infrastructures," *Transfers* 3 (1) (2013).

24 Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2018).

recognize the border (a key concept of infrastructure studies[25]) between the remembrance site and its surroundings. When I first visited Tylawa, the area was already tidy and mown; yet the plaster on the monument was partly off and the wall cracked (Fig. 2). Quite obviously, it was natural forces rather than humans that caused the damage. In accordance with the concept that the infrastructures become visible upon their breakdown, the mere existence of the cracks directed my attention to the surface on which they appeared – it was a specific type of concrete, called *lastryko* in Polish, often used under communism.

Fig. 3. Monument in Tylawa, plaque and inscription, April 2022, M. Saryusz-Wolska.

The inscription on the plaque says, in Polish and in Hebrew: "In the common grave rest over 500 Jews from Dukla and Rymanów who died a martyrs' death at the hands of German murderers on 13 August 1942. May their memory be a blessing." Below, it contains the information that the monument was founded by the Jewish Committee of Dukla, designed by J. Jędrusik from Dukla, and built by J. Piróg from Lipowica (Fig. 3). In comparison with other mass graves, the one in Tylawa is very informative. Although the inscription does not say when the monument was built, a close reading of the place suggests that it is an early post-war commemoration because the Jewish committees ceased to exist by the early 1950s. In addition, we see the remains of another inscription on the reverse side of the plaque (Fig. 4). Apparently, the monument was made of an old matzevah, hence under extreme shortages; otherwise, the founders would not have recycled the material from another grave. By no means was this an exception; I found recycled matzevot on the site of at least four other mass graves.

25 Susan L. Star, "This is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept," *Science, Technology & Human Values* 35 (5) (2010).

Fig. 4. Monument in Tylawa, reverse side of the plaque, April 2022, M. Saryusz-Wolska.

A quick internet search reveals that the local association Shtetl Dukla cares for the place. I therefore contacted the head of the organization, Jacek Koszczan, who, as it turned out, knew the history of the place only partially. In his narrative, the monument was erected soon after the war and has been maintained by his association since about 2010.[26] What had happened in between, he did not know. My first interview with Koszczan alone disclosed the embeddedness of memory work with other social arrangements: he used to be an immigration officer on the Polish-Slovakian border; after retirement, he started preserving the Jewish heritage of Dukla and himself sponsored many of these activities, such as mowing the grass at the Jewish cemetery. In 2016, the Law and Justice party government reduced to a minimum the pensions of former members of the "uniformed service" (army, police, border defense etc.) who had served in communist Poland. Koszczan (who, in the meantime, won a lawsuit against the government) was left without financial resources to sponsor his association's work. For the next years, inmates at the local prison mowed the grass as part of their resocialization work. In 2022, the municipality of Dukla granted a small amount of money to prepare the monument in Tylawa for the ceremony of the 80th anniversary of the massacre. As the grant proved insufficient, the local stonemason volunteered to do

26 Interview with Jacek Koszczan, April 20, 2022.

the work.[27] Interestingly enough, he is the grandson of a woman who hid the local rabbi during the war and was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations in 2014. This biographical detail once again reveals the embeddedness of mnemonic networks.

Thanks to the inscription on the plaque, the beginnings of the monument in Tylawa are much easier to trace than its later history. On November 9, 1948, seven men, survivors from Dukla, founded the Jewish Committee of Dukla,[28] hence the monument was probably erected after this meeting. Consequently, archival records state that the monument is from 1949.[29] Google Maps displays an undated but obviously old photograph of the monument[30]: the granite plaque is the same as today, but the prism is not yet covered with *lastryko*. The fenced area is smaller than today, and instead of the small wall there is barbed wire on wooden posts. The inhabitants of one of the neighboring villages claimed that the wall and the *lastryko* had been added in the 1960s.[31] Mushroom pickers whom I met in the forest told me that the monument had been enlarged no sooner than in the 1970s.[32] It is possible, however, that it was only in 1984, as the entry in the governmental database suggests.[33] A "professional" witness, who had given many interviews to journalists and researchers, claimed even that the change was from the late 1990s, when another, much smaller grave, was discovered in the close vicinity.[34] Regardless of the actual date, there is no doubt that the place was changed at least once, probably even twice, between its erection and the first activities of Shtetl Dukla.

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27 Interview with Koszczan, July 6, 2022.

28 Protokół zebrania organizacyjnego obywateli wyznania mojżeszowego pochodzących z miasta Dukli, celem utworzenia Komitetu żydowskiego w Dukli [Minutes of the meeting of Jewish citizens from Dukla in order to establish a Jewish Committee in Dukla], AP Sanok 60/1188/51.

29 ROPWiM inventory card [karta ewidencyjna], AAN 2/3955/0/1/188, k. 60; Cemetery Card [karta cmentarza], archives of the Office for the Preservation of Monuments in Krosno, no reference.

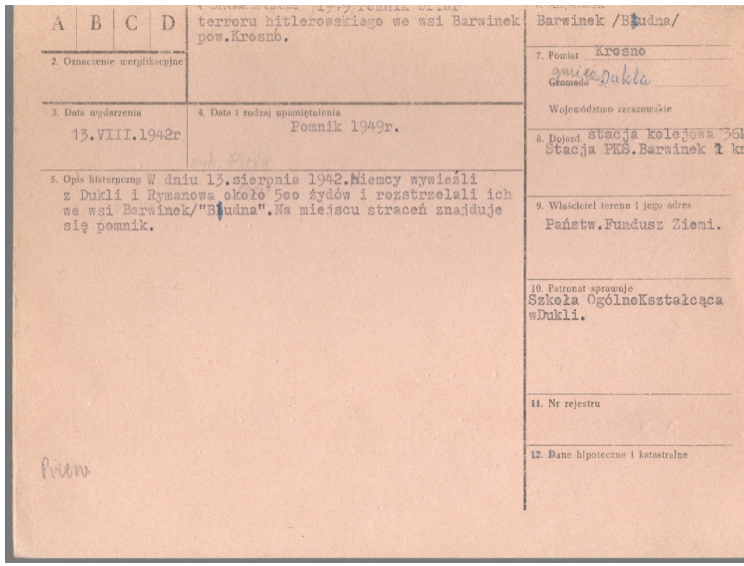
30 Photograph of the grave in Tylawa, Google Maps, accessed May 3, 2023, https://goo.gl/maps/Tuw7mss034JTFzU47.

31 Interview with Mr and Mrs G., October 15, 2022.

32 Author's research diary, entry from October 15, 2022.

33 War Graves Database, accessed May 5, 2023, https://mpn.rzeszow.uw.gov.pl/?s=Tylawa&resting_place_category=zbiorowa-mogila-wojenna&p=3435.

34 Interview with H., July 18, 2022, provided by Koszczan.


A | B | C | D

terroru hitlerowskiego we wsi Barwinek pow.Krosno.

Barwinek /Budna/

2. Oznaczenie weryfikacyjne

7. Powiat Krosno
Gromada gmina Dukla
Województwo rzeszowskie

3. Data wydarzenia
13.VIII.1942r

4. Data i rodzaj upamiętnienia
Pomnik 1949r.

8. Dojazd stacja kolejowa 36km
Stacja PKS. Barwinek 1 km

5. Opis historyczny W dniu 13.sierpnia 1942.Niemcy wywieźli z Dukli i Rymanowa około 500 żydów i rozstrzelali ich we wsi Barwinek/"Budna".Na miejscu straceń znajduje się pomnik.

9. Właściciel terenu i jego adres
Państw.Fundusz Ziemi.

10. Patronat sprawuje
Szkoła OgólnoKształcąca wDukli.

11. Nr rejestru

12. Dane hipoteczne i katastralne

Fig. 5. Cemetery Card [karta cmentarza], archives of the Office for the Preservation of Monuments in Krosno.

Two standardized records in the Office for the Preservation of Monuments mention the monument in Tylawa. The first is from 1963 (and includes an additional, handwritten annotation from 1979), and the second is from 1996. None of these documents refers to any renovations or changes, although this is because of their standardized form. They are cardboard sheets with 23 spaces in which the inspectors are asked to provide information about the commemorated event, the location of the inspected place, and its current condition; the inspector should also give suggestions for future work (Fig. 5). Thus, the infrastructural logic of monument preservation bears at least partial responsibility for the scarce data on the history of the monument. Using Bowker and Star's phrase, we can say that it has been "sorted out." Meticulous analysis of the records suggests only that the renovation in Tylawa must have taken place between 1979 and 1996. If documentation of this renovation exists at all, I am yet to find it.

Is the discussion of the possible renovations of the mass grave not just hairsplitting? According to infrastructure studies, it is not, because only detailed analysis reveals the entanglements between humans and physical matters. It is the materiality of the monument, rather than the interviews and the documents, which discloses that individuals and/or communities have taken care of the place over the last eight decades. Otherwise, plants would have overgrown it to an extent that the monument would not be visible today.

The inspectors from the Preservation Office filled in the forms very vaguely, sometimes just copying existing information, and took no accurate measurements, although they should have. Similarly abnegating was my interviewees' attitude to the post-war history of the place. They obviously lacked interest in it and referred to the alleged renovations only when I repeatedly asked about them. Apart from the issue with the renovation(s), several other questions require answers. The record from 1963 mentions that the school in Dukla was in charge of tidying up the monument (no evidence in the school chronicle could be found), whereas the record from 1996 mentions "an inhabitant of the village." Local people suggested H., whose older brother witnessed the massacre, but H. denied this.[35]

In light of these divergent sources and contradictive information, the mere materiality of the place proves enlightening. Cutting several trees (the stumps are still visible), transporting bricks for the wall and concrete for covering the monument with *lastryko*, and, finally, paving the path with 30 standardized concrete plates measuring 100 x 300 x 15 cm have been cost-intensive and visible actions in the small village of Tylawa. It is very telling that local people no longer know when (not even in which decade) these actions took place. The material structure of the monument also stands for cultural techniques of commemorating the dead. Despite the matzevah, on which Jewish visitors lay the stones, the place mirrors funeral infrastructures that are rather typical of Christian graves: with enough space for laying flowers. Also typical of Christian graves is the small concrete wall surrounding a rectangle filled with soil. Although there are no immediate Christian symbols on the grave, the spatial organization of the mass grave in Tylawa stands for Christian memory culture. The two, initially mentioned, road signs showing the way

Fig. 6. Road sign to the mass grave in Tylawa, July 2022, M. Saryusz-Wolska.

35 Interview with H.

to the grave strengthen this conclusion, as they depict the icon of a Christian grave (Fig. 6). This notwithstanding, I would not conclude on this basis that the monument in Tylawa is an example of Christianizing the Holocaust.[36] The people who do the memory work there are mostly Christian (but not necessarily Catholic) Poles and they commemorate the murdered Jews by means of rituals which are familiar to them. The road signs are in accordance with the Polish traffic act and represent the Polish state symbolic rather than a specific religious iconography. The structures visible in Tylawa prove, therefore, what we can see elsewhere in Poland, namely that Christian symbols largely dominate the once multi-religious country.

Infrastructures of Mass Shooting

I cannot properly read the current monument in Tylawa without detailed knowledge about the events from 1942. The logic of infrastructural inversion requires investigation of the technological and material settings of individual actions that contributed to the mass shooting. Was this particular place more suitable for a mass murder than others? How did the victims get there? Who dug the pit (and how)? Was it just one pit, as the form of the monument suggests today, or were there more of them? Was it/were they very deep? And if so, was it/were they reinforced to avoid sinking? How much ammunition did the perpetrators need? Who covered the bodies (and how)? How did the summer temperature affect the decomposition of the dead bodies? Who covered up the pit after the shooting (and how)? Additional questions arose in the course of the archival work, as documents from the Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes in Poland suggest that there was more than just one mass shooting in Tylawa.[37] If so, are the bodies buried in the same grave? Thinking in terms of infrastructures therefore means that instead of focusing on issues typical of Holocaust studies, such as relations between victims and bystanders/helpers and perpetrators, we should also consider

36 For the concept of Christianizing the Holocaust see publications by Elżbieta Janicka, "Pamięć nieprzywojona?" [Unabsorbed memory], *Kultura Współczesna* 63 (1) (2010); "'Corpus Christi, corpus delicti' – nowy kontrakt narracyjny. *Pokłosie* (2012) Władysława Pasikowskiego wobec kompromitacji kategorii polskiego świadka Zagłady," *Studia Litteraria Historica* 7 (2018).

37 Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce [Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes in Poland], *Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni popełnionych przez okupanta hitlerowskiego na ziemiach polskich w latach 1939–1945. Województwo krośnieńskie* [Register of sites and facts of Nazi crimes in Poland from 1939 to 1945. The Krosno voivodeship] (Warszawa, 1983), 145.

roads and means of transportation, weapons (not necessarily guns) and ammunition, pits and tools for digging them, soil and plants, season and temperature, and so on. A good example for the entanglement of infrastructures which are necessary to commit a mass murder is a letter from the mayor of Dukla to the Jewish Community (meaning probably the "Judenrat") from July 30, 1942. The mayor ordered the Jews to prepare six beds "in very good condition" with bed linen, six chairs, two wardrobes, and two basins for six German military policemen" that were about to come.[38] Apparently, the victims had to prepare the housing equipment for their murderers. Obviously, the issue of infrastructures does not replace other topics of Holocaust research. Just as in Domańska's model of "environmental history of mass graves," my idea of infrastructural history is conceptualized as complementary to the methods which we already have.[39]

The issue of choosing the place for the shooting is related to a more general one, namely transportation. Although much research has been done on this topic, it has usually focused on the railway infrastructure.[40] An important question still remains open, though: why did Germans in Dukla and other towns of the Krakow and Galicia District murder only some Jews in death camps and shoot others on the spot? When I asked other scholars about this, they usually pointed to the poor transportation infrastructure in the region. However, a comparison of the railway maps in the Krakow District of the General Government, which prior to 1918 had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with the railway maps of the Radom or Lublin District, which until 1918 had been part of the Russian Empire, proves that the railway infrastructure in the Krakow District was relatively well developed. And yet most of the Jews from the northern districts of the General Government were deported to the death camps, whereas in the southern districts (Krakow and Galicia District), mass shootings were much more common.

Consequently, I do not know why a few hundred Jews were taken from Dukla to the train station in Iwonicz (today: Targowiska) and from there to Bełżec, while others were taken to Tylawa. But a reading of historical maps from the time helps us to understand why the Jews from Dukla and Rymanów were shot in Tylawa, and not elsewhere. On the one hand, the killing site is

38 Letter from the Mayor of Dukla to the Jewish Community, July 30, 1942, courtesy of Jacek Koszczan.

39 Ewa Domańska, "The Environmental History of Mass Graves," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2) (2020): 245.

40 See the classic work by Raul Hilberg, *Sonderzüge nach Auschwitz* (Berlin: Ulstein, 1987). For more recent approaches see Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes*, 99–123; Libionka, *Zagłada Żydów*, 104–105.

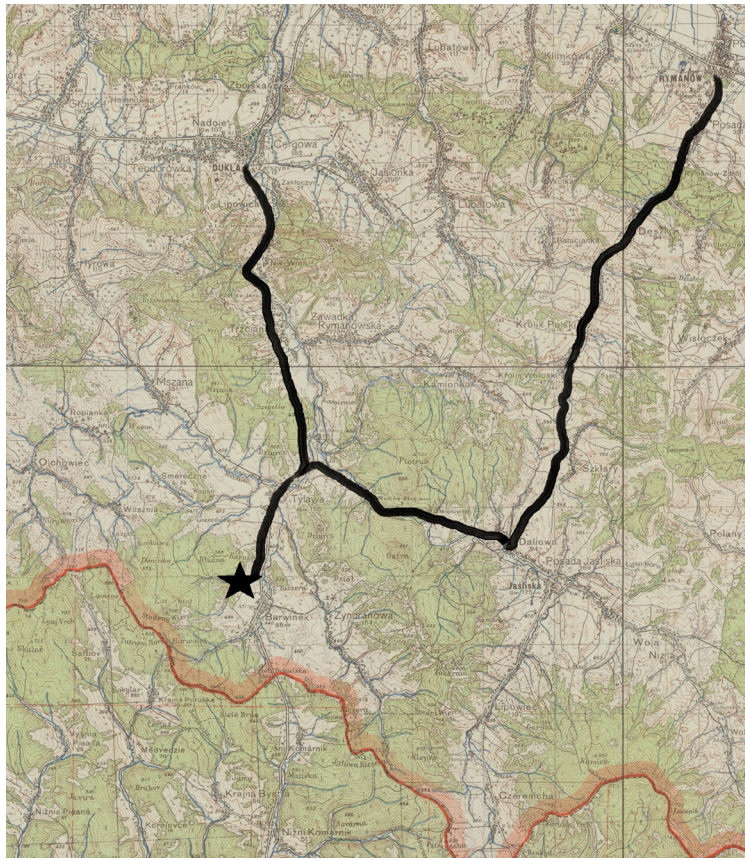


Fig. 7. Topographical map, 1942. The star marks the killing site; marked in black are the roads from Dukla (left) and Rymanów (right).

not far away from the place where the roads from Dukla and Rymanów cross (Fig. 7). The logistics of Operation Reinhardt required putting different "liquidations" together. On the other hand, the place of the execution was not yet a forest (as it is today) but a marshy meadow where digging large pits was quite easy. The Holocaust archaeologist Caroline Sturdy Colls speaks in this context about "opportunistic burial sites," that is natural conditions which facilitated burying the many victims of mass shootings.[41] Colls means

41 Caroline Sturdy Cols, *Holocaust Archaeology. Approaches and Future Directions* (Cham: Springer, 2015), 282.

primary ravine or natural holes, but the structure of the soil is also certainly an "opportunistic" factor.

Also speculative (at this stage of research) is the answer to the question about the exact relationship between the actual killing site and the location of the mass grave, or, as archaeologists put it, between the "fields of death" (*pola śmierci*) and "fields of pits" (*pola dołów*).[42] As mentioned above, the monument's shape suggests that it covers the mass grave – it is a rectangle of 25 x 5 meters. Witnesses of the mass shooting commented on the pit's size: while one of them said that it had been "very long" and about 4 m wide, another claimed that it had been no wider than 2 meters. Similar discrepancies concern the depth of the pit: the first witness said that it was at least 3 meters deep; the second responded that from their point of view it was impossible to estimate the pit's depth.[43] At one point of the interview, the first witness also said that the execution had taken place "not far from the place where they [the Jews] are buried now." Then, however, he visited the grave with the interviewers and gesticulated as if the monument was the actual shooting site.[44]

Does the materiality of the current monument contribute to clearing up these confusions? Depending on the shooting technique, in a 25 x 5 meter pit 50 to 100 bodies fit in one layer. Theoretically, it is possible that the mass grave in Tylawa, as marked by the monument, covers five to ten layers of bodies. Practically, it is very unlikely that the bodies were laid down so precisely. Witnesses were consistent in their claims that the Jews had been forced to step on a wooden board and from there had fallen into the pit. It is also unlikely that the pit was very deep, because it would have collapsed while digging in the marshy soil. In 1990, Richard Wright excavated a Jewish mass grave in Serniki (Ukraine) with approximately 500 bodies – hence a similar case to that of Tylawa. Its surface, though, was almost twice as large as the monument in Tylawa and of a much less regular shape.[45] In

42 Adam Falis, "Wspólny grób ofiar różnych totalitaryzmów. Ekshumacje na terenie dawnego więzienia w Białymstoku w latach 2013–2014," in *Poszukiwanie i identyfikacja ofiar zbrodni systemów totalitarnych*, ed. Marcin Zwolski (Białystok: IPN, 2018). Quoted after Ewa Domańska, "Nekrodziedzictwo" [Necroheritage], in *Ekshumacje polityczne. Teoria i praktyka* [Political exhumations. Theory and practice], ed. Alexandra Staniewska and Ewa Domańska (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2023), 594.

43 Yahad-In Unum, Witnesses No. 357 PO and 358 PO. Interviews from June 22, 2014, courtesy of Yahad-In Unum.

44 Yahad-In Unum, Witness No 358 PO.

45 Richard Wright, Ian Hanson and Jon Sternberg, "The Archaeology of Mass Graves," in *Forensic Archaeology: Advances in Theory and Practice*, ed. John Hunter and Margaret Cox (London–New York: Routledge 2005); see also Sydney Jewish Museum, *Unearthing*

addition, no sources mention the Germans burning the corpses in Tylawa (which would explain the relatively small size of the monument), as was the case in some other places in occupied Poland.[46] In Tylawa, they remained untouched, at least until the end of the war.

Thinking of mass shootings as concrete actions in specific material settings inevitably leads us to macabre descriptions and calculations, such as the one above. On their basis, I assumed that the actual "field of the pit" was probably larger than the surface of the monument and the "field of death"

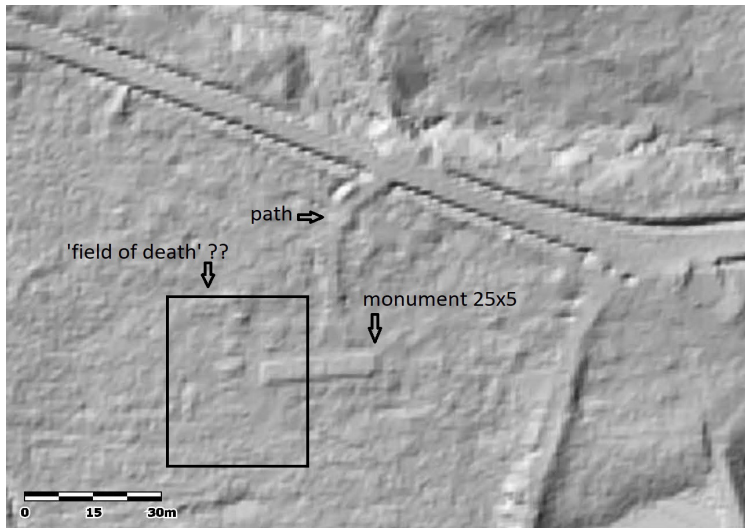


Fig. 8 LiDAR image of the killing site in Tylawa. I am grateful to Anna Zalewska and Jacek Czarnecki for their help in the analysis of the LiDAR images.

must have been even much larger. On the LiDAR images, we can see shapes of presumably anthropogenic origins that reach beyond the very well visible monument (Fig. 8). Also, an aerial photograph from 1944 shows a clearing at the edge of the forest with irregularities and a slightly brighter surface (Fig. 9). This can be explained by the fact that the killing-site was covered with lime, as the witnesses claimed.[47] The analysis therefore leads to the preliminary

the Holocaust, accessed May 4, 2023, https://artsandculture.google.com/story/owVRI-4OEK1Sfog.

46 Andrej Angrick, *"Aktion 1005" – Spurenbeseitigung von NS-Massenverbrechen 1942–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018), Chapter 5.2.

47 Yahad-In Unum, Witnesses No. 357 PO and 358 PO.

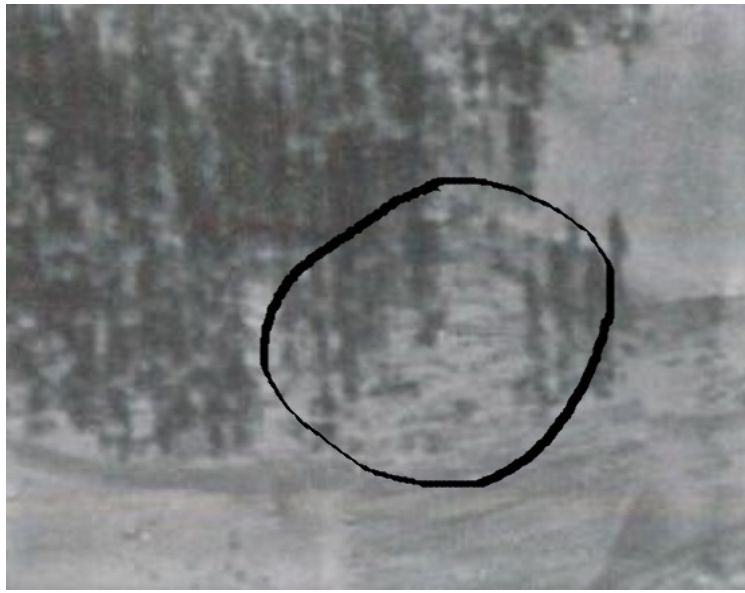


Fig. 9. Aerial photograph, 1944. The area around the current monument is marked in black.

conclusion that the monument, which indeed has the shape of a mass grave, is in fact smaller than the "field of the pit" and the "field of death." I made similar, and even clearer, findings of this kind elsewhere – for example in Jasienica Rosielna and Brzozów, where the different sizes of the monuments and the pits are visible at first sight.

Specialists in conflict archaeology advise triangulating research results from various methods, especially when excavations are not allowed. The two most commonly used methods are GPR (ground penetrating radar) and forensic chemistry, aimed at determining the level of phosphorus (an element released during the decomposition of human and animal remains) in the soil.[48] Yet GPR is not very helpful in forests, such as the one in Tylawa,

48 GPR is among the techniques used by the Zapomniane Foundation, which traces non-commemorated graves of Holocaust victims in Poland. For more information see Lawrence B. Conyers, *Interpreting Ground Penetrating Radar for Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2012). For information about phosphorus in the context of mass graves, see Józef Żychowski, "Selected Elements in the Soils Covering Mass Graves from World Wars I and II in Southeastern Poland," *Minerals* 11(3) (2021). Żychowski's analyses also cover the mass grave in Tylawa. See Józef Żychowski, *Wpływ masowych grobów z I i II wojny światowej na środowisko przyrodnicze* [The influence of mass graves from World Wars I and II on their natural environment] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe AP, 2008).

where tree roots disturb the image. Determining the level of phosphorus, in turn, requires taking soil samples, which is controversial in the light of the Halakha. There are, however, other underestimated elements of the necroscape that may help, namely trees. In her famous poem about trees witnessing the Holocaust, Halina Birenbaum writes "The trees are silent / The trees have seen and heard a lot / Have imbibed and covered much / But even when rustling / They remain silent."[49] Fortunately, dendrologists are able to elicit useful information from trees, despite their literal silence. The idea is based on the assumption that chemicals from the ground accommodate in plants. The taking of tree samples has not started yet, so I cannot offer any results. Hopefully, the dendrologists whom I work with will be able to determine the level of phosphorus and calcium (constituent of lime) in the tree trunks, which would solve the problem of taking soil samples. The method sounds promising, especially in the light of some testimonies that the Germans forced Poles to plant seedlings on the mass graves in order to cover them.[50]

Conclusion

Among the matters which occupy me most in Tylawa is the spatial relationship between the memorial site and the killing site. While I applied infrastructural inversion to the memory and history of the mass shooting in Tylawa, which practically meant disassembling all processes into singular actions and routine procedures within their material settings, I realized that I overlooked one step that split history from memory. In 1946, Adolf Nattel, a survivor from Dukla, testified what he knew from hearsay (he was not in Dukla at that time), namely that in Tylawa the Germans shot around 400 people on August 13, 1942.[51] Later testimonies mentioned about 500 victims. How did they know, and why were they so consistent? I went through the scarce documentation again and suddenly realized: the bodies may have been exhumed! In a handwritten table from 1948, we read that there are two mass graves with 522 bodies in total "for exhumation."[52] Another, undated table states

49 English translation quoted from Agnieszka Kłos, "The Green Matzevah," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2) (2020): 230.

50 Krzysztof Malicki, *Poza wspólnotą pamięci. Życie i Zagłada Żydów w pamięci regionu podkarpackiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS, 2017), 205, 207.

51 Testimony of A. Nattel, AŻIH 301/1757.

52 Wykaz ofiar terroru pochowanych na terenie woj. rzeszowskiego (powiat Krosno) [List of victims of terror buried in the Rzeszów voivodeship (Krosno district)], AP Sanok, 60/1193/0/95, k. 20.

that 503 bodies were "exhumed to Dukla in 1952"[53] – a fact which I believe was only on paper. On the one hand, no other source mentioned such a large post-war entombment in Dukla; on the other hand, transporting 500 bodies would have been a large, cost- and time-intensive operation. Given that the bodies were already buried in the provisional mass grave in Tylawa, bringing them to Dukla was not necessary. In any case, however, local authorities carried out excavations in Tylawa in the early post-war years. In all likelihood, they took the bodies from the primary deposition place and entombed them accurately again. Having other resources (probably more time or shoveling machines), the people in charge of the post-war exhumations may have laid down the bodies in a deep grave measuring 25 x 5 meters which the monument later covered. Whether the spatial shift took place or not is still to be verified. If true, this hypothesis would explain at least some of the confusion mentioned above. There is no doubt, however, that exhumations and secondary entombments in close vicinity to the initial pits took place in other killing sites. While the mass shootings are usually commemorated (more or less visible), the exhumations are absent from the mnemonic space. Although commemorative forms, like the monument in Tylawa, suggest being located exactly at the crime scene, history and memory are often spatially separated.

The issue of exhumations in post-war Poland is not new, though it is still to be sufficiently discussed by researchers.[54] In her monograph about the Polish post-war memory of World War II, Joanna Wawrzyniak argues that Poles "dug up corpses and arranged their funerals," while the Polish state was consolidating its powers in the early post-war years.[55] A very recent discovery, which I made in the archives, namely an internal report from the Council for the Preservation of Monuments of Fights and Martyrdom (Rada Ochrony Pomników Walk i Męczeństwa, ROPWiM), confirmed the importance of mass graves for the understanding of Polish post-war traumas. The report states that between 1947 and 1960 alone, approximately 2.5 million human bodies were exhumed to mass graves in Poland.[56] Schools and the scouting organiza-

53 Wykaz ofiar terroru z powiatu Krosno [List of victims of terror from the Krosno district], AP Sanok 60/1193/0/1582, k. 64.

54 Domańska, *Nekros,* and – most recently – *Ekshumacje polityczne*, ed. Staniewska and Domańska.

55 Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory. The Politics of the Second World War in Communist Poland* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2015), 60.

56 *Wybrane problemy działalności Rady Ochrony Pomników Walki i Męczeństwa PRL w trzydziestoleciu 1947–1977* [Selected aspects of the activity of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites], AAN 2/2253/0/4.3.1/317, k. 5. However, the number is

tion (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, ZHP) largely supported these actions. Apparently, dead bodies affected not only the war generation, but the post-war cohorts too.[57]

Abstract

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Infrastructures of Holocaust Mass Graves: Work-in-Progress in Tylawa

In the course of Operation Reinhardt, Germans not only deported Jews to death camps but also killed them in mass shootings in the close vicinity of their homes. The mass graves are still part of the Polish landscape. Meanwhile, most of these post-killing sites are marked in space and commemorated. Taking the example of the mass grave in Tylawa, in southeastern Poland, the article gives an insight into research on the memory of the mass shootings. Given the poor archival documentation, the author argues that physical matter, including landscape, is very informative as a source on the history and memory of Operation Reinhardt. A method used for interpreting physical objects and their entanglement with human actions is called infrastructural inversion, as proposed by Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star. The author therefore applies the concept of infrastructure in order to understand the historical and mnemonic processes behind the mass grave and its monument in Tylawa.

Keywords

mass graves, Holocaust by bullets, infrastructure studies, Holocaust memory, southeastern Poland

underestimated, as ROPWiM did not consider German soldiers because already from the early post-war years the (West) German *Volksbund* [War Graves Commission] has been in charge of exhuming the German corpses.

57 Katarzyna Grzybowska, "The "Alert" for Non-sites of Memory: A 1965 Scout Action of Discovering and Describing Second World War Sites in Poland," *Heritage, Memory and Conflict* 1 (2021): 63–72.

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