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Our Temporalities: Between the Present and the Future

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Our Temporalities: Between the Present and the Future

FOREWORD

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Foreword

Ryszard Nycz

Time for Time: There's No Time, We Have Time

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From amongst the deluge of information incessantly overflowing the internet this immediately stood out – akin to Barthesian *punctum*. A note placed in the tidbits or curiosities section, in a column hoping to intrigue through the reversal of meanings, expectations, or normal behavior, that in the newspapers belonged to the trivia columns (of the "fox shoots hunter" variety) – instantly aroused my interest, drawing attention and proliferating with a cascade of innovative implications.

On November 2, 2023, one of the mainstream news portals, named Interia, published a short movie clip, just shy of fifty seconds, depicting two natives from an indigenous tribe, springing out of the forest wearing nothing more than scant pieces of cloth on their hips, who in a state of utmost agitation run up to a river bank, shout at and threaten some unknown adversary with pikes, clubs, and bows, only to disappear the next moment, just as ghostlike as they appeared, in the thick trees behind them.[1] It seems from the accompanying description that the recording was registered with a mobile phone by a bulldozer operator, who was razing the forest for a planned nickel mine, that is required in the large-scale production of

1 https://geekweek.interia.pl/styl-zycia/ciekawostki/news-sceny-jak-z-avatara-operator-buldozera-spotkal-w-dzungli-taj,nId,7124469, accessed November 22, 2023.

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car batteries for electric cars undertaken on a planetary scale. As luck would have it, there are abundant deposits of this metal on the Indonesian island of Halmahera, which is inhabited by the mysterious, reclusive tribe O'Hongana Manyawa.

The tribe's name translates as "the forest people," and rightly so, as they truly lead their lives in deep reverence for the natural environment, for the local fauna and flora, and for the trees in particular. The accompanying commentary of an expert from the Survival International explains that the life of this 300–500 strong tribe is closely connected with trees: from the birth of a child, whose umbilical cord is buried under a newly planted tree, to the moment of death, when the body of the deceased is placed high upon a tree growing in a special cult part of the forest. What is more, the trees themselves are believed to possess souls and are therefore never cut down. This secluded tribe is susceptible to infections, diseases, or other pandemic dangers. It is also completely defenseless in the face of biopolitical threats: the Indonesian authorities have not as yet provided the tribe with the status of an indigenous population. Hence, they do not exist in the legal sense and they can be deprived of their existence at any given time.

Still, there seems to be something more to this story that is easily discernible in the momentary flash lighting up this brief encounter, and which is framed by the previously mentioned comments. It goes beyond a bizarre change of roles: a native man with a pike threatening a professional who is armed with gargantuan, specialist machinery. This is also a dramatic clash of cultures, or maybe primarily a clash of times – of the prehistoric cyclical time of tribal existence and the future-oriented post-historical time of civilizational "progress" that is goal- and possession-oriented, wherein the operator of the monstrous cyborg-like bulldozer resides. The note's headline – "Scenes Straight from *Avatar*" – suggests that in this case it was life that emulated art (movies, virtual reality) and it is indeed hard for a contemporary viewer to shake off such impressions (of the resemblance to one of the initial scenes of the movie). In turn, a reader can rightly be reminded of the scene that was immortalized some 125 years ago by Joseph Conrad, in his description of nearly identical experiences of Marlow travelling up the Congo River into the heart of Africa, and up the river of time towards an encounter with the "prehistoric man," who "was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings [...] we could not understand, because we were too far [...] because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories."[2]

Though, come to think of it, is it any different nowadays? Can we even imagine what or who was seen by the terrified, but valiantly confrontational, natives when something monstrously frightening was drawing closer, producing growing noises,

2 Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, ed. Cedric Watts (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 139.

killing their sacred forest, depriving them of their world and living space… Because, surely, they could not have thought that these were creatures that resembled them? In any case, we have the opportunity to think about this – and what we have to thank for this is the extraordinary self-possession of an anonymous Indonesian bulldozer driver. If only he hesitated for several seconds, and did not turn on the camera of his mobile phone, then in most probability he would not be able to capture this extraordinary moment… And we would not be able to grasp and deliberate the clash and compression of temporal orders, the remarkable simultaneity of that which is nonsimultaneous, the sudden tectonic shift of the layers of the past, or maybe even their sudden volcanic eruption. If the operator failed to catch this unforeseeable event, then all he would be left with would be some faint trace in memory, an impression of something that could have been a daydream or an illusion.

By grace of this rare occurrence yet another frame of time is being activated: it is a time of a privileged sudden moment, which diligently, without forewarning, pulls us out of the everyday temporal routines, and which we somewhat habitually allow to pass us by. If we only manage to catch such a chance at the instant at which it occurs, then we will probably get the feeling that we were able to sensually, physically touch time as it was happening and which – we might assume – could change our lives or at least reveal some important truth. This is the very experience of temporaneity of which Augustine of Hippo said that it "lacks spatial extent,"[3] and which Manuel Castells named "timeless time."[4]

Here a special way of experiencing the present moment comes into play; one which comes from the future, even though it has nothing to do with realizing the chronological order. This is not Chronos but Kairos. It is a kind of gift, a stroke of luck, the grasping of an opportune moment. It is a time which we neither possess nor manage, but one which we enter with passionate passivity, taking part in whatever it brings us. What is symptomatic is that this distinctive time has not only a broad historical background and rich symbolism – active from the very beginnings of the European cultural tradition – but that it is currently growing in significance – what is attested to by, among others, the writer Olga Tokarczuk, historian François Hartog, and philosopher Giorgio Agamben.

Tokarczuk dedicates an interesting passage to this type of time in her essay about the tender narrator, reminding us of its godly personification as "the god of chance, of the fleeting moment, of preposterous possibility, which is open for all but the briefest of times, and which must be grasped without any hesitation (by the fringe!), so that it does not flee […], a decisive instance that changes everything."

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3 Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 267.

4 Manuel Castells, "The Edge of Forever: Timeless Time," chapter 7, in *The Rise of the Network Society* (New York: Wiley, 2011).

And she goes on to add: "for me Kairos is the deity of eccentricity," whose lair is – according to the Nobel laureate – literature, which "is a challenge to the conformism and hypocrisy, it is a kairotic act of courage, of seizing the moment and of changing the course of destiny."[5] In turn, Hartog places this type of time within the history of Christian Europe and of the evolving temporal regimes (though he remembers its Greek roots), where the three strands of Chronos, Kairos, and Krisis intertwine. Kairos, for Hartog, offers the possibility of recognizing the decisive moment (either perilous or favorable, in individual or collective life), but the chance will be granted us only if we manage to be "on time," if in the passing "now" we will be capable of opening ourselves to the unexpected.[6]

Likewise, Giorgio Agamben recalls in his recent note – dated September 23, 2023 and titled "On What Is Coming," published in his internet opinion column *Una voce* – the kairotic time as our contemporary "time on time." In his interpretation this is, etymologically, neither chronological future, nor the passing present. It is something that is coming, getting closer (he explains that the Greek noun found in the gospels, *eggizo*, points to something that is at arm's length, that can almost be touched). Agamben notices that:

> Closeness is not the measure of time but its transformation [...]. Such unmeasurable but always close time was called Kairos by the Greeks, who differentiated it from Chronos, and they depicted it in the form of a child that comes out to greet us, running with wings at its feet, and which can only be caught by the fringe dangling above its forehead. Hence, the Latin scholars called this *occasio*: a fleeting chance offered by things: if you catch it, it is yours, but if it escapes, even mighty Jove himself cannot not regain it.

Agamben goes on to generalize this insight:

> And this is exactly what is at the heart of our lives, our thinking, and of politics: to be able to foresee the signs of what is coming, and what is no longer time, but a mere chance to fathom what is pertinent and immediate, what requires decisive gestures or actions. True politics is exactly the sphere of such concern, of presaging that what is coming.[7]

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5 Olga Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator* [The tender narrator] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2020), 2425.

6 See François Hartog, *Chronos: The West Confronts Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022). Here, I merely refer to the analysis presented by Justyna Tabaszewska in *"Teraźniejszość w natarciu?"* [The present on the offensive], *Teksty Drugie 6 (2023)*.

7 Giorgio Agamben, "Su cio che si avvicina," accessed November 22, 2023, https://www.quodlibet.it/una-voce-giorgio-agamben. I am grateful to professor Francesca Fornari for directing me to this address.

Therefore, the hand of the bulldozer operator registering the sudden encounter on a mobile phone was, so to speak, an instrument of this kairotic time. It is hard to disagree with Agamben's diagnosis that it is neither the future, nor the present in its standard understanding, but something different – a premonition of the coming, of the approach, emergence, and realization of an event in light of which, as it turns out, things seem different, and it itself gives us something to think about and understand; it has something important to tell us. The internet surfer allowing himself to be led on a journey by kairotic directions, can initially be rightly shocked by the extraordinary occurrence of this unforeseeable event. Here, in the third decade of the twenty-first century, on our planet, there not only exist enclaves of time that came to a standstill at a prehistoric phase, but, unexpectedly, prehistoric man can be looked right in the eye (though by means of a recording made from a distance of several yards by the Indonesian operator). That is, almost right in the eye, as this is directness mediated by specialized technological instruments that assist our senses, and, furthermore, by film and literature with their overlaying framework of anachronistic meaning and anthropological presuppositions and biases.

Mieke Bal argued already some time ago, in her theory of preposterous critique,[8] that this kind of anachronism is inherent to our knowledge and gaze. We cannot suspend our contemporary understanding and the presently developed competences of our senses, to open ourselves to the actual directness of contact with that which is prior or different, which is not contaminated by the input of retroactive meanings. We therefore perceive through what is latter, superficial, technologically encumbered, but the significance of the fact or event grows upon these histories (as Bruno Schulz would say), revealing previously unseen dimensions. Nonetheless, our experience can still remain authentic and valuable – which is confirmed by participants of historical reconstructions or of interactive museum spaces (and, according to anthropologists of time, it is senseless to argue to the contrary).

This anachronistic shaping of the contours of the past (according to our present desires, needs, sensitivities, and knowledge) clashes with an opposing process: with the tectonic movements of the past, revealing figures, who akin to ghosts and specters, demand justice, sending directions and warnings our way. It could be argued that Derridean spectral ontology deconstructed our, somewhat too loose, anachronistic rule over the past and memory, leading us into a reality reminiscent of the world of Shakespearian plays – which suddenly became also our world. In *Henry IV* Glyndŵr boasts before Hotspur that he "can call spirits from the vasty deep," which is met with a sharp retort: "Why, so can I, or so can any man; / But will they come

8 See Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio. Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

when you do call for them?"[9] Our world, just as that of Shakespeare, is filled with specters and ghosts of the past, which nonetheless have no intention to obey the living nor serve the contemporary. They appear when and where they will, taking us into their possession: they drag us into their matters; they force us to settle the score of harms, misdeeds, and abusive advantage; they call on us to reflect, to gain critical insight, to look at ourselves with fresh eyes…

This is what the recording allows us to experience. Two native inhabitants of the island appear akin to ghosts from our past, compelling us to realize that the very same threats posed to their way of life by our contemporary industrial civilization – destruction of environment, pandemics, approaching climate disaster, violence, biological devastation – are also in store for the rest of us, and they are just now starting to take form before our eyes. Resorting to biblical language, we can say that first we see them "face to face," and then, from a distance, we begin to see ourselves in them, though not clearly, but "in a mirror, darkly." And, finally, when we try to take a fresh look at the "human place in the cosmos" (as it was once put by Max Scheler), we begin to identify with them, to feel as they feel. In the compulsive fear of the Other, of higher intelligence and foreign civilizations, we start to feel as spiritually impoverished natives: primitive in our knowledge, comically combative, sometimes happy and sometimes threatened; the indigenous inhabitants of a small planetary island somewhere in the faraway reaches of the universe.

In this whirlwind of times, brought to our attention by the sudden appearance in the light of the flash of the two natives, different temporal orders clash, intermingle, and compete; an almost perfect rose of the winds of history is found here: the cyclical and chronological, kairotic and retroactive, spectro-ontological and contemporary times (to name but a few) – rousing ever mightier sounds of the tectonic shifts of the past and the growing grumblings of a threatening future. And in the eye of this storm lays the motionless and timeless pattern of fate: a momentary "perception of reality […] a joyous shock of the certainty that this is real. That there is some higher sense to this world, that I partake in an existence that can never be taken away from me."[10] I quote here two sentences from Jan Józef Szczepański's short story "Japońskie kwiaty" [Japanese flowers], because it evokes similar feelings. Szczepański tries to convey his experience of the present moment overflowing with meaning, reminiscing of his childhood fascination with small, dried plant "capsules," which when submerged in water turn out to be blossoming multi-colored flowers that wither and fall apart in the next instance.

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9 William Shakespeare, *The History of Henry the Fourth*, act 3, scene 1, lines 50–52. Quoted after *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. Gary Taylor et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

10 Jan Józef Szczepański, "Japońskie kwiaty," in *Autograf* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1979), 22–23.

In turn, what I attempted here is to narrate my own experience of a brief internet event that resonates with comparable ambivalence to that of the not much longer-lasting theater of animated Japanese flowers (or blooming teas). Just as that which from the outside seems to be no more than a sudden flash of exploding and disappearing present, viewed from the inside is the whole of our life. It is a hard earned ability or sense, this radical switching between the two points of view. Many years ago, Wisława Szymborska proved to have mastered it in one of her better-known poems, "W rzece Heraklita" [In Heraclitus's river], though I am not so certain that it was necessarily noticed by its readers. The poet suggests that it is not so much so that we cannot twice enter the same river – the river of the present (as St. Augustine argued: there is no other time than the present one; and if this were not enough, it passes so quickly…) – but rather that we cannot, in fact, ever escape its current.

In this all-encompassing river of the present we find ourselves with all that exists, the human and non-human, alive and dead; at the same instance, it is also within us, in our body and in our mind, in everything we do or want. It turns out that what from the outside seems a cascade of momentary events, from the inside is felt as our continuously flowing existence within the liquid contemporaneity. Of course, I have no idea what the natives on the other side of the river – which also turned into a river of time – could have thought, imagined, or felt. They stood like "two visions." But anyone can see, by activating this event, that they lived at that moment at the height of their emotional lives, deeply moved and terrified by the closeness of the danger that is coming, and that is surely capable of obliterating the entirety of their lives. That is, of the short and only time that we are ever given.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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Time for Time: There's No Time, We Got Time

A short film online showing an encounter between an Indonesian bulldozer operator and two natives of an indigenous tribe on the island of Halmahera initiates a reflection on the clash and collision of the many times in which we live and reasons for the increasing importance of modern temporal consciousness.

Keywords

collision of the many times in which we live: cyclical and chronological, kairotic and retroactive, hauntological and the present

Essays: Between the Present and the Past

Justyna Tabaszewska

The Present on the Offensive?

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1. Turning to the Present

In the last ten years, the present has become the focus of discussions about contemporary temporal regimes. Especially within temporal studies, it is generally accepted that we are now living in a present-oriented time regime.[1] This turn towards the present is all the more visible, the more tangible its relationship becomes with the memory boom that has dominated the humanities in the last three decades, directing our attention to the past or – in more nuanced definitions of memory work – to the relationship that the present establishes with the remembered

1 See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *After 1945: Latency as Origin of the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present. Time and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 2014); Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); François Hartog, *Chronos. The West Confronts Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022).

past.[2] As some memory scholars argue, the opposition between looking at the past and focusing on the present is not particularly sharp: for example, Andreas Huyssen shows that in the late 1980s there was a shift in interest from the present future to the present past.[3] Traces of Huyssen's theory (and of other theses linking the past with the present or the present with the future) can be found in most concepts regarding the present orientation of our current temporal regimes, including the widely discussed ideas of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht regarding the nature of the current chronotype (oriented precisely at "now") or the present, in which the past remains latent, but still susceptible to changes and transformations taking place under the influence of current events (to simplify slightly: the latent past influences the present, but the present also transforms the remembered vision of the past, so the relationship between what was and what is remains dynamic).[4]

Given the many important differences between the theories that I have mentioned, they should be considered as s e p a r a t e diagnoses and responses to the present day, which is now, more than ever, focused on the present. However, some similarities are hard to miss: all the theories cited above are quite reluctant to define the present, departing from the language of philosophy used in the earlier attempts of temporal analyses[5]; they recognize the existence of certain bridges between the present and the past, and – which is extremely interesting in my opinion – they all almost axiomatically acknowledge that the future has disappeared from our field of view.

We can therefore say – making some gross simplifications at the beginning of this article, which are nonetheless necessary to pose the research question more clearly – that the orientation towards the present and the belief in the present character of the current chronotype results, first of all, from the preconception that the past is slowly ceasing to be the center of our interest, and the future has not been there for a long time.[6] Secondly, it is a direct

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

3 See Andreas Huyssen, "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia," *Public Culture* 1 (12) (2000).

4 See Gumbrecht, *After 1945*, 45.

5 This is especially clear when compared, among others, to Krzysztof Pomian's famous publication *Porządek czasu* [The order of time], trans. Tomasz Stróżyński (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2014).

6 In some theses, the interest in the future started to fade with the beginning of Second World War. See Huyssen, "Present Pasts"; Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, trans. Sarah Clift (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2020).

outcome of the thesis that, in recent centuries, "now" has not usually been a separate point of interest, also due to the problems associated with defining what exactly "now" means. Thirdly, it employs the belief that in the last ten years something has changed drastically in our perception of time relations.

Without denying outright the value of this reasoning, I would like to consider whether the commonly reported loss of interest in the future or the past and the change in the contemporary chronotype are synonymous with focusing on the present. It seems premature to me to automatically exclude the thesis that what we are now observing is the emergence of a new type of interest in the future, and therefore, in fact, a continuation of the trend from the beginning of modernity. In this case, the interest in the past and memory, observed approximately for the last thirty years, should not be interpreted as an opposition to the previous future orientation, but rather as a specific complication of it. In other words, perhaps the change in time orientation from the present future to the present past was an episode rather than a lasting trend, but this nuance might be hard to spot when we still define the future in accordance with the modernist paradigm.

To simplify again, I believe that the major change in the current chronotype and the fact that we are observing temporal evolution is indisputable. I also agree that in this process the past loses its distinctive position, but I cannot agree that focusing on the present does not mean (and is not conditioned) by at least a subconscious return of interest in the new forms of the future. To at least partially explain my argument, I would like to briefly refer to one of the more recent theories regarding presentism: that is, François Hartog's concept of temporal regimes.

2. Double Presentism

François Hartog belongs to that group of thinkers who, several years ago, at the beginning of the change in thinking about time relations diagnosed here, proposed a theory indicating that we are currently living in a period of *presentism*. In *Regimes of Historicity*,[7] Hartog argued that three dominant temporal regimes should be distinguished: the first, as old as Western culture, was focused on the past, treated as a source of the tradition important for the development of humanity. In this time regime, the past was interpreted as a reservoir, carrier, and medium of meaning, crucial for building a valuable present and future. This period ends with the French Revolution: what revolution is expected to bring is fundamentally different from the present and the past, and yet it is valued as positive. Or maybe even more: it is perceived

7 Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*.

as positive not d e s p i t e being different from the past, but simply b e c a u s e of it. This new, future-oriented time regime puts new projects at the center of attention: it is t h e f u t u r e that is supposed to bring change and redefine what should really matter. Therefore, sacrifices begin to be made not in the name of the past, but in the name of the future.

However, while the first of the historical regimes noted by Hartog lasted thousands of years, the second barely survived a century and a half: two world wars, as well as the fall of communism – considered, not only by Hartog, as a futuristic project – herald its rather abrupt end. This end marks the beginning of the presentism regime: the date of its beginning is somewhat unclear, but Hartog claims that at least from the 1970s to the 1990s there was little to no interest in the future. He treats the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of communism and the rise of the capitalist order in Eastern Europe – somewhat similarly to the ideas of Francis Fukuyama – as the end of a certain way of thinking about history, in which we expected constant growth and development. The end of history is for Hartog the beginning of presentism.

Hartog also repeated the diagnosis of the presentist orientation of the contemporary time regime in a more recent publication entitled *Chronos: L'Occident aux prises avec le Temps* (published in 2020 and translated into English in 2022). In this book, the philosopher slightly expands and modifies his earlier thesis: in his view, contemporary presentism is, to some extent, the result of adopting a Christian model of understanding time.

In *Chronos*, the starting point for Hartog's theoretical argument is early Christianity, but he tries to prove that Christian presentism also influences the latest concepts regarding time, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty's category of planetary age.[8] It is best to start the reconstruction of Hartog's theory with a quotation regarding the researcher's definition of time:

> What is that time? What is our relation to time? What is our "today" – few would be tempted to call it a "beautiful today" – made of? The thread unifying this work of conceptual history is the regime of historicity's radar, and the goal has always been to illumine temporal crises. In those moments shifting landmarks throw us off balance, and the articulations of past, present, and future come undone.[9]

Hartog is therefore most interested in crises and gaps that are – at least partially – represented by three key categories: *Chronos*, *Kairos*, and *Krisis*.

8 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary* Age (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

9 Hartog, *Chronos*, XX.

In defining *Chronos*, Hartog is inspired in equal measure by ancient Greek philosophy and the thought of Saint Augustine. He also underscores its dual nature: it is the kind of time which we experience everyday as passing (and whose passage we are able to measure), and also – in reference to God – it is of eternal duration, something that will never end.

Kairos is much more ambiguous and can best be described through reference to Greek tragedies: they commonly present a pivotal moment, an instance at which the fate of heroes changes drastically. Still, the heroes (such as Oedipus, who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother) are usually unaware of why their actions carry such great meaning just now. Therefore, Kairos carries in itself a certain kind of hope and threat: only recognition that one is immersed in this specific time frame allows one to take the right decisions and actions:

> Kairos differed fundamentally from chronos, which is our measurable, flowing time; it opens on the instant, the unexpected, but also the opportunity to be seized, the crucial opening, the decisive moment. By bestowing a name on kairos we grant it a status, and we acknowledge that human time, which is to say that of well-regulated action, is a blend of chronos time and kairos time.[10]

The third of the notions mentioned, *Krisis*, refers to at least two contexts: the first is judgment, and the second is the dichotomy of health and malady. In the latter case, *Krisis* is a pivotal point at which the patients either begin to heal or their death becomes certain.

What is especially interesting is that for Hartog, *Krisis* and *Kairos* are the key to understanding Christian temporality, or, more precisely, the specific temporal moment in which we currently reside according to the Christian doctrine: it is the time after the first coming of the Savior, which did not bring about the end of the world or the final judgment. It opened a new order ("New Testament") instead, which will remain unresolved until the second coming (the term used here by Hartog is *Parousia*, which is more common in other European languages). A particularly important distinction here is that *Krisis* revolves around the act of judgment itself, whereas *Kairos* is focused on the temporal rupture that accompanies it: on the time between both comings of Jesus. This temporal rupture is of the greatest significance to Christianity, because it is in its span that the whole development of this religion occurs. What was initially supposed to be a short period of time has instead turned into an undefined, expansive contemporaneity, and therefore the Christian

10 Ibid., 5.

Kairos has absorbed *Chronos* as well, annexing the calendar order to represent the cyclical rhythm of Christian holidays.[11]

It is worth noting that Hartog argues that the Christian understanding of time is responsible for reevaluating the relationship between the old and the new, shifting the vector of interest to the new – the New Testament, the New Covenant – which in turn means that the new replaces the old, and the old has meaning only as an announcement of the new. Moreover, the horizon of expectations begins to be marked by the apocalypse, which is to be actively awaited. The Christian apocalypse, understood as the final *Krisis*, constructs *Kairos* from the present time – a time of rupture in which *Chronos* still flows (somewhat like in Saint Augustine's concept of the human state), but should be subordinated to *Kairos*.

Of course, as Hartog rightly points out, maintaining the feeling that we live in the time of *Kairos* required numerous steps from Christianity (first, shifting the time of the expected *Krisis* from "immediately" to an unspecified future; then, indicating that the *Krisis* will take place unexpectedly, and therefore it is necessary to constantly prepare for what is to come; and finally, implementing the idea that the apocalypse is a specific closure of time in which, as in Saint John's vision, temporal relations are flattened and the past, future and present overlap each other).[12]

To give a brief summary of Hartog's theses: the presentist temporal order absorbed by Western culture through Christianity rests upon a conviction that we are living at a time of *Kairos*, in a specific temporal environment shaped by two time points: the first coming of the Savior (the one that occurred in the past) and the second coming (which is yet to happen in the future). The imaginings of the future and the memory of the past are shaped exactly by the recognition of this specific temporal regime.

According to Hartog, this specifically presentist temporal order lasts for quite a long time, activating various adaptive strategies during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but it begins to crumble under the influence of the French Revolution (with its concept of newness and rupture and the idea of a different calendar), and under pressure from scientific discoveries – especially the development of geology and establishing of the true age of the Earth (which is fundamentally at odds with Christian traditions), as well as Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. It finally falls apart with the onset of modernity, which not only introduced a uniform system of measuring time but also led to a significant acceleration in the rate at which changes occur in

11 Ibid., 40–63.

12 Ibid., 40–63.

society. Modernism is therefore the beginning of a new era, in which a future-oriented time regime starts.[13]

However, this new temporal order erodes quite quickly – that is, as in Hartog's previous theory, just after the failure of great future-oriented projects, such as communism or fascism, and the shock caused by the course of Second World War, especially the Holocaust. Hartog argues that the use of nuclear weapons in Second World War is another reason why there is a slow retreat from the future-oriented *Chronos* to *Kairos*: the risk of their subsequent use during the Cold War opens a new temporal mode, a new "in-between" – between the creation of nuclear power and the apocalypse that it might unleash.[14] The second event that is especially pivotal in the formation of the secular *Kairos* is the onset of the Anthropocene[15] and the threat of climate disaster that opens another kind of in-between – between the start of radical human influence exerted on the environment and the disaster that this brought.

To sum up, Hartog assumes that the threat of a nuclear catastrophe,[16] combined with the diagnosis of the Anthropocene, marks the beginning of a new presentism. Its constitutive features are turning away from the future understood as a positive project; acceleration; suddenness of contemporary times; presentist politics focusing on the here and now; a certain political focus on prevention, and a clear caution in formulating political projects. Interestingly, focus on memory is, according to Hartog, also a part of a new presentism, as memory is treated as something active, that is – reconstructed from a contemporary perspective. For Hartog, therefore, the Anthropocene and the threat of ultimate climate catastrophe are a new incarnation of Christian *Kairos*. The religious, supernatural perspective is replaced here by the indeterminacy of the time of the Anthropocene (it both extends into the future, because it is difficult to determine when this era could end, and is extrapolated into the past, because it is impossible to determine when exactly we entered

13 Ibid., 189–210.

14 In his analyses devoted to the impact of nuclear weapons on our contemporary perception of time, the philosopher follows the theses of Günther Anders, but for him the "supra-threshold" of the catastrophe is less important, and more important is its final – and therefore in a sense mystical – character. See Günther Anders, *L'obsolescence de l'homme: Sur l'âme à l'époque de la deuxième révolution industrielle*, trans. Christophe David (Paris: Ivrea, 2002); Paweł Mościcki, "Apokalipsa Teraz!" [Apocalypse now!], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2020).

15 Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, "The Anthropocene," *IGBP Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17–18.

16 Paul Crutzen and John W. Birks, "The Atmosphere After a Nuclear War: Twilight at Noon," *Ambio* 2/3 (1982): 114–25.

this stage of introducing irreversible changes into the natural environment), with its hard-to-imagine scale (for example, imagining the duration of the Earth is impossible from the perspective of human life). Moreover, although Hartog consistently distinguishes *Krisis* – the final judgment and division – from crises, that is smaller breakthrough moments, the climate crisis is to some extent underdefined: it is difficult to decide whether it is a crisis that may yet be overcome, or already the *Krisis*, whose only solution can be a secular apocalypse. This vagueness, however, is intended to serve the purpose of opening a new, climate *Kairos*, in which things (including the possibility of the continued existence of the world) are only being decided.[17]

3. The Theoretical Obsolescence of the Future and its Practical Return

I discussed Hartog's theory in such detail because it can be considered an example of a broader trend of defining the current time as a moment of special interest in the present. In this respect, the concept of presentism can be treated as an umbrella term that includes at least several separate, but similar theories: both those of Gumbrecht[18] and Huyssen on the present past, and of Aleida Assmann, who suggests that the future has permanently disappeared from our field of interests, mainly for ethical reasons.[19] Although these theories differ fundamentally in terms of assessing the value of the past for the present (for Assmann and Huyssen it still plays a fundamental role for the present; it is also important – albeit to a lesser extent – for Gumbrecht; but for Hartog it basically lost all of its value during the French Revolution) and the role of memory in building the present, they unanimously assume that we are no longer interested in the future. The future, I would add, that is defined in a very specific way: as constructing collective, positive projects.

In the aforementioned theories, therefore, the future is defined according to the modernist paradigm, so naturally the fall of this paradigm brings with it

17 Hartog interprets Chakrabarty's concept of planetary age similarly (*The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*): it is the overlap of History (i.e. *Chronos*) and climate change (i.e. *Kairos*) that determines the specificity of contemporary times.

18 In Gumbrecht's case, the concept of the latent duration of the past as a force shaping the present and the theory of chronotypes are based on the same belief: that the future has stopped shaping our field of reference.

19 Assmann points out that, as a result of the trauma of the Holocaust, it is our moral obligation to shift our focus from the future to the past. Despite seeing the negative consequences of the disappearance of the future as a landmark for the present, she considers the retreat from thinking about the future to be a natural consequence of the failure of large modernization projects. See Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint?*, 5–20.

the fall of the future. What is even more interesting is the fact that if the future is either not clearly defined as one, common goal, or is not a positive project, shared by all, it magically ceases to be considered t h e f u t u r e. The next weakness of these concepts concerns the sudden acceleration of the chronotype changes: the period of interest in the past (which lasted thousands of years) is interrupted by a very short period of interest in the future (which started no earlier than during the French Revolution), which already begins to erode before the mid-twentieth century. In the second half of the twentieth century, new time regimes are interested either in the past, or in the specific mix of the past and present, or in the present itself. This diagnosis indicates that, on the one hand, changes in chronotypes are now taking place much faster than before, but on the other, the period of expansion of the present is definitely still ongoing.

The diagnosis that the future has ceased to be an important part of the current chronotype is therefore based on the preconception that the lack of grand, positive, collective projects, or collectively shared visions of a positive future, means that we are not interested in the future itself.[20] In my opinion, it is worth asking how this reasoning works in the light of growing interest in the topic of ecological catastrophe, especially climate catastrophe (still understood as an element of the future, not the present, as the "true" catastrophe is yet to come). I also wonder why, when defining the present in terms of its attitude towards time, so little attention is paid to what actually shapes the present – especially present fears and hopes. And I strongly argue that "this something" is the future, which – I am reversing Gumbrecht's theory here – latently lies in the present. It is not a future understood as a collective, positive project, but it is the future nonetheless.

The climate catastrophe is an exceptionally good (although not the only) example of such a future. Its theoretical power results from the fact that many thinkers – including Hartog – do not deny its existence, but instead try to include this future threat in the model of presentism, and therefore transform something that is an obvious signal of interest in the future into part of the extended present. According to Hartog's concept, the climate catastrophe works as a secular apocalypse (final *Krisis*), which opens a new in-between (a secular *Kairos*): between the beginning of the catastrophe (which started in an unspecified past, when human influence on the planet's future has already become overbearing) and its fulfillment.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that while the *Chronos-Kairos-Krisis* triad works very well when we want to explain the relationship between the religious and secular (pre-modern) concept of time, it is not so effective if

20 I am referring here to Assmann's comments in *Is Time Out of Joint?*, 6.

we try to use it to explain a complex physical phenomenon like the climate catastrophe. And if we try to interpret the climate catastrophe and religious apocalypse as some kind of analogous events, then the temporal relations within secular *Kairos* would be much more complex than what Hartog described: they would concern the present, in which the past latently lingers (past beginning of the catastrophe), and the future, whose influence on the present already exists (for example: present awareness of the future threat and present attempts to avoid the future).

Interestingly, the complex temporal structure of the ecological and climate catastrophe has already been analyzed by numerous scholars,[21] including in Poland,[22] and been the subject of many detailed interpretations.[23] It has even featured as a main theme of popular series (and not only in the last year or two: for example, the final season of one the award-winning Netflix series *The Affair* combines an interest in the consequences of the titular romance and the climate catastrophe, shown from a future perspective).[24]

If the broad manifestations of not only the awareness of the ecological catastrophe but also its complex temporal structure (including the future in which it will be fully realized; the present in which the catastrophe is taking place; and the past in which it was initiated) are so visible even in popular culture, not to mention academic research, it is quite surprising that this topic is still being researched in the field of temporal studies, for which it should be a primary point of interest. It also worth underlining that, if catastrophic thinking should be treated as a manifestation of a new type of temporality, it is difficult to treat this temporality as immersed solely in the present: although

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

22 Mościcki, "Apokalipsa Teraz!"

23 See Joanna B. Bednarek, "Zacznijmy od końca" [Let's start from the end], *Czas Kultury* 17 (2022); Magdalena Ochwat, "Katastrofa klimatyczna non-fiction" [Non-fiction climate catastrophe], *Kultura Współczesna* 2 (2020); Anna Herman, *Krytyka ekofeministyczna a katastrofa klimatyczna. Narracje o kryzysie w "nareszcie możemy się zjadać" Moniki Lubińskiej* [Ecofeminist criticism and the climate catastrophe. Narratives about the crisis in "we can finally eat each other" by Monika Lubińska], *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* LXIV (2021).

24 In the last season, the plot achronologically shows the fate of the main characters (two married couples: Alison and Cole and Noah and Helen), marked by signs of the present: fires in California and the #metoo social movement, as well as the adventures of Alison's daughter, which are taking place in the near future, in the era of a fulfilled ecological catastrophe. The fate of one of the most important characters in the series, Alison (and the mystery of her death), is related to certain climate changes (the water level in the ocean).

most theoretical studies emphasize the fact that the catastrophe is already taking place,[25] its full potential can only be realized in the future, or – which is an optimistic version of the same variant of thinking – through current actions, a certain vision of the future will be avoided.

Furthermore, catastrophic thinking is not the only manifestation of the existence of the future in the present. The second, at least equally important signal, suggesting that the future has not completely disappeared from the field of references of the present, is the technological and futurological consequences of the changes currently taking place, regarding the development of both artificial intelligence and the metaverse. The third one, which has been visible for years (paradoxically, at least since the advent of the temporal paradigm, which, according to most researchers, is supposed to be focused on the present, that is since the 1990s), is the clear interest in various forms of utopia and dystopia in culture and art. The fourth is the development of theories and concepts regarding prevention, preemption and premediation (for example, the optimistic version of averting the climate catastrophe is based on the mechanism of prevention or preemption: for the societies of the global North, the motivation to introduce political and economic changes is not the current climate catastrophe in the South, but the future consequences of this catastrophe for the North).

I will try to briefly describe these phenomena one by one. A year ago, a new technological tool was premiered, ChatGPT. In simple terms, this is a technology based on artificial intelligence in which the system itself learns the answers to the questions asked (i.e., it does not answer on the basis of any algorithm, but – using a language reserved rather for describing the accumulation of knowledge by humans – it learns based on all available information, including the questions that it is currently being asked). In a sense, this is not a breakthrough technology: for years, simple conversations with customers have been conducted via automated chats. Now, however, ChatGPT is able to perform much more difficult tasks, precisely because of its ability to learn – although it may sound strange – based on its own experience. The first experiments with the use of ChatGPT (including user tests, as the chat can – at least for now – be used without additional fees) indicate its great potential and lead to a growing concern related to the possibility of using it as a work automation tool, as well as one enabling students to cheat more easily. Not surprisingly, there have already been accusations that ChatGPT or another

25 See, for example, Tomasz Markiewka's thesis that disaster is no more a future theme, but a present problem ("Katastrofa jest za progiem" [Disaster is just around the corner], *Dwutygodnik.com*, accessed May 8, 2023, https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/8632-katastrofa-jest-za-progiem.html.

similar tool was used to create an expensive – and currently not very successful – report on universities in Poland.[26]

The metaverse is a fundamentally different tool: it is virtual reality, the experience of which is to become as real as the experience of reality, thanks to, among others, VR glasses (and in the future, probably also other sensory simulators). For now, the development of the metaverse mainly provides entertainment (just like the fledgling ChatGPT), but if it develops in line with current forecasts (and does not become overly expensive), it will most probably also become a therapeutic tool, allowing in some cases to rehabilitate motor functions, and in others, where rehabilitation is no longer possible, to re-experience lost motor skills. What is really interesting is the fact that, b e f o r e the metaverse fully debuted, it was already the subject of interest in numerous cultural texts, including the television series *The Peripheral* based on William Gibson's novel (Amazon production, 2022), in which the world of the metaverse is so well developed that it is possible to practice specific skills in it, including motor skills. Metaverse players acquire competences in virtual reality that translate one-to-one into skills in the real world (which is also divided in time and in which the future plays a significant role, secondarily influencing the present of the main character, Flynne).

Therefore, the current emergence of new technological tools is not only accompanied by the creation of a vision of their use and development in the future, but even more: before given technologies make their debut, they have already become an inspiration for fictional texts. One can, of course, argue that such phenomena are nothing new, since similar futurological trends were already visible at the beginning of the twentieth century, but this argument actually serves in favor of the thesis formulated in this article: since a certain durability of futurological thinking can be noticed from the beginning of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century, why do we assume that the future no longer interests us?

Of course, the predictions that the development of the technologies highlighted above, ChatGPT and the metaverse, m a y contribute to a radical reformulation of what our future will look like, do not have to come true. Although the first experiments with ChatGPT indicate the possibility of using it for various tasks, including those traditionally considered to require

26 Cf. Beata Maciejewska, Marcin Rybak and Marcin Sztandera, "Skandal uniwersytecki. Czy UJK za milion złotych sporządził raport wygenerowany przez sztuczną inteligencję?" [University scandal. Did Jan Kochanowski University prepare a report generated by artificial intelligence for a million zloty?], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 5, 20203, accessed May 8, 2023, https://kielce.wyborcza.pl/kielce/7,47262,29730166,skandal-uniwersytecki-czy-ujk-za-milion-zlotych-sporzadzil.html?disableRedirects=true.

considerable competences (from creating graphics, editing and translating texts, through air traffic supervision, to creating medical metadata, which in turn may contribute to advances in medical science), this does not mean that all of this potential will be realized. Nonetheless, it is hard not to consider the emergence of these two technologies as a manifestation of, first of all, thinking about the future as a certain project (I do not claim that this type of thinking about the future is collective in the same sense that Gumbrecht or Hartog propose, but it certainly concerns the collective and will probably have global effects). Secondly, it is difficult to deny that they are rooted in a rather classically understood futurology.

I will try to explain in more detail why I have identified as symptoms of the ongoing domination of the future in the current chronotype these seemingly different phenomena, that is the expansion of the topic of natural disasters and the development of two new technologies (including their influence on culture and literature), correlated with the growing popularity – also political – of doctrines that aim to either prevent or predict some version of the future. As I have already pointed out, there is nothing particularly new in the correlation of technological development and interest in the future, expressed in science fiction genres. However, in recent years, the connection between technological development and fictional, futurological visions has become deeper and clearer than before. "Metaverse" is a word taken from the science-fiction novel *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson, and the prediction of the development of artificial intelligence and the possibility of total immersion in virtual reality has been the subject of many novels and films, including the record-breaking *Matrix* films (directed by the Wachowskis), whose fourth instalment, not coincidentally, was released only in 2021. The future of technological change is therefore a topic that engages us collectively in the present (questions about how the development of artificial intelligence will change the labor market are now widely repeated, with both hope and anxiety).

The vision of technological development and the vision of ecological catastrophe are two dominant (and often not contradictory) versions of a possible future, developed in numerous utopias, dystopias and alternative histories.[27] Many of those visions are temporally complex, that is, based not on one

27 There are also more and more academic articles devoted to this topic, including those that return to the less recently used category of retropia. See, among others, Karolina Wierel, "Literackie dystopie początku XXI wieku – między realizmem a fantastycznością" [Literary dystopias of the early twenty-first century: Between realism and fantasy], in *Fantastyka a realizm*, ed. Weronika Biegluk-Leś, Sylwia Borowskiej-Szerszun and Ewelina Feldman-Kołodziejuk (Białystok: Temida, 2019), 13–153. The topic of ecological disaster is also well-studied in Poland, see, among others, Aleksandra Ubertowska, "Krajobraz po

version of possible future, but on multiple versions of possible futures, or on a vision of the future that is already embedded in the present (either latently, as a not yet fully realized possibility, or as a particular threat or hope). This phenomenon, like the colonization of the present with visions of possible futures, is now noticed even by researchers who claim – like Hartog – that we are stuck in a time of new presentism. This means that what was once defined as a manifestation of futurological thinking is now characterized as a manifestation of the negotiation of the present, as if the future was absorbed by the present, rather than the present being shaped by future possibilities and threats. I find this change in the interpretation of the trend very interesting – much more so than the stubbornly repeated theses about the present orientation of the current chronotype. It is worth asking, therefore, why clear manifestations of thinking about the future as a threat or warning are treated as a manifestation of interest in the present. It is rather obvious that even at the beginning of the twentieth century, visions of the future were created for the present change, and yet that period is treated as focused on the future, not on the present.

The only answer that seems likely is the qualitative difference in the mentioned visions: currently, there are few that paint the future in bright colors, and the imagined changes are rather negative. Hence the interest in those types of thinking about the future that are aimed not at bringing it closer, but at preventing it. The doctrines of prevention, preemption,[28] and premediation[29] are not only well developed theoretically, but also widely used in politics. Brian Massumi, who analyzed the functioning of contemporary affects, pointed out how the system of alarms and alerts[30] (currently widely used not only in USA, but also in Poland) influences our perception of reality as threatening and how it can also serve to build a policy that promises us false security

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Zagładzie. Pastoralne dystopie i wizje 'terracydu'" [The landscape after the Holocaust. Pastoral dystopias and visions of "terracide"], *Teksty Drugie* 2 (2017).

28 In this article, I define these terms after Brian Massumi, *Ontopower. War, Powers, and the State of Perception* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). I wrote more on this topic in Justyna Tabaszewska, "Przeszłe przyszłości. Afektywne fakty i historie alternatywne" [Past futures. Affective facts and alternative histories], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2017).

29 Richard Grusin, *Premediation. Affect and Mediality after 9/11* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

30 The alerts always concern a future danger or a current threat that may only be fully realized in the near or distant future. Referring to the Polish reality, which is relatively little immersed in pre-emergence politics, the RBC alert system is intended to warn about future violent weather events, and not, for example, a current storm.

and fuels something that, following Hartog, can be considered a manifestation of presentism, that is the desire for reality to remain u n c h a n g e d.

4. A Punctual Future and a Looping Present

The desire for the unchangeability of the present and the need to protect it from a threatening future are therefore the real tropes of the current chronotype. However, the question remains whether this chronotype is really focused on experiencing the present: if our task is to control the future so that it does not threaten the already established state of affairs, what is the main subject of interest – the present or the future?

The above question is partly built on a false alternative. I do not think that the contemporary chronotype can be described by choosing only one of these options, just as I do not think that interest in the present replaces focus on the future (or vice versa). Instead, we are observing the creation of a novel, complex temporal structure in which the relations between the past, the future and the present are subject to a specific loop, clearly visible when analyzing the functioning of the climate catastrophe in, for example, Hartog's concept. The presentness of the disaster does not mean its reduction to "now." On the contrary, it reveals in the present that certain processes that were initiated in the past will fully reveal their threatening consequences in the future. The danger and threat have neither begun now, nor will they end now, but the time to react i s n o w and in the near future, as the past cannot be changed, and the only chance to avert threatening future is immediate action.

This means that the temporal relations between the present and the future are flattened, and time is accelerated. Nevertheless, this is not a presentist flattening in the sense in which Hartog wrote about it: after all, the purpose of taking action in the present is not to prepare for the future of a religious apocalypse that will end human existence on Earth, but to negotiate the future of the catastrophe and replace it with another future – one in which there will still be place for human existence on Earth. At stake in this temporal game is not achieving *Krisis*, but avoiding it and reopening time for the future.

Of course, the "new" future understood in this way is rather vague and defined by negation: it is supposed to be a future other than that of catastrophe. Nevertheless, this future is significantly different from the present, since the basis of ideas about what is yet to come is imminent change, which will occur either way: maybe it will be a change that is a continuation of the present mistakes and bring with it a climate catastrophe; maybe it will be a change that will start now and enable us to avert to catastrophe. In both cases, the present is oriented towards the changing future, towards what is to come, and the fact that it is not an optimistic vision does not change the goal; that

is the transformation of a threatening and negative future into something that will be different both from catastrophic visions of the future, and from this present that is slowly turning into a past in which the beginning of the catastrophe has been missed.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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The Present on the Offensive?

The article critically analyzes theses on the dominance of the present in contemporary chronotype. I analyze the theories of A. Assmann, H. U. Gumbrecht, A. Huyssen, F. Hartog, and F. Fukuyama to show that – although some chronotype change is indeed currently happening – it is somewhat simplistic to describe the contemporary historical regime as presentist. Thus, I propose a new take on the relationship between the dominance of the present and the alleged disappearance of the future from the humanities. I do so by indicating the theoretical importance of specific categories, such as catastrophe, which – counter-intuitively – are directed at the present and the future to the same extent.

Keywords

the present, the future, presentism, chronotype, time studies, memory studies

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A Chiasmatic Present

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Michel de Certeau's foundational text *The Practice of Everyday Life* concludes with a chapter wherein the author adopts as his motto the words of György Lukács on the "anarchy of the chiaroscuro of the everyday," from his 1909 essay "The Metaphysics of Tragedy." For Certeau, this anarchic blend is something positive. It produces a fertile response of uncertain and opposing elements that challenge all that is stagnant, formalized, and official (note that the final chapter is specifically titled "The Unspecified"). Today, the agonizing of the everyday perception of the ordinary does not so much announce a promising adventure and is not a form of resistance (as for Certeau), as it is in keeping with the knowledge of the ephemerality of life that makes the everyday so elusive. The literature of high modernism has taken this elusiveness as one of its grand themes. Lukács himself – as Michael Sheringham wrote in his book on the phenomenon of the everyday – was more restrained in this regard. For the future author of *The Theory of the Novel*, the "anarchy of the chiaroscuro of the everyday" is the negative pole in the opposition, in which everyday life contrasts with a higher existence that possesses "form" and "soul": "life [everyday – M. Z.] is an anarchy of light and darkness:

nothing is ever fulfilled… nothing ends… nothing ever blossoms into real life [which is – M. Z.] always unreal, always impossible."[1] Sheringham adds that the opposition between "everyday" life and "real" life appeared in the thinking of Georg Simmel and especially Martin Heidegger, and later in the texts of Henri Lefebvre, which were so crucial to Certeau. We read that Lefebvre was critical of Heidegger's postponement of the everyday as the domain of the fallen, the inauthentic, the trivial, and the meaningless. For him too, however, the Heideggerian equation of the everyday with temporality itself, and therefore with a mere mode of being, remained in force: for the author of *Being and Time*, everyday life is indeed a way of being with its inevitable dullness, but Dasein gains moments of insight when it can control everyday life, although it can never extinguish it. Both authentic and inauthentic, Dasein has the everyday as its field of existence. If Being is discontinuous and inaccessible, it is because it depends on the everyday, which is the opposite of it. Lefebvre, concludes Sheringham, made this temporal dimension of everyday life – and above all, Heidegger's distinguished co-existence of the epiphanic and the non-epiphanic in it – the warp of his reflection.

In the last century, the everyday (*le quotidien*) became a routine subject of philosophical and literary reflection. It had already been explored by the Parisian Surrealists and then by the Situationists. At the same time, it also became the focus of anthropologists' attention: here, especially in France, anthropologists went hand in hand with writers (Sheringham points to the intellectual affinities of Michel de Certeau, Maurice Blanchot, Roland Barthes, Georges Perec, Annie Ernaux, and others). To this French tradition, as if aware of their backwardness, Anglo-Saxon anthropologists have been joining in for nearly twenty years (although, after all, one must remember the work of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, Erving Goffman, or Stanley Cavell). Today, they are trying to install themselves even more strongly in this field, inspired by the philosophy of affect. It is worth noting a book published four years ago, *The Anthropology of the Future* by Rebecca Bryant of Utrecht University and Daniel M. Knight of the University of St Andrews. The two authors revise the view of the everyday in its temporal aspect. Traditionally, it is the present, but they find the temporality of the present highly problematic. In their opinion, the view and understanding of the present needs to be revised significantly. On a day-to-day basis, we and the world of things are immersed in the social institutions that influence our lives – everything and everyone exists in various temporal orders that are specific to themselves. Each of us reduces them to the denominator of the present, which – I would add – could be called

1 Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006), 31.

the temporality of the natural attitude. However, as they say, the present is highly "thick," indeterminate, and unpredictable, often evading the forms we impose on it every time we install ourselves. Lefebvre wrote of this unstable nature: "everyday life protests, rebels in the name of innumerable individual issues and contingencies."[2] Kathleen Stewart highlights its deceptive opacity: "rooted in habits and perceptions, in our loves and hates, it can entangle you in something bad or good."[3] As I read in a review of her book from which these two quotes come, "this ease, with which we become involved in something good or bad, makes us think that the unpredictability of the everyday has as its cause the promises and dangers derived from the various anxieties and conflicts that engage us daily. Anxiety marks many of the situations Stewart recounts, and the 'ordinary' affect is experienced as a strong ambivalence in which one finds both the familiar and the unfamiliar."[4]

It is time to return to Bryant and Knight's thesis: in the "thick" present, past and future exist in a complex, ambiguous relationship, and anthropologists should investigate how these temporalities relate to each other in everyday life. Their interference constantly occupies our consciousness and prompts us to act – or, on the contrary, not to act. It is, therefore, worthwhile for anthropology to make them the object of its institutional scrutiny – both its practice and its theory – because such an approach can lead to essential recognitions. It is difficult to deny this, although the intuition itself is not new: Oswald Spengler wrote that the conflict and asynchrony of temporality, in which its institutions function within a civilization, leads to a crisis of that civilization. Crisis, however, is an ambiguous concept,[5] and the broadband present offers an opportunity for the encounter and osmosis of different dimensions of temporality, allowing for an invigorating restructuring of the symbolic field of everyday life – this is the understanding of temporal asynchronies advocated by the authors of this book.

What is the novelty of Bryant and Knight's proposal? A change of perspective: while today it is clear to historians, social scientists, and scholars of

2 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, vol. 2 (Paris: L'Arche, 1961), 69. Quoted in Natalya Lusty, "Every Kind of Everyday," *Cultural Studies Review* 15 (1) 2009: 202, accessed August 14, 2023, https://www.academia.edu/76082082/Every_Kind_of_Everyday_Book_Review.

3 Kirsten Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 106. Quoted in Lusty, "Every Kind of Everyday," 205.

4 Lusty, "Every Kind of Everyday."

5 See Edmond Radar, "Crisis and Civilisation," *Diogenes* 34 (135) (1986). Quoted in https://doi.org/10.1177/039219218603413503, accessed April 15, 2023.

memory studies that the past is the obvious legacy of the present and, at the same time, its minefield, Bryant and Knight insist that in the shaping and understanding of the present, the mythologized "now" – the fetish of modernity – our orientation towards the future plays a more significant role and is more important than hitherto thought in the social sciences and anthropology. The authors point out that until recently, the future was of little interest to anthropologists and social scientists. The past and the present, yes. Anthropology was primarily interested in issues and institutions that ensured the continuity of tradition and culture. There were two dominant temporal approaches to the field of research, usually described in anthropology textbooks as diachronic and synchronic. The focus was on the present and the past-present relationship. The last three decades have brought research into nationalism, collective memory, social transformation, and post-socialist nostalgia. While this has generated interest in the "homogeneous time" of the nation and the constitution of "imagined communities" (Benedict Anderson), in how the national past is constituted, and in how nations "remember" (here the authors cite the work of Paul Connerton in 1989, John R. Gillis in 1994, Pierre Nora in 1989, and the reissue of Maurice Halbwachs' classic work in 1992), little has been concerned with the national or collective future.

Furthermore, even though creating a new model of state or society is a future-oriented project, scholars focusing on the temporality of the processes described here have yet to address the relationship between the collective past and the envisaged future, say Bryant and Knight. What they do not write about is that the puzzling abandonment of the futural perspective in the 1990s was primarily due to the consequences of the disavowal of the "grand narratives" of history as a teleological project. Thinking in terms of grandiose projects in the service of progress and its ideologies discredited itself as politically scrambled. Teleological narratives were criticized for the messianic eschatology inscribed in them (Marxism, for instance) or considered exhausted (cf. Francis Fukuyama and the "end of history" he proclaimed). Paradoxically, the idea of globalism also contributed to the abandonment of reflection on the future. As Marc Augé wrote in 2004, "the ideology of globalism consists in rejecting history and proclaiming its end. Related to this is the rejection of any history that is in any way directed and that is becoming. It is almost as if control of space implies control of time."[6] After all, nothing "historical" will happen anymore. There is no more "becoming" in the former sense. We will only have to deal with the repetition of pattern and language. In a global space subjected to the control of the media, governed by turbo-capitalism,

6 Marc Augé, "Key Informants on the History of Anthropology: An Itinerary," *Ethnos* 69 (4) (2004): 549, accessed February 22, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/0014184042000302353.

making history is simply the efficient management of a planetary enterprise. According to Bryant and Knight, the future emerged as a promising field of research after 2000, when the "war on terror" and the global financial crisis and its aftermath left many people worldwide unable to predict the next day. Coupled with a growing literature on risk and finance, climate change, and the catastrophe of the Anthropocene, it became clear that any return to the past remained directly linked to an uncertain future.

Moreover, social media constantly catapult the past into the future, putting the immediate future in the spotlight as the anticipated present and eagerly dealing with the "past future." This term, introduced by Brian Massumi, does not appear in the two authors' book, although they deal differently with the temporality module it describes. The past future, as Justyna Tabaszewska, who has been using the concept in her research for several years, puts it, "is a vision of the future that was anticipated at some point but never realized," and today it often recurs in our disputes about the present and the future.[7] In this sense, our present is chiasmatic: it forms a space of mutual entanglement between the past and future. Alternatively, to put it another way, the phenomena belonging to it are "preposterous" in nature: they are figures of dual belonging and are borderline. That is the way Tabaszewska understands it:

> The Angelus Novus of our time is turning towards the future, but the momentum of history pushes it into the past: into the past of past futures, their promises and threats, and into a past realistically experienced, which is continually reconstructed by the present experience of subordination to what Massumi describes as a circular, self-induced future. Recasting the researcher's words slightly: we are currently living in the shadows of various circularly reproducing and, at the same time, contradictory futures, which force us to reconstruct the past in such a way that we do not lose our elementary sense of the meaning and continuity of time.[8]

So it is: not only does the past project the future, but the future "colonizes and revises the past" and is "hostage to current affective politics."[9] Moreover, the unrealized future becomes real because its present effects are real. Bryant and Knight advocate precisely the teleological view of temporality operating in the philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Heidegger and the proponents

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7 Justyna Tabaszewska, *Pamięć afektywna. Dynamika polskiej pamięci po roku 1989* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Mikołaja Kopernika, 2022), 24. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this artice.

8 Ibid., 34.

9 Ibid., 27.

of speculative realism. Following Theodore Schatzki, they recognize that time and space are intertwined in our everyday "bundles of practices" that have a future purpose – practices that are rooted in and have consequences in the material world. This ontology is reminiscent of Bruno Latour's network model of reality, but the authors find it appropriate to refer to the American philosopher's concept. The bundles of practices form a space-time that they call the "teleoaffective structure" of the present, a structure that, while goal-oriented, is also affective. For Schatzki, such a structure is a series of standardized and hierarchically ordered goals, projects, and tasks linked to normative emotions and moods.[10]

> In other words, the impatience with which, on a sunny day, I wait for the washing machine to finish its work, or the irritation I feel when living next to some endless construction site, the anxiety over an impending dead-line – these are all teleoaffects triggered by our orientation towards specific goals within bundles of practice.[11]

Tele-affects determine the tensions within the heterochrony that is the present. They can be individual, but they can also be collective ("this is not the Poland we wanted," to refer to an indigenous affect). They can be our private worldview and those suggested by various institutions and agencies. Bryant and Knight, writing about the presence of the future in the present, distinguish the orientations active in this regard and, at the same time, the "teleoaffective structures": anticipation, expectation, speculation, potentiality, hope, and destiny. In their book, these are heuristically distinguished, but on a day-to-day basis, they coexist and are intertwined. Daily, they say, we live on a thick and porous threshold between past and future, and the horizon of expectation seen from this threshold, which defines our knowledge of the future, shapes the perception of the familiarity of everyday life. On this threshold, which is a heterochrony, the "magic of the future" happens, they say, invoking Debbora Battaglia. Our semi-scientific, semi-magical understanding of the future can give us a sense of stability in the present. However, it can also disrupt the present by presenting it as uncertain and lacking prospects. While this understanding can motivate us to act, such as emigrating, it can engender melancholy and resignation. For instance, a remote threat, such as an impending ecological calamity, can cause the present to stretch

10 Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight, *The Anthropology of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019), 18.

11 Ibid., 18.

out interminably before us and take on an eerie, apocalyptic quality. Exploring the temporal dynamism and possible stagnation of such orientations, the authors argue for an anthropology that considers the teleologies of our lives and actions and charts a new future for the discipline.

> If we accept anthropology's relation to the present, and thus to the temporality considered fundamental to the history and development of the discipline, new attention to the future certainly implies a new kind of anthropology. It involves a reorientation of the discipline: from being to becoming, from structure to action, from the status quo of social institutions to hopes, planning, practices, and actions that project what is yet to come.[12]

David Graeber, the author of *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, writes his books guided, as he says, by the principle that "anthropologists have so far described the world; the point is to change it."[13] Bryant and Knight agree. The chapter on anticipation justifies their position and shows how the future compels us to act today. The word "anticipation" needs to convey what anticipation is. Anticipation is more than expectation or foresight, which is imagining the future: it has a causal dimension; it is an intervention in the present, bringing the future into the present. Our expectation of something or prediction in anticipation is concretized in the present action. In the chapter on anticipation, the authors reconstruct the philosophical thinking that maintains that the present is pregnant with both the past and future. They cite Saint Augustine, who says that the present is the threshold at which the future passes into the past; Edmund Husserl, for whom the act of consciousness has a retentional/protentional character; Martin Heidegger's thinking, where the future awakens the present and gives it meaning. Anticipation pervades our actions in everyday life, as the lyrics of popular songs tell us every day. In collective life, it is linked to specific moments of an uncertain or threatening future when a particularly affective dimension of time manifests itself, often requiring collective action (the authors locate such reactions in times of war, natural disaster, famine, etc.). For our experience of the future in the present, the notion of a liminal "threshold of anticipation" rather than a transcendent "horizon of expectation" seems more appropriate to them. The threshold of anticipation "implies both the

12 Ibid., 192.

13 Mark Thwaite, *David Graeber Interview with ReadySteady Book*, September 17, 2011. Quoted after https://libcom.org/article/david-graeber-interview-readysteadybook, accessed February 11, 2023.

proximity of the future and the idea of potentially crossing it."[14] The liminal temporality of the "threshold of expectation" implies a radical reorientation of the present. An example is the time of war and the apocalyptic time increasingly leaking into our present.

The authors of *The Anthropology of the Future* draw on their ethnographic research on the Eastern Mediterranean to illustrate the emergence of future studies as a field of anthropology. The region's financial turmoil, mass migration, climate change, and political instability are causing a historical and temporal awareness shift. Nevertheless, they emphasize that they are using examples from the region to see some existing research on the history, historicity, tradition, and the past through a lens oriented towards the future and not necessarily the immediate one. They also set their lens like a telescope at a further distance: anthropologists have taken an interest in our fears and what was, until recently, considered to belong to the realm of fantasy or speculation. Space exploration and encounters with extraterrestrial life have long been the subjects of futuristic visions, but anthropology has recently become increasingly interested in space as a significant area of study. Numerous scholars are exploring humanity's technological and ethical limitations and advocating for a shift in our spatial and temporal horizons, urging us to consider a future beyond the confines of planets and species. All speculation about the future alters our perception of Earth's future and blurs the distinction between nature and culture. Concern about the end of our future is growing. The authors refer to Hirokazu Miyazaki's work on reconceptualizing the present through the lens of the end of human time. In the study of philosophical anthropology practiced today, it is not only the near, everyday, and historical present that is beginning to be perceived and structured futuristically: this is also starting to happen with that seen on a planetary scale and now increasingly seen in post-humanist terms, analyzed, as Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, in terms of "inhumanly vast timescales of deep history."[15] Chakrabarty's name does not appear in *The Anthropology of the Future*, and nor are Bryant and Knight's names to be found in Chakrabarty's book *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. However, his thinking represents an application of the research project presented in Bryant and Knight's book. Chakrabarty claims that we are situated "on the cusp of the global and what may be called 'the planetary,'"[16] which will prove crucial to our species' future. He argues for replacing our current historical

14 Bryant and Knight, *The Anthropology of the Future*, 35.

15 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in Planetary Age* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2021), 4.

16 Ibid., 3.

experience of time with the planetary experience. Specifically, the conclusion of the preface to his book appears significant in this regard:

> We can then say that as humans, we presently live in two different kinds of "now-time" (or what they call *Jetztzeit* in German) simultaneously: in our awareness of ourselves, the "now" of human history has become entangled with the long "now" of geological and biological timescales, something that has never happened before in the history of humanity.[17]

Our understanding of time, as explored by phenomenologists, is only sometimes in line with the evolutionary and geological chronologies. Until now, these two forms of chronology have remained out of synchrony. However, it is now crucial to synchronize them, as it has become a matter of life and death:

> We need to connect deep and recorded histories and put geological time and the biological time of evolution in conversation with the time of human history and experience. [...] The crisis at the planetary level percolates into our everyday life in mediated forms, and one could argue that it even issues in part from decisions we make in everyday life (such as flying, eating meat, or using fossil fuel energy in other ways).[18]

Chakrabarty's book is an example of new thinking about the present and the future and an ethical manifesto. Will a catastrophic scenario be averted? The future increasingly haunts our present. When I read that this July was the hottest month in the planet's history, I began to wonder about the desirability of what I was doing. It is obvious today – although still not for everyone – that the temporality of our future tense is increasingly becoming a temporality enshrined in the *futurum perfectum*, a module of the future antecedent tense. However, its realization appears unlikely despite not being widely recognized. As Lecia Rosenthal says in *The Mourning Modernism* – a book about modernity in mourning for itself – the future anterior is the temporality proper to the projected future of an event, located in a future later than a future that has already taken place before. It is temporality pregnant with its paradoxicality, anticipating the future as a completed interval of time: accomplished because it is completed and located in the past. It becomes the future-as-the past. At the same time, the future anterior requires no end to the future *tout court*: there is always a future necessary concerning which the future anterior will

17 Ibid., 7.

18 Ibid., 7; 8.

already be past. Anticipating two futures: the future as past and the future from which this future is already perceived as past, the future anterior opens up the future and closes it down. Derrida, Rosenthal adds, sees this paradox as the foundation of the archivist's founding gesture: the existence of the archive anticipates the future, but also simultaneously terminates it:

> Anticipation opens to the future, but at the same time, it neutralizes it. It reduces, presentifies, transforms into memory [*en mémoire*], into the future anterior, and, therefore, into a memory [*en souvenir*], that which announces tomorrow as still to come. A single movement extends the opening of the future, and by the same token, by way of what I would call a horizon effect, it closes the future off, giving us the impression that "this has already happened." I am so ready to welcome the new, which I know I will be able to keep, capture, and archive, that it is as if it had already happened and as if nothing will ever happen again. Thus, the impression of "No future" is paradoxically linked to a more significant opening, an indetermination, a wide-openness, chaos, a chasm: anything can happen, but it has already happened.[19]

Our future is potentiality; that is obvious. Potentiality is the possibility with which the future is equipped, if it is to be the future of the past or now virtually present in everyday life. As Bryant and Knight write, Aristotle observed that when one eliminates potentiality, only the actual remains, so the future becomes something impossible. Potentiality gives meaning to the idea of the future, so it makes the future possible; it also allows us to think about what exists for us in the present and, at the same time, remains absent from it. It allows the present to be something other than just reality. Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, and Brian Massumi describe the latently present potentiality dormant in the present as the realm of virtuality, real but not actual.[20] Potentiality as a futural temporal orientation, similar to anticipation, permeates our everyday life and allows us to get out of the chalk circle of what is factual. Nevertheless, as Giorgio Agamben notes, and Rebecca Bryant and Daniel Knight cite, potentiality is what it is because it may not happen, either.

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19 Jacques Derrida, "Phonographies: Meaning – from Heritage to Horizon," in *Echographies of Television, with Bernard Stiegler*, trans. Jennifer J. Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 105––106. Quoted after Lecia L. Rosenthal, *Mourning Modernism. Literature, Catastrophe and the Politics of Consolation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 25.

20 Bryant and Knight, *The Anthropology of the Future*, 107.

It is positivity and negativity, potency and impotence, the possibility of being or not being: "the future also includes its absence."[21] Derrida wrote his praise of the archive when the idea of potentiality leaned towards the pole of positivity. Today, it is heading in the opposite direction. If we realize an optimistic scenario, our world will continue. However, the "horizon effect" now forces us to anticipate an end signifying the reign of victorious facticity (once eagerly portrayed as a "cold" necessity, and today, for us, increasingly hot, haunting us from the future as the specter of global warming, which will paradoxically extinguish the present of Dasein). Furthermore, an archive may be left in space, but no archivist will be left.

Abstract

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A Chiasmatic Present

This article advocates the usefulness of the research categories and proposals presented in Rebeca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight's book *The Anthropology of the Future* (2019), in describing the challenges and threats we face in the future.

Keywords

anthropology, everyday, present, teleoaffect, temporality

21 Ibid., 125.

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The Economy of Memory: How Memcoins Enter the Market

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Grzegorz Marzec – Associate Professor at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. A significant part of his work focuses on literary theory, Romantic literature, and memory studies. He is the author of four monographs and numerous articles. The presented paper is mostly translation from his book *Ekonomia pamięci* [Economy of memory] (2016: IBL PAN), and it has never been previously published in English.

Shakespeare the Economist

The main thesis of this text is that the theoretical apparatus of memory studies, at least in its mainstream, has a hidden economy which is the classical liberal economy. The economy accompanies the often-declared left-wing nature of the studies, although there is no room in this text for a political analysis of this peculiar conceptual marriage. This thesis elaborates on a monologue only seemingly surprising in this context – as it received several commentaries in memory studies – a monologue by Hamlet:[1]

> O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
> And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
> And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
> But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?
>
> Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe. Remember thee?

1 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. David Bevington and David Scott Kastan (New York: Bantam Books, 1988).

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damnèd villain!
My tables—meet it is I set it down
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.
At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.
[Writing.]
So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word:
It is "Adieu, adieu! Remember me."
I have sworn't.[2] (1.5.93–113)

[Writing.] From the point of view of a reader who does not worry much about memory issues, this stage direction may not bear much importance. We may treat it as we usually do with stage directions: neglect them, and either treat them as tips for directors or a form of rudimentary narrative. However, it is interesting that this matter does not seem to concern researchers of cultural memory who refer to this fragment. What seems to be of paramount importance from this perspective is the question of what the Prince of Denmark writes down in his "tables" and, in particular, whether he records anything at all.[3]

2 Ibid., 31–32. Quoted lines are marked in text round brackets.

3 Shakespeare uses the word "table" as a synonym for memory or as a term for a writing-pad, tablet, slate or notebook. It appears more than once in Shakespeare's works, and we also find it in other works of Elizabethan writers. We might say that "table" refers to an ancient philosophical distinction between the mind and matter. Sometimes, a table means the mind, and sometimes it means matter. For example, Shakespeare refers to this memory metaphor in part II of Henry IV (William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of the History of Henry IV*, ed. John D. Wilson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968], 72):
No, no, my lord. Note this – the king is weary
Of dainty and such picking grievances,
For he hath found to end one doubt by death
Revives two greater in the heirs of life:
And therefore will he wipe his tables clean,
And keep no tell-tale to his memory
That may repeat and history his loss

To the point. *[Writing.]* in some edition may appear as "Hamlet writes" or "He writes," however it does not appear in the First Folio [F1; 1623] nor in the Second Folio [F2; 1632]. We find it neither in the First Quarto [Q1; 1603] nor the Second Quarto [Q2; 1604] nor in any of the later Quartos.[4] It appears for the first time in the 1709 edition by Nicholas Rowe. We find there the word "writing"[5] preceded by a square bracket and ended with a dot without the bracket.[6] As it is almost commonly accepted among scholars, Rowe based his work mostly on the corrupt F4, the most recent edition at that time, and to a lesser extent on previous editions. In comparison with the earlier versions of Shakespeare's works – as we mean more than just *Hamlet* now – Rowe introduced many major corrections, and one of the "improvements" were stage directions, including the "*Writing*" we examine. Rowe himself was a playwright and certainly based his conviction about the adequacy of changes on his experience. A particular staging of *Hamlet* could also have influenced Rowe's decision. A director could assume that "meet it is I set it down" must involve a physical necessity to write down, as actors who played Hamlet often immediately received writing utensils. However, for us, both Rowe's dramatic experience and stage practice may seem questionable arguments. On the other

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To new remembrance. (4.1.197–204)
An extremely interesting article by four authors refers to the rich historical material and convinces us that the "writing table" was not just a notebook, in which one would irreversibly record in ink this or that information, but that it presented an opportunity to write down the text and then remove it. Some writing tables have survived to this day. They usually resemble a small-format handy calendar, which consisted partly of pre-printed cards and partly of cards intended for writing. This type of notebook was extremely common in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and – as the article suggests – it probably served Shakespeare as a technical model for describing Hamlet's memory. See Peter Stallybrass, Roger Chartier, John F. Mowery and Heather Wolfe, "Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55 (4) (2004): 379–419.

4 As we know, F1 and Q2 are usually considered to be the most representative and reliable texts, although Q1, depreciatingly labeled as "bad quarto," is a fascinating editorial puzzle for many researchers. It is also believed that Q1 provides better insight into first onstage performances of Hamlet.

5 To be sure, I reviewed the facsimiles of seventeenth-century Hamlet editions. A footnote to an article by a well-known Shakespeare researcher convinced me that "there is no stage direction specifying that Hamlet writes until Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition." Cf. Margreta De Grazia, "Soliloquies and Wages in the Age of Emergent Consciousness," *Textual Practice* 9 (1) (1995): 83.

6 William Shakespeare, *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear*, vol. 5 (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, at Grays-Inn Gate, 1709), 2387.

hand, we know not how appeared Shakespeare's own stage directions. In her essay on this particular topic, Bernice W. Kliman indicates that researchers remain skeptical about the stage directions printed in Q1, Q2, and F1. She then adds on behalf of Shakespeare researchers: "we gather that even if we had *Hamlet* manuscript(s), we might not understand Shakespeare's intentions for staging the play because he presumably clarified them in performance with his colleagues."[7] Following Q1, Q2, F1, and Rowe's edition, there seems to be a certain latitude in this regard. Sometimes, Hamlet's monologue contains the remark about writing down; sometimes there is none. Under Rowe's influence, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editions began to follow this small yet significant addition. Lewis Theobald's 1733 edition, which played a key role as the basis for all subsequent editions of all Shakespeare's works, contains exactly the same correction as does Rowe's edition.[8] A few decades later, Samuel Taylor Coleridge will write without any hesitation or doubt:

> But Shakespeare alone could have produced the vow of Hamlet to make his memory a blank of all maxims and generalized truths, that "observation had copied there," – followed immediately by the speaker noting down the generalized fact,
>
> That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain![9]

Intuitively, Coleridge touches here upon the fundamental problem of memory studies, related to the use or omission of a seemingly banal stage direction. Coleridge was one of the key people who cemented the interpretation of Hamlet as a person incapable of action, despite his constant declarations to the contrary. Coleridge probably used different editions of the text, but I conclude from some of his remarks and additions that he relied mainly on Theobald's edition. It is possible that he did not bother with the question whether *[Writing.]* comes from Shakespeare or an editor of his works. Coleridge could have also assumed – regardless of the answer to this question and especially when it is impossible to find a solution – that a suggestion

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7 Bernice W. Kliman, "Explicit Stage Directions (Especially Graphics) in *Hamlet*," in *Stage Directions in "Hamlet": New Essays and New Directions*, ed. Hardin L. Aasand (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 75.

8 William Shakespeare, *The Works of Shakespeare*, vol. 7 (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth et al., 1733), 255.

9 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Essays and Lectures on Shakspeare and Some Other Old Poets and Dramatists* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1907), 147. Coleridge delivered his Shakespeare lectures in 1808–19. The problem is that the text of these lectures was reconstructed from the author's partial notes and the listeners' records. As in the case of Hamlet, it is difficult to really speak of a canonical version.

comes naturally to mind that Hamlet must write something down. We may come to a similar conclusion when reading editorial comments in nineteenth-century editions.

For a better understanding of the dilemma inherent in Coleridge's text, let us briefly summarize Hamlet's monologue. The prince delivers the monologue right after he speaks with the father's ghost, who commands his son: "remember me" (Act I, Scene V). In order to comply with the order, Hamlet decides to erase from his memory all book knowledge, all minor news, and all information that could compete with the memory of his father. Of course, Shakespeare refers here to the motif of memory as a book, widespread since the Middle Ages, which largely replaced (or at least transformed) the old Platonic metaphor of the seal imprinted in wax. Plato compares memory – a part of the soul – to a wax tablet upon which we imprint thoughts and perceptions.[10] Shakespeare offers us a broader understanding of this motif. "Table [of memory – G. M.]" becomes a writing-pad or notebook or a handy notepad. Immediately, Sigmund Freud's "mystic writing-pad" comes to mind, especially as a few verses later Shakespeare adds the term "book and volume of my brain," which leads directly to the phenomenon of corporal remembering and forgetting; to use an anachronism, it leads to its neurology and psychoanalysis. The (alleged) liquidation of the previously acquainted memory data allows Hamlet to make room for his father's order, which from now on gains the rank of not one among many but the only mnemonic content: "all alone shall live."

However, Hamlet soon remembers his mother and uncle, which results in a sarcastic aphorism about villains with smiling faces. He decides to write this thought down in a handy notebook. We do not know for sure, if Hamlet writes it down, although the way in which Q2 and F1 differentiate between

10 Memory as a book is the main motif of a very interesting work by Mary Carruthers (Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990]). The idea of memory as an imprint appears in Theaetetus, in which we find the other, equally important metaphor of aviary-like memory (see Plato, *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, trans. Christopher Rowe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015]: 70–79). Aristotle in *De memoria et reminiscentia* also refers to the metaphor of a seal in wax:
"Now, one might raise the difficulty how you remember that which is not present, since it is the affection that is present, while the thing is absent. For clearly one must think about that which is so generated through sensation in the soul, that is, in that part of the body which contains it, as a sort of picture, and the state of having this we call "memory"; for the movement produced stamps almost a sort of impression of the sense-impression, similar to what is done by people using their seals." See Aristotle, "On Memory and Recollection," trans. David Bloch, in *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection*, ed. David Bloch (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 31.

grammatical types of tables is noteworthy. When Hamlet speaks of his memory, he uses the singular t a b l e , but when he refers to an external object, he uses the plural t a b l e s.[11] Hamlet's monologue ends with a statement that it is time to return to the words of the father and his order.

In each of the known variants, the monologue is to some extent ambiguous. It is only seemingly understandable and transparent, which is largely due to the presence or lack of the stage direction under investigation. If there were no stage direction – and it is probable that there never were any directions at all, which we, of course, will never know for sure – then Coleridge's and others' assumption that the act of writing down does happen is not supported by any specific proof from the text. In Coleridge's interpretation, such a statement is very comfortable: Hamlet decides to remove from his memory all inferior thoughts and then he does exactly the opposite, because writing thoughts down in a notebook does not equal their definite removal from memory. However, let us notice – again this Shakespearean ambiguity! – that such interpretation could support an opposite situation. Namely, one when Hamlet does not write anything down but seems to wish that he did. Even without stage direction, we may say that writing down remains only a potential choice, a verbal possibility, an empty illocutionary force; only with the direction does it become an act. Hamlet who writes down is the Hamlet who acts. Moreover, from the viewpoint of modern readers, Hamlet deprived of any support of stage direction and in front of a potential choice would have a special charm reminiscent of Beckett's dramas, whose characters often declare to act and do not act. This is, perhaps, especially visible in *Endgame*. The difference is that Beckett usually informs about the lack of action in stage directions, so a fully analogous situation would require another Shakespeare's stage direction: "Hamlet does not write" or "Hamlet writes not."

However, let us assume that Hamlet does indeed record something in his notebook. Since none of the versions of the text suggests what Hamlet could write down, we are left uncertain with four possibilities. First, according to Coleridge's conviction, Hamlet records his aphorism about villains. Second, he writes down both the aphorism about villains and the command to remember his father. Third, only the obligation to remember his father. Fourth, we do not know what he writes and, as the text suggests, whether he did write anything at all.

I already tried to diagnose the dilemma of the first of the above proposals. At first glance, the problem is that the behavior and conduct of Hamlet are as

11 Q1 differs from Q2 and F1 in double appearance of the plural version ("tables"). In any case, it seems only right to assume, as Shakespeare's English editions do today, that the grammatical difference is here justified.

consistent as possible with his verbal declarations. He gave his father a place in mind and heart, having prepared them beforehand, and he recorded all which is "trivial" – like the maxim on villains – not in his memory, but in his handy notes, which serve as a convenient *aide-mémoire*. But according to this term, what would the notes serve if not memory? External carrier only postpones future use. It may even happen that Hamlet will never use the notebook again, but the mere carrier of something in the "memory" of pages, notes, or cards is connected with the assumption that whatever is stored may finally return to the proper memory, in this very case to aberrant, deviant memory monopolized by a particular mnemonic order.

On the other hand, the physical recording of his father's order, that is, writing it down in a notebook – the third possibility – would simultaneously break the promise given to Hamlet's father. Commitment based on external memory – in this case writing – would be worth very little. It is a type of order that must be engraved "in the heart and mind," and that is what Hamlet promised to do. The only acceptable currency here is the handwriting of the heart. Because father's words are an order, an imperative, thus Hamlet must transform himself into a mnemonic entity, a walking memory, as the function of the imperative radically changes the form and role of what would normally be a mere memory of a father.

It would certainly be possible to present this fragment of the drama as a model example (or synecdoche) of the distinction between functional and storage memory introduced by Aleida Assmann, widely popular in memory studies. In a nutshell, the distinction attempts to present the history of memory after oral cultures began to use external memory carriers and actually abandoned the oral stage. In this respect, there is an agreement between Assmann's views and the ideas of Walter Jackson Ong. Before the breakthrough postulated by Assmann, a given culture – or actually a group of people who created a given culture – was the only carrier of memory. Everything worth remembering and what decided about the specificity of the culture was its exclusive property later ceded to the next generations. The Latin "omnia mea mecum porto" would probably be an adequate description of this somewhat ideal situation. Everything changes with the introduction of external carriers of memory and the transition to the writing culture. From then on, there was a growing gap between what people know or remember and what is stored on carriers other than human memory. Successive carriers, print and digital media in particular, only widen this gap, which is why memory studies is to a great degree interested in the overgrowth of archives and online content of various kinds, the issue of organizing and cataloging them, and how they can return to the functional memory of societies and people. Functional memory is the memory shared and used in a given moment by a group of

individuals. Especially today, it is disproportionately small when contrasted with the external mass of information that forms storage memory. In oral culture, the memory of individuals was actually functional memory in the strict sense, with the simultaneous absence of any other form of memory.

Plato's criticism of writing in *Phaedrus* seems to be the natural philosophical foundation that accompanies this terminological division and its related theory. Of course, *toutes proportions gardées*, one of Plato's fundamental questions was how the written message could guarantee the truthfulness and validity of thought that was ultimately forced to assume the form of signs external and alien. This is not the key question of memory studies, but the fundamental trait remains common: Plato also refers to the breakthrough transition from the culture of speech to the culture of writing and tries to dress it in a conceptual robe. Anyhow, it is hard to resist the impression that the division into functional and storage memory repeats the characteristic Platonic distance to what happens to memory, especially after the spread of electronic media. This seems stronger than just distance: rather coldness and reluctance. As far as I know, such physical-astronomical metaphors and comparisons do not appear in Assmann's works, and yet storage memory presents itself as a kind of antimatter or dark matter. Meanwhile, memory studies would serve as a theoretical diagnosis of the problem and, at the same time, a remedy, thanks to which we would perhaps learn how to deal with this alienation of antimatter and how to transform it into ordinary matter, so as to return it closer to functional memory. In any case, it is all arranged into an intriguing story. People used to be at home. We felt at home, we knew as much as we remembered, and we only used functional memory. Jan Assmann claims that this was a time of constant festivity: "originally, there was only one order, which was festive and sacred and which had a guiding influence on everyday life."[12] Later, we were banished from this paradise: the spirit of storage memory emerged in our world. But it was blind and still needed the eyes of functional memory. Today, the study of cultural memory allows the spirit to open its eyes, to unite with functional memory, and people to return to themselves through explaining the phenomenon of remembering. This agrees with Aleida Assmann when she interprets William Wordsworth and the concept of the "wound of time," which distracts us from the form of existence typical for living in nature: "disappearing into time entails alienation, but every theory of alienation contains a salvational vision of unity."[13] Thus, memory studies

12 Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43.

13 Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 96.

adopts a different method than Plato for dealing with the alien. At least theoretically and as far as he did not have to write down his own dialogues, Plato unconditionally rejected writing. Memory studies is interested in how matter from one level can become matter of the second kind, while the movement goes both ways, as stored memory can become functional, while functional memory can be stored.[14]

Hamlet's monologue perfectly exemplifies the dichotomy of both memories, but it does it in two ways; I will remark on the second one later. In the first variant, functional memory is the individual memory of the Prince of Denmark located in his mental apparatus, defined here in several different ways. It comes as a "distracted globe," a "table of my memory," and "the book and volume of my brain." Storage memory is a notebook Hamlet keeps in his pocket. According to Hamlet's decision, functional memory contains only what is important, or rather, what is only important. On the other hand, at least until the appearance of the ghost of the father and accepting his order, storage memory gathers less significant information like book wisdom and life maxims, which Hamlet hunts and collects. However, from the perspective of memory theory, what is not model in the situation outlined by Shakespeare is a sudden reversal of proportions. Functional memory, which transforms into a command to remember, is deprived of its basic value, that is, its functionality, and perhaps the notebook contains information that could guide Hamlet's actions, if not for the fresh decision to abandon all knowledge of "baser matter." Hence, Hamlet's functional memory is non- or a-functional. It is nothing else than a paralyzing order, a commitment, or a sense of responsibility. Although Hamlet repeats "remember thee," it is not the father but the internalized duty itself that is the most important object of remembrance in this case. If functional memory is to be truly functional, it must always be capable of either differentiating between the value of different memorized

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Cf. also J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 42: "cultural memory extends the everyday world with a further dimension of negations and potentials, and, through this, it compensates for the deficiencies of normal life."

14 It is at least intriguing that the terminological proposal by Aleida Assmann came into being after Jacques Derrida's radical criticism of Platonic logocentrism. Assmann, knowing and from time to time even quoting Derrida's works, however fails to notice that the difference between functional and storage memory can be treated as parallel to Platonic dichotomies. This is even more true of the conceptual opposition introduced by Jan Assmann. Within the framework of broadly understood collective memory, Jan Assmann distinguishes between communicative memory and cultural memory. The former is the domain of everyday life, the latter is a hallowed domain. The former is ephemeral, the latter is permanent and constitutive. The former is particular, the latter is as general as possible. See J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 34–50.

contents or of forgetting, relegating irrelevant information to storage memory. However, by virtue of Hamlet's own decision and his father's order, such a solution is forbidden and excluded. Hamlet already removed the unnecessary ballast of knowledge, or he naively promises to do so. His naivety would be measured by his conviction that it suffices to say "I forget" to truly forget. If he wrote his thoughts about villains in a notebook, he would prove himself incapable of forgetting.

I believe we can describe this situation in terms of an economic crisis. In oral culture, which very often forms the initial condition for memory studies, as long as a group of people is not excluded from some specific knowledge, they all share memory more or less equally, so everyone knows (and remembers) about the same amount of information. In this case, memory material differs from the usual currency in that it can be redistributed among all interested individuals without risking hyperinflation. Since minds are memory carriers, knowledge cannot be multiplied without end. It encounters a barrier that protects against the oversupply of memory money. However, this money does not end up in the free, liberal market. If this state of equilibrium is to be maintained, we need a specific commitment that binds the culture of memory understood in this way: the commitment to remember. A commitment is like market regulation. We cannot cede any part of this knowledge to external memory carriers – nor renounce it – as this would mean that we would question our affiliation with a community. Folk literature supports this thesis, and it comes from a culture closely related to orality. In folk literature, we find examples of clear ostracism that hurts those who forget.

By reducing functional memory to one specific memory order, Hamlet becomes a man of oral culture. Somehow perversely, it would be an oral culture with a notebook, the meaning of which in this scene is still unclear to the reader. But in Hamlet's case, the primary alienation does not end with redemption, a return to nature. This is due to the fact that – in oral culture – the duty to remember serves only the stability of the system that supports the cultural order. In the case of Hamlet, remembrance is entirely subordinated to the duty to remember. The duty to remember exists for its own sake. In any case, we must draw the following conclusion: to abandon the somewhat idealistic image of oral culture for the culture of writing and other external carriers of memory must lead to suspicions against the idea of mnemonic commitment. Understood as memory that goes beyond individual or group psychology, cultural memory cannot be based on any commitment.

If we observe this condition – that the category of duty does not enter the area of cultural memory – then this memory itself begins to behave like a self-regulating market governed by the laws of liberal economics. The guiding principle of this market is the unrestricted and unregulated capital flow.

Capital consists of symbolic content that people commemorate. Flow means both the possibility of distributing memory content between members of the same community or different communities and also the possibility of transferring data content from functional memory to storage memory and vice versa. By its very nature, this market is also highly susceptible to the overproduction of mnemonic currency, which can lead to hyperinflation.

Let us refer to two examples. I think that we can read in this spirit the well-known article by Wulf Kansteiner[15] and the essay by Tzvetan Todorov on uses and abuses of memory.[16] Kansteiner does not really speak out against memory studies but rather tries to strengthen it methodologically by indicating its weaknesses and aporias. We may call this a contemporary variation of Kantian criticism. In Kansteiner's opinion, one of the most serious difficulties faced by scholars of cultural memory is the impossibility to clearly separate collective and individual memories. For that reason, researchers constantly use tools developed in the field of neurology or psychology. Kansteiner considers this to be "a tempting yet potentially grave methodological error."[17] Later we read:

> it might make sense to argue with Freud that an individual's failure to work through his or her past results in unwanted symptoms of psychological unhealth, that the self relies on a sense of continuity that makes it impossible to repress the past without having to pay a psychological price for this repression. But on a collective scale, especially on the scale of larger collectives, such assumptions are misleading. Nations c a n repress with psychological impunity; their collective memories can be changed without a "return of the repressed."[18]

As we see, Kansteiner not only opposes the application of psychoanalytical methods to the study of cultural memory but also argues against a characteristic assumption that memory studies encounters traumatized communities almost at every step. Kansteiner seems to be particularly concerned about the ease with which scholars of memory studies accept the thesis of social trauma. As we know, this applies mainly to the literature devoted to the problem of the Holocaust. Even if some communities have been traumatized, Kansteiner believes that this is not an object of cultural memory, which begins right

15 Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41 (2) (2002): 179–197.

16 Tzvetan Todorov, "The Abuses of Memory," trans. M. L. Chang, *Common Knowledge* 5 (1) (1996): 6–26.

17 Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 185.

18 Ibid., 186.

where psychology ends: "though specific visions of the past might originate in traumatic experiences they do not retain that quality if they become successful collective memories."[19] These words should indicate the fact that the essence of collective memories is their detachment from primary historical and psychological motives: "memories are at their most collective when they transcend the time and space of the events' original occurrence."[20] Therefore, memories are about freeing a given event from its initial context and lead to a situation in which members of a community do not have to be personally burdened with the memory of an event, yet the event still shapes their identity or worldview. Kansteiner calls this state: "disembodied, omnipresent, low-intensity memory."[21] The author does not directly explain the meaning of this descriptive and challenging term, which particularly refers to the last part of the whole enumeration. The following sentence[22] offers some sort of clarification: "concern with low-intensity collective memories shifts the focus from the politics of memory and its excess of scandal and intrigue to rituals and representations of the past that are produced and consumed routinely without causing much disagreement."[23]

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19 Ibid., 187.

20 Ibid., 189.

21 Ibid., 189.

22 Ibid., 189–190.

23 We find a similar explanation in a book by Ana Liberato: "by 'low intensity' I mean that there have not been sustained and heightened confrontations by different communities of memory over competing narratives of the recent past." Cf. Ana S. Liberato, *Joaquín Balaguer, Memory, and Diaspora: The Lasting Political Legacies of an American Protégé* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 12.
It is possible that Kansteiner borrowed this notion from the area of social and cultural psychology, especially represented by the theory known as "social sharing of emotions." This term and the underlying assumptions were proposed by B. Rimé et al. "Beyond the Emotional Event." Among other things, this theory explores how people share their emotional experiences with others. One of the indicators used to describe the research results is the level of "emotional intensity" felt by people who listen to other people's stories. The authors distinguish between low-intensity, moderate, and high-intensity situations. However, this would be a somewhat perverse reference, because what Kansteiner would like to achieve is the independence of cultural memory studies from psychology and neurology. Cf. Bernard Rimé, Batja Mesquita, Stefano Boca and Pierre Philippot, "Beyond the Emotional Event: Six Studies on the Social Sharing of Emotion," *Cognition and Emotion* 5 (5–6) (1991): 435–465. See also Bernard Rimé and Véronique Christophe, "How Individual Emotional Episodes Feed Collective Memory," in *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, ed. James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez and Bernard Rimé (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997).

Consequently, such memory already traveled the path of social distillation, as a result of which it ceased to be a traumatic experience of individuals or human groups, which is equal to its "disembodiment." It transformed into a form of socially recognized consciousness, which refers to the cultural signs of memory ("omnipresence"), and no longer includes the unwanted foam of national-ethnic and political disputes. From now on, it is only a certain "low-intensity" point of reference in the social space.[24] However, even a cursory overview of memory studies shows that the ideal of collective memory outlined by Kansteiner is either too ideal or too uninteresting for those who deal with collective memory. Memory studies papers very often draw our attention to divisions and points of divergence, rather than elements that unite, already with their titles, which contributes to raising the temperature of a political dispute rather than its mitigation.

Another example is Tzvetan Todorov's treatise on memory abuse, in 2004 also published in France as a separate small book.[25] Todorov is certainly not part of the group of cultural memory scholars, but nothing stands in the way of seeing him in this context, especially since certain coincidences are astonishing. One of the terminological novelties proposed by Todorov is the distinction between literal memory (*mémoire littérale*) and exemplary memory (*mémoire exemplaire*). The first one covers the past experience of a particular character, therefore, of an individual or of a larger group of people. We experience the event that is the subject of literal memory for itself and treat it as exceptional and incomparable to other events. It is "an intransitive fact."[26] This applies in particular to difficult or even traumatic situations, which are the main focus of Todorov's interest. In the case of exemplary memory, we deal with an attempt to build a bridge between our own suffering and the events in which representatives of other communities suffered. The events are detached from their original psychological context and generalized in such

24 Kansteiner believes the United States of America reached such a point in terms of Holocaust remembrance.

25 Todorov presented the original version of the text in 1992, in Brussels, at a congress devoted to the history and memory of Nazi crimes. It is noteworthy because, in his speech, Todorov argues quite strongly with the popular thesis about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, or at least with its possible abuses. According to one of the main theses of the book, Jewish memory of the Holocaust takes the form of literal, closed, and intransitive memory. Todorov's theses presented in The Abuses of Memory are partly a continuation of some of the themes from the 1991 book *Face à l'extrême*. Cf. Tzvetan Todorov, "The Abuses of Memory," trans. M. L. Chang, *Common Knowledge* 5 (1): 6–26; Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 2004).

26 Todorov, "The Abuses of Memory," 14, cf. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire*, 30: *intransitif*.

a way that they can become an example and lesson, especially if an injustice occurs again. Quite contrary to what is recalled by literal memory, the events of exemplary memory "are up for evaluation with the help of universal rational criteria that sustain human dialogue, and such is not the case with literal and intransitive memories, which are incommensurable."[27] A literal event subordinates the present to the past, often in an obsessive or insane manner. On the other hand, an exemplary event subordinates the past to the present. In contrast to literal memory, exemplary memory is "potentially liberating."[28]

According to Todorov, there are no absolute events in the sense that they could not be the subject of comparison or analogy. Todorov writes this essay long after his antistructuralist turn, but we still hear reverberations of structuralism in his text: "whoever deals in comparison deals in both resemblances a n d differences."[29] All this in order to open to other groups the originally sterile literal memory, convinced of its uniqueness, non-recurrence, and incomparability, and to not succumb to the cult of memory for the sake of memory itself or make it sacred. Only then will we be able to connect memory with the problem of justice. Todorov emphasizes it is no coincidence that the victims or their families, however serious their pain may be, do not judge in processes that involve the culprits. What constitutes the essence of exemplary memory is its "dis-individuation," which allows the law to appear.[30]

Hence, what would memory economy be like in Todorov's reasoning? Todorov himself does not put it this way, but the same mechanism governs the transition from literal to exemplary memory, as in the transition from the exchange of natural means to the exchange of money; that is, a transition to symbolic nature. Along with all the consequences resulting from this fact. Exemplary memory uses commonly recognizable and acceptable means of payment, emitted by some large memory bank. The use of these means – let us call them "memcoins" – allows us to get rid of all the troubles that the exchange provides with the use of natural means. In Todorov's opinion, the use of natural means, that is memories with real psychological background, blocks any possibility of exchange, which ideally should be universal and rational. We would be in trouble, should one of the people involved in the transaction

27 Todorov, "The Abuses of Memory," 14.

28 Ibid., 14, cf. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire*, 31: potentiellement libératrice.

29 Todorov, "The Abuses of Memory," 16.

30 Ibid., 15, cf. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire*, 32: dés-individuation. Dis-individualization and deinvidualization are terms used in social psychology to describe the process by which individuals abandon own personal traits in favor of group identification. Here I will use the term "dis-individuation."

offered, for example, a wedding ring, which was the most important memento of the deceased spouse, while someone else offered a beloved pet, treated as if it was a family member. The rationality and universality of exchange – understood here as full translatability of the introduced monetary units – can appear only when we begin to refer to a system of symbolic equivalents of natural means. This means that memory studies fundamentally assumes the classic distinction between use-value and exchange-value, while imbuing the latter with significance. In such a situation, we can speak of universality, because dis-individuated *memcoins* can be used on equal rights by all participants of one or another transaction. In this case, we should understand the term "on equal rights" in a limited way, because there may be inequality resulting from different access to money; some may have more, others less. We can also discuss rationality because dis-individuated *memcoins* are no longer dependent on their initial equivalents in nature but are governed by the rational rule of the invisible hand of the market, which determines their actual value. *Memcoins* may be reverted to natural equivalents – just like Todorov's exemplary memory allows assessing the legal effects and nature of new literal events – but this does not change anything in terms of either universality or rationality of their application.[31]

31 Kant believed that money was only partly dis-individuated. Of course, he did not use this adjective in his works. When answering the question "what is money?" (Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 104–106), Kant explains that it would have no value if the owner and potential acquirer were unaware how much labor (Fleiss) is necessary to earn money: "it is the universal means by which men exchange their industriousness [or industry] with one another" (Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 104). We may add that Kant draws attention to the psychological side of money and believes that the direct translation of money into work – and not into a product that can be bought or sold – is a protection against excessive money supply. Without even deciding whether this interpretation is correct or not, we must admit that psychologization and individualization are not as strong in this case as in the case of the exchange of goods, especially goods of commemorative value. On the other hand, it is easy to imagine a person, let us say a pensioner, who easily multiplies original capital, earns money without much difficulty, and yet feels psychologically connected with it, while the money acquired in this way obviously does not lose its value. In such case Kant's argument is invalid. Someone once humorously noted that it is not worth for Bill Gates to pick up a $100 bill in the street, because he earns much more in the time he would need to pick it up. But Gates himself later admitted that he would still stop and pick up the bill. This might be compared with Simmel for whom an exchange is a means of overcoming the purely subjective value significance of an object: "the technical form of economic transactions produces a realm of values that is more or less completely detached from the subjective-personal substructure. Although the individual buys because he values and wants to consume an object, his demand is expressed effectively only by an object in exchange. Thus the subjective process, in which

It is astonishing how in memory studies occur these continuous cash flows, from functional to storage memory, from literal to exemplary memory, from high-intensity to low-intensity memory. The spirit of a self-regulating market hovers over it, at least for the time being. In this context, it is not a coincidence that Aleida Assmann[32] (2009: 47–51) introduces the concept of dialogical memory (*die dialogische Erinnerung*) contrasted with monologic national memories (*die monologische Erinnerung*), the latter being mostly described in terms of sacrifice and suffering, and as a social phenomenon concentrated on fighting external threats. According to Assmann, we should cross homogeneous memory constructions limited by national borders to reach a broader European perspective, fostered by the project of the European Union. Assmann believes that European integration cannot become any stronger as long as there are monologic constructions of memory. And now those words of warning, written long before there were any harbingers of Brexit, have proved prophetic, even though memory certainly had not been playing the key role in the process; various other aspects, for instance economics, need to be taken into account. An economic interpretation of Assmann's idea would boil down to the conviction that memory studies wishes to reduce external factors in the sphere of communication – like

differentiation and the growing tension between function and content create the object as a "value," changes to an objective, supra-personal relationship between objects. The individuals who are incited by their wants and valuations to make now this, now that exchange are conscious only of establishing value relationships, the content of which forms part of the objects. The quantity of one object corresponds in value with a given quantity of another object, and this proportion exists as something objectively appropriate and law-determined – from which it commences and in which it terminates – in just the same way as we conceive the objective values of the moral and other spheres. The phenomenon of a completely developed economy, at least, would appear in this light. Here the objects circulate according to norms and measures that are fixed at any one moment, through which they confront the individual as an objective realm. The individual may or may not participate in this realm, but if he wants to participate he can do so only as a representative or executor of these determinants which lie outside himself. The economy tends toward a stage of development—never completely unreal and never completely realized – in which the values of objects are determined by an automatic mechanism, regardless of how much subjective feeling has been incorporated as a precondition or as content in this mechanism." Cf. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 2004), 76–77. Therefore Simmel, who owes so much to Kant, seems to give a different answer to the money question. The answer is: money separates us from the value that we subjectively give to the object.

32 Aleida Assmann, "Von kollektiver Gewalt zu gemeinsamer Zukunft: Vier Modelle für den Umgang mit traumatischer Vergangenheit," in *Kriegserfahrung und nationale Identität in Europa nach 1945: Erinnerung, Säuberungsprozesse und nationales Gedächtnis*, ed. Kerstin von Lingen (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009).

politics, ideology, religion, and most of all nationalism – to a minimum. External factors in memory studies play a role analogous to government institutions that regulate the market. Political interventionism in the sphere of commemoration is as harmful as state interventionism in the field of the free market. In this sense, cultural memory can play an emancipatory role. Let us recall that Todorov views exemplary memory as "potentially liberating." Acting outside the limitations of a political-ideological nature and outside the dimension of individual or collective harm – and the need for revenge that follows – exemplary memory can reconcile the conflicting particular memories and become a low-intensity memory as a result of this transformation. The previously confronted parties of the mnemonic dispute, now free of petty ethnic restrictions, could engage in commercial interactions and pay with a common currency: *memcoins*. If hope or even a desire for profit is what guides people, there is absolutely nothing inappropriate about it, because the exchange is rational, controlled by objective market mechanisms, and so the profit of some does not have to be associated with the harm suffered by others. If such harm happens, then this is when memory studies steps in to diagnose the causes of the illness. However, as almost directly results from Assmann's reasoning, all parties involved in the transaction gain from the dialogic exchange of memcoins.

As we see, the dream of a polyphonic memory is connected here with a certain ideal vision of a federation of nations, which, and not only because of Brexit, is still a long way off. The European Union, including the whole paradox of the situation, managed to develop a common currency but not, as far as I know, any common memory. Pierre Nora and Wulf Kansteiner share the opinion.

"Th'arithmetic of Memory"

Therefore, we should conclude that memory studies – if Hamlet's monologue is to be a useful and representative methodological metaphor – needs this very gesture of writing down, which would perform a function analogous to the processes of dis-individuation and reduction of intensity. The reading of the monologue proposed by Aleida Assmann[33] confirms this viewpoint. Until now, I refrained from mentioning this interpretation because it required proper introduction. First, Assmann does not describe the fragment with her own categories of functional and storage memory, although, certainly, nothing stood in the way. The scholar observes Hamlet as

33 Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 232–237.

"a passive writing surface,"[34] on which the father writes his order. Referring to Nietzsche's idea of a body imprisoned by the soul, the author tries to show the psychological and traumatic dimension of the father's order. This body, on which the father writes, must bear the spiritual burden of "the traumatic inscription,"[35] which Hamlet experiences and which makes him incapable of action. Like in any case, the trauma leaves a devastating mark: "whereas ancient initiation rites apply body writing to the forceful establishment of a new identity, the body writing of trauma has the opposite effect of destroying the possibility of identity-building."[36] Without supporting this conviction with any evidence or even with a critical dissection, Assmann states that, at the moment of mental dissipation, Hamlet braces himself and ultimately manages to write down the last four words of his father: "adieu, adieu! Remember me." Assmann understands it as the externalization and alienation of the most internal thoughts and beliefs. I believe she means we should understand externalization as an attempt to escape from the trauma of writing down information in the body, as a momentary relief from the memory of enormous intensity, as a change of a psychological quality to a de-psychologized and dis-individuated one. In this context, it surprises not that Assmann quotes the edition of the drama with the *[Writing.]* stage direction. However, she does not draw attention to its historical uncertainty.

After all, should we but suggest there is a problem with the possibility of inscription, Shakespeare's "memory machine" immediately appears as a troubling anomaly. Whatever Hamlet tries to write down or even does write down in a notebook – be it a maxim about villains, a duty to remember his father, or anything else – it plays the role of an external medium, which transforms individual memory, that is, the content of the "distracted globe," into a symbolic exchangeable currency. In this case, the memory material should be subjected to a kind of distillation, thanks to which it will be able to participate in exchange transactions with other distilled contents of memory. The trouble is that this writing down of memory in a notebook cannot succeed. It constantly confronts a command contained in the "table of memory," with which it must have some connection. *Memcoins* can be exchanged freely, but in the end they must reveal their value in relation to natural goods. Distillation is only a technical procedure that merely postpones the question about the relation of the material recorded in the notebook and placed in the "table of memory." Even if Hamlet is pathological and a-functional, the conviction

34 Ibid., 233.

35 Ibid., 233.

36 Ibid., 237.

of memory studies that it has a therapeutic function in relation to such individuals and communities – that memory studies can teach them how to lift themselves to a "higher generality" – is based on an unstable illusion.

It is difficult to resist the feeling that memory studies treats the moment of transition from functional to storage memory with a certain amount of reluctance. This would contradict the thesis suggested in this paper that, from the viewpoint of memory studies, inscription as a form of generalization, dis-individuation, and reduction of intensity (*scriptura non erubescit*) is a desirable phenomenon. Let us recall Ong who, unlike Plato, considered the technology of writing to be useful in all respects. Now, I may add that this statement was only a part of the problem. We may now present the second variant of functional and storage memory in Hamlet's monologue. In this second interpretation, functional memory appears represented both by the "distracted globe" of the prince and by his notebook. To put it even more precisely, the notebook will certainly serve as a representation of functional memory in the text, while the "distracted globe" with some reservations only. Storage memory is virtually absent in this fragment. We relegate it to the background as it is of no interest to us at this juncture. What is at stake is actually the degree of functional memory's dis-individuation, all the more so because storage memory is dis-individuated by its very definition. However, functional memory is not an individual memory but a form of collective memory. If Hamlet transfers something to his notebook, he may do so, believing that he will be able to recollect it at a given moment. As a "written memory" it achieves the value of "divisibility," intersubjectivity, "generalization," and "rationalization," but as it remains within reach, it retains the form of functional memory; it is as if Assmann's functional memory or Olick's collected memory were going through dis-individuation. Therefore, the question mainly concerns how to talk about the low intensity and dis-individuation of functional memory, while at the same time we inevitably reach the conclusion that this memory requires someone to remember, thus performing the function of a physical and mental carrier. In other words, we ask how to move from a purely use-value to an exchange-value within the framework of functional memory.

Thanks to Shakespeare and *Hamlet*, we know that there is "th'arithmetic of memory" (5.2.114). The Prince of Denmark uses this formula to sarcastically refer to the paean sang by Osric praising the qualities of Laertes. Intriguingly, Shakespeare links arithmetic with memory in such a way that he makes arithmetic a constitutive part of memory. He does it even though most of us would immediately link arithmetic with the abilities of reasoning or the mind in a narrow sense. In other words, it would seem more natural to use words such as "mind," "reason," "intellect," and perhaps "wits" rather than "memory." Other

candidates could be some of the sixteenth-century equivalents that may have already become obsolete and would be used in the way modern English uses "mental calculation" or "mental arithmetic."

The arithmetic of memory allows us to return to the notion of the "table(s) of memory" and the initial question. What does Hamlet actually write down, and does he actually write anything in his "tables"? The comparison of "th'arithmetic of memory" and the "table(s) of memory" reveals an inner link, an essential connection. "Table" may mean a notebook, but it may also mean a register like the one in debit and credit balance. If I commit to over interpretation, it is for a specific purpose. I know one thing: if Hamlet really wants to write a maxim about villains or a commandment to remember his father, then his arm either hangs over the tablet or simply simulates the action of writing. If Hamlet actually writes something down, then he just transfers the arithmetic of memory onto the surface, on which he places signs that result from the account of profit and loss; "debit" here and "credit" there; in the latter case, the risk of the promise made to his father, and the possible victory.

The recognition of the "table" as an accounting book is not an anachronism on my part. It is true that the annotated English editions of Hamlet usually explain the word "table" as "tablet" or "writing-tablet." Some add the term "note-book." All these terms refer to a notepad or writing pad. Samuel Johnson's dictionary,[37] first published in 1755, translates "table" as "a tablet; a surface on which any thing is written or engraved." This is the fifth definition of the word. Earlier definitions refer to it as "any flat or level surface" and, of course, "a horizontal surface raised above the ground, used for meals and other purposes." The latter meaning is probably the most elementary one that we may think of today. There still are several further definitions: "a picture, or any thing that exhibits a view of any thing upon a flat surface"; "an index; a collection of heads; a catalogue; a syllabus"; "a synopsis many particulars brought into one view." Another dictionary draws attention to the adjective "tabled," which refers to *Cymbeline* (1.4.6) and means "noted" or "set down."[38] In the abovementioned work by Peter Stallybrass and three other authors, we find a suggestion that the erasable writing tables – to which Shakespeare most probably referred in *Hamlet* and a few other places – were very popular among merchants and traders:

37 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 2 (London: Printed for J. Johnson et al, 1799), 1.

38 Walter W. Skeat and A. L. Mayhew, *A Glossary of Tudor and Stuart Words: Especially from the Dramatists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), 400.

> Who bought these writing tables? At the end of the fourteenth century Cennino d'Andrea Cennini noted that parchment tables were used by merchants to record their calculations. And merchants seem to have been the primary market for Adams and Triplet, since the printed materials included woodcuts of coins; charts of weights, measures, and the distances of towns from London; dates of fairs; a fold-out multiplication table for calculating in roman numerals; and instructions on how to reckon a servant's wages.[39]

Frank Adams and Robert Triplet were London booksellers and bookbinders, who in the second half of the sixteenth century flooded bookshops with their own "writing tables," which are at the same time a kind of calendars that contain various more-or-less useful information. Hence, the authors used the term "printed materials," as the "writing tables" consisted of pre-printed cards and cards intended for writing; that is, for the private use of the buyer of such a booklet. In a preserved calendar by Triplet from 1604, we find a "manual," which shows how to delete a previously noted text.[40]

Finally, Shakespeare's hendiadys "the book and volume of my brain" takes us to the arithmetic of memory. Literally "one through two," a hendiadys is a rhetorical figure that renders a single concept with the use of two terms connected by "and" or its equivalent. Latin writers, among them Virgil, used this rhetorical device eagerly. Shakespeare even seems to overuse it. George T. Wright, Shakespeare's metric researcher, mostly renowned for his *Shakespeare's Metrical Art* (1988), notes that only three plays of Shakespeare do not include any hendiadys, while in *Hamlet*, there are as many as sixty-six of them. Wright indicates that in the case of the particular hendiadys above we encounter a semantic rivalry of two meanings of the word "volume"; it means either one copy of a book or the size of a book. If we look at the "book and volume" juxtaposition in this context then, "at first glance, the two words seem nearly synonymous, but the phrase also seems to mean 'within the book and largeness of my brain,' that is, 'within the spacious book of my brain.'"[41] It is certainly justified to assume that the use of hendiadys entails some semantic tension, and we encounter here something more than simple rhetorical ornamentation. It certainly is of the greatest importance how large and spacious

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39 Stallybrass et al., "Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England," 401.

40 Roger Chartier, *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 23–24.

41 Georg T. Wright, "Hendiadys and Hamlet," *PMLA* 96 (2) (1981): 186.

this book is and how much it is able to contain. This issue directly relates to the economy of memory. Contrary to Wright's interpretative suggestion, it is possible that memory is not so capacious, since Hamlet must order it and remove all trivial records. This is the moment when the Prince calculates and compares data, calculates risk, adds and multiplies, subtracts and divides. Although, whatever Hamlet really thinks about the capacity of his memory, one thing remains certain, and this is precisely the moment indicated by the hendiadys. Hamlet's fundamental dilemma is the capacity of memory, to what extent it is indeed a "vast memory," what is the absorption capacity of the book of memory. In other words, the arithmetic and economy of memory as one.

Translated by Mikołaj Golubiewski and Jan Burzyński
(translation revised by the author)

Abstract

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The Economy of Memory: How Memcoins Enter the Market

The main idea of the paper is that the theoretical apparatus of memory studies contains a hidden liberal economy. The article refers to the works of William Shakespeare, Aleida Assmann, Wulf Kansteiner, and Tzvetan Todorov to present how the dis-individuation of memory – understood as a resignation from the psychological side of memory and a turning to symbolic contents of low intensity – makes memory theory similar to economic rules that govern the liberal market, including its focus on the rationality of exchange and dislike of external interventionism. The invisible hand of this market witnesses the flow of mnemonic monetary units, which this article calls "memcoins."

Keywords

memory studies, economy of memory, Shakespeare, memcoins, theory of memory, New Economic Criticism

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People in Perspective, the People's Perspective. Perspectivism and Positivism

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Scholarly accounts of the past in Poland rarely take the form of perspectival narratives.[1] For the most part, contemporary domestic historical writing likes to appear behind a screen of neutrality, factuality and objectivity, and authors tend to shy away from clearly indicating the perspective from which they are speaking. Texts written in this way are considered as excellent exemplifications of the study of history, meeting – at least in this one respect – the strict requirements of the historical workshop. Surprisingly few works show reflection on the author's inevitable entanglement with earlier interpretations of the past, with structures of narrative and language, with social ideas and social valuations. Even fewer authors are aware of the indelible relativity of the scholarly story of the past, its genre characterization and social conditioning. The Polish school of history has little

1 Perspectivism is Frank Ankersmit's term for the indelible relativity of historical narratives, speaking from an ever-present perspective. Cf. Frank Ankersmit, *History and Tropology. The Rise and Fall of Metaphor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Frank Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

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recourse to the experience of narrativism, considering it a matter of perhaps interesting methodological disputes, but irrelevant to the scholarly writing practice of history. Narrativism and perspectivism are held in greater esteem by a relatively small group of researchers who combine historical activity with methodological reflection.[2]

In contemporary Polish historiography, despite the rich traditions of social and economic history, political and event histories still hold the lead, usually following the patterns of simplified positivism.[3] These patterns, in the briefest of terms, can be described as the assumption of an unbiased and exhaustive presentation of a sequence of facts in as neutral a narrative as possible.[4] This state of affairs is all the more astonishing as it also applies to works on social history. The practice, moreover, usually deviates from positivist tenets; the descriptions are in fact far from phenomenalism, and the authors evaluate and reproduce social valuations.[5] This specific positivism limits the critical load to the traditional criticism of sources, seeing the conditioning of other people's narratives (perceiving them as biased, unreliable, propagandistic or ideological), and consistently overlooking its own conditioning. Historians often uphold the paradigm thus developed, considering it the only legitimate canon for practicing not only the study of history, but also any reflection on the past.[6] Recent

2 The first example of such a combination would be the works by Tomasz Wiślicz, Ewa Domańska or, before them, by Jerzy Topolski.

3 I cover this more extensively in "Contemporary Historical Discourse on Polish Communism in a Narratological Perspective," *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2016): 99–115.

4 See Jerzy Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej* [Writing and understanding history. The secrets of historical narration] (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Rytm," 1996).

5 From the point of view of narratology, this is obvious and inevitable. Nevertheless, positivism creates a fiction of neutrality, passing over the fact that there is no narrative about the past without at least a selection of relevant and irrelevant elements, not deserving of representation. This is the first valuation. There is also no historical narrative that does not use value-laden categories, such as sovereignty, freedom, nation, authoritarianism, etc. Representatives of the trend dubbed "specific positivism" here indulge in doublethink; on the one hand, they want to create the illusion that these valuations do not exist; on the other hand, they produce valuations, naturalizing them as "common" and "obvious."

6 A characteristic example may be the skepticism with which representatives of academic history in Poland refer to the field of memory studies as a kind of competition in the field of narratives about the past. Arguments revealed explicitly are the unclear scope of research and unstable methodology; arguments somewhat more camouflaged are the failure to meet the criteria of historical research, and in fact of the consensus of "specific positivism."

works in the fields of environmental history,[7] gender history,[8] rescue history,[9] and microhistory are much rarer and definitely stand out from other research, perhaps representing the beginning of a new way of practicing history. Among "positivist" historians, however, works of this kind, as well as interdisciplinary research drawing on the findings of such disciplines as anthropology, ethnology, psychology, literary studies, and film studies, arouse considerable resistance. Treatises inspired by sociology or economics, especially those with clearer empirical inclinations, may be received more kindly.

The People's Rebellion

The latest historical trend, which describes itself as "people's history," "history of rebellion," "people's rebellion," or "history of serfdom," is certainly an example of a perspective narrative.[10] In just one year, 2021, as many as four books were published that resonated greatly not only in the scholarly world, but also among amateur readers, and this was only the beginning of an entire trend.

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7 See, e.g., Małgorzata Praczyk, *Pamięć* środowiskowa *we wspomnieniach osadników na „Ziemiach Odzyskanych"* [Environmental memory in the memoirs of settlers from the "Recovered Territories"] (Poznań: Instytut Historyczny UAM, 2018).

8 This is a thriving trend; examples include the works by Małgorzata Fidelis, Natalia Jarska, Barbara Klich Kluczewska, Magdalena Grabowska, Dobrochna Kalwa, Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz and many other prominent figures of Polish historiography, whom I do not mention here due to the limited size of the article.

9 The milieu of Ewa Domańska.

10 This trend also includes Tomasz Wiślicz from the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, whom I omit exclusively due to the scattered forms of his utterances and narrow references. Nevertheless, his works merit a mention: Tomasz Wiślicz, *Earning Heavenly Salvation. Peasant Religion in Lesser Poland. Mid-Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Berlin: Peter Lang 2020); Tomasz Wiślicz, *Rebelie chłopskie na ziemiach polskich od statutu toruńskiego do rabacji galicyjskiej: podstawowe zagadnienia badawcze i interpretacyjne* [Peasant rebellions on the Polish lands from the Toruń statute to the Galician slaughter: Basic research and interpretation issues], in *Chłopi na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej do czasów uwłaszczenia*, ed. Dorota Michaluk (Ciechanowiec: Muzeum Rolnictwa im. ks. Krzysztofa Kluka w Ciechanowcu, 2019), 287–300; Tomasz Wiślicz, "Fabrykacja nierządnicy, czyli o ofiarach względnej swobody seksualnej na polskiej wsi przedrozbiorowej" [The fabrication of a harlot, or the victims of relative sexual freedom in the pre-partition Polish countryside], *Lud* 101 (2017): 129–148; Tomasz Wiślicz, *Naród chłopski? Społeczna, religijna i narodowa tożsamość chłopów we wczesnonowożytnej Polsce* [Peasant nation? The social, religious and national identity of peasants in early modern Poland], in *Między Barokiem a Oświeceniem. Społeczeństwo stanowe*, ed. Stanisław Achremczyk and Jerzy Kiełbik (Olsztyn: OBN, 2013), 52–65.

I am referring to the books by Adam Leszczyński,[11] Michał Rauszer[12] and Kacper Pobłocki.[13] Their goal is similar: all three authors want to describe the forms of popular resistance against the authority and violence of the upper classes, although the results of their research may differ. In Leszczyński's work, for example, it is power, conditions of oppression, and exploitation that come to the fore, rather than the people themselves. The tension between the perspective of the "victors of history," the traditional subjects populating its pages to date (kings, hetmans, ministers, prime ministers, presidents, party leaders, or, more broadly, magnates, bourgeoisie, nobility, intelligentsia, etc.) and the reconstructed perspective of the people is constantly palpable in all of these books, not only because of the disproportion between the "peasant" and "lordly" sources, but also because of the dialectical relationship of violence/power of the upper classes that defined the condition of the subjugated. These books oscillate between attempts to give voice to hitherto silent social subjects and analysis of the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the people's existence.

Historiography conceived in this way is faced with the task of reconstructing the ill-present perspective, recasting the narratives of the dominant political history, co-creating and consistently maintaining a social perspective, defined by the vantage point from which one looks, by the interpretation of the people's experience. This radical perspectivism implies the need to remodel cognitive categories and categories of description. Perspectival historiography is supposed to encompass a completely different world of heroes, hitherto silent and remaining in the background, a different area of social bios and a different world of historical processes. This also means that a people's history must show a different level of agency in history and subjectivity, since the subjects of the story are not those who in previous depictions influenced, caused, changed – in short: set the machinery of history in motion.

National and Political

The establishment of a people's perspective causes profound re-evaluations in the canon of national history. First of all, the nation ceases to be the center of

11 Adam Leszczyński, *Ludowa historia Polski. Historia wyzysku i oporu. Mitologia panowania* [People's history of Poland. History of exploitation and resistance. The mythology of rule] (Warszawa: WAB, 2020).

12 Michał Rauszer, *Bękarty pańszczyzny. Historia buntów chłopskich* [The bastards of serfdom. History of peasant rebellions] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo RM 2020); Michał Rauszer, *Siła podporządkowanych* [The power of the subjugated] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2021).

13 Kacper Pobłocki, *Chamstwo* [Rabble] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2021).

history. This history is not about the struggle for national self-determination, for independence, nor about the political adventures of the national spirit. Independence does not represent any stakes, nor organize the narrative value-wise.[14] In order to write a people's history, one must violate the consensus on what is most essential to history, what enters its canon, what must be told. For example, the history of all national uprisings or the struggle against the Tsarist authority will not be accommodated. Even more important seem to be profound re-evaluations of the events and processes presented: the January Uprising will remain important, but it will have a fundamentally different meaning for people's history than for national history. It will cease to be a story about manipulated, ignorant peasants who did not recognize the sacred national cause; it will become another installment of the story of the "good lord" (played by Tsar Alexander II), who is better than the local "lords," or a story about the end of serfdom and the escape from slave labor and degrading living conditions. National history suffers from an overabundance of sources, while people's history has to laboriously reconstruct them, often using indirect documents produced by the upper classes. This peculiar archaeology of the dominated and mute subject is sometimes accused of peasant-mania and mythologization of the past. At other times, on the contrary, it is accused of false sensationalism and the politics of breaking down open doors.[15]

The need to recast politicality, that is political history as a fundamental form of historical expression, steers people's history towards a specific dialectic, forcing it to turn not only against the main paradigm, not only against individual canonical interpretations, but also against the entire established pattern of thinking about the community.[16] The dialectical starting point in historical narrative means critically (in the spirit of Adorno) rereading the previous historical stories, but also opening up new disciplinary and social horizons.

Looking Awry in an Anthropological Way

By its very nature, therefore, people's history cannot be confined to political history; it must transcend the rigid framework that has been established so

14 For example: those who cared about Poland's independence (Polish Socialist Party) gain approval, their actions carry a positive sign; those who did not care about it (communists) deserve absolute rejection and a negative sign.

15 Characteristically, these accusations sometimes go hand in hand, such as in the text by Janusz A. Majcherek "Narodowo i na ludowo," *Polityka*, March 3, 2021, 28–29. The author also managed to add an accusation of weakening the authority of the elite and apologetics for those poorly educated residents of villages and towns who support authoritarianism.

16 The "us" of whom and to whom the history is told.

far. It departs from the premise that the people (peasants/the poor masses)[17] were not a political subject in either the fifteenth or the eighteenth century, but at most an object of various policies;[18] although they did not remain passive and developed many strategies of rebellion, resistance and survival, they constituted a social subject.[19] People's history therefore seeks tools to describe the place from which it speaks. It is no coincidence that the first works of this trend came from researchers who combine the workshop of history with sociology (Leszczyński) and anthropology (Rauszer, Pobłocki). However, it should be noted that, as in the case of historiography, anthropology also becomes in this case a "sideways glance" or "awry look." For Pobłocki and Rauszer, an anthropological view of people's history means writing against their own discipline, or at least many of its hidden precepts. The ethnographic-anthropological vision of the rural/peasant world as a sacred, cultural, extra-temporal fullness, a self-sufficient cosmos, portrays history and modern society as a destructive force. For an anthropology conceived in this way, the concept of social advancement was unacceptable, and whoever used it risked, at best, being accused of a misdiagnosis. Such anthropology wanted to bring out the harmonious structures, the holistic character of folk culture, and thus the more "traditional" the culture described was, the more authentic it seemed.[20] Pobłocki's and Rauszer's stance emerges as contrary to such anthropology.[21] Their anthropology must be open not only to history, to change, but also to conflict and violence; it describes the experience of the body (Pobłocki) subjected to social pressure and repression, adopting masks, creating secret protocols of resistance (Rauszer). Peasant culture is not an independent cosmos, but it is always in a dialectical relationship to the culture of the dominant classes and their violence.

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17 Each author defines this people differently and understands its scope differently. For Leszczyński it will be peasants, workers, the poor, but also Jews and other national minorities clearly subordinated to the Polish majority. Rauszer focuses firmly on the peasants, Pobłocki calls them *pańszczyźniaki* (serfs) and draws attention to women of the lower classes and farmhands, servant girls, peasant servants.

18 It is difficult to fully agree with this, of course, as since the end of the nineteenth century the people were becoming a political subject. Another thing is that only Leszczyński's book describes this period and the twentieth century.

19 I will return to this issue in the part on the political subject vs. the social subject.

20 In contrast, for example, to postwar culture, which from the perspective of this paradigm lacks authenticity, such as the mythologized figure of the peasant-worker.

21 Rauszer and Pobłocki are not anthropology's outliers, they are representatives of a significant current of anthropology, underwritten by names such as: Eric R. Wolf, Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginzburg, Hans Medick and Alf Lüdtke.

Power, Resistance, Agency

The affinity of goals and similar social imagination does not blur important differences between the authors' respective writing or social strategies. Leszczyński's *People's History of Poland* takes the form of an academic historiographical synthesis, describing the changing forms of violence, power and domination era by era, and following the timeline. As I have noted, however, it does decompose political history: readers do not follow along the "important" political events, the traumas of Polish national history. Referring to the nobility's idea of two nations (the nobles and the "cattle," or rabble), Leszczyński arrives at a shift that had the subjugated identifying with the dominant discourse – which, we should add, they always did in a way that was either wholly or partially unauthorized. At the same time, the "nation of cattle" was held accountable for the shortcomings of this identification and inadequate engagement with national history.[22] Only Adam Leszczyński's work reaches the present day – that is, he does not overlook the radical post-war change, although he does not consider this change revolutionary. He points out the continuation of violent patterns. Leszczyński does not see the rupture in history, or notice that the new people who formed at the time have completely different living conditions, and their representatives have new life trajectories, new cultural aspirations, habitus,[23] different opportunities, and expected life paths. In short, that it is a completely different people than perhaps even half a century earlier.[24] The focus on the hypocrisy of the elite, however, does not allow the author to see this fact.

Pobłocki and Rauszer adopt a completely different point of view. Their subject is not so much power, but rather the resistance taking shape between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Subordination, violence and forms of exploitation define the social condition of the popular classes, but do not cover the entire field. The people have agency, and in this sense they are a subject. Kacper Pobłocki writes:

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22 This is very much reminiscent of Bourdieu's description of symbolic violence, yet the author does not refer to it.

23 Here I understand Pierre Bourdieu's term as aesthetic dispositions, expected life trajectories resulting from training and social positioning.

24 The fundamental and rapid change in the class structure (the abolition of the landed gentry, the bourgeoisie), the ownership of the means of production, the escape from the appalling living conditions of the masses as a whole means that we can legitimately speak of a revolutionary change. It was certainly not a grassroots liberation movement; it took place under conditions of post-Yalta dependence on the Soviet Union.

> The serfs were not a passive, silent mass that meekly participated in the world created by the mighty. They refused to obey surprisingly often, not to say: constantly. They also created their own tools and institutions that allowed them to assert what everyone believes deep down: that each one was born equal and free. It is only when we turn our attention beyond the ruling class, to the groups that continue to be denied their rightful place in history, that we are able to see this.[25]

Rauszer describes these actions in *The Power of the Subjugated* as follows:

> The practices of everyday forms of resistance include: slowing down work and sabotaging it, pretending to do things, false complaints, theft, simulated stupidity, gossip and slander, arson, petty theft. Their repertoire depends not only on the ingenuity of the subordinated, but on the very essence of the practice of domination. It is a reaction to the manifestations of this domination. Sometimes these everyday forms of resistance turn into more overt and visible forms, most often when the situation allows it, or when there is no other choice. Among such overt forms of peasant resistance, we can additionally include fleeing, peasant strikes, petty violence (such as beatings of overseers or even lords), up to peasant rebellions and insurrections.[26]

The mask of the ignorant fool and the humble servant is the same practice of resistance as rebellion, although, of course, rebellion or insurrection[27] is the ultimate action, undertaken only as an act of self-destruction. In this case, we cannot speak of emancipation, but we certainly can of agency. And agency is the vehicle that pulls the people into history. Through agency, a people can

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25 Pobłocki, *Chamstwo*, 12 . If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this artice.

26 Rauszer, *Bękarty pańszczyzny*, 54.

27 Pobłocki points out the difference in the registers of the two expressions. The word *powstanie* (uprising) is usually reserved for national liberation movements of the nobility. Peasants can at most participate in a rebellion (*bunt*); chaotically and in a haphazard, reflexive manner, since the peasantry, as a group living in pre-modernity, has no social structure. Pobłocki, *Chamstwo*, 282: "we also use the language of the ruling class when talking about noble 'uprisings' and peasant 'rebellions.' These ostensibly similar words lead us onto completely different tracks, point to completely different stories. Polish nobles rose up, because the social existence depended on them. The peasant class did not rise up, because they did not exist as an autonomous entity with the awareness of its own distinctiveness and subjectivity. Official, textbook history views the peasant class as a random cluster of individuals, and that is how it tells the story of its resistance: as incidental, atomized, disorderly. Spontaneous, devoid of deeper thought and any more permanent structure."

become a subject. This, however, raised the following question: would "passivity" and non-resistance exclude peasants from history? Would they not be deserving of attention and place? Would they not be subjects then? Does an implicit valuation not come into play in this choice, in which heroism/activity/self-determination is valued much more highly than survival? Is the rejected paradigm of the heroic history of the masters not posthumously victorious here, after all?

The Voice of Peasants

Gayatri Spivak[28] famously asked whether the subaltern can speak. This question of whether those whom history deprived of their voice can ever regain it translates into the methodological problem of a lack of peasant sources, or the ability and necessity of reconstructing them. In his book, Leszczyński makes abundant reference to diaries, personal notes, but also court records, documents produced by economists, nobility, and authorities. Paradoxically, he gives more space to peasants' diaries and notes of the past centuries, where this source was extremely scarce, while making sparing use of the abundant peasants' diaries of the inter-war and post-war periods, when "the great mute finally spoke," as Maria Dąbrowska put it. This is related, as I mentioned, to the author's strategy; Leszczyński is more interested in reconstructing the mechanisms of violence, hypocrisy and perversity of power than in giving a voice to the people.

Rauszer and Pobłocki reconstruct the peasant experience rather than the peasant voice, so memoirs appear quite sparingly in their books.[29] They assume that folklore – customs, chants, rhymes, proverbs – have preserved this experience. Pobłocki goes even further, describing common cultural imagery as primal scenes and records of peasant experience – these would be scenes of rape in the woods or at the well, depictions of women as hunted game, images of sexual initiation by lords as sexual exploitation of peasant women, and so on, while using literary works such as Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's novel *Ulana* from 1842.

The reconstruction of the people's voice in Rauszer's and Pobłocki's works is therefore only partial, but not only because of the significant difficulties in acquiring sources and researching old oral culture. Both authors seem to shy away from the usurpation that would be the appropriation of a reconstructed or supposedly reconstructed voice. They see a way out of this impasse

28 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2010).

29 This is also due to the different time frames of Rauszer's and Pobłocki's works (fifteenth–nineteenth centuries); peasant diaries were scarce at the time.

by narrating conditions, situations, relationships, and experiences. Kacper Pobłocki writes:

> like the overwhelming majority of members of the popular class, they will forever remain faceless people, people without qualities, people without a voice. We will not draw an individual or even a collective portrait of them; all that remains is to piece together the fragments of knowledge available to us and thus sketch the contours of the world in which they lived.[30]

Talking about a people through their situation, experiences, archetypal scenes, "the contours of the world," is not the same as trying to reconstruct their voice, although this is how we can understand the evocation of personal records and folklore. People's history thus balances between the story about the people and the story of the people. Metaphorically speaking, between first-person and third-person narrative.

Political Subject vs. Social Subject

Pobłocki and Rauszer, focusing on the problem of serfdom and its social and cultural consequences, set a clear temporal boundary for their interest – Tsar Alexander II's decree of 1864, ending serfdom in the Kingdom of Poland. Leszczyński goes all the way to the present day, writing about the political, social and cultural impact of this way of life. All authors emphasize that serfdom meant not only bonded labor, but also personal dependence, direct violence, beatings, humiliation, annihilation of subjectivity, and therefore a form akin to slavery. They treat attempts at popular resistance as a manifestation of the social subjectivity of the peasantry. The people are thus a social subject, but not a political subject. This approach, however, is due to the time frames, because in fact, the people had already become political subjects since the end of the nineteenth century. They formed parties (peasant and workers'), articulated their interests, organized the 1905 revolution, and undertook strikes (not only workers', but also peasant strikes in the 1930s).

People's history reaches back for the notion of social class, rightly seeking to demystify this word. In the field of dominant contemporary anti-communism, "class" is an unwelcome, even unacceptable category in Polish humanities. The authors use it consciously,[31] although they understand it in different

30 Pobłocki, *Chamstwo*, 19.

31 The authors are aware of the problems of using this category, for example, in relation to the Middle Ages, although they do not pay much attention to these considerations.

ways: in Weberian fashion (Leszczyński) or according to the interpretation of the contemporary Marxist Karl Polanyi[32] (Rauszer). Rauszer defines class as

> The intertwining of cultural and social responses to culturally and socially differentiated mechanisms of subordination, expressing themselves in their own specific ways. If a given system is based on bonded labor, then class relations (of domination and subordination) are expressed in cultural and social practices and political forms of slavery. In addition, this slavery, due to a number of factors, can in different historical contexts shape differently, be more or less intense.[33]

In people's history, class antagonism still runs strong. It is described in its many manifestations: legal, political, cultural and symbolic. Unfortunately, there is no answer to the question of whether the people are a class, or to be more precise, one class. Leszczyński separates peasants from workers, but also speaks of other groups, such as the Jewish poor and Ukrainians. Pobłocki differentiates the peasant classes most strongly, and points out the tensions and conflicts of interest between them, although Rauszer too sees internal oppositions.[34]

Speaking from a people's perspective, fortunately, cannot be reduced to peasant-mania or a fascination with the figure of the flamboyant rebel peasants or, more broadly, the erstwhile traditional cultural models in opposition to alienated capitalist reality. The authors do not look through sentimental intellectual glasses; they show not only the various forms of violence, but also its scale, including violence within families and between different groups of the people. Violence – physical, economic, symbolic – constitutes the most enduring and universal cultural pattern. According to the authors, this long duration, over and above political and economic changes, still has consequences today. Kacper Pobłocki devotes the most space to these issues, capturing violence in terms of an expanding patriarchy, showing how violence "trickles down," while also defining internal folk relations, relations between rich peasants and servants of servants, children and parents, women and men.[35] In Pobłocki's book *Chamstwo*, we read:

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32 Karl Polanyi wanted to change the economic definition of class, recognizing that social factors such as the need for recognition are just as important as economic ones.

33 Rauszer, *Bękarty pańszczyzny*, 24.

34 These are certainly not works that could be considered a "class history of Poland"; this still remains a task to be done.

35 Only Adam Leszczyński evades the topic altogether; in his entire 700-page book there is no place for the history of women. The author excuses himself citing lack of sources and competence, leaving this matter to a separate discipline – gender history.

> People's history is feminine history. Not only because women are its main characters – they are the ones who usually do the most servile work. People's history is feminine because women are its trustees. A lords' history consists of a procession of heroic figures who come, look around and conquer. The peasants' history is founded upon the myth of valiant resistance to the lords' tyranny. People's history, in turn, is everything that took place in between. Not the history of battles, of clashes between classes, but the history of support, solidarity, care. History without exaggeration, and even without dominant heroes. It is a history of a multitude, of a many-headed hydra. And it involves a completely different language, one that barely broaches the high registers of official Polish. People's history is both feminine history and popular history. Because men also chose unmanly strategies of dealing with the terror of slavery. Instead of revenge or resistance, they too leaned toward care and patience.[36]

Pobłocki is the only one to contrast peasant history with people's (women's) history. Rauszer speaks of women in the context of witchcraft, their trials, the lords' fear of the folk power of the curse, wielded by the women of the people. Pobłocki also sees the theme of the Catholic Church from the perspective of the patriarchy, while Leszczyński and Rauszer see it as yet another figure of the serf lord.

Potential Histories, Rescue Archaeologies

People's histories are performative, that is, they not only tell the story of past time, but are also a kind of contemporary intervention. Returning to the past, they show different collective genealogies than those stretching back to the families of the well-born Czartoryskis and Potockis, and seek to break down false aspirational lines of descent and false identifications. They unveil a past that is not harmonious, a past not so much of conflict as of violence, forming the present, shaping it into a post-feudal submissiveness, a sense of inferiority, inclining it to accept violent and hierarchical cultural patterns. In this sense, they are an intervention into a culture of hidden violence. People's history attempts to unlearn automatisms, established patterns of memory, to distance itself from national history, to describe and rethink ill-present history. It shows past practices that are hidden (albeit perfectly visible on the surface) to convey a story about also hidden desires for equality and recognition. It reveals new possibilities for a non-national community and non-national history. In this sense, we can call Leszczyński's and especially Rauszer's and Pobłocki's books "potential histories." Ariella Azoulay's term, from her *Potential*

36 Pobłocki, Chamstwo, 247.

History. Unlearning Imperialism,[37] refers to the history and space of Israelis and Palestinians. Revisiting the imperial past, Azoulay subjected history to critical work, searching for new, concealed starting points, unsatisfied desires, attitudes, and unrealized possibilities for actors of the past. These possibilities create an alternative in thinking about the community, but also in talking about history. History is potential or potentialized in a dual sense – as opening up new possibilities of the past and new possibilities of description. Azoulay's ideas[38] and people's history compel us to reopen or reread archives and cultural texts, to extract from them claims to equality and recognition, to bring to light a repressed, overlooked, disregarded past and repressed violence, very much different from the story of a nation's self-realization.

People's history differs fundamentally from Azoulay's project, however, in its quest for reclaiming.[39] It demands the restoration of past violence – not even conflict, since it is difficult to speak of any equivalence here – to the public consciousness. Past violence casts a shadow over the present. People's history proposes no coexistence of these two figures of the past – the lords' and the people's in the present, new forms of coexistence that have not yet been exhausted, because the former victors ("lordly" Poland) are only an imagined community, although a living figure of the present.[40] People's history reveals a paradoxical *constans*: in the modern past, the existing popular masses had no voice, no cultural representation; in the present, the dominant voice is the heir to the narrative of a group no longer in existence, yet permanently hegemonic within the national and cultural discourse.

For the same reason, we cannot consider people's histories as agonistic stories, referring to Chantal Mouffe's[41] term and her opposition between the antagonistic, agonistic and cosmopolitan model. Mouffe cites the situation of conflict between memory and rationales, proposing models for their understanding.

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37 Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

38 Ariella Azoulay, "There Is No Such Thing As a National Archive," in *Archiwum jako projekt*, ed. Krzysztof Pijarski (Warszawa: Archeologia Fotografii, 2011); Ariella Azoulay, "Potential History: Thinking through Violence," *Critical Inquiry* 39 (3) (2013).

39 Though the authors, like Azoulay, are also concerned with understanding it.

40 Although the descendants of aristocratic, bourgeois and noble families also live in contemporary society, 1945 fundamentally changed their social role. The question remains, however, to what extent it was taken over by the intelligentsia, including its members who ascended to it by upward social mobility, who aspired to the aristocratic habitus and the preservation of hierarchical social structures. These considerations, however, exceed the limits of this text.

41 Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics. Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013).

The antagonistic model implies a life-and-death struggle, denial of the opponents' right to present their arguments, rejection of their acknowledgement. The cosmopolitan model seeks to reconcile rationales, to unite opposing positions, believing that this is a process that must end in reconciliation. Mouffe's agonistic model assumes that the public space is one of struggle between irreconcilable hegemonic identities, which, however, do not seek to abolish the opponent's rationale, but enter into dialogue with each other. In a situation of symbolic dominance, violence, the agonistic model does not work. The past that people's histories want to bring out is far from the conflict of opposing rationales that can meet: one is still silenced and inconspicuous, difficult to reconstruct; the other is dominant, difficult to deconstruct.[42]

We can also call people's history a Foucauldian counter-history[43] (Rauszer speaks of counter-hegemonicity), because it distances itself from the legitimized dominant narrative, one derived in a straight line from the "victors" of the social conflict, and looks for inconsistencies, breaks, cuts in the national narrative. Within this meaning, people's history undertakes archaeological work consisting in the discovery and description of ill-present violence. By analogy to Ewa Domańska's category of rescue history,[44] we can speak of rescue archaeology which "becomes an element of restitutive humanities, that is humanities of reconstruction, regenerative humanities that support and affirm."[45] "It is of a multidisciplinary nature and it draws on the tradition and methodological output of many sub-disciplines of historical research, and especially: cultural and social history, anthropological history, microhistory, oral history, grassroots history and/or history of ordinary people, visual history, sound history, history of flavors and sounds"[46] – and, we might add, of bodies. People's histories restitute and reinforce the suppressed, undervalued and forgotten dimension of shared history.

Unwanted Progenitors and Welcome Allies

People's histories were not created in a cultural vacuum. Leszczyński and Rauszer realize that their area of interest naturally refers back to earlier

42 However, the people's voice is always dialectically coupled to the dominant history.

43 Michel Foucault, *Lecture of 28 January 1976*, in Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, trans. D. Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).

44 Ewa Domańska, "Historia ratownicza" [Rescue history], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2013): 12–26.

45 Ibid., 13.

46 Ibid., 15.

historiography, particularly that which focuses on the past of the popular masses. The field of discourse was opened after 1945, during the period of the formation of the communist state, when "people's power," the fulfillment of "the best democratic aspirations of the past" and "social justice" were the main elements of the new state's historical policy,[47] while egalitarianism and social advancement, the abolition of the privileged classes, in short, were its policy program. Professional historians in the 1950s and 1960s took up the topics of serfdom, peasant resistance, the Galician Slaughter, the figures of Piotr Ściegienny and Jakub Szela.[48] The attitude of authors of people's history to these progenitors is telling. They cite (by no means with polemical or critical intent) many works, drawing on the output of Stefan Kieniewicz, Jerzy Topolski, Janusz Tazbir, Nina Assorodobraj, Witold Kula, Stanisław Arnold and others (much of which was published in the Stalinist period). Leszczyński even points out the similarity of starting points with Marxism in historical research at the time:

> The key observation brought by Marxists to Polish historiography was that there are no politically neutral facts and no politically neutral study of history. A historian, they argued – regardless of what he himself thinks of his work – usually legitimizes the prevailing social order, or he simply supports the current regime (unless he takes an openly critical stance toward it). The very choice of the object of study has the character of a political statement.[49]

Yet these are rejected, unwanted progenitors. Authors of people's history emphasize that the change in the paradigm of historiography occurred as a result of administrative, Stalinist coercion;[50] it was not a free choice of the historical world. Adam Leszczyński writes:

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47 See my text: *Legitimization of Communism. To Build and to Demolish*, in *Reassessing Communism. Concepts, Culture, and Society in Poland 1944–1989*, ed. Katarzyna Chmielewska, Agnieszka Mrozik and Grzegorz Wołowiec (Budapest/Wien: CEU Press, 2021): 25–62.

48 Hence, it is easy to level the accusation of ostensible novelty, since the research trajectory has long been open. This is a misguided accusation because of the different questions, research tools and context posed by people's history.

49 Leszczyński, *Ludowa historia Polski*, 596.

50 See Rauszer, *Siła podporządkowanych*, 18: "the early works of Janusz Tazbir, Jerzy Topolski or Stefan Kieniewicz, to name a few, also became important voices during the communist era. The subject of peasant rebellions and peasant resistance, with few exceptions, was exhausted in Poland in the 1960s. [...] Their research was part of the worldwide discussion of forms of peasant resistance." And: "research on peasant rebellions, as it were, by administrative appointment, was conducted in many, if not all, countries of the so-called Soviet bloc."

> The apogee of Polish researchers' interest in the internal power relations of Polish society in the past came in the 1950s and 1960s. It was forced on historians – not all, but many – by the Communist Party, for which it was a research priority.[51]

Leszczyński is right about the conservative, and in many cases nationalist, milieu of pre-war historians. Certainly, the part of it headed by Władysław Konopczyński, whom he describes (and who was forced to resign from the university), did not embrace Marxism with enthusiasm, euphemistically speaking. Many in academic circles, not just professional historians, certainly opposed Marxism. However, this does not change the fact that the authors of the cited works by no means had to be forced to undertake these subjects; they were often avowed people of the left who participated in the creation of this paradigm (which in no way diminishes the value of their publications). There must be a vast methodological and conceptual difference between books published in the 1950s and in the 2020s, that is some sixty or seventy years later, and the opposite situation would be immensely surprising. This is not the kind of distance at issue, however. It can be assumed that this detachment is a gesture of cutting oneself off from Stalinism,[52] which in the dominant field of contemporary anti-communism is as understandable as it is ritualistic and tedious.

The people's histories by Leszczyński, Rauszer and Pobłocki are immersed in a trend that evokes a lively social resonance. The discussion began with Daniel Beauvois's[53] *Trójkąt ukraiński* [The Ukrainian triangle], which critiqued the idyllic depiction of the relationship between the nobility and the peasantry, the myth of noble freedom and noble democracy, the solidarity between the aristocracy and the nobility, and finally noble patriotism. "The People's Turn," which we have been able to observe for a good ten years, aims to confront the shame of peasant, "rabble" social origins, attempting to re-evaluate the experience of rejection, strengthen the sense of community in the face of past events – the abolition of serfdom, peasant revolts and the experience of coming out of oppression. The distinctive title of Pobłocki's book, *Rabble*,[54]

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51 Ibid., 594.

52 Post-October texts also fall victim to this, as tainted by communism and Marxism.

53 Daniel Beauvois, *Trójkąt ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793 –1914* [The Ukrainian triangle: The nobility, the tsar and the people in Volhynia, Podolia and Kyiv Region, 1793–1914], trans. Krzysztof Rutkowski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2005).

54 "Cham" ("boor" or "bumpkin"), derived from Ham, Noah's biblical son, who was cursed by his father for a shameful act. In contemporary Polish, the word "cham" is still used as

directly alludes to these discussions. It is worth recalling that in 2011 the band RUTA released the album *Gore – pieśni buntu i niedoli XVI–XX wieku* [It's on fire! – Songs of rebellion and misery of the sixteenth to twentieth centuries], while in the same year Marian Pilot received the Nike Award for *Pióropusz* [The warbonnet], a picaresque novel constructed around lowly origins and advancement, and in 2020 the same award went to Radek Rak for *Baśń o wężowym sercu. Albo wtóre słowo o Jakubie Szeli* [The tale of the serpent heart. Or another word on Jakub Szela]. The year 2011 also saw the publication of Jan Sowa's *Fantomowe ciało króla* [The phantom body of the king], a book which opened a society-wide debate on serfdom and the repressed peasant origins of the overwhelming majority of Polish society, as well as the premiere of Monika Strzępka and Paweł Demirski's *W imię Jakuba S.* [In the name of Jakub S.], a film that also drew on the figure of Szela. In the visual arts, one cannot omit the works of Daniel Rycharski and his installations: *Brama*[55] [The gate] (2014) and *Pomnik chłopa*[56] [The peasant monument] (2015–2016). Of course, it is impossible in this short text to cite all the important manifestations of the re-evaluation of "chamstwo" and opening to people's history.[57] However, the examples indicated form a clear constellation that brings to mind the project of potentializing history and the rescue humanities described earlier. The people in perspective and the people's perspective can meet and open up new possibilities of interpretation.

Translated by Maja Jaros

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a pejorative for a person who is simple, uncouth and uneducated. In the past, however, it conveyed an element of class, distinguishing the servile peasants ("chamy") from the lords ("pany").

55 See http://rycharski.artmuseum.pl/pl/serie/o/brama, accessed April 4, 2021.

56 See https://plock.wyborcza.pl/plock/1,35681,18844982,pod-plockiem-stanie-pomnik-chlopa-mozesz-pod-nim-wykrzyczec.html, accessed April 4, 2021.

57 At this point it is worth recalling the movement of peasant literature, somewhat suppressed in these discussions, which five decades earlier created a perspective on the people's experience of oppression but also emancipation, describes a different level of social bios than political life, tries to reconstruct the peasant, but also workers' autobiography – here first of all we should mention the texts of Kawalec, Nowak, Myśliwski.

Abstract

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People in Perspective, the People's Perspective. Perspectivism and Positivism

Chmielewska explores "people's histories" – works by Adam Leszczyński, Michał Rauszer and Kacper Pobłocki – in the context of perspectivism, counter-history, rescue humanities, and, above all, potential histories (which reveal the possibilities of different narratives, and, indirectly, of other historical processes), accounts that analyse an alternative historical bios. The new type of historiography must tackle the task of reconstructing the sources and perspectives that are not properly present, it must recast the narratives of dominant politics, show us a different level of agency and subjectivity, question the consensus on what ought to be regarded as most important in national history and what should enter its canon. It is a unique archeology of the dominated and silent subject.

Keywords

people's histories, perspectivism, potential histories, rescue humanities

Kinga Siewior

Is There No Free Love in the Houses Made of Concrete? Intimate Narratives in the People's Republic of Poland

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In the houses made of concrete there is no free love. There are marital relations and acts of indecency. Casanova doesn't visit us here,"[1] sings Martyna Jakubowicz in a Polish hit from 1982. The melancholic song about the neighborly acquaintance between an anonymous woman and man unexpectedly stormed the music charts, rapidly gaining the status of a political manifesto while giving its singer a reputation as a moral provocateur. Yet Jakubowicz has repeatedly stressed that she does not deserve this

1 The song is available to listen to (among others) here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlYIEBgS3rk, accessed February 25, 2024. English version of the lyrics: "I woke up later than usual / I got out of bed, there was music on the radio / I took off my shirt first then danced a bit / And for a while I felt like the Playboy girls / (Chorus) In the houses made of concrete / There is no free love / There are marital relations and acts of indecency / Casanova doesn't visit us here / The man from the opposite house who has a cat and a bicycle / He stood at the window as still as a rock / I thought it's for you this show / Let's move, I won't stand like this / In the afternoon I saw him in the grocery store / He only had eyes for me / With a shake of his head he showed me the window / So we will spend this evening together again." If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this artice.

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label. The story in the ballad was completely invented by her husband at the time, Andrzej Jakubowicz, who was inspired by the banal view from their flat window. "This was composed by my former spouse while sitting in a block of flats. He was probably writing at his desk, looking out of the window at the horrible Stegny district, with its gray concrete all the way to the horizon. You couldn't see anything else, and he probably watched himself as people existed, turning off lights, turning on lights, going to work, coming from work. It's not a real story."[2] Martyna Jakubowicz also rejects any political interpretations of the song:

> I know from my fans that for many people this was rather a song that they made love to. That's why many girls who were born in the 1980s are named Martyna. As a matter of fact, though, for some it is a song about the lack of freedom, and for others it is precisely about freedom [...]. I was not an opposition fighter, because I'm not one for going out with flags to the barricades. I didn't participate in the life of the opposition and didn't conduct political struggle through songs [...]. Since I didn't get in the way of the authorities, the authorities didn't bother me either. For me, the music I cared about would always be music of the heart, not a political manifesto [...]. It was just a nice song. It was successful, so I guess it's important to people.[3]

Indeed, it is a nice song. In my opinion, however, its impact is not only a result of its aesthetic qualities. The song has stirred the collective imagination because, while it is not a true story, it does feel like one. It depicts a typical late-socialist Polish landscape, a concrete housing estate, which metonymically evokes the omnipresent mood of grayness; as well as the typical property status of its average inhabitant ("a cat and a bicycle"); finally, it captures the typical horizon of the desires of its average inhabitant defined by the figures of the absent Casanova and the "Playboy girl," which becomes a disguise allowing her to break away for a moment from the rules of the sleepy everyday life of the socialist housing block. Moreover, the song describes one of the basic principles of this reality, in which the space of the home becomes a space of merely concessional freedom, and the traditional boundaries between private and public are

2 "Historia pewnej płyty *Mam na imię Martyna, to na pani cześć* (radio program)" [The story of a certain album "My name is Martyna, it's in your honor (radio program)", accessed January 24, 2024, https://www.polskieradio024.pl/6/13/Artykul/319851,Mam-na-imie-Martyna-to-na-pani-czesc; transcript: http://www.niezapomniana.pl/img.php?id=652.

3 Martyna Jakubowicz and Mariusz Urbanek, "Kobieta z betonu" [Woman of concrete], *Wysokie Obcasy* 17 (2008), accessed January 24, 2024, https://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,5151645.html.

disrupted as well. That porosity is exposed, on the one hand, in the interplay of the gazes of the song's characters in the windows, which reveals both a panoptic crampedness and a lack of intimacy, but also paradoxically establishes such an intimacy. On the other hand, the permeability of the social orders is indicated by the language of the state and conventionality intruding into this intimate lyric, as expressed in the legislative phrase of "marital relations and acts of indecency." In short, Jakubowicz tells a love story of that time. All the more evocative if we consider the song's basic historical background, which I have not yet mentioned explicitly: the time of Martial Law (1981–1983).

I start by mentioning the rather trivial circumstances of the song's origins and popularity, because in the entanglement of everyday life, feelings and power, Jakubowicz's song encapsulates a record of the socialist experiences of the People's Republic of Poland, which I would like to examine more closely. Furthermore, the song aptly illustrates the discourse in which these experiences are articulated. In order to define it, it might be helpful to cite Lauren Berlant's explorations of the intimate public sphere as a phenomenon in which narratives of all kinds are read as autobiographies of collective experience.[4] The intimate public is not defined by literal autobiographicality, although first-person narratives appear relatively frequently in it. According to Berlant, what determines its framing is the almost automatic self-identification of its subjects in the plots, worldviews and emotional knowledge that these narratives – regardless of their fictionality or factuality – offer, and the assumption that they derive from everyday and, so to speak, general human experience.[5] Therefore, the intimate public sphere suggests scenarios of familiar and frequently experienced histories, which are considered both an expression of common experience and the outcome of this commonness produced by it. The issue here is the space of mediation, which is generated – as in the case of Jakubowicz's song – at the intersection of fictionality and lifehood, and when the denial of direct autobiographicality is accompanied by anonymous self-recognition. Effectively, at its center remain fantasies of the common, the everyday and the ordinary, usually of a positive hue.

The public sphere is made intimate when the emotional attachments of its subjects come to the fore and the scenarios of events and behavioral modes circulating in it turn out to be not real, but possible. Such an understanding enables lateral identification, which takes place, as it were, alongside the identity production of more petrified social and national structures. Berlant

4 Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), vii.

5 Ibid., 10.

describes this position as juxtapolitical.[6] It is in close proximity to the political register, but only sometimes intersects directly with it. Again, the case of the song reflects the nature of it quite well; above all Jakubowicz's unwillingness to get involved, her consensus attitude towards reality, and her commitment to "music of the heart," which is not as much about leading to the barricades as bringing comfort to listeners as indeterminate as she is. After all, in the matter of the intimate public, politics is a threat that is linked to the spectrum of various exclusions or coercion, thus always located "elsewhere." The intimate public itself, on the other hand, functions as a scene of escape, in which things commonly understood as non-political – that is, feelings and attitudes that in these "elsewheres" would be considered ridiculous, petty or inadequate – are brought to the center stage. Thus it provides a kind of asylum for those who are unwilling or unable to participate in "big" politics. It is a space, as Berlant continues, that produces relief from daily oppressions, postpones civic duties, and eases social frictions and antagonisms.

This situation, of course, does not mean that the intimate public is apolitical. On the contrary, it can be considered declaratively apolitical at best. On the one hand, after all, the narratives characteristic of it are most often classified among moral genres that remain anchored in conventional and normative notions of the good life that reproduce structures of power. On the other hand, it also happens that even in the most mediocre forms there are moments of critical dissent. More broadly, they become, as it were, secondarily politicized in relation to the canons through which even that mediocrity defines itself. To be more precise: according to Berlant, what is at stake is not to negate these – well-recognized, even banal – attachments and arrangements, but to redirect attention to the more vernacular circulations of intimate content and the modes through which they organize the public sphere. Central to this reflection remains the problem of the ambivalence of intimate narratives, which as much preserve the structures of social worlds as they produce the energy for their radical critique. Finally, this reflection is also stimulated by the question of what actually determines that the scales of publicity identification favor one side or the other, and by the question of why the oscillatory status of such stories for their female users often turns out to be perfectly sufficient.

By invoking Berlant's ideas, I want to consider whether an intimate public can exist under different political conditions than those initially examined by the American scholar. The example of Jakubowicz's song suggests a positive answer and indicates that its mechanisms would converge at least at certain points. The allusion to a shameless excess that organizes the singing genre scene indicates the limits of the moral norm. The song itself, however, acts as

6 Ibid., X.

an equation, oscillating in reception between, to repeat Jakubowicz, "a song about the lack of freedom" or a song "just about freedom." It also opens up to situations that do not easily lend themselves to "politics per se," but rather build a sense of emotional belonging.[7] And this is all that may or may not result in political agency. However, while for Berlant the inevitable enabler of this possible transformation is liberal democracy, people's democracy seems at first glance to create different conditions of articulation and a different dynamic for the functioning of intimate stories in the public sphere. Such possible differences are the first issue that will interest me here.

The second point is the realm of experiences that Jakubowicz's song reveals, which one might call *minorum gentium* experiences. This refers to a corpus of stories and images that remain within the close proximity of "ordinary people" and happen somewhere on the edge of "big" history and politics, but, as I will argue further, resonate closely, though sometimes in a non-obvious way, with it. For all these reasons, then, the song becomes a starting point to ask somewhat more general questions: how do these types of projections of intimacy work in communist conditions? What characterizes them? And finally, what can the launch of the perspective of intimate stories bring to the understanding and study of the culture of the People's Republic of Poland?

Intimacy under Suspicion

In dictionary definitions, intimacy is derived from the Latin *intimus*, which is the superlative degree of *interior* (inner) and means: "something of a personal or private nature," "the state of being intimate,"[8] that is "marked by a warm friendship developing through long association," "suggesting informal warmth or privacy," "engaged in, involving, or marked by sex or sexual relations."[9] Its colloquial understandings, meanwhile, cover a wide range of phenomena from erotic experiences through various formulations of the practices of love, friendship or familiarity, to the secret and idiomatic qualities of individual emotional life. According to the approach I am interested in here, oriented towards the social interactional and relational aspects of intimacy, it is defined across the entire spectrum of such glossary possibilities. It could therefore be seen precisely as synonymous with sexuality – as is the case in

7 Ibid., 38.

8 See, e.g., https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intimacy, accessed January 1, 2024.

9 See, e.g., https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intimate, accessed January 1, 2024.

The Transformation of Intimacy by Anthony Giddens, who sees the title category as an instrument of democratization of modern societies.[10] It could also be synonymous to feelings – such an approach resounds in the Polish translation of Eva Illouz's book *Cold Intimacies*, dedicated to the mechanisms of commodification and rationalization of them within the framework of twentieth-century therapeutic culture.[11] Finally, it could be synonymous to kinship and familiarity – such an interpretation is proposed by Michael Herzfeld in the *Cultural Intimacy*, which describes the importance of social cordiality as unacknowledged in the centers of power, but powerful ways in which subjects recognize themselves as a national community.[12]

These references give a very brief indication of some of the undoubtedly most influential approaches to the study of intimacy. At this point, however, I would like to highlight a certain pattern. Giddens writes at the outset of his work, "modern societies have a covert emotional history, yet to be fully drawn into the open."[13] Illouz begins by noting the state of the research with the following words: "most grand sociological accounts of modernity contained, in a minor key, another story: namely descriptions or accounts of the advent of modernity in terms of emotions."[14] Pointing to the marginalized, but still present appearance of emotions in classical sociological thought, she defines her goals as follows: "to recover that not-so-hidden dimension of modernity."[15] Herzfeld, on the other hand, identifies his aims as "revealing the cultural secrets of their nation-states"[16] and peeking behind "facades of national culture."[17] Thus, intimacy functions here each time as something essentially hidden – to varying extents – and generally as something that is placed on the private "side" of reality.

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10 Anthony Giddens, *Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Emotions in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

11 Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies. The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Malden: Polity Press, 2007). Polish edition: Eva Illouz, *Uczucia w dobie kapitalizmu,* trans. Zygmunt Simbierowicz (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010). The original title in Polish was translated exactly as "Feelings in the Age of Capitalism."

12 Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy. Social Poetics and the Real Life of States, Societies, and Institutions* (London: Routledge, 2016).

13 Giddens, *Intimacy*, 2.

14 Illouz, *Cold Intimacies*, 10 (epub edition).

15 Ibid., 12.

16 Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, 2.

17 Ibid., 61.

Yet this dichotomous spatial matrix can be modified when reaching for the verbal variant of intimacy, namely the Latin *intimare*, which means both to "communicate through allusions" and "to notify." This is exactly the track Berlant follows in her account, in which the association of intimacy with the act of uttering, recording and public announcement makes intimacy a medium that serves as a bridge between the private and public orders, anchoring the experiences of the individual in the trajectories of collective life.[18] In such a view, intimacy obtains the character of a narrative, and with it its specific poetics as well. According to Berlant, typical intimate narratives would include stories of love, family and fulfillment, but also their reverse: stories of betrayal or boredom. Conversely, typical intimate poetics would include melodramas, autobiographies and entertainment genres, but also more discrete and more ephemeral forms based on eloquence and requiring the ability to read complex signs and gestures. The increased presence of this type of narrative in the public sphere makes it possible, in effect, to look at the latter as a reality in which it is the emotions, feelings and sentiments circulating in texts and linked to intimacy that normalize certain models of subjectivity and formulate the conditions for individuals to recognize themselves as a society, often ahead of more "rational" policies.

To sum up, in all the approaches I mention, making the public sphere intimate is (in the end) valued positively: as a measure of democratization and emancipation. However, such an interpretation is complemented by a darker variant of the history of modern intimacy, which is activated particularly in the study of societies caught up in multidimensional histories of violence (class, ethnic, colonial). A brilliant discussion of this problematic is offered by Ann Laura Stoler, who – to stay with the nuances of vocabulary – focuses the reflection this time on a pseudo-etymological figure, namely, she proposes to associate intimacy with intimidation (from Latin *intimidare*), that is, oppression.[19] Stoler traces the ways by which imperial formations consolidated their presence through "intimate social ecologies"[20] (spaces of the home, alcoves, etc.), "sentimental affiliations"[21] (marital, familial and affectional relationships) and by "shaping appropriate and reasoned affect"[22] (value systems

18 Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 282-283.

19 Ann Laura Stoler, *Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen*, in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

20 Ibid., XI.

21 Ibid., XIII.

22 Ibid., 2.

transmitted through educational and upbringing processes affecting family customs, misalliances, etc.). She argues that intimate matters played a key role in modern orders of power, since it was in them that the grammar of race and class resonated most forcefully.

In the triviality of this conclusion, however, lies the magnitude of the overlooking of aspects of imperial history that are of interest to Stoler. Intimate images and stories often refute widespread modern nomenclature; they are usually not articulated directly, and their comprehension often proceeds at the level of embodied knowledge, but despite (or perhaps because of) this, they give the impression of being "strangely familiar"[23]; and it is precisely because of this effect of familiarity that they remain more difficult to grasp. On the one hand, it is about the occupation that "we cannot see and what we know."[24] On the other hand, the point is about quite visible elements of the archives, which until now have been treated as irrelevant, overly obvious or unspecific. In this regard, Stoler writes about the troublesome position of intimate data (family stories, love affairs, but also metrics, which determines the troublesome position of their model researcher: the historian), at the same time noting that the chances of overcoming this impasse are created only by new methodological sensibilities, located at the intersection of postcolonial, feminist, memory and affective studies.[25]

From this brief overview of research, I would like to draw two basic conclusions that may prove useful in rethinking the relationship between intimacy and power in the People's Republic of Poland. Firstly, the understanding of intimacy is shifting from seeing it as something hidden, and often offscreen, to treating it as narratives circulating in the public sphere. Secondly, contrary to the usual topographies of modern social worlds, intimacy is not placed on their periphery, but remains at their very core, a position that is, however, often blinded. Following these indications, therefore, in the next sections I will try to expand on the characteristics of the narratives I am interested in here, and point to one such overlooked, but still central juncture of the intersection of Polish communist power and intimacy.

Misfortunes, Mere Misfortunes

An interesting resource for considering the peculiarities of the People's Republic of Poland's intimate narratives is provided by a volume of reportage

23 Ibid., 14.

24 Ibid., XIII.

25 Ibid., 79.

published in 1981 entitled *Kto dzisiaj kocha…* [Who loves today…].[26] The character of this book is best captured by an anonymous reviewer, who wrote on a website that: "the book describes the problems of women in the 1970s. Some I know from my own experience; others seem a bit exaggerated. It is a collection of average reportages that might have appeared in women's magazines in those years."[27] However, the title of the anthology remains misleading to some extent: it does contain accounts of the pursuit of a husband and of marriage, of single motherhood and of caring for sick children, but the love itself, the romance, emotional and sexual life, are relegated to the background, remaining virtually unspoken in these narratives. Instead, we have a number of looping motifs that are worth a brief look.

First: marriage relations – the most important, but unromantic case. As the worker from the reportage "Ostatnie tango w hotelu 'Rytex'" [Last tango at the Rytex hotel] says, "the dream of the heart is for the youngest ones. We look at men practically – he doesn't drink, has an apartment and what others have – this is enough to go to the altar with him."[28] Elżbieta, the protagonist of the reportage "Zabezpieczyć męża" [Securing a husband] expresses similar views. The stakes of the titular challenge are high: "if her plan succeeds, if he falls into the trap of the plan, the rest of life will be easy. […] There will be a house. A clean one. With a wonderful bathroom. There will be curtain rods fastened by his hands, and from these curtain rods the curtains will flow to the ground."[29] Elżbieta's peer, a single mother from the reportage "Zmarnowałaś życie, idiotko!" [You wasted your life, idiot!] explains the priority of getting married simply: privileging young married couples in the queue for flats. Meanwhile, after marriage, everything usually seems to be on the uphill side: "marriage consists of cleaning, fatigue, arguing and haste."[30]

Second: living in a block of flats. "When the lights come on in the cinema, you have to go back to your room. You have to go to work or sleep, or you have to stand at the window and look at the beautiful housing development,"[31] says

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26 Helena Madany, ed., *Kto dzisiaj kocha…* [Who loves today] (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1981).

27 An anonymous entry accessed on https://www.biblionetka.pl/art.aspx?id=24436, January 21, 2024.

28 Michał Mońko, "Ostatnie tango w hotelu 'Rytex'" [Last tango at the Rytex hotel], in *Kto dzisiaj kocha…*, 21.

29 Ewa Szemplińska, "Zabezpieczyć męża" [Securing a husband], in *Kto dzisiaj kocha…*, 143.

30 Anna Grigo, *"Tadeusz i Małgorzata"* [Tadeusz and Malgorzata'] in *Kto dzisiaj kocha…*, 119.

31 Mońko, "Ostatnie tango w hotelu 'Rytex'," 19.

another resident of the Rytex hotel dreamily. A number of the female protagonists of the reportages are put up by their families or live in dormitories, care centers, factory barracks or old family cottages. Definitely: in flats far too small for them. The concrete houses in the reportages are luxury goods, "branches of heaven," as Małgorzata Szejnert writes.[32]

Third: freedom and free love. To be more precise: in the reportages there is no mention of freedom, nor even less of free love; instead, there are piles of dirty dishes, hollow couches and nosy neighbors. One of the protagonists confesses: "she hasn't had unhappy loves, but her life is like this: she throws pots in the sink, it's already nine o'clock, her husband eats sausage out of the fridge, and she doesn't feel free."[33] Another girl has no illusions: "first there was the escape to Warsaw, a head full of dreams and a mouth full of clichés about a free life […] there was the escape to college, which was supposed to bring not only knowledge and status, but also liberation […]. Hope begins with college, hope for everything, which is way too much […] if a girl says she wants to be free, she is either lying, meaning she has given up, or she's showing off, or she is stupid."[34] Making a living in the city, women's experience shows, financially is almost impossible alone. In order to save social advancement, the girl's marital status must be sacrificed.

Fourth: aspirations. The horizon of the women characters' desires is quite predictable: an apartment, high-gloss furniture, carpets, vacations at the seaside, a small car and an allotment garden. The dream of singing lessons from the reportage "Portret Ewy M." [Portrait of Eve M.] turns out to be an unprecedented whimsy here. The most eloquent visions of the good life, however, are collected in Barbara Łopieńska's reportage "Syn" [The son], in which she asks future mothers at a maternity hospital how they imagine their child's life. The beginning looks good: kindergarten, tennis lessons, good dinners. Next, the visions of the mothers-to-be slide further and further into gloomy realities: "he'll finish school – he'll start to climb the ladder. And then? – And then? Then nothing special will happen to him."[35] Regardless of whether mothers see their child as a future steelworker, writer or engineer, when asked how they see his daily life, a similar answer is given. Łopieńska encapsulates this

32 Małgorzata Szejnert, "Czwarte piętro, filia nieba" [The fourth floor, branch of heaven], in *Kto dzisiaj kocha*..., 50–61.

33 Barbara Łopieńska, "Syn" [The son], in *Kto dzisiaj kocha*..., 25.

34 Szemplińska, "Zabezpieczyć męża," 136–143.

35 Łopieńska, "Syn," 27.

in a short sentence: "going to work, coming home, going to the cinema with his wife, coming home."[36]

Fifth: politics and career. The protagonists in the reportages stay away from the former – as in the case of "Życie rodzinne" [Family life]: "there is nothing to talk about politics. Because a person can't be political."[37] Symptomatically, the only representatives of authority in the 22 texts collected in the volume are the social aid officer and the district policeman. Career – yes, sometimes characters manage to move up a level or two in the social hierarchy, but they never reach so high as to engage in big (or at least district) politics. And that is actually a good situation – the mothers-to-be in the delivery room agree on this: "you shouldn't get caught up in state affairs, because no private brain can unravel that. I get the shivers when I think that my son might be the chief of the municipality."[38]

And the final motif: troubles. Natalia Iwaszkiewicz writes about her protagonists: "troubles – as many as there are hairs on the head: a sickly child, a shabby apartment."[39] Another author echoes her: "things that are filmically trivial, but how cruel in life."[40] Divorce, miscarriage, mental illness, accident, widowhood, disability, loneliness, poverty – one might say: the infinity of sadness constantly fueled by patriarchal violence.

From today's perspective, what appears to be an expression of boundless hopelessness, however, in the eyes of the protagonists of the reportages appears quite bearable. In this regard, the words of yet another reportage protagonist whose children have been in trouble with the law are very telling: "why say right away that they did not succeed! Is it something so unusual? Did it only happen in my family? […] There may have been some misfortunes, but so what? After all, she is not the only one. What happens to people, happens to us."[41] Equally significant is the reader's assessment cited at the beginning of this section, noting that the texts are "a bit exaggerated," but one could say that not so much so as to suspend one's recognition or to treat the events presented in them as anomalies.

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36 Ibid., 32.

37 Krystyna Jagiełło, "Życie rodzinne" [Family live], in *Kto dzisiaj kocha*..., 206.

38 Łopieńska, "Syn," 29.

39 Natalia Iwaszkiewicz, "Jak ptaki z gniazda..." [Like birds from the nest...], in *Kto dzisiaj kocha*..., 281.

40 Grigo, "Tadeusz i Małgorzata," 259.

41 Joanna Siedlecka, "Co ludziom, to i nam" [What happens to people, happens to us], in *Kto dzisiaj kocha*..., 188.

The themes of the reportages, their declarative belonging to so-called "women's culture," and the refusal of politicization they manifest encourage us to consider them as examples of the texts of the intimate public. Then, however, it turns out that we are facing a pivotal reversal. If for Berlant consolation and recognition are inherently brought by happy stories that more or less directly mediate political (albeit cruel) optimism, then in the case of *Who Loves Today*…. such possible consolation and recognition seems to be brought by mediocre or even tragic plots, which would rather be sponsored by political pessimism. Just as if the rule "others are doing badly too, if not worse" is a sufficient (and even t h e o n l y) source of identification and of empathy as such; since after all, nothing connects like sadness. At the same time, the reportages depict a specific flattening of intimate worlds deprived neither only of sexuality or tenderness, but also of the emotions accompanying them. In the reality of reportage in the People's Republic of Poland there is no place for both (romantic) love and despair over the lack of it; a symbolic place, but also a literal place. The most we can note is an anemic struggle with this state of affairs or a melancholy resignation.

It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the reportages shatter the positive image of the 1970s era in Poland. However, their status can be considered ambivalent. On the one hand, some of the authors had censorship problems with the reprinting of texts from *Who Loves Today*… in individual books.[42] On the other hand, in the anthology, the same texts become an element of support for social pedagogy, which is directly expressed in the introduction to the book. The reportages serve in it as anti-examples mainly due to the assumption of the otherness of the "female gaze" which, as it were, would automatically serve to blunt the sharpness of criticism.[43] That volume's extremely condescending ideological framework thus means that it goes from texts originally written rather "against" to texts written rather "on behalf of" communist power through a strong discursive frame.

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42 A striking example of this is the case of Hanna Krall and her book *Katar sienny* [Hay fever], in which the reportage from *Kto dziś kocha* …and several other press texts maintained in a similar style and theme) was to be reprinted, but its entire print run was destroyed just in 1981.

43 See Mikołaj Kozakiewicz, *Wstęp* [Introduction], in *Kto dzisiaj kocha*…. Kozakiewicz was a well-known People's Republic of Poland sociologist of the family. About the circumstances of the volume's creation, he writes as follows: "this book becomes […] indirectly an appeal for broad efforts to improve human relations in general, to combat social vices and addictions, mistakes in the functioning of institutions […] Out of the awareness of how important this area is, these reportages were born in the feminine insightful and sensitive, but in the masculine bold and combative." Ibid., 12.

Tales of Impossible Loves

To the collection of stories discussed here, I would like to add a few parallel, but this time visual narratives, which, when juxtaposed with reportages, perhaps make even more evident the fluidity of the boundary between what is acceptable and harmless, and what is not. The first of these is presented by Wojciech Wiszniewski in the film *Historia pewnej miłości* [Random love story] (1974/1981): the boy – a bachelor and a simple-minded worker – has just learned that the works council will fast-track his apartment allocation, but only on condition that he moves in with his wife; the girl – beautiful and ambitious, works in an office and lives in a shabby cramped apartment with her family. The boy falls in love at first sight, while the girl rather makes calculations. The negotiations on love take place in a turpist space crowded with neighbors and sub-tenants. Then things move quickly: a wedding, a move, betrayal and the girl's escape. The second tale is Agnieszka Holland's *Kobieta samotna* [A lonely woman] (1981/1987), with comparable crampedness, yet with the load of misery multiplied significantly. The woman – a single mother, lives in an unheated shed somewhere near the railway tracks, struggling unsuccessfully to find an apartment; the man – younger than her, on a disability pension, sublets a room from a nosy married couple. A seed of affection is born between the protagonists, but soon withered by the lack of private space. Further on, we observe a cascading sequence of events: a dream of escape, a theft, a murder. Tale number three is Barbara Sass's *Krzyk* [The scream] (1982). The girl – a petty thief, just released from prison, living with her mother and her vodka friends in a repulsive room; the boy – who arrived in the city from the countryside, has settled in an inconspicuous barrack in the suburbs in anticipation of being assigned an apartment. For a while, the youngsters live happily among furniture and appliances cobbled together from nothing. The rest of the story, however, consists of the news of the apartment allocation, the lack of funds to finalize it, a breakup, an attempted theft, and a murder. A fourth tale, older but essentially similar, is told by Aleksander Ford in *Ósmy dzień tygodnia* [Eighth day of the week] (1958/1983), with the plot driven by a couple in love's unsuccessful search for a place to be alone for a while. This again leads to an inevitably unhappy ending.

The above compilation may seem inappropriate as much because of the blatant abbreviation of the plots as because of the disrupted chronology.[44] However, I collect these narratives here because they all still tell the same

44 *A Lonely Woman* was produced in 1981, but only released in 1987. Shot in 1982, *The Scream* hit the screens a year later. Wiszniewski's film, on the other hand, was made in 1974, but did not have its premiere until 1981. The case was similar with Ford's film, shot in 1958, but not made public until 1983. All the films were halted by communist censorship.

plot that interests me. They all deconstruct in a robust sense the relationship between love, fulfillment, and conventional "houses made of concrete." All the films feature protagonists who are unwilling or unable to exist in the political reality. This is exemplified by the famous scene in *A Lonely Woman*, when the main character indifferently walks past a Solidarity unionist demonstration against the communist authorities, as well as by the rejection of the main character of *The Scream* from both social welfare and Solidarity activists she meets at work. Finally, all of these narratives were filmed or saw the light of day in the first half of the 1980s, as if it was at this point when a space to make visible a certain story of the post-war era appeared.

However, the links between love, "houses made of concrete," and power go back to the very beginnings of communist Poland. As Tomasz Żukowski notes: "the issue of engaging erotic desires turned out to be of key significance for the legitimization of change and of the new authorities. Romance was at the center of the tale about building a new society, and not as a remnant of prewar methods of storytelling, nor as a trick to smuggle in boring ideological content. It was rather driven by the needs that underpinned the very foundations of the revolution and, thanks to this, effectively organized the collective imagination."[45] Proof of this can be found in film productions from the Socialist Realist period, including Leonard Buczkowski's famous *Przygoda na Mariensztacie* [Adventure in Mariensztat] (1953), a film that tells the love story of the bricklayer Janek and Hanka, a soloist in a folk ensemble, who is also employed at a construction site. According to Żukowski, the story not only presents the new realities of labor, the worker-peasant alliance or the communists' demands for women's emancipation, but also a significant shift in the depiction of the revolution itself. Janek and Hanka are no longer angry workers watching out for the enemy, but a laughing couple who, after the day's work, dress up in fashionable clothes and go dancing; they are driven not by the desire to fight, but by private aspirations. The protagonists are building a new order, but also their relationship and their home – in a completely literal, material as well as emotional sense. Żukowski writes, "Eros, the sexual energy of romance, feeds into the revolution and propels it forward. The union of lovers represents the signifier of the project and its embodiment; the dream, its coming true, as well as the creation and consolidation of change."[46]

However, this propagandistic energy of the early postwar era and the new imagination it generated burned out very quickly, around 1956.

45 Tomasz Żukowski, *Eroticism and Power*, in *Reassessing Communism. Concepts, Culture, and Society in Poland, 1944–1989*, ed. Katarzyna Chmielewska, Agnieszka Mrozik and Grzegorz Wołowiec (Budapest: CEU Press, Budapest 2021), 115–116.

46 Ibid., 118.

The later cinema blockbusters of the 1970s, such as Andrzej Kostenko and Witold Leszczynski's *Rewizja osobista* [Personal review] (1972) and Tadeusz Chmielewski's *Nie lubię poniedziałku* [I don't like Monday] (1971), would be a reflection of what evolved from the ruins of the revolution project: love relationships as a transaction in which feelings and intimate relations become currency exchanged for privileges and material goods (including housing), while the equality of women, projected at the dawn of the postwar era, is increasingly lost in patriarchal clichés.[47]

In such a perspective, the stories, in which the establishment of deep intimate relationships and their fulfillment is unfeasible due to the lack of space suitable, can be read, however pompous this term may be, as a sign of the ultimate failure of the revolution as well as a kind of point of arrival of the history of the abandonment of the post-war modernization project. Or at least as a certain part of it oriented programmatically towards the production of desires and notions of the good life, the realization of which the authorities did not actually keep up with from the very beginning. As those narratives no longer expressing the official cultural policy of the authorities, but the sentiments of oppositionist communities and "ordinary" citizens, they would thus reveal with particular (melo)dramatic force what had been located in that gap, growing in direct proportion over the decades: structural and infrastructural violence, which, loosely by popular association, could also be called a banal violence – diluted and naturalized in the broader field of everyday experiences of crampedness, shortages and deprivations; the impossibility of moving patriarchal patterns; violence involuntarily normalized in collision with the more pronounced and brutal variants of communist repressions. Thereby, the pictures can arguably be seen as an illustration of "unfulfilled promises of prosperity"[48] and an emanation of the emotional condition that undoubtedly influenced the social demands formulated by the Solidarity movement, and in a broader, contemporary perspective, as a cultural supplement to the historical and social diagnoses of the political changes of the 1980s.

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47 Moreover, this scheme reflects a more general diagnosis of the social trasformations of the Real Socialist era (the 60s and the 70s). On the one hand, they were related to the conservative backlash that took place after 1956 and defined Polish moralities for the following decades; on the other hand – to the soc-consumerism of the early Gierek era (the 70s.), which essentially activated the latent middle-class imagination. See Dobrochna Kałwa, "Post-Stalinist Backlash in Poland," *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 41 (2015): 165–174; Justyna Jaworska, *Piękne widoki, panowie, stąd macie. O kinie polskiego sockonsumpcjonizmu* [Beautiful views, gentlemen, from here. On the cinema of Polish social consumerism] (Kraków: Universitas, 2019).

48 Małgorzata Mazurek, *Społeczeństwo kolejki. O doświadczeniach niedoboru 1945–1989* [The queue society. On the experiences of scarcity 1945–1989] (Warszawa: Trio, 2010), 181.

Towards a Civic Imagination

The narratives, which were intended to help me reconstruct the intimate public sphere, in the end probably said more about the inevitable politicization of intimacy in the People's Republic of Poland. Their fates were variable. *Houses Made of Concrete* quickly sank in the music charts. *Who Loves Today…* ranks in the category of books sold off for pennies in discount stores. The female authors of the reportages, if they function in the reading discourses, it is rather due to later books published in opposition outlets.[49] Wiszniewski's and Ford's films hold cult status, but mainly due to their status of being the movies withheld by censorship for longest. Sass and Holland's films, in contrast, are considered outstanding, but at the same time they are regarded as feminine, boundary-breaking, polemical variations on the subject of the cinema of moral anxiety, rather than as emblematic examples of it.

Generalizing, all these works can be considered to be located somewhere next to such emblematic, better-remembered or perhaps default (male) images of the first half of the 1980s. At the same time, they supply the field of stories that are well known or "strangely familiar," recognizable and well experienced. On the one hand, therefore, they may seem all too obvious, but on the other, all too unsuited to the cultural scenarios of time of Martial Law.

What is at stake here is the heroic-insurgent dominant image of martial law as mass mobilization; as the last Romantic uprising; as an event that in the archive of lawful Polish culture is encoded in the ranks of non-alternative values such as "freedom," "struggle," "independence" or "brotherhood."[50] Yet it is precisely on this maladjustment that the troublesomeness of the evoked narratives – slipping through the rules of this archive, and at the same time articulating the experience of the silent majority,[51] which could not or would not correct its shape – would be founded.

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49 See, among others, Barbara Łopieńska and Ewa Szymańska, *Stare numery* [Old numbers] (Londyn: Aneks, 1986); Teresa Torańska, *Oni* [They] (Londyn: Aneks, 1985); Ewa Berberyusz, "Lechu" [Lech], *Głos,* 1982; Ewa Berberyusz, *Pierwsze wejście* [First entrance] (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1984), Joanna Siedlecka, *Parszywa sytuacja, Jaworowe dzieci* [Lousy situation, Sycamore children] (Poznań SAWW, 1991).

50 Marcin Zaremba, "'Im się zdaje, *że* zapomnimy. O nie!' Rodowody rewolucji" [They think we will forget. Oh no!' Genealogy of the Revolution], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2016): 183. Przemysław Czapliński, "Bunt w ramach pamięci. 'Solidarność,' rewolucja, powstanie," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2016): 204–225, Maria Kobielska, *Polska kultura pamięci w XXI wieku: dominanty. Zbrodnia katyńska, powstanie warszawskie i stan wojenny* [Polish culture of memory in the twenty-first century: dominants. The Katyn massacre, the Warsaw Uprising and Martial Law] (Warszawa, Wydawnictwo IBL, 2016), 297–389.

51 On the silent majority, see more Stefan Chwin, "Polska pamięć – dzisiaj. Co pozostaje? Trwały ślad i mechanizmy niepamiętania" [Polish memory – today. What remains?

Hence, I recall these narratives not because they remain completely absent from the collective consciousness, but rather because they reflect the framework of the civic imagination, which in Polish culture is allowed to speak only under certain conditions – most often in the variant of comedy. Meanwhile, making a rightful place for this type of imagination and its basic genres in the social imaginaries and taking into account narratives from the periphery of the canon, or simply outside of it, is one of the first steps to unlearn imperialism. As Ariella Azoulay, the tacit patron of my reflection, writes, it is an initial condition to move away from the established masters of understanding the past in order to rethink it in a more compassionate and empathic manner.[52] In Azoulay's view, opening up to the civic imagination is opening up to the gesture of potentializing history – critical work that involves reconstructing the histories of praxis and desires that motivated the actions of various social actors in the past, yet were ultimately rejected by the scrutiny of the legitimizing discourses. This work uncovers the rules of discourses that enable the suppression or misrepresentation of these narratives in the name of preferred visions of society; and, finally, that points to the new possibilities that arise with the exposure of what was previously overlooked to the public.[53]

While imperialism, in the context of the considerations undertaken, may not be the most accurate term, Azoulay's call to look into the margins of hegemonic-exclusionary discourses does not lose its operability here. The narratives I have chosen, as I have tried to point out, neither match exactly with communist rhetoric; nor with anti-communist rhetoric, which was the main counterpoint to the introduction and sustaining of political change after 1945, as well as still providing the main frame for the description of postwar

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Permanent trace and mechanisms of not remembering], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2016): 15–39; Przemysław Czapliński "Bunt w ramach." The author confronts the treatment of the Martial Law in terms of revolution and uprising, pointing out, respectivel, the progressiveness and conservatism of these tendencies. At the same time, he makes space for a third tendency of communicating the experience of the 1980s – the humorist tendency. Indebted to traditions outside the 'canon' of Polish culture, but effectively unsealing the then prevailing division between the authorities and the struggling society, the humor current introduced a third actor into this binary arrangement - the silent majority. However, if in Czaplinski's case humor lies at the core of independent culture, which lies within the boundaries of the anti-communist imagination, and thus the final balance producing political subjects, in the case of the narratives discussed here this kind of transformation does not turn out to be the rule and does not formulate new forms of political subjectivity.

52 Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of* Photography (London: Zone Books, 2012).

53 Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

history. The shift towards the everyday and banal civic imagination that they set in motion would thus attempt to overcome this great dualism, which has already been undertaken successfully for some time in the study of various aspects of Polish culture and history. Emphasizing the affective and emotional areas of this imagination, presented here inevitably in a fragmentary manner, would in turn open up to the issue of the structure of feeling as that register of communist reality that still awaits in-depth study.

Abstract

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Is There No Free Love in the Houses Made of Concrete? Intimate Narratives in the People's Republic of Poland

The article deals with the category of intimacy and the possibilities which it opens up in the study of communist culture. In the theoretical plan of the article, the author recapitulates the concepts of an intimate public sphere (L. Berlant), imperial policies of intimacy (A. L. Stoler) and selected cultural definitions of intimacy (I. Illouz, A. Giddens, M. Herzfeld). In turn, in the interpretive plan, the author characterizes selected intimacy narratives from the communist period: songs (M. Jakubowicz), reportages collected in the volume *Who Loves Today*... and selected films (A. Holland, B. Sass, A. Ford, W. Wiszniewski). The article shows how these narratives deconstruct the opposition of the public and the private, and further defines the socialized public sphere of the People's Republic of Poland both as a space for the distribution of political meanings and the reproduction of oppression, and as a space for the construction of formulas of resistance and the denunciation of mechanisms of power. As a result, the article finally points to a category in intimacy that allows us to look at the People's Republic of Poland beyond the dominant dominant (martyrdom-centric, anti-communist, male-centric, etc.) in Polish discourse.

Keywords

intimacy, People's Republic of Poland, public sphere, communism, power

Interpretations: Towards the Future

Katarzyna Majbroda

The Anthropologies of the Future. Anticipating the Energy Transition

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The Maturing Present

We live in the era of a gestating (as if it were yet to mature) present that is continuously unfolding, leading to the chronotrope of the "eternal now." "The extended present […] tries to diminish the uncertainty of the future by recalling cyclicality and seeking to combine it with linearity."[1] As the future penetrates the present, it becomes diffuse and, in a certain sense, conceptually vanishes. What really invests life with meaning are the present, simultaneity and synchronicity;[2] this does not, however, imply that one should refrain from reflecting on what is already looming on the horizon and what is still difficult to envisage. The maturing present, which Kim Fortun refers to as "late industrialism," is "a historical period characterized by aging industrial infrastructure, landscapes dotted with

1 Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 58.

2 Elżebieta Tarkowska, *Kategoria wykluczenia społecznego a polskie realia* [The category of social exclusion and Polish realities], in *Skazani na wykluczenie*, ed. Małgorzata Orłowska (Warszawa: Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej im. Marii Grzegorzewskiej, 2005), 51.

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toxic-waste ponds, rising incidence of cancer and chronic disease, climate instability, exhausted paradigms and disciplines, and the remarkable imbrication of commercial interests in knowledge production, legal decisions, and politics at all scales."[3] Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, fossil fuels have been the driving force behind the industrialized world and its economic growth. The contemporary pursuit of economic growth, industrialization and the maximal exploitation of high-energy raw materials is one of the clearest symptoms of a present in which human efforts to extract natural resources are occurring at the expense of environmental, climate and socio-cultural harm on a historically unprecedented scale. The multi-dimensional crises of our times require "an anthropology […] that takes landscapes as its starting point and that attunes itself to the structural synchronicities between ecology, capital, and the human and more-than-human histories through which uneven landscapes are made and unmade."[4] By activating an anthropological perspective in the process of analyzing a phenomenon within which matter, economics and the environment are intertwined, one can identify the multiple hazards and perils inherent in new technologies and (post)industrial practices.[5] All of these function within specific temporalities that, along with the dominance of the logic of neoliberalism and late capitalism, constitute sequences correlated with work and profit[6] that serve a regime based on the development and accumulation of capital that shapes the normative fabric of everyday life.

Thinking about What is to Come Has a Future

Even though anthropology was perceived for many decades "as a 'time machine' taking people back through time by the study of the Other,"[7] since the mid twentieth century it has become a discipline relatively open to reflecting on the future. In 1971, Margaret Mead published her article titled "A Note on

3 Kim Fortun, "Ethnography in Late Industrialism," in *Writing Culture. Life of Anthropology*, ed. Orin Starn (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 158.

4 Anna Tsing, Andrew Mathews and Nils Bubandt, "Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and The Retooling of Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 60 (2019): 186.

5 Kim Fortun, "Anthropology in Farm Safety," *Journal of Agriculture* 22 (1) (2017): 1–18, accessed June 2, 2024, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1059924X.2016.1254697.

6 Jeff Sugarman and Erin Thrift, "Neoliberalism and the Psychology of Time," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 60 (6) (2017): 807–828.

7 Samuel G. Collins, *All Tomorrow's Cultures: Anthropological Engagements with The Future* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021).

Contributions of Anthropology to the Science of the Future" (1971; 1978),[8] which envisioned a discipline interested in the future of societies and cultures, which was somewhat of a *novum* at the time, because in twentieth-century anthropology, the topic of temporality was usually approached as one of the more important research categories when attempts were being made to create typologies of the life rhythms of the communities among which ethnographic research was being conducted. A significant contribution to that research trend was made by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his reflections on "hot cultures," which retain an awareness of the existence of a social hierarchy and disparate resources and forms of possession, and "cold cultures," which seek to preserve their equilibrium and continuity by closing themselves off to the influence of external knowledge sources.[9] Lévi-Strauss compared the former to a clock-like mechanism functioning in an unfaltering, repetitive manner, while the latter reminded him of steam engines with their dynamism, high temperature and potential for change. Field research undertaken by Edward Hall yielded the concepts of polychronic and monochronic time,[10] in which past and future shape the temporal dimension of the present. In monochronic time cultures, the anthropologist perceived events occurring in a linear fashion that also structures planning and thinking about the future. He drew a contrast between that conception of time and polychronic temporality, in which social practices and events unfold in synchrony, causing time to fragment and condense in such a way that what has occurred in the past and what is yet to occur comes to influence the present.[11] Time became a monographic object of theoretical reflections in Alfred Gell's book *The Anthropology of Time. Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images* (1992), while the phenomenon of temporality was taken up by Johannes Fabian, who argued that anthropologists systematically place those about whom they are writing in the past – in a different time dimension to their crafted representation, which may be characterized in allochthonous anthropological discourse as the "denial of the present" effect.[12]

8 Margaret Mead, "The Contribution of Anthropology to The Science of The Future," in *Cultures of The Future*, ed. Magoroh Maruyama and Arthur M. Harkins (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1978), 3–6.

9 Claude Lévi Strauss, *Zegary i maszyny parowe* [Clocks and steam engines], in *Rozmowy z Claude Lévi Straussem*, ed. Georges Charbonnier, trans. Jacek Trznadel (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2000), 27–35.

10 Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Press, 1976).

11 Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Garden City, 1966).

12 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Others: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

However, little attention has been paid in anthropology to futurology due to a marked tendency to focus attention on the present and its past origins. As late as the early 1990s, Nancy Munn asserted that in anthropology "futurity is poorly tended as a specifically temporal phenomenon,"[13] which she attributed to a tendency of anthropologists to perceive the future in "shreds and patches," as opposed to the special attention with which "the past in the present"[14] is analyzed within the discipline. Arjun Appadurai points out in a separate context that "in spite of many technical moves in the understanding of culture, the future remains a stranger to most anthropological models of culture."[15] Peter Pels suggests in turn that anthropology's negligible interest in the future stems from the ethical obligations of the "unfinished project of postcolonial reflexivity,"[16] adding elsewhere: "while not denying that things change, anthropologists first tend to contextualize futuristic discourse in a cultural *longue durée.*"[17]

It is becoming increasingly clear how the social sciences, new humanities, natural sciences, science and technology studies, ecocriticism, environmental anthropology, anthropology of energy, multispecies and transrelational ethnography, and many other fields of study, are reorienting themselves towards the future. The call, formulated some time ago, for attempts to be undertaken to anticipate the cultures and societies of tomorrow is gaining particular relevance as scholars of every gender strive to create a social imaginary open to unknown futures.[18] What is looming on the horizon or merely languishing in vague potentiality is seeking avenues of articulation within different circuits of knowledge. Both the academic establishment and public space need wise stories about the future, capable of activating social imaginaries and jolting them out of states of uncertainty,

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13 Nancy Munn, "The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (2012): 115.

14 Ibid., 115–116.

15 Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London: Verso, 2013), 5.

16 Peter Pels, "Modern Times: Seven Steps toward an Anthropology of the Future," *Current Anthropology* 56 (6) (2015): 779–796.

17 Peter Pels, "Anthropology as Science Fiction, or How Print Capitalism Enchanted Victorian Science," in *Magical Capitalism Enchantment, Spells, and Occult Practices in Contemporary Economies*, ed. Brian Moeran and Timothy de Waal Malefyt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 242.

18 Samuel G. Collins, *All Tomorrow's Cultures: Anthropological Engagements with the Future* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021).

lethargy and fear of the unknown. It is in the spirit of a clear need to create perspectives and narratives directed towards what is to come that a trend is developing for a future-oriented anthropology[19] that, as Sarah Pink and Juan Francisco Salazar propose, "calls for a renewed, open and future-focused approach to understanding the present, anticipating the unknown and intervening in the world."[20] By developing a futurological perspective, the anthropologists argue, the discipline should be able to shed the constraints of conventional mainstream anthropological practice, thereby liberating itself of any need to document and analyze the past, according to the premise that "the creative, improvisational, speculative, and participatory techniques of a renewed anthropological ethnography have the potential to make a significant contribution in the making of alternative futures."[21] Within the realm of cognition, this means "creating generative forms of n o t k n o w i n g with others, which might involve imagining, planning, designing, enacting, intervening or anticipating the future on an everyday basis."[22] The authors of a book titled *The Anthropology of the Future* (2019) argue in a similar vein, proposing the perspective of cognition should encompass orientations such as "anticipation," "expectation," "speculation," "potentiality," "hope" and "destiny," "all represent differing depths of time and different, though often related, ways in which the future may orient our present."[23] The aforementioned premises correspond well with the anthropology of the present, the tenets of which were presented by Paul Rabinow in his book *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment* (2003). Borrowing from Michel Foucault's ontology of the present (1984),[24] Rabinow developed a conception of the anthropology of the present by postulating its cognitive perspectivism and reflecting on notional constructs of reality while taking into consideration the indispensable practice of writing in line with the assumption that the graphy of ethos, logos and pathos establishes a privileged place for study

19 See *Manifest Antropologii Przyszłości*, accessed June 23, 2023, http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2014/panels.php5?PanelID=3230.

20 Juan F. Salazar, Sarah Pink, Andrew Irving and Johannes Sjöberg, eds., *Anthropologies and Futures. Researching Emerging and Uncertain Worlds* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 3.

21 Ibid., 3.

22 Ibid., 16.

23 Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight, *The Anthropology of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 8.

24 Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50.

and experimentation.[25] In the light of Rabinow's premises, the aim of a discipline thus designed is to follow the rhythm of the appearance of the relational, emergent phenomena of reality – or assemblages – for the purpose of explaining them and making them accessible, not only to anthropological thought, but also to social reasoning and critical reflection.

Dysfunctional Topographies, Fragmented Temporalities

One perspective, which developed alongside the "anthropology of the future" research trend, privileges the practicing of anticipation and projection as important cognitive strategies that need not lead anthropology down blind alleys and avenues of uncertainty. The aforementioned cognitive orientations turn out to be useful for the analysis and explication of the transitional processes taking place in many places in the world, within spaces of social, political and economic life and within varied contexts and settings. My interest in anthropology oriented towards the present[26] and the future was sparked by my research on the prelude to the energy transition, which I have been observing and evaluating in the area surrounding the Turów energy and mining complex in the Bogatynia commune in the region of Upper Lusatia. Given its status as a country with substantial lignite deposits, Poland has been participating for years in the implementation of the European Union's climate and energy policy. Within the Polish public space, visions for energy policy are being shaped that are clear enough to enable the pursuit and exercise of power through energy management. While the political transition of the 1990s brought new economic challenges rooted in Poland's desire to catch up with the economies of the developed world, which led to the profiling of economic policies for development and growth, the energy transition requires a radical reorientation of energy policy and profound changes based on the profiling of the contemporary late-capitalist economy in such a way as to make it less carbon-intensive, more cyclical, and ideally, degrowth. However, the vision of a green future is not only ill-defined, but demonstrates ambivalences and contradictions in the perception and evaluation of natural resources in Poland within the context of the climate crisis, economic growth and specific political goals. The desire

25 Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today. Reflections on Modern Equipment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 77.

26 Katarzyna Majbroda, *W relacjach, sieciach, splotach asamblaży. Wyobraźnia antropologii społeczno-kulturowej wobec aktualnego* [In relationships, networks, and assemblages. The imagination of socio-cultural anthropology towards the current] (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, 2019).

to comprehend the processes behind the emergence of transformative energy futures[27] requires constant interrogation as well as a readjustment of scales and values stringent enough to perceive, in this field of observation, various conflicting interests and varied perspectives and ways of establishing certain hierarchies: socio-cultural, environmental, economic, material and political. It is still open to question how the current situation affecting the area around the Turów mining and power complex, the decisions of decision makers and European and domestic plans for the decarbonization of Upper Lusatia are creating a post-coalmining future for that place. How is what is planned for the future reconfiguring the social practices of the present? And in what way is it influencing affective social poetics? Is a truly equitable energy transition possible? In this article, I present a history of Wigancice Żytawskie and Opolno-Zdrój – two localities located in an area rich in lignite deposits – that weaves together the past, present and anticipated future of the region on different scales and in different dimensions, testifying to the fact that sociocultural phenomena associated with energy and transformation are strong on temporal issues.[28]

Numerous analyses of the impact of the mining industry and its sprawling infrastructure on landscapes and the local communities' places of residence are dominated by the use of spatial metaphors and topographical research categories, such as energycapes, mining spaces, living on mineral seams, multi-species neighborhoods and spatial cleansing. There is also a clear tendency to situate the phenomena being studied along spatial scales, such as global–local, urban–rural, or center–periphery,[29] reflecting the work of a topographical imaginary oriented towards fields, ranges and areas.[30]

However, it is hardly possible to confine oneself to the spatial dimension of the explored terrain when dealing with momentary encounters of different temporalities and trajectories, heterogeneous landscapes of

27 Dominic Boyer, *Energopolitics: Wind and Power in the Anthropocene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

28 Frank W. Geels, Tim Schwanen, Steve Sorrell, Kristen Jenkins and Benjamin K. Sovacool, "Reducing Energy Demand through Low Carbon Innovation: A Sociotechnical Transitions Perspective and Thirteen Research Debates," *Energy Research & Social Science* 40 (2018): 23–35.

29 Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier, eds., *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

30 Lars Coenen, Paul Benneworth and Bernhard Truffer, "Toward a Spatial Perspective on Sustainability Transitions," *Research Policy* 41 (6) (2012): 968–979.

multiple temporal phenomena and "shifting assemblages of humans and non-humans"[31] in uncertain living conditions and uncertain environments, in an arena of irregularities. Complex aspects of the interspecies neighborhood in energyscapes, such as the relations between people, coal, technology and the environment, require analyses sensitive to the changing rhythms and temporalities of those phenomena. It could be said that a terrain that is in itself a dynamic and ad hoc assemblage acquires added instability and temporality during the process of transformation to which it is being subjected. By incorporating the temporality variables of the analyzed phenomena into anthropological research we can dynamize them and capture both their transitions and new configurations. The above strategy would appear to be of key importance when the anthropologist's attention is being focused on the lives of people in the mining spaces being transformed according to the rhythms of nature, a mining and power complex, machinery and technology. Despite its awareness of the consequences of extracting and burning fossil fuels, the late-capitalist narrative is still dominated by the conviction that the energy industry is a so-called "growth pole," around which various industries and services can develop, contributing to the enhancement of local communities' well-being. Publications addressing Poland's abundance of lignite deposits use such terms as "the prospective development of electricity production," lignite is described as "the optimal energy offer for Poland," the development of energy complexes relying on coal seams is described using such language as "milestones for the Polish energy doctrine for the development of the lignite industry in the twenty-first century," and it is emphasized that "lignite is the optimal fuel for the Polish energy industry." Narratives of development, enrichment and economic growth shape the public imagination, even though, as critics of the mining industry argue, dependence on the extraction of natural resources is inversely correlated with economic development, a phenomenon referred to as "conflict minerals"[32] or "the resource curse."[33]Extraction sites are also associated with environmental and climate disasters, areas of contamination, polluted air and toxic post-production waste, all of which affect the wellbeing of local communities. The ambiguity of the socio-environmental situation at mineral exploitation sites has led Stuart Kirsch to employ the

31 Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of The World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 20.

32 Deanna Kemp and John Owen, "Community Relations and Mining: Core To Business But Not 'Core Business'," *Resources Policy* 38 (4) (2013): 524.

33 Michael Ross, "The Political Economy of the Resource Curse," *World Politics* 51 (2): 297–322.

notion of "colliding ecologies," which draws attention to the paradox that while the living circumstances of people residing on, or in the immediate vicinity of, extraction sites is constantly improving, their economic, social, cultural situation and health are often severely harmed as a consequence of functioning within the spaces of late industrialism and the pollution of their local surroundings[34] during the process of accumulation by dispossession that impacts socio-spatial transitions.[35]

Any attempt to comprehend the specific tactics and operating strategies employed by a local community functioning under the environmental, economic, political and cultural conditions of the present requires the prism of the future to be activated, for what it is at stake in the transition game is more than just a fixed stage in the functioning of the mining industry. It is the future of energy itself. Social life in the area surrounding the Turów mining and power complex revolves around the rhythm of many times, experienced individually and communally and arranged in hierarchies that are intertwined despite being more often than not mutually exclusive. The transformation of the environmental, material, technological, socio-cultural and economic is accompanied by the transformation of fragments of the space around the mines and power stations, which takes the form of barren landscapes, displaced villages, tree-covered slag heaps, and waste dumps given over to nature, and these transformations occur within entanglements of people and non-human existences. Consequently, mining areas are no longer analyzed exclusively within economic and technological parameters as a depeopled landscape, but are increasingly being viewed in terms of an assemblage,[36] which makes it possible to see them as a relational entity co-constituted by people, coal as a raw material, the lie of the land, plants, architecture, material objects, machinery and the mining infrastructure – the open pit and external dump. While examining the energy transition, I consider how the individual factors co-constituting the mining landscape of Wigancice and the wider region of Upper Lusatia interact with one another and in what way they constitute a dynamic whole, open to successive transformations, which makes it possible to "conceptualize relationships between stability and change."[37]

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34 Stuart Kirsch, *Mining Capitalism. The Relationship between Corporations and Their Critics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 18.

35 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

36 Majbroda, *W relacjach, sieciach, splotach asamblaży*, 133–164.

37 Havard Haarstad and Tarje I. Wanvik, "Carbonscapes and Beyond: Conceptualizing the Instability of Oil Landscapes," *Progress in Human Geography* 41 (4) (2016): 440.

The Transformations of an Energyscape

The energyscape molded during the process of the foundation and expansion of the Turów mining and power complex in the Bogatynia commune in Lower Silesia constitutes an accumulation of both its historical shapes of the past and the local manifestations of global scenarios of environmental, economic and social transformations. The Turów mine and power station have their own times of establishment and operation and the work of those places has its own rhythms and intervals comprising the activities of people and machines; the lignite seam has its own separate time. The local community living in the area functions according to its own rhythms; the landscape surrounding the mining and energy complex is being transformed in definite time sequences from a space of nature into an industrial mining energyscape modified by the decisions and hand of humans – making it anthropogenic. Today, the immediate space surrounding "Turów" is being transformed into barren landscapes, displaced villages and tree-covered heaps and waste dumps centered around an open lignite pit expanding ever outwards. The erstwhile agrarian landscape of the region has been radically transformed into an industrial and post-industrial one. Cultivated fields, orchards and gardens were replaced by "huge mining waste dumps and tips, sinkholes caused by underground mining, brick kilns, stones, lead, sand and gravel pits, ash and cinder dumps, road cuttings, rail and road embankments, micro-sculptural elements of dumps and excavations, post-mining zones and re-routed riverbeds."[38] The complex's construction precipitated interference in that area's pre-existing topography and the rearrangement of the natural environment into a complex assemblage of raw materials, matter, geological existences, hydrographic networks, industrial and technological elements of infrastructure set in motion by the action of humans and machinery. The development of the mining and power industry not only equated to a radical change in the landscape surrounding the Turów complex, but also significant transformations in the local community's pre-existing life patterns, culture and well-being.

That process is very clearly embodied in the story of Wigancice Żytawskie, one of the ghost villages located in the vicinity of the external dump that was created by the expansion of the mining industry but destroyed at the dawn of the twenty-first century.[39] During the coal extraction process, the external dump built from the overburden removed along with coal, ash and soil grew

38 Adam Szpotański, *Kotlina Turoszowska. Monografia miasta i gminy Bogatynia w okresie 1945–2010* [Turoszowska Valley. Monograph of the city and commune of Bogatynia in the period 1945–2010] (Legnica: Biblioteka Diecezji Legnickiej, 2019), 113.

39 Katarzyna Majbroda, "A Ghost Village. Spatial Cleansing in Wigancice Żytawskie in the Landscape of the Turów Mining and Power Complex, Lower Silesia," *Lud* 106 (2022): 261–297.

large enough to begin encroaching on the village. An environmental survey carried out in the 1970s concluded that the dump's subsidence was endangering the villagers' lives. The decision to demolish the village was taken in the 1980s, prompting a procedure for the villagers' displacement and resettlement that I refer to elsewhere – after Michael Herzfeld – as spatial cleansing.[40] In view of the genuine threat facing the village, residents of private and council houses began to be dispossessed of their homes, which were repurchased from their owners, while villagers who had lived in rented accommodation were resettled. Some of the buildings destroyed by mining operations had sunk into the ground while others had been buried. In 1999, the village disappeared from the face of the earth. The village's remote location far from transport routes and the increasingly oppressive proximity of the pit meant that much of the local community made no protest against the dispossessions, with some even striving to accelerate the process. This is mentioned by one of the village's former residents, who stressed that the fact that there was no proper road and it was so difficult to get to neighboring villages effectively discouraged the community from staying in that place:

> The flooding of the village during torrential rain from unsecured water bodies on the slag heaps was a major inconvenience. It was ash mixed with mud. As soon as I stepped into it in wellingtons, it was impossible to pull the wellingtons out again…because they were lodged in the thick ash. Time and again, the residents tried to restore order and normality on their own. The mine partially covered the cost of any damage incurred. People were tired of constantly battling against the slag heap. Life had become unbearable. The locals started to demand better living conditions, at which point the mine started to resettle them in stages because that was easier for them. (Inhabitant of Zagorzelec, 67 years old)

Shortly after the activation of the dispossession and resettlement procedure, it became apparent that the local authorities and mine management had made a rash decision and the village could have actually continued to exist despite its close proximity to the dump. The awareness that the village's fate could have played out according to a different scenario has led some villagers to make it completely clear today that they consider the village's demolishment to make way for the development of the mining industry to have been harmful socially, economically and culturally. They are also keen to emphasize the effect of losing family homes, a neighborhood, local traditions and cultural heritage, as the following comment illustrates:

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40 Michael Herzfeld, *Siege of the Spirit. Community and Polity in Bangkok* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

> We had our past taken away. Supposedly, you could have bought a house anywhere you wanted, because they paid us well, a lot. But nowhere is anything like where you grew up, lived with your friends, family, knew places, your home, surroundings, everything. That won't return now, it won't be like it was in Wigancice. (Inhabitant of Zagorzelec, 63 years old)

Looking at the village's present form, it could be said that the depopulated village has been ultimately engulfed by forest. The scanty remains of old houses are overgrown with the vegetation that stretches over the roads, colonizing former farmyards and encroaching on farmland and spaces once jointly occupied by the local community. However, the village's removal from the face of the earth was primarily topographical in nature, because in the memories of former Wigancice residents, the village still exists. Since 2008, the former inhabitants of Wigancice and succeeding generations have been displaying their roots at an annual celebration of community held at Kołodziej's house – an Upper Lusatian house (or Umgebindehaus) translocated there from Wigancice. Local cultural animators and historical conservationists strive to get the public interested in Wigancice's history by spreading knowledge and memory of that place. The cultural animation and educational activities have evolved into a concrete plan for rebuilding the village that involves attracting cooperation partners, including architects, archaeologists, botanists, engineers and investors, whose combined efforts should lead to the village being reconstructed and restored to its former splendor.

The example of Wigancice Żytawskie demonstrates that the linear perception of time that forms the bedrock of the capitalist logic of growth, acting as a vector for imposing order on strategies, plans and actions, is not immune to shortcomings and disruptions. Strategic development concepts are liable to modification provoked by unforeseeable environmental disturbances and social interventions. Now it has been colonized by vegetation, the village has become a testing ground for the intertwining of different temporalities – despite not existing in topographical terms, it endures, not only in the identity-based and emotional–affective dimensions of the former villagers' stories and memories, but also as a rehabilitation project to be implemented in the not-too-distant future based on the transformative, equitable restoration of the cultural heritage of the Tripoint and Upper Lusatia.

The Time Machine – A Return to the Past

Even though the appearance of mines, and subsequently power stations, gradually transformed the Upper Lusatian landscape into an anthropogenic

landscape shaped by technology and man, and subsequently into a mining landscape, the memory still persists among the local community of a time when all that was visible against the sky were the soaring spires of churches built on the Polish, Czech and German sides of the Tripoint, and the only chimneys visible in that space formed part of a local architecture comprising Umgebindehäuser or spa bath houses. Taking place on a micro-scale within the village of Opolno Zdrój's local environment are the global transformation processes associated with the decarbonization and zero-emission policies being pursued by Europe and the international community. It is a heterogeneous, stratified space marked by the co-existence of three worlds: that of the opencast lignite mine, the world of nature and the world of people. In this quaint, compact village famous for its imposing Umgebindhäuser, bath houses, large park and walkway under generously arching linden trees, the local mud was once used to treat rheumatic diseases and "frazzled" nerves. In those times, before the construction of the mine and subsequent power station, Opolno Zdrój was a charming, picturesque place located by the Tripoint, on the route leading to the Czech lands and Germany, which was an added bonus. This characterization belongs to times gone by. The Opolno of today situated by the Tripoint, on the Polish-Czech-German border, is in state of decline and in limbo, with the threat very real that it could be engulfed by an ever expanding open lignite pit. The fear exists among the local community that Opolno will share the fate of its neighbouring villages – Wigancice and Rybarzowice – whose inhabitants were locally resettled in other places following the destruction of their homes, which basically disappeared from the face of the earth. Bordering Opolno to the north is Bogatynia, less formally known as the "Commune with the Energy," while to the south-west of Opolno, a tarmac road tapers off into a dirt path, which halts at an abyss, or "the hole," as the locals call it – in fact, it is the open lignite pit. Abutting Opolno's western boundary are meadows, the edge of a forest and open fields, while a road there leads to the German city of Zittau (formerly Żytawa in Poland) and Uhelná, the small Czech village from where, in 2021, the "Turów dispute," which made the press, began. Presently, the village situated on the edge of the open lignite pit is functioning in a peculiar temporo-spatial fissure – between its health-spa past, a present full of stagnation and foreboding, and an uncertain future that is difficult for villagers to envisage. For the past three years, an open-air event has been organized in the village under the banner "Taking a Time Machine to Opolno Zdrój." This undertaking was initiated by a number of local non-governmental organizations primarily focused on the discovery of hotspots of local culture and the evocation and preservation of memories relating to the villages surrounding the mine whose fates are closely intertwined with the development of the mining industry.

While navigating in time, the residents of Opolno "develop representations or time maps which mediate and shape personal experiences of it."[41] In the world they are experiencing, the spatial and temporal dimensions cannot be disentangled; it is necessary to understand this entanglement,[42] which means that social life is experienced space-time.[43] The time machine-themed event, which takes place at the beginning of September, is a moment when times gone by are symbolically restored during what amounts to a retroactive celebration of the village's health-spa past. Charming cafés are set up in the central square in front of the village hall, and locals and visitors in costumes of the 1920s and 1930s stroll through the streets and health spa grounds; they dance the tango, chat with friends, sip coffee and wine and listen to music. On that day, the organizers take curious visitors on a tour of those old spa houses and bath houses that have survived somehow despite the successive demolitions associated with the expansion of the open pit, which is swallowing up more and more parts of the village. Many of the surviving spa houses are in ruins; some are overgrown with plants that often invade their interiors, tumble over their verandas, block their windows and bedeck their walls. In this entanglement of architecture and nature, one can perceive the workings of time and the outcome of the inexorable advance of the destruction of a spa heritage that was left to its own devices. However, this merging of disparate elements can also be seen as a symbolic figuration of the impending future, as the natural environment's intrusion into buildings destroyed by humans, which provides the local community with some hope of their village being rehabilitated through being granted a new, post-coal life.

When the villagers retroactively evoke the past, they devote a great deal of energy to finding a common element important for the identity of the place. Their conceptual retrograde movement activates a stream of memories relating to Opolno's topography, the functioning of cultural and entertainment venues – restaurants, cafés, a cinema and a small amphitheatre whose existence would be difficult to surmise today. The questions posed by the anthropologist about what the future holds for Opolno and the area surrounding "Turów" during the process of gradual decarbonization and what life after coal may look like clash with the fears articulated by her interviewees, who sense

41 Alfred Gell, *The Anthropology of Time. Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images* (London: Routledge, 1992), after Laura Bear, "Doubt, Conflict, Mediation: The Anthropology of Modern Time," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* (2014): 15.

42 Nancy Munn, "The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 94.

43 Ibid.

that they are losing control over their own lives as they grapple with a great unknown. For them, thinking about horizons or a reality without mines and power plants is a meaningless and abstract endeavour. "What's the point of speculating if nothing's going to be cooked up anyway?"; "What will happen? – The mine will happen, because it has always been there." "Without the chimneys, there is no landscape, just like there's no ship without a mast." "The only thing awaiting us is a big open pit, and then a black hole." "The world will end here and even stray dogs will be a thing of the past." "Nothing will happen and that will be the end of it."

As if to spite the genuine threat of being swallowed up by the open pit, Opolno-Zdrój presently functions as a venue for meetings, workshops and cultural animation and educational activities, which are being developed by external actors – activists and artists-in-residence – sculptors, performance artists, educators and cultural animators. Some of these people are looking for hotspots of local culture, while others are pursuing specific social and political goals within this space. The contemporary interest in Opolno could be called retroactive. In the 1970s, it was the inspiring site of an en-plein-air art workshop titled *The Zgorzelec Land 1971: Science and Art in the Process of Protecting the Natural Human Environment*, which brought together art people wishing to demonstrate the relations between people, coal and the environment. Five decades later, the place's artistic and ecologically engaged spirit has returned within the context of the climate crisis and opposition to the late-capitalist policy of continuous growth and modernistically engineered development, which found expression in an art event organized by the Eko-Unia Foundation[44] whose title, *The Zgorzelec Land: Opolno 2071*, was supposed to stir the locals from their stagnation and sense of powerlessness by directing their attention to the post-transformation future of this place on the principle that "people's actions are all the time informed by possible worlds which are not yet realized."[45]

Contemplations on the transformation are moments in which an indeterminate future takes on a definite form, what Stine Krøijer calls a "figuration of the future,"[46] arguing that the future, rather than being conceptualized as

44 Hanna Schudy, *Aktorzy transformacji – między czasem linearnym a cyrkularnym* [Transformation actors – between linear and circular time], in *Pomiędzy wzrostem a katastrofą. Identyfikacje i analizy*, ed. Krzysztof Łukasiewicz, Jacek Schindler and Hanna Schudy (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, 2021), 127–150.

45 Marlin Strathern, *Kinship, Law and the Unexpected: Relatives Are Always a Surprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51.

46 Stine Krøijer, *Figurations of the Future. Forms and Temporalities of Left Radical Politics in Northern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 42.

an emergent point in linear time, should be viewed as a co-present bodily perspective. This means that social practices of the present accumulate, originating in a retroactive process of remembering, imagining and anticipating what may occur in the future. On a terrain continuously anticipating an inevitable, albeit deferred, transformation, many of the local community's actions arise from concern for their wellbeing and a desire to prevent economic, architectural, environmental, climatic and cultural/social harm. People living on a coalfield whose concerns about their loved ones' wellbeing are closely correlated with their work in the mining industry find it difficult to accept visions of a post-coal future, so banish the inevitability of the decarbonization process from their memory. Survival strategies are all too often developed on the discursive and symbolic plane – when they talk about the abundance of local deposits and the likelihood of further extraction, almost without limit, negating, as it were, the available expert knowledge on the gradual depletion of the lignite seam and negating the rational premises inherent in the existing mining concessions (until 2026) and plans for a maximum limit to be set for the exploitation of that resource until 2044. The Bogatynia commune residents have learnt to live on the coalfield over the course of their many years of proximity to the mine. They have woven the lignite seams into their histories, stories relating to their neighborhood and community and family narratives, producing something akin to a symbolic "coal community." "People constantly produce and reproduce life stories on the basis of memories, interpreting the past through the lens of social information and using this information to formulate present and future life stories."[47] Living on the coalfield is becoming a crucial element in their identity project, as numerous statements from my interviewees make clear:

> I was born here and for as long as I can remember, we've had coal at home – my father and before him, my grandfather, worked down the mines. My husband, my brother and also my brother-in-law – same thing. We talk about the mine, laugh about it. They talk every day; not a day passes without my father talking about the mine at home. They are one and the same – our home and the mine, it's a kind of second life. Also, I don't know what will happen further on down the road without the mine. They can't close it, because that would mean the end of life here. (Inhabitant of Bogatynia, 65 years old)

> The mine is an octopus, you think you can't see it, but it's continually reminding you of its existence, entwining the whole region, providing jobs, taking away homes, even whole villages, sustaining the community, connecting people, often

47 Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 32.

> for years. Half of my family is connected with the mine. (Inhabitant of Opolno-Zdrój, 54 years old)

> How could that be, no mine, no coal? There's always been a mine here, and those chimneys have been here since I was a kid. When I was little, I used to attend summer camps, yes, there were summer camps, holidays provided by the mine. No matter whether I was in the mountains or by the seaside, I pined for those chimneys. They're really lovely, a constant sight around here. That power station, even children draw those chimneys when they're making cards. It's always been like that, they're important. Once I see the chimneys, I know I'm home. (Inhabitant of Bogatynia, 42 years old)

Affective Social Poetics

Navigating a terrain awaiting transformation lends confirmation to the validity of the observation that "the future is never a tabula rasa of endless possibilities. Futures are already crowded with fantasies, paranoias, traumas, hopes, and fears of the past and the present."[48] What is yet to exist can be discerned in affective social poetics, where future states and phenomena are "already here," engendering certain attitudes and social practices. Imagining the future in the present allows people to step into the "elsewhere" and cultivate affects and actions that could otherwise be abandoned or not perceived at all. Using the landscape to tell the story of life in the vicinity of the mine and power station is a multi-contextual endeavor that deals with many different relations and temporalities at the same time: memories of times past, memories of time spent in the landscape, the context of working in the mine and power station, the process of rehabilitating the external dumps and heaps and the sustainable tourism that could potentially be developed in the post-transformation reality – in a post-coal future. In the narratives of my interviewees, there is also no shortage of concerns about the region's future, and even of catastrophic visions, in which each village sinks below the ground, swallowed up by the ever expanding open lignite pit:

> We'll be swallowed up, I'm telling you that some time, one day, the ground will begin to subside and we'll go tumbling with our homes, our trees, into that hole. And that's how things are going to end up, like in Rybarzowice. Some dust and dirt will be left, and that's it. (Inhabitant of Bogatynia, 41 years old)

48 Daniel Rosenberg and Susan Harding, *Histories of The Future* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

> Everything flows into the open pit, into the mine. It acts like a huge vacuum nozzle. When it starts sucking water away from the land, everything will be under water and we'll end up in the opencast. Every year the ground moves more. I can see it from my allotment. It's such a [powerful] suction force that I barely know [what to say – K. M.]. (Inhabitant of Opolno-Zdrój, 50 years old)

When the space around the mine and the power plant are evaluated, it becomes clear that strategies for perceiving the landscape and the manner in which it is being valorised are intertwined with the current geopolitical and economic-environmental situation, drawing from the political debate and discourses present in the public space. Weaving stories about the energy landscape around "Turów" is becoming a way of expressing opinions on the activities being pursued by the mine and the power plant as well as the Polish-Czech-German relations prevailing around the Tripoint. My interviewees' statements also contain comments addressing political and economic decisions connected with the operation of the Turów complex:

> I don't know why the Czechs are bothered by the view of the open pit, and the chimneys from the power station are actually troubling them as well. Now behind Opolno they're constructing a kind of screen, a wall of sorts, so the Czechs can't see the pit from their side. What's so dreadful about it? After all, the power station has great chimneys, at night it looks like a whole metropolis, something like Las Vegas, there are so many lights. One night, I was giving a friend a ride in my car and he asked me what this city was, and it was the power station. I don't know what's so terrible about it. It displeases the Czechs. (Inhabitant of Jasna Góra, 40 years old)

> Wind turbines are what they are, you can see them, they are visible. We don't have a wind power station on the Polish side, because we have the Turów power station. If they want to take energy from the wind, they take it, but it is not windy all the time, and so many houses need to be supplied. Maybe we will have them one day as well, but it would be a hydroelectric power plant instead; there are plans for that after the open pit has been flooded. (Inhabitant of Bogatynia, 37 years old)

Accumulating within stories about the space and landscape are specific affective social poetics, and when my research partners talk about the environment within which they are functioning, they are giving expression to their opinions, emotions, hopes and fears connected with the region's present and post-coal future. I first proposed the conceptual category "affective social poetics" when analyzing sociocultural anthropology's imaginary vis-à-vis the

present,[49] (defining it as "a conceptual tool for perceiving and interpreting human practices denoting a focus on their relational and emotional dimensions as well as their manners [verbal, symbolic, embodied, performative – K. M.] of expression").[50] I still share the conviction that even though modes of expressing emotions, moods and feelings, much like experiences and memories, are ostensibly personal and most often located within so-called "intimate experience," they are still constructed and shared by culturally and socially mediated narrative forms.[51] At the same time, I propose that they are intertwined with the sphere of social practices developed in specific shared spaces and temporalities.

Drawing from the theory developed by Theodore Schatzki, it could be said that sequences of everyday life practices are ordered by time brackets that may overlap or be entangled, each characterized by sets of directed affects. The time when an energy transformation is being anticipated is full of restlessness, apprehension, prognosis, hope and apocalyptic speculation. In this peculiar fissure – the interval between a remembered past and an unknown future – individuals and communities orient themselves towards specific goals and objectives, a project accompanied by emotions and affects linked by the motivation to either undertake or abandon certain actions.[52] "More specifically, the doings and sayings that compose a given practice are linked through (1) practical understandings, (2) rules, (3) a teleoaffective structure, and (4) general understandings. Together, the understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structure that link the doings and sayings of a practice form its organization."[53] Rather than being a property of social actors, teleoaffective structures are a feature of individual practices further characterized by Schatzki as "a range of normativized and hierarchically ordered ends, projects, and tasks, to varying degrees allied with normativized emotions and even moods."[54] In a given teleoaffective regime, this structure takes on a collective character, becoming the property of a particular time, such as the era of transformation and the transitions associated with it. A community forming

49 Katarzyna Majbroda, *W relacjach, sieciach, splotach asamblaży*.

50 Ibid., 255.

51 James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

52 Theodore Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

53 Ibid., 77.

54 Ibid., 80.

part of an energy culture and living in a country "based on coal" struggles to make any effort to imagine a post-transformation future, which does not mean the complete lack of existence of any assumptions, fears and hopes relating to life in the region after coal has been phased out. Temporal cognition can be conceptualized as a triangular relationship between perception (output data), memory (schema, recall) and anticipation (prediction, projection).[55] Anthropological scrutiny of the daily life of the community living in the vicinity of the mine and the power station demonstrates very clearly how vivid and detailed the memoir narratives of the past of that place are, and how difficult a practice it is to talk about what is to come. The post-transformation future of that place, or life after the coal, seems to my interlocutors to be an implausible, nebulous time, a temporality with fuzzy shapes and contours. The lignite around which the life of the local community revolves is not only conceptualized in terms of a high-energy raw material, but also in a symbolic manner as that place's foundation – the ever-present bedrock of its existence. The lignite-bearing seam is intertwined with many of the Opolno residents' memories and pervades family stories and childhood memories, causing it to become a crucial component of the local identity of a community with a special affinity for coal.

The local community mentions green tourism, a pumped-storage power plant that will be capable of operating on the site of the previously water-filled open pit; there is talk of the post-mining spoil heaps being used for recreational purposes, the rehabilitation of the "big hole" by means of afforestation and the creation of water reservoirs along the lines of those that drive seasonal tourism in nearby Zittau (formerly Żytawa). Nevertheless, the post-coal reality appears unstable, and it is not entirely clear when it can be expected to take place. Polish decision makers are battling to keep the mine in operation until 2044, but in the European debate, a binding date for its closure is yet to be agreed, which has blocked financial support from the European Union's Just Transition Fund. Political and economic decisions on that issue are still liable to change, which has caused the vision of the region's transformation to lose its clarity and forecasts of post-transformation futures to falter once they are confronted with more pressing concerns relating to everyday life unfolding in the maturing present. "Temporal textures of experience"[56] oriented towards what is to come are embedded in everyday life; the future is present in every action and interaction, in aspirations and inertia. This means that living

55 Bryant and Knight, *The Anthropology of the Future*, 8.

56 Anand Pandian, "The Time of Anthropology: Notes from a Field of Contemporary Experience," *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (4) (2012): 548.

in a state of anticipation and immobility or in moments of (in)decision and (in)action is also designing the future.

An Inability to Anticipate – The Path to Crisis

Kim Fortun argues that the climate crisis has provided a clear impetus to "think geology" after its terminology was introduced into the social sciences under the influence of Gilles Deleuze, who opened scholars' imagination to sedimentation, lines, fissures and faults, which can help us outline the ways in which "knowledge is being defined and made at the edge of times and places called modernity."[57] The spatial anchoring of the anthropological imaginary enables skillful routing, mapping and navigation in the process of following emerging research fields. However, the aforementioned fields oscillate between the past, the present and what the future holds, encouraging us to broaden our cognitive perspective to incorporate aspects relating to time, its rhythms, scales and loops. Identifying what is emerging on the horizon can also be exploited from a research point of view in the form of clues hinting at the directions in which individuals, groups and communities are heading when orienting themselves towards the times to come. This knowledge turns out to be useful when one is attempting to comprehend what people do, say and aspire to, and why they act in that manner, as Kirsten Hastrup once demonstrated very clearly by tracking the hunters of North Greenland. Upon observing the actions of hunters who also forecast the potential of their own environment and the opportunities it creates, allowing them to take suitable action in the interests of the future without claiming the right to comprehend it, the anthropologist posits that the aforementioned use of inference and the ability to anticipate could become the basis for new anthropological knowledge that would exert an influence on human life.[58] The "anticipation" is here understood, after Mark Nuttall, as "a form of knowledge, as ontology, as foresight and insight, as engagement, as orientation, as self-realization, and as a consideration of potential."[59]

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57 Kim Fortun, "Figuring out Ethnography," in *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be: Learning Anthropology's Method in a Time of Transition*, ed. James Faubion and Geogre Marcus (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 168; Kim Fortun, "Scaling and Vizualizing," in *Multi-sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*, ed. Mark-Anthony Falzon (London: Routledge, 2009), 73.

58 Kristen Hastrup, "*Świadomość mięśniowa. Wytwarzanie wiedzy w Arktyce*" [Muscle awareness. Knowledge production in the Arctic], trans. Ewa Klekot, *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2018): 143.

59 Mark Nuttall, "Anticipation, Climate Change, and Movement in Greenland," *Études/Inuit/Studies* 34 (1) 2010: 33.

A similar conception of anthropological cognition was proposed by Kim Fortun, who argued that "ethnography, it seems to me, can be designed to elicit these new forms," because researchers "have an affordance for unimaginable futures."[60] As anthropologists, we must not lose sight of imagining the present which it also has not yet.[61] There is also a growing awareness of the consequences of making no attempt to anticipate the future, a phenomenon to which Rebecca Bryant drew attention almost a decade ago, warning that the inability to make predictions creates a state of crisis, which also has a cognitive dimension, while – at the most elementary, affective level – being in a present deprived of a future outlook creates anxiety and fear as well as a sense of helplessness.[62]

The outlook of the anthropology of the future – which could also be characterized as anticipatory thanks to the activation of numerous contexts and readjustment of scales and contexts – enables us to analyze contemporary situations, events and the transition-related phenomena we are studying, on a micro scale. This does not, however, mean that the door has been closed to researchers wishing to undertake analyses with a broader, more-than-local dimension. The development of the mining industry, the emergence of industrial mining landscapes and the trajectories of the energy transition are transcending the localness of specific places, impacting environmental, economic and social changes intertwined in a macro perspective that does not recognize national borders and administrative divisions. On the one hand, the anthropology of the future, by drawing on the perspective of the anthropology of the present, is offering us an opportunity to anticipate possible versions of the future. On the other hand, however, the knowledge and experience arising from that process is encouraging researchers to focus on developing new research techniques and tools and also construct theories that are more sensitive to time as a category. Consequently, when it comes to the laboratory testing of tools and methods, the range of possible practices is expanding as the anthropology of the future is created along with its as yet unnamed trends and perspectives. The horizon of the future is therefore not only dynamizing the research field, but also the discipline itself, mobilizing anthropologists to creatively develop, by trial and error, an instrumentarium and new perspectives of cognition. That challenge is also allied to a need to more closely examine

60 Kim Fortun, "Ethnography in Late Industrialism," *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (2012): 458.

61 Ibid., 450.

62 Rebecca Bryant, "History's Remainders: On Time and Objects after Conflict in Cyprus," *American Ethnologist* 41 (4) (2014): 681–697.

the temporal dimensions of explored worlds along with their human and non-human arrangements.

In anthropological study of the energy transition, anticipating the future and attempting to outline the forms it may plausibly take, rather than equating to a desire to create a closed vision of the post-coal world, actually reflects a wish to leave it open and susceptible to further modifications. Moreover, I share the conviction of the importance of "any creative engagement with possible futures crafted using imaginative anthropological approaches toward the aim of building just and ethical relations across spatial and temporal scale."[63] Ultimately, however, Samuel Gerald Collins is largely correct when he stresses, when contemplating the directions and possibilities of anthropological action for the cultures of tomorrow, that "anthropology needs to interrogate its role vis-à-vis the legitimation of the status quo and the naturalization of capitalism's inequalities," because we, as researchers, "have a moral injunction not only to interrogate power and inequality today but also to work toward societies that are better than they are now."[64]

63 Michael Oman-Reagan, "First Contact with Possible Futures," *Theorizing the Contemporary*, December 18, 2018, accessed June 3, 20204, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/first-contact-with-possible-futures.

64 Samuel G. Collins, *All Tomorrow's Cultures: Anthropological Engagements with The Future* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021), xv.

Abstract

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The Anthropologies of the Future. Anticipating the Energy Transition

The article considers how the categories of time and, especially, the future can be employed in anthropological reflection; both as study object and direction and as a horizon for current affects, emotions, experiences, and social moods, which are happening "here and now" and are associated with people's functioning in landscapes of energy resources extraction. The mining industry development transforms local countryside, changing the realities of living on coal reserves. To properly recognize such changes, we must activate spatial and temporal perspectives, while any explanation attempts encourage us to shift scales and values. Faced with an unknown future of transitions, local communities create narratives about the past and the maturing present by developing specific affective social poetics. Thus, energy transition studies provide an ethnographic contribution to the developing anthropology of the future, thus co-creating an imagination of the post-coal future.

Keywords

anticipation, anthropology of the future, prognosis, transformative future, Turów mine and power plant

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The aim of this article is to discuss the potential reframing of memory of the Polish People's Republic in terms of actions taken in the hope of development and change. Contrary to the dominant Polish mnemonic narrative and its focus on martyrdom and heroism, this perspective draws on the possibility of a "positive" version of memory of the postwar times in Poland, more concerned with agency than with trauma. We are inspired by Rebecca Solnit's writing on hope as associated with memory; in her book *Hope in the Dark*, Solnit argues that "though hope is about the future, grounds for hope lie in the records and recollections of the past."[1] She elaborates on the potential of memory to create hope: remembering the past, comparing it with present experiences, prevents the depressive conviction that a change is impossible, and also allows one to accurately grasp the change's real dynamics, which is not always evident (sometimes revolutionary, but often resulting from a slow accumulation of small activities, or discontinuous, when positive effects are due to remote causes, which makes the whole process

1 Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark. Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), XIX.

easy to overlook). Some forms of memory, however, block its hope-creating potential:

> We can tell of a past that was nothing but defeats and cruelties and injustices, or of a past that was some lovely golden age now irretrievably lost, or we can tell a more complicated and accurate story, one that has room for the best and worst, for atrocities and liberations, for grief and jubilation. A memory commensurate to the complexity of the past and the whole cast of participants, a memory that includes our power, produces that forward-directed energy called hope.[2]

According to Solnit, simplified accounts of the past hinder the production of hope, which is based on inherently plural, multifaceted memory that can grasp the complexity of the world, acknowledge convoluted dependences and relations, include all perspectives and agents, and restrain from clear-cut, one-sided axiologies. What Solnit calls for is thus not far from some most prominent theories of contemporary memory studies – primarily, the "multidirectional memory," as coined by Michael Rothberg.[3] A search for plural, alternative memory forms, allowing the status quo to be broken, is also close to "potentializing history" in the theory of Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, who calls for an exploration of the archives for silenced, rejected scenarios of thinking about the past and new possibilities that result from these scenarios.[4] Ann Rigney argues that investigating the memory of hope helps memory studies to avoid two possible traps: a fixation on trauma, and, on the other hand, an utopian, simplistically optimistic escapism. To do so, she searches for mnemonic forms of hope, which is understood potentially, as a civic and activist value, cultivated despite painful failures that are part of its history.[5]

These works discuss memory that can generate hope, but also memory which is about past (or initiated in the past) acts of hope: Solnit writes about remembering upheavals and revolutions, but also about the painstaking efforts of progressive movements, underlining that they are collective, grassroots and emancipatory. In this perspective, the memory of hope would form an opposition to these forms of memory, reducible, politicized and excluding, which trigger fear, anger, or resentment. However, as examples resulting from

2 Ibid., XIX.

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

4 Ariella A. Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

5 Ann Rigney, "Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic," *Memory Studies* 11 (3) 2018: 370–371.

our overview of Polish memory culture will show, hope turns out to be an element of various memory forms and narratives. In the context of the postwar times in Poland, it is important to note that hope is a central element of the communist utopia, with its progressive, future-focused worldview. In this case, it is not necessarily inscribed into a manifold vision of past and future, but quite the contrary – into simplistic standards of propaganda discourse. However, it would be equally simplistic to perceive the communist period solely through its ideology. Diverse archives from this time record people's experiences of change, mobility, agency and emancipation,[6] opening the possibility to destabilize clichéd forms of memory about the postwar communist project of social progression.

We wish to argue that hope as a category has a potential to reframe – or at least diversify – what is perceived as the basic schemes of Polish collective and cultural memory. It has been described at length that the Polish master narrative about the past is dominated by such central themes and values as heroic fight, oppression, suffering and martyrdom, which form the basis of self-perception for the community. In line with this, the postwar history of Poland is represented in terms of oppression suffered by an imaginary "us" (the Poles, the nation, the good guys) at the hands of "them" (authorities, communists, generalized into an enemy figure). In this context, the perspective of memory of hope could reframe this narrative of sacrifice and trauma into one more focused on collective agency. At the same time, it is highly possible to integrate the "fight and resistance" variant of the master narrative with a narrative of hope, and remembrance of the postwar socialist Poland is a case in question.

In the following analysis, we draw on the results of our research on the twenty-first-century museum boom in Poland and use spaces of historical museums as a field of observation of memory processes. We assume that flourishing new historical museums can reveal prevalent tendencies in contemporary memory culture – as its touchstones – but also unveil complications and counter-trends. The material provided by Polish museum culture can be used to test the hypothesis concerning mnemonic potential of hope – and indeed, hope turns out to be one of the leitmotifs or keywords of historical exhibitions about the Polish People's Republic created in recent years. It is generally reserved for stories of resistance against authoritarian power and strongly associated with the Solidarity movement. In two of the museums, the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk and the Dialogue Centre Upheavals in Szczecin, "hope" is referred to already in the titles of sections of

6 Magda Szcześniak, *Poruszeni. Awans i emocje w socjalistycznej Polsce* [Moved. Promotion and emotions in socialist Poland] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2023).

permanent exhibitions devoted to the years 1980–1981: respectively, "Solidarity and Hope" and "The Birth of Hope." The third case analyzed will be the Emigration Museum in Gdynia, where the topic of hope manifests itself on two levels – that of individual stories of migration, and that of the history of Poland, culminating in the opening of borders and the optimistic return of emigrants. This exhibition has a broader temporal scope than the previous ones, which will also allow us to look at museum representations of hope pertaining to an earlier period.

In the course of our argument, we will propose a visual, rhetorical, spatial and narrative analysis of "exhibiting hope" in the three museums mentioned, to show the potential of reframing memory about the postwar period in terms of hope that does not concern the utopia of the communist project, but resistance to communist power, and sometimes also the transition of 1989. The first two displays, so prominently and explicitly invoking hope as a kind of frame, will serve as a mnemonic mini-laboratory for the sake of our argument, to unpack messages revolving around hope, the ways in which hope may be constructed, distributed, associated with specific figures, ideologies, and discourses (and in particular, the context of Catholicism). We will investigate to what extent this established framework hinders the narrative of hope in its plural and multidirectional potential. We will show how, in the context of the Polish museum landscape, hope turns out to be simultaneously a persuasive mnemonic frame and a tool of mnemonic ideologization. The hope exhibited in historical museums is in fact often presented in terms almost opposite to those espoused by Solnit: subordinated to the agenda of historical policy, univocal, rather declared *ex post* or *ex cathedra* than embodying a collective and spontaneous effort of imagination and movement. Preliminarily, we identify it as "a hope petrified"; discussing its form, however, we will at the same time search for other possibilities, closer to the promise made by *Hope in the Dark*.

The European Solidarity Centre and the Dialogue Centre Upheavals: General Description

All three museums share basic organizational features. They are located in big cities, but not the capital and not centrally situated in the country, located on or close to the Baltic coast – a space shaped by twentieth-century migrations as well as, in the 1980s, a key scene of the anti-communist opposition movement. The permanent exhibition of the European Solidarity Centre (ESC) was inaugurated in 2014, and that of the Dialogue Centre Upheavals (DCU) in 2016. Both museums are managed jointly by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and local authorities (respectively: the city of Gdańsk and the Pomorskie voivodship in the case of the ESC,

which was also co-founded by the Solidarity trade union and the Solidarity Centre Foundation; Zachodniopomorskie voivodship in the case of the DCU as a branch of the National Museum in Szczecin). Both institutions deal with the history of the Solidarity movement, but their missions in the field are defined differently. The ESC is an institution devoted to the history of the Solidarity movement as such, albeit with a focus on the local perspective and on the historical site of the Gdańsk shipyard, where it is located. The DCU, in turn, is a museum of the city of Szczecin (pre-war German Stettin), which aims to present its complicated postwar history, to date generally disregarded and perceived as uninspiring.[7] The focus on the history of Solidarity in the region was chosen as a key to the task of adding value to the local history. A further difference concerns each museum's position in recent national memory wars.[8] The ESC is one of the museums contested by the "mnemonic warriors" from the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) party, which governed until 2023.[9] Unable to fully take over the museum, the minister significantly cut its budget. The conflict primarily concerned the museum's presentation of Lech Wałęsa, who is an enemy figure in the PiS discourse, accused of collaboration with the communist secret services. The DCU has not raised significant controversies to date, and is trying to be perceived as a forum for open, inclusive debates.

According to official declarations – such as a text authored by Basil Kerski, the museum's director, in the catalogue of the permanent exhibition – the ESC is meant to respond to the shortcomings of European memory culture, such as reducing the story of the fall of communism to the fall of the Berlin wall and the absence of an international institution to document a breakthrough in all countries in question.[10] Acting as such, the ESC should be "a Polish voice

7 Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz, "Centrum Dialogu Przełomy – ewolucja idei" [Przełomy Dialogue Center – evolution of ideas], in *Miasto sprzeciwu – miasto protestu*, ed. Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, Centrum Dialogu Przełomy, 2015), 13–17. All translations from Polish are ours, unless indicated otherwise.

8 About memory wars in the Polish context see Zofia Wóycicka, Joanna Wawrzyniak and Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, "Mnemonic Wars in Poland: An Introduction to New Research Directions," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 128 (2023): 5–25.

9 On Polish mnemonic warriors and their politics towards museums, see Ljiljana Radonić, "'Our' vs. 'Inherited' Museums. PiS and Fidesz as Mnemonic Warriors," *Südosteuropa* 68 (1) (2020): 44–78.

10 Basil Kerski, "Muzeum Solidarności oraz instytucja wspierająca kulturę obywatelską" [Solidarity Museum and an institution supporting civic culture], in *Wystawa stała Europejskiego Centrum Solidarności. Katalog*, ed. Basil Kerski and Konrad Knoch (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2019), 254.

in the European memory discourse,"[11] integrating the international context with a narrative focusing on the Polish experience. At the same time, pluralism of perspectives is declared, together with a consensual historical approach as a principle of its permanent exhibition. Its narrative covers the years 1980–1989 in Poland, with a retrospective look at the previous period of the Polish People's Republic in the first part of the tour and a kind of "follow-up," presenting the international perspective on the beginning of the 1990s. The exhibition uses a wide range of contemporary museum means; it consists of several galleries which do not resemble each other in style, but involve various design concepts.

Throughout the whole tour, the exhibition generally follows the mentioned central narrative about oppression, suffering and heroic resistance, within which the postwar history of Poland is told from a point of view of "us," the nation, opposing "them," the communist regime; "freedom" is a key word of the whole narrative. It is of course a somewhat natural choice for a museum of Solidarity to use a discourse of anti-communist resistance, fight, sacrifice and moral superiority to a significant degree. As a result, the exhibition has been criticized by some experts as following an easy path of affirmative memory, without acknowledging any ambiguities, to an effect of "national branding."[12] It must be noted, however, that the museum presents the history of Solidarity as a down-to-earth story of a collective success, realistic and detailed, rather "usual" than pathetic or generalizing – in which it already departs from the prevalent mnemonic clichés, albeit only to some extent.

"Solidarity and Hope," the third (of six) section of the exhibition, is a "mnemonic touchstone" we want to explore here. Its story stretches from August 1980 to December 1981, that is the period when the Solidarity Independent Trade Union operated legally and openly in communist Poland, after the victorious strikes of 1980 and before the violent suppression of the mass movement when Martial Law was introduced in 1981. The contents of the showcases include, for instance, material concerning official registration of the union, its efforts to commemorate previous strikes and street protests, developing forms of independent culture, the first Congress of Delegates in 1981, or discussion on Solidarity as a new form of revolution. Hopes for the future are primarily related here to the activities of the union, and this is shown in

11 Ibid., 253.

12 Anna Ziębińska-Witek, "Przeszłość w muzeach – dwa modele reprezentacji. Analiza porównawcza Europejskiego Centrum Solidarności i Muzeum II Wojny Światowej w Gdańsku" [The past in museums – two models of representation. Comparative analysis of the European Solidarity Center and the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2020): 227; see also Anna Ziębińska-Witek, *Musealisation of Communism in Poland and East Central Europe*, trans. Alex Shannon (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2024), 41–62.

Photo 1. Section "Solidarity and Hope," ESC, September 2021. Photo by Maria Kobielska.

great detail (from the point of view of the economics of visiting the exhibition – even redundantly), and as a result not only impresses with its scale and diversity, but also appears to be arduous work.

Generally, this is a rather "informative" part of the exhibition, compared with other more "experiential" sections; visitors are supposed to read, listen, watch and absorb the content, rather than feel and live through a recreated situation. Contrary to the previous and following galleries, this is a bright hall,

with daylight coming through a glass wall that allows visitors to look outside. The whole room is arranged in white and red, with a mirrored ceiling. The reason for this lies in the conceptual design: the exhibitors, seen from above, form the union's famous logo. Wandering around them, visitors become a part of the inscription, and – metaphorically – of the joint work of "Solidarity." Throughout the impressive – if not overwhelming – exhibition, this is also a moment for taking a breather and relaxing, which suggests feelings of freedom and hope. The hopes seem dashed in the next section, the grim space devoted to Martial Law, but then might come back in the closing part of the exhibition, with the story of the victorious revolutions of 1989.

As already mentioned, the aim of the DCU is to tell the story of Szczecin, beginning in wartime and revealing its unique situation and identity, and to confront the lack of interest in this period, a memory of which has "blurred and faded," according to Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz, the museum's director.[13] A perspicuous interpretation of this situation is suggested by the permanent exhibition headline, framing Szczecin as "a city of protest – a city of objection" (Kuchcińska-Kurcz adds further possible slogans: "a city that initiates transformations,"[14] "a rebellious city"[15]). Szczecin's history follows the mainstream Polish narrative as a "road to freedom" and the process of shaking off communist hegemony in a series of upsurges of resistance and "upheavals" highlighted in the very name of the museum. The exhibition narrative consists of a series of close-ups of such moments, including the time of migration just after the Second World War, Stalinism, the 1970 anti-regime protests (violently suppressed), the emergence of Solidarity in 1980 and the introduction of Martial Law in 1981; finally, the exhibition story reaches the end of the 1980s. A detailed presentation of the postwar history of Szczecin clearly shows it as a heroic narrative of Polish anti-communist resistance – a highly politicized one, with everyday life, economic and social processes, or cultural events featured as a background. In the exhibition, the identity of Polish Szczecin becomes crystallized in a series of "upheavals."[16] The narrative

13 Kuchcińska-Kurcz, "Centrum Dialogu Przełomy," 17. The DCU exhibition's strategy has already been discussed by one of us from a different angle: in terms of central-peripheral dynamics creating "mnemonic frictions." See Maria Kobielska and Kinga Siewior, "Peripheral (Non)Polishnesses. Museums, Creeping Conflicts, and Transformative Frictions," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 128 (2023): 106–111.

14 Kuchcińska-Kurcz, "Centrum Dialogu Przełomy," 17.

15 Ibid., 15.

16 Anna Ziębińska-Witek classifies both the ESC and the DCU as identity museums, pursuing a heroic approach, in order to deliver "a coherent story as a narrative that guarantees

of "upheavals" is intended to integrate various (and disparate) twentieth-century experiences into the collective consciousness and a contemporary Szczecin, regional, and Polish identity. In terms of design, the exhibition is very consistent: the series of exhibition spaces generally follow the same concept. A large part of the space is plunged into darkness, with black walls and spotlighting; visitors are guided between the exhibition's chapters by a clear line on the floor, along which run some meaningful keywords, like "Fear," "Foundations," or "The Price of Freedom."

The "Birth of Hope" section is dominated by the August 1980 strikes; in a "cinema," at its entrance, a video of the signing of the August Agreements is looped, and accompanying applause fills the whole section space. It is a mixture of various exhibition techniques, starting from the scenography of the cinema, through showcases, databases, audio testimonies and photographic displays, to artistic installations. The narrative is thus constructed with the use of historical documents and objects alongside artworks (the substantial role of the latter, some created specifically for the exhibition, is unique compared to other Polish historical museums). There is, for instance, the installation *Tower Blocks*, arranged by Grzegorz Hańderek and Michał Libera for the DCU, which evokes the oppressive character of socialist housing estates, especially thanks to its disturbing soundtrack.

Generally, in the presentation of the following months, the enthusiasm associated with Solidarity's actions is juxtaposed with acknowledgment of the supply shortages, anxieties and tensions typical of the early 1980s. The whole display is not overloaded, and is balanced in acknowledging the hopeful phase of "carnival of Solidarity" together with Polish society's problems of the time. In this way, the hope earns the status of "hope in spite of difficulties," if not in spite of everything. The concept of the section offers a particular temporality for the hope: we are witnessing "the birth of hope" (therefore the August strikes are its source), but not necessarily its realization, which makes the whole narrative lean towards the more distant future (in which, potentially, solutions to the mentioned problems might occur). The following sections – concerning Martial Law and the transition of 1989, which is presented here in a particularly nuanced way[17] – do not yet promise the fulfilment of such hopes.

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the continuation of national identity" (Ziębińska-Witek, *Musealisation of Communism*, 105) by creating a positive self-perception of the group. While the ESC advertises a "national brand," the DCU, according to the author, tries to create a patchwork identity of Szczecin and the region.

17 The title of the last part of the exhibition, concerning the elections of 4 June 1989, is the enthusiastic announcement "Poland is ours." Far more complicated content, though, follows the headline; there is even an attempt to explain the complex mechanism of

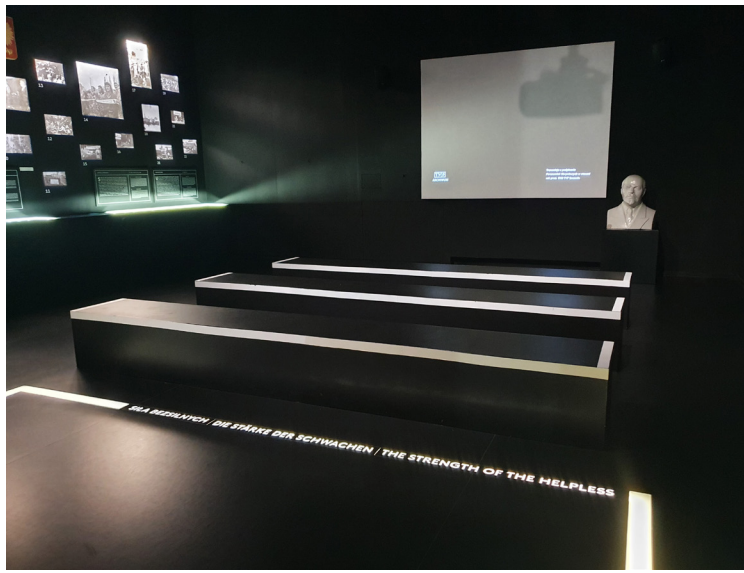

Photo 2. "Cinema" in the section "Birth of Hope," DCU (with the inscription "Siła bezsilnych" ["The power of the powerless," here translated as "The strength of the hopeless"] visible), August 2022. Photo by Maria Kobielska.

Solidarity and Hope: Figurations of Memory

By juxtaposing the two exhibitions, in which hope plays the role of an important framework for the story of Solidarity or, more broadly, for the history of anti-communist breakthroughs, we can observe several mechanisms operating in this context.

Firstly, it is obvious that hope comes within a set of fixed images and formulas that reverberate – somewhat surprisingly – in every exhibition. Hope – as a crucial factor of anti-communist resistance – is typically linked with the famous phrase "the power of the powerless," from the title of Václav Havel's manifesto. This is a title of one of the exhibition's sections in the ESC, and in the DCU – one of the "keywords" written on the floor along the guiding line. In each exhibition, these words neighbor references to the role of Pope John Paul II and the religious experiences of the Poles in creating the atmosphere of hope – to an effect of "Catholicization of hope." Typical quotes include:

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the partially free contract elections ("Due to the non-democratic character of the elections, free voting concerned only the Senate and the campaign was like a plebiscite") and a mention that some opposition factions had called for a boycott of the vote.

> The election of the Cardinal Archbishop of Cracow Karol Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II, and his subsequent visit to his homeland in June 1979, brought about a resurgence of hope.

> The Pope's first visit to Poland, on 2–10 June 1979, awakened a desire for freedom among Poles so long oppressed by the authorities, giving them hope and a feeling of strength.

Both quotes come from the ESC exhibition, the former from the board opening the section "The Power of the Powerless," retrospectively showing the history of the Polish People's Republic from before August 1980, and the latter from the section's ending; the obvious repetition is meaningful here.

Secondly, and as a consequence, Pope John Paul II and, to a lesser extent, Lech Wałęsa are typically depicted as "distributors of hope," those who explicitly (in particular in the case of the pope) or implicitly "give" people hope. This may result in perceiving hope as a kind of individual merit, or asset, which a leader (a hero) can possess – and people who hope for a better future as rather passive, following the leader. On the other hand, hope is also associated with collective work and described as a quite paradoxical power of people who realize the call for solidarity: in this view, agency is allocated much more equally.

To illustrate this contrast: a spacious gallery on "The Birth of Solidarity" in the ESC concludes with an iconic video featuring Lech Wałęsa's triumphant announcement, delivered at the top of the shipyard gate after the successful August strike. He says, emphatically, "We finally have independent self-governing trade unions! We have the right to strike! And we will establish more rights soon." Acknowledgement of his leadership is balanced here with an emphasis on collective agency. It is a powerful and memorable gesture that the whole ceiling of this hall is covered with the yellow helmets of shipyard workers, to highlight the number of strikers. There is also an impressive installation on "Strikes in Poland," presenting filmic and photographic shots of enthusiastic masses from various places in the country, to a similar effect of collective empowerment. The gallery on "Solidarity and Hope," in turn, embodies hope and makes it more concrete in a slightly different way, thanks to its hyper-detailed documentation of the union's work. Similar elements can be found in the DCU. Hope is contextualized here through acknowledging various aspects of the 1980s, including people's difficult experiences, expressively juxtaposed with the "great hopes" of August 1980 (this is the title of one of the boards in this section of the exhibition). A report by Łucja Plaugo, one of the strikers in Szczecin, is available via headphones next to the mentioned "cinema" and includes yet

Photo 3. Section "The Birth of Solidarity," ESC, September 2021. Photo by Maria Kobielska.

another powerful and thought-provoking formulation of hope. The witness recounts her sense of strength and virtual invulnerability at the time: she was convinced that "nothing could happen to her" as long as she was in the shipyard with thousands of other strikers. This would be hope stemming from collective agency, while at the same time expressed in the individual idiom of a single, theoretically "meaningless" person (in terms of history).

In our interpretation, such dispersed traces of hope undermine its clichéd formulas, embodying it in specific people, places, objects or photographs.[18]

This distinction also concerns our third general observation on the "content of hope," the question of which usually remains open. It is about hope for a change of system or for a better future, and this non-specificity may be responsible for an effect of dissolution of hope when the transition of 1989 comes to life. This is also obscured by the solemn, ceremonial phrases that "Catholicize" hope and are prevalent in the official discourse – for instance concerning the commemoration of Solidarity. On the other hand, as we mentioned earlier, it is worth noting that hope may also be associated with down-to-earth, everyday actions.

Fourthly, hope is entangled in complicated temporalities and seems to join the past, present and future dimensions. Its source is sometimes clearly (although not in a very convincing way) defined and dated, but it can also be ambiguous. Hope is built upon past experiences (in line with Solnit's concept) that seem to achieve a certain "critical mass." This way, the August 1980 strikes are a source event for people's hope, but also realize their hopes themselves. Even more tricky is the question of an "expiry date" for hope. The Martial Law imposed in 1981, and the oppression of the 1980s more generally, are presented as dashing the hopes of the enthusiastic first period of legal Solidarity. Hope seems to be reborn around 1989, but already in a somewhat diminished form. The "fractured" memory of the transition (without any common, uncontested form), as Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik put it, is behind this ambiguity.[19]

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18 Here we wanted to flag the issue of the gendered representation of hope (without, however, having the space to consider more broadly the context of traditional patterns of hope for Polish culture – for example, the role of the woman-patriot as preserving and sustaining hope). The monumentalized form of hope as a resource and merit of the (male) hero-leader is part of the "masculine" type of memory, centralized, organized around a military pattern (combat, confrontation, concrete actions), focused on self-affirmation. None of the exhibitions we analyzed fulfils the postulates of writing herstories (suffice it to mention that among the important figures who had a part in shaping the events, whose biographies and portraits intersperse the narrative of the exhibition at the DCU, there is not a single woman). Nevertheless, the aforementioned forms of presentation of "dispersed" hope could be interpreted as belonging more to "female" memory, more flexible and inclusive, taking into account the plural perspectives of female participants in the events. However, such an explicit gendering of the two forms of hope of interest here proves only partially operative. The memory associated with "dispersed hope" is related to the memory of the "women's underground" or "Solidarity according to women" (to refer to the classic works of Shana Penn and Marta Dzido), but is not contained within it.

19 Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, "Roundtable Discord. The Contested Legacy of 1989 in Poland," in *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60–84.

As these observations show, two partially contradictory forms of hope co-exist in the exhibitions we analyzed. While hope is used as a persuasive mnemonic frame, it can also be a tool of mnemonic ideologization, when its presentation supports simplified heroic narratives about history, with religious motivation of historical actors. In this form, hope comes as a default, unsurprising element of the mnemonic discourse on Solidarity; it is presented in a solemn, pompous, dignified tone, with the use of recurrent clichés. This form of "petrified hope," serving the mentioned master narrative, may undermine or limit the memory of hope in its pluralizing and multidirectional potential. On the other hand, there is a "hope dispersed," non-obvious and more paradoxical, which at times flashes through the narratives. It is expressed with traces of collective agency, individual experiences, through gathering specific facts and observations, everyday and usual details, which escape conventions and generalizations, and shake off the automatic commemorative performance.

Hope at the Emigration Museum in Gdynia

The Emigration Museum in Gdynia opened in 2015, precisely between the openings of the European Solidarity Centre (2014) and the Dialogue Centre Upheavals (2016). It is located in the historic building of the Marine Station, a space strongly linked to the theme of migration. The Marine Station, built in 1933, was crucial for pre-war passenger traffic. It was from this place that Witold Gombrowicz (with whom the museum's narrative begins[20]) and Zbigniew Brzezinski (with whom it ends) set sail. During the war, the station was largely destroyed, both as a result of the actions of the occupying forces and during air raids by Allied forces.[21] Between 2013 and 2015, the building underwent a major refurbishment, during which the damaged parts were rebuilt and the whole edifice was adapted for museum use.

The Marine Station building corresponds to the museum's exhibition on a semantic level. The themes of population flows and the fluidity of societies run through the permanent exhibition. The exhibition combines two themes: the history of Poland and the history of migration. In doing so, it also combines two timelines: a broader one, that is, the history of the country, and a narrower one, that is, individual stories of emigration of specific people. The frame of the narrative is the history of Poland "from the beginning"

20 A quote from Gombrowicz's *Diary* can be seen right above the entrance to the exhibition.

21 Maria J. Sołtysik, "Heritage Restored: From Marine Station to Emigration Museum," in *Dimensions of Emigration. The Marine Station and Emigration Infrastructure in Gdynia*, ed. Adam Walaszek, trans. Magdalena Moran and Sean Moran (Gdynia: Emigration Museum in Gdynia, 2018), 165–192.

(understood as the early Middle Ages) through the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution, the two world wars, the socialist era, to the present day. The exhibition is divided into ten sections, each dealing with a different time span, but also a slightly different theme. For example, the third section deals with emigration at the turn of the twentieth century and is narrated by the story of the fictional Sikora family from near Chmielnik, who emigrated to Chicago. The section on the First World War is a short corridor with information boards on forced migration, the evacuation of Congress Poland, Haller's Army, Ignacy Paderewski and the impact of emigration on the national consciousness. In the section on the Second Polish Republic, on the other hand, the exhibition focuses exclusively on Gdynia – as a city to which one came and from which one emigrated.

Within specific themes, we follow the migrations of specific individuals or groups, sometimes lasting months and sometimes a few hours. The exhibition is very heterogeneous – at one time it focuses on the masses emigrating due to hunger and poverty, at another on outstanding individual emigrants, such as Poland's national poet Adam Mickiewicz or the composer Frédéric Chopin. In an article in *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture*, Małgorzata Litwinowicz-Droździel draws attention to the museum's disjointed narrative. In her view, the exhibition resembles an attempt to "complete every possible homework: the story is to be new, but nevertheless repeating what we recognize; contemporary, but nevertheless rooted in the distant past; leaning towards social history, but rendering what is due to the elite and high culture."[22] It seems that the curators wanted to show the full spectrum of the expatriate experience and create a polyphonic story rather than offer a coherent narrative.

In the exhibition, the decision to emigrate is presented as an individual act of hope, based on a belief in one's own agency. Marcin Szerle, a curator at the Emigration Museum, writes about people who arrived in Gdynia "with a ticket or just with hope,"[23] in order to continue traveling the world. This hope can be seen in the story of the Sikora family mentioned above. The first chart on this subject begins with the words: "there were thousands of families like this one. They differed as to their level of wealth or education, but they all

22 Małgorzata Litwinowicz-Droździel, "Poruszenia. O gdyńskim Muzeum Emigracji" [Movements. About the Emigration Museum in Gdynia], *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture* 20 (2018).

23 Marcin Szerle, "Konieczność a przymus. Zagadnienia migracyjne w założeniach ekspozycji stałej Muzeum Emigracji w Gdyni" [Necessity and compulsion. Migration issues in the assumptions of the permanent exhibition of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia], *Studia Historica Gedanensia* 5 (2014): 398.

shared the desire for a better life." The museum visitor accompanies the Sikora family on their long journey – he or she is with them in their home, on the train, on the ship and in their next stops in the United States. The exhibition invites the visitor to identify with the protagonists of this story and to "experience" their fears and hopes. The prominence of the peasant story can be seen as part of a "people's history turn" in Polish historiography, but it also allows for the display of a single, grassroots story, thus becoming close to the form of hope that we have described above as "dispersed." This desire and the hope for its fulfilment is the driving force behind many of the migration stories presented in the museum. At this level, the main message of the museum is the belief that the individual can act effectively to improve their life. The stories on display have happy endings; it is difficult to find stories in the exhibition of people who regret their decision to leave their country. The message of the exhibition is optimistic and emphasizes the value of action taken with hope.

The museum conducted a survey on Poles' attitudes to migration. The study reports on the emotions associated with it: "two thirds of respondents link emigration with sadness, regret or longing, while for 57% of them it brings hope for success."[24] In the printed version, the study is illustrated with images of people associated with success – Tadeusz Kościuszko ("the most famous Polish emigrant"[25]) and Roman Polański ("the most recognizable Pole living abroad today"[26]). It seems that "success" is the key word in the narrative of the museum in Gdynia. While at the European Solidarity Centre and the Dialogue Centre Upheavals hope was most often felt collectively and was supposed to lead to victory, at the Emigration Museum it is an emotion felt more at the level of the individual, mobilizing independent agency and supposed to lead to success. Success, on the other hand, is understood as the improvement of one's living conditions, and optimally also as making one's own contribution to the country which one has left for (which is particularly evident in the eighth section, which is about Poles living abroad).

At the same time, hope is present at the more general level of the museum's narrative, namely the fate of Poland. Optimism organizes the whole vision of the country's history, which, despite the difficulties, ends with the successful overthrow of communism and joining the community of democratic countries. The last part of the exhibition is entitled "Free Poland," and among the objects on display is a copy of *Newsweek* magazine with a photo of Lech Wałęsa

24 Łukasz Kierznikiewicz and Joanna Wojdyło, eds., *We Connect Stories: Emigration Museum in Gdynia* (Gdynia: Emigration Museum in Gdynia, 2014), 32.

25 Ibid., 33.

26 Ibid., 33.

on the front page, with the triumphant caption "the prize winner" (a reference to the 1983 Nobel Prize). In the museum's narrative, the ultimate proof of success is, on the one hand, the enabling of the return of emigrants (in this vein, the stories of Radosław Sikorski, Barbara Toruńczyk and Czesław Miłosz, among others, are presented), and on the other hand, the opening of borders and the facilitation of Poles' travel to Western countries.

Hope thus operates on two levels – that of the fate of the country (striving for success understood as democracy) and that of individuals (seeking opportunities for a better life). The former, with its emblematic images of Pope John Paul II and Lech Wałęsa, is closer to forms of petrified hope. The pope and Wałęsa are presented in the role of the aforementioned "distributors of hope," thus inscribing the exhibition into an ideologized narrative of anti-communist resistance. In this narrative, hope is unambiguous and is a resource that is transmitted to the people by the leaders. In the multiplicity and ambiguity of the forms of the latter, one can look for traces of dispersed hope.[27]

The last part of the exhibition at the Emigration Museum, dedicated to the postwar years, is no different. Here, hope is mainly expressed as the anti-communist resistance, in a heroic narrative.[28] In the section on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the audio guide informs: "communists tried to interfere with the radio's signal, but Poles listened to it in spite of the noise and crackling."[29] This sentence points to the protagonists of the exhibition (Poles) and their enemies (communists), as if they were two independent and rival groups – the story will, of course, end with the success of the protagonists. This section also features the theme of individual hope and agency, presented on a board with information about escapes from communist Poland.

At the Emigration Museum, hope is embedded in the Catholic format, although to a lesser extent than at the European Solidarity Centre and the Dialogue Centre Upheavals. The role of the Catholic Church in the Solidarity revolution is highlighted. The way in which a duplicating machine (used for printing underground press) is displayed in the room dedicated to Solidarity is also distinctive. At the end of the rectangular space hangs a large photo of Lech Wałęsa surrounded by a cheering crowd, with many Solidarity logos above it. In the middle stands the duplicating machine. It is tightly covered

27 The example of the Emigration Museum confirms the gendered character of the two types of hope signaled above. Petrified hope is centered around the male figures of John Paul II and Lech Wałęsa. Dispersed hope has many female threads, e.g. the narrator telling the story of the Sikora family is Hanka Sikora, a young girl.

28 Ziębińska-Witek, *Musealisation of Communism*.

29 This is our translation of the Polish audio guide – at the time of writing this article, we did not have access to the English version.

by a display case, like almost no other object in the museum. Because of the setting and the solemn atmosphere of the room, the display case with the duplicating machine looks a bit like an altar. On the walls around it, the visitor will find information about censorship, the Solidarity carnival, Martial Law and the emigration of the 1980s. A photo of the priest Henryk Jankowski, a prominent figure of the Solidarity movement, later accused of being a child rapist, also appears as part of the mural on the wall. Thus, Catholicism determines the narrative about Solidarity at the level of both form and content.

Photo 4. Duplicating machine on display at the Emigration Museum. Photo by Sara Herczyńska.

Pope John Paul II is also an important figure, of course. At the European Solidarity Centre and the Dialogue Centre Upheavals, he is shown as a figure who "gives hope" and unites Poles, thanks to whom the overthrow of communism will be possible. In the Emigration Museum, he appears for the first time in the section dedicated to the Polish diaspora (presented mainly through the prism of its importance for various countries and regions). The board with a photograph of John Paul II is accompanied by the following description:

> Pope. Pole. Emigré.
> On 16 October 1978, the Archbishop of Krakow Karol Wojtyła was elected Pope and took the name John Paul II. By entering the Holy See, the new pope enriched the mission of the universal Church through the historical experience of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.
> The Polish diaspora enjoyed a renaissance. John Paul II was, after all, the most famous exile in the world, although he described himself as a pilgrim. He even joked with Americans in Chicago in 1979 that after the decision of the Conclave, the number of Poles in the USA had increased. In 1982, he gave hope to compatriots living in Britain: "You are for me not first and foremost emigrants, but a living part of Poland which, even torn from its native soil, does not cease to be itself."

The pope is therefore shown as a strong individual and as an emigrant, so his success story is exposed. The narrative focuses on his relationships with the Polish diaspora, to whom he also "gave hope." John Paul II returns in the final section of the exhibition, which highlights some of his correspondence with Zbigniew Brzezinski. The men are portrayed as two people who simultaneously achieved success in their careers: Wojtyła became pope in 1978; Brzezinski became Jimmy Carter's security adviser in 1977. The letters on display in the last room are meant to illustrate their positions, but also to testify to their work for the betterment of Poland and the world.

Conclusion

To conclude these reflections on the different forms of hope that can be juxtaposed through the analysis of historical exhibitions, we wanted to point out that the tensions and contradictions between them do not exclude their mutual looping. Hope "petrified" in commemorative celebration coexists with "dispersed" hope, emerging from the collective experience of agency (sometimes ephemeral). The forms we have associated with the latter also merge with ideologies, as the "narrative of success" from the Emigration Museum clearly demonstrates.

Finally, the complications of mnemonic forms of hope can be illustrated by another work of art that contributes to the DCU exhibition in the "Birth of Hope" section: a photographic documentation of an action from the era, entitled *Easter 1981*, by Teresa Murak. The artist placed the titular inscription on a beach in Gdańsk in the spring of 1981, a few months after the signing of the Gdańsk Agreement, during the "Solidarity Carnival" (between August 1980 and December 1981) – creating the effect of a vague political allusion to the events of the time. Murak, associated with earth art, created a kind of living inscription by sowing the inscription with cress onto the fabric; the further fate of the object after it was left on the beach is unknown.[30] We propose an interpretation of this work in terms of the dispersed, under-defined hope that manifests itself in it. Easter and the resurrection of Christ is, of course, one of the strongest symbols of hope available in Polish and Western culture. The content of the inscription refers to the religious calendar and, at the same time, to the "here and now" of the action itself, suggesting that hope should be understood as a performative gesture, happening in the present and drawing from its conditions. The cress, the matter of the inscription, is first

Photo 5. Artwork by Teresa Murak at the Dialogue Centre Upheavals exhibition, August 2022. Photo by Maria Kobielska.

30 Teresa Murak and Sebastian Cichocki, "Teresa Murak. Selected Earth Works," trans. Katarzyna Bartoszyńska, *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture* 8 (2014), accessed September 4, 2024, https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2014.8.1062.

and foremost a rapidly sprouting plant that can be seen as a manifestation of energy and bold growth. Recognizing the allusion and enigma that the work represented requires the assumption of the existence of a community – and the artist, on her own terms, not explicitly, joins through it a community of resistance, (perhaps) pinning its hopes on the Solidarity revolution.

In 2024, it is difficult not to add the context of the climate crisis to the interpretation of the work *Easter 1981*. Murak's work portrays humankind's relationship with nature as tender and based on a gesture of care – sowing, watering and nursing. The current state of the environment and subsequent cataclysms are one of the greatest challenges to a hopeful view of the future. This theme emerged at the Emigration Museum in 2021 in a temporary exhibition entitled "Climax," the narrative of which dealt with the multi-level relationship between migration and the environment. The museum does not shy away from difficult topics, but presents them in its own language. The institution also responded adequately to the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. In a series of meetings entitled "Człowiek na granicy – zapytaj eksperta" ("Man on the border – ask an expert"), viewers could ask questions to specialists in refugee and migration law. The institution also created a webinar for teachers entitled "How to talk to students about the situation at the border." The museum's activities on climate and refugee issues can be seen as an attempt to practice hope – this time not in a mnemonic form, but in relation to current crises. The museum's various activities can also be seen through the prism of the division we have proposed. The clearly optimistic permanent exhibitions as a whole can be understood as the realization of mnemonically petrified hope, i.e. codified, accomplished hope which is part of the dominant historical narrative. Smaller activities such a s temporary exhibitions, accompanying events or the educational program are close to dispersed hope – less stable, temporary, but polyphonic and open to dialogue with the viewer.

Abstract

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Exhibiting Hope. Postwar Poland in New Historical Museums

The aim of this article is to analyze the narratives about hope present in new Polish historical museums. The authors refer to Rebecca Solnit's book and make a distinction between "dispersed" and "petrified" hope. The subject of the analysis is the narratives about the People's Republic of Poland presented in three museums: the European Solidarity Centre in Gdansk, the Dialogue Centre Upheavals in Szczecin and the Emigration Museum in Gdynia.

Keywords

hope, historical museums, Polish museum boom, museum narratives, Polish memory culture

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"You Will Never Walk Alone": Potential Histories of Polish Literature

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Horizontal Networks

The inspiration for this text comes from the not so distant historical moment. Firstly, it was COVID-19 pandemic with its unprecedented affinity of fate and experience at the global level, and going through a collective trauma that nevertheless challenged familiar methods of describing and experiencing it. The tedious mundanity and everydayness of the pandemic life, its looped temporality and dulness, its loneliness despite its universal nature, did not chime with known patterns of groundbreaking historical events or natural catastrophes, and demonstrated the shortage of available forms of creating community: those not centered on acts of abstract heroism, but based on civil care. Secondly, the events in Poland in the fall of 2020, that is, the mass protests that erupted in response to the decision of the Constitutional Court to ban almost all abortions.[1] Even before the ruling, Poland had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe, and after

1 The ruling was made on October 22, 2020. An important prelude to these events were the earlier August protests in defense of LGBT activist Margot (Malgorzata Szutowicz), a member of the Stop Bzdurom [Stop the bullshit] collective.

the court's decision, the ban would also include the cases when the fetus is affected by severe congenital defects. The protests, known as "Strajk Kobiet" [Women's strike], gathered thousands of participants amidst the COVID-19 crisis, and mobilized not only residents of big cities, but also people from smaller towns and villages alike, also in more rural regions where the ruling right-wing party had the strongest support. Thus, they made visible members of Polish community hitherto excluded, silenced or neutralized in mainstream identity-forming and historical narratives, that is, women, LGBTIQ community, people with disabilities, the youth and people from small towns.

The "Women's Strike" might be interpreted as another act of civil disobedience, common in Polish history and similar to the uprisings, the 1968 student protests, and the Solidarity movement. Yet, it is important to emphasize that it rejected, in a revolutionary gesture, the Romantic pattern that usually regulated the symbolic sphere of these kind of events. This pattern was based on the model of a mythical male community, united by the ideals of messianism and the rituals of Catholicism.[2] The 2020 protests irrevocably took on new forms of both actions and representations, significantly different from the established "procedures" in the Polish tradition. They were realized, firstly, in the form of acts that were radically comradely and egalitarian, civil and dispersed, based on horizontal networks of interdependence and trust, and devoid of hierarchical structures. These features are well reflected in the main slogan of these events: "you will never walk alone," captivating in its performative efficiency. Significant in it are the ordinariness and civilness of the projected gestures: its stakes are thus not elevated acts of struggle or sacrifice, but precisely unspectacular walking together. It is also iterative and atheleological: "you will never walk alone" calls for horizontal, contingent and inclusive networks based on brief flows of egalitarian solidarity. Secondly, the protests used widely nonchalant and intertextual gestures towards Polish symbols and canon. Again, I will use the example from the banners: "they raised us to romanticize uprisings, and then they are surprised that we protest," one of them said. The richness of literary references, often quoting the (post-) Romantic masters of Polish literature (Juliusz Słowacki, Adam Mickiewicz, Maria Konopnicka, Henryk Sienkiewicz, etc.[3]), was seconded by an ironic,

2 See Maria Janion, *Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* [To Europe, yes, but together with our dead] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2000), 19–34. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this artice.

3 See Michał Rusinek, "'Jarku, daj, ać ja pobruszę, a ty wyp***.' Jak autorzy transparentów sięgają do literatury," *Gazeta Wyborcza. Wysokie Obcasy*, November 1, 2020, accessed June 3, 2024, https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/7,100865,26466977,jarku-daj-ac-ja-pobrusze-a-ty-wyp-jak-autorzy-transparentow.html.

even mischievous ability in their creative transformation. Using the ephemeral and ontologically weak form of slogans written on cardboard banners, the protesters created a multi-author corpus that must be considered a key text of recent Polish culture. In this text, I would like to search for the traces of this alternative paradigm of national culture – based on radical civil solidarity and horizontal relations – in the post-war history of Polish literature.

Potential Histories

My search for other potentialities of Polish history (of literature) is also inspired by three theoretical formulations that propose a paradigm shift: by Ryszard Nycz, Maria Janion and Ariella Azoulay.

In his essay "Możliwa historia literatury" [A potential history of literature], published in 2010, Polish literary scholar Ryszard Nycz described his "dream of a potential history of Polish literature," or rather, possible histories of literature, that would be "carried out in a specific time and place, in a particular milieu of authors and readers" and created in "acts of experimental interrogating"[4] past reality. For, as it turns out, each "fragment of the past" can be subjected to multi-perspective approaches, and each conceptualization "is based on a different formative dominant, creates a different canon […], leads to the prominence of a different list of problems."[5] Therefore, Nycz postulates a turn to the experiential dimension of learning about past reality, which "reveals its paradoxically unclosed character: it is open to reconceptualizations and reinterpretations […] and even ultimately unfinished […]."[6] And it is not a matter of creating alternative histories, but of envisioning a possible history of literature, which rejects predetermined goals and is instead directed toward "continuous renewal of the vocabulary" and "unexpected orders of perception."[7] The precursor of such a method was Walter Benjamin with his analytical practice of constellations of concepts and dialectical images. Nycz proposes two models that enable "changing the way national history of [Polish – A. S.] literature is conceptualized"[8]: one based on various variants of dependency theory (operating within categories of center and periphery;

4 Ryszard Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura* [Poetics of experience. Theory – modernity – literature] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012), 180–181.

5 Ibid., 167.

6 Ibid., 167.

7 Ibid., 170.

8 Ibid., 173.

domination, resistance and emancipation), and another derived from thinking about borderlands. I would like to propose another: a model of civil history of literature, based on principles different from those traditionally implied in Polish culture, namely empathy, horizontality, and dispersed protest.

The question of a potential history of Polish literature will therefore for me also be a question of potential Polishness: different models of national, cultural, affective, political, imaginary belonging and identification. This is why my second mentor in this attempt is Maria Janion, Polish feminist thinker (and the unofficial matron of the events of Autumn 2020), who in her essay "Rozstać się z Polską?" [Parting with Poland?] wrote about the need to "create a different Polish imaginary" and tell "a different history," and through such actions attempt to "renew social trust and the capacity for empathy."[9] Moreover, in the context of the aforementioned protests, her speech "Solidarność. Wielki zbiorowy obowiązek kobiet" [Solidarity. Women's great collective duty] that inaugurated the first Women's Congress in Warsaw in 2009 is of particular importance. She showed in it how the "Solidarity" movement forsaked women by passing a law banning abortion in parliament in 1991. "Solidarity" movement, in its repertoire of symbolic gestures and, above all, in its forms of projected community, is completely in line with the romantic paradigm studied by Janion, dominant in Polish culture, which excludes women as agents of history and culture, relegating them to the position of supplement. Moreover, they are not alone in this situation:

> We can reflect on the concept of the national canon and its persistence in the twenty-first century consciousness from the perspective of cultural minorities, such as women, Jews, all non-Catholics, as well as sexual minorities. The national canon in Poland is treated as something sacred, unchangeable. The understanding of the spirit of the nation is supposed to be determined by the Catholic Church and the tradition of the Armia Krajowa [Home Army – A. S.]. We rarely consider how much national culture can play an emancipatory role.[10]

Projecting potential histories of Polish literature, and thus potential Polishness, may be, it seems, such a gesture of discovering the emancipatory role

9 Maria Janion, "Rozstać się z Polską?" [Parting with Poland?], in *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007), 329.

10 Maria Janion, "Solidarność. Wielki zbiorowy obowiązek kobiet. Wykład inaugurujący Kongres Kobiet 20–21 czerwca 2009" [Solidarity. Women's great collective duty. Inaugural lecture of the Women's Congress, June 20–21, 2009] *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27–28 June 2009, accessed June 5, 2024, https://oko.press/prof-maria-janion-demokracja-w-polsce-jest-rodzaju-meskiego/.

of national culture. "History of literature remains to be done" – Janion wrote as early as in 1973.[11]

And a third theoretical parallel. Nycz's project of possible histories of literature resonates strongly with the concept of potentializing history proposed by Israeli-American scholar Ariella Aïsha Azoulay in the context of Palestinian-Israeli history in particular, but also more broadly in the history of European imperialisms. Azoulay suggests that we should unlearn imperial thinking about history, that is, the seemingly objective ways of conceptualizing history in terms of progress, emancipation, citizenship, property, borders, and so on. For the history of European imperialism is a history of violence: of discoveries that brought enslavement, dispossession and rape; of a "differential rule" that divides people into those who can be citizens and those who have been deprived of this right, into those who enjoy the democratic right to admire museums and archival collections and those who have been robbed of the objects that make up these collections, and finally into those who belong to history and those whose historical agency has been erased. Potential history opposes treating the past as past and the present as determined, recovers various abandoned or forgotten scenarios to reveal their power to influence reality now, and speaks the language of "continuance, renewal, and repair" to think about the world in terms of co-citizenship without divisions. It is not "an alternative account of this already historicized world, but rather a deliberate attempt to pulverize the matrix of history, to disavow what was historicized by making repressed potentialities present again."[12]

Polish Civil Literature

Could we therefore potentialize the history of Polish literature in the framework of civilness, empathy, horizontal solidarity? Where to seek such overlooked precedents of civil Polishness? How to make the history of national literature more dense, how to show the alternative forms of social communities present in it, different from masculine-centered, hierarchical, based on the logic of property and war, patriarchal and exclusionary nationalistic?

I will argue that the key historical context for the discussion of civil Polishness must be the experience of Second World War, which reduced Polish identity almost entirely to its Catholic-ethnic version. An absolutely fundamental issue, although rather absent from the reflection on Polish culture,

11 Maria Janion, "Jak możliwa jest historia literatury?" [How the history of literature is possible], *Życie Literackie* 13 (1973): 8.

12 Ariella A. Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso Books, 2019) [e-book, no page count].

is the question of the civil solidarity of non-Jewish and Jewish Poles during the occupation. It is overshadowed by "ethical arrogance," as Maria Janion, following Slavoj Žižek, called the attitude of moral superiority accepted in Polish culture towards the death of Jews who perished in camps, ghettos and mass shootings. This refers not only to anti-Semitic prejudices about Jewish passivity, but also to a general lack of appreciation for the forms of resistance other than military heroism and martyrdom. "The uniqueness of the Holocaust," Janion wrote, "forces us to revise many beliefs. The heroic-martyrdom schemes of the nineteenth century, the stereotypes of 'worthy' and 'unworthy' death, 'heroic' and 'unheroic' behavior, etc., often still weigh too heavily on us."[13] Film director Agnieszka Arnold, quoted by Janion, said in an interview: "still heroism can only be partisan – and ordinary human love of neighbor is not yet heroism. And I want the equality of these two heroisms."[14] In this optics, clandestine activities of "conspiracy" during the war, however trivial, are heroism because they are part of the vertical military order, helping Jews – based precisely on the horizontal order of solidarity – is not. "Wanda, Poland will prevail without you, stop distributing leaflets, save the Jews, one saved Jew means more than everything else," Artur Nacht Samborski, Jewish-Polish painter, is believed to have said to one of the "Żegota" (underground Polish resistance organization) members.[15] Jan T. Gross writes poignantly about this dynamics: "the most important difference between the two was that the work of the underground was surrounded by universal respect and that a lot of people were engaged in it, while in helping the Jews there were few people involved who did not get for their activity a wide support."[16] The context of the Holocaust highlights most strongly the monophony of behaviors considered socially desirable and ethically important in Polish culture.

And yet it seems that horizontal alliances of solidarity and the ideal of co-citizenship, visible during the 2020 protests, did not arise in a vacuum. I will show three of its literary antecedents, parts of this potential history of Polish civil literature: by Jan Kott, Miron Białoszewski and Magdalena Tulli. All of

13 Maria Janion, *Aneks o Zagładzie* [Annex about the Holocaust], in Janion, *Bohater, spisek, śmierć. Wykłady żydowskie* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2009), 63.

14 Agnieszka Arnold, "Nienazwane i nieusłyszane. Z Agnieszką Arnold rozmawia Sebastian Matuszewski" [Unnamed and unheard. Sebastian Matuszewski talks to Agnieszka Arnold], *Kos* (2007), quoted in Janion, "Aneks o Zagładzie," 75.

15 Quoted in Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Bez próby losowej" [No random sample], *Tygodnik Powszechny* 43 (2004).

16 Jan T. Gross, "Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej..., ale go nie lubię" [This one is from my homeland... but I don't like him," *Aneks* 41–42 (1986): 32.

them relate (to varying degrees) to the moment of violence I have indicated as crucial for understanding the contemporary landscape of collective affects in Poland, namely Second World War and the Holocaust.

A Different Kind of Heroism: Jan Kott

Jan Kott, Polish-Jewish theatre critic, in his essay "O laickim tragizmie" [On secular tragedy], published in the first issue of Polish postwar literary journal *Twórczość* in September 1945, reconstructs the philosophical stance of Joseph Conrad and André Malraux and shows how, for the former, the heroism of death constitutes "the highest value of life." This particular manifesto – rather infamous in the history of Polish literature as evidence of the author's Marxist befuddlement and read by his adversaries, including Maria Dąbrowska and Jan Józef Lipski, as an attack on the heroism of the Home Army and Warsaw Uprising – can be interpreted quite differently in the context of the signaled issue. Kott writes:

> During the first years of the occupation, when the enemy began to take away our loved ones, this attitude often seemed supreme to us. Gradually, however, we all became familiar with death. We came to understand that while every death is equal, not every death is worthy of respect. We learned, instead of judging life by the measure of death, to judge death by the measure of life. That's when we moved away from Conrad.[17]

The war, Kott argues, made people to counter Conrad's "heroism of death" with "heroism of deed and thought," the idea that life is lived in a world of history and values. Criticizing the "heroic choice of death, which testifies to one's own imaginary greatness"[18] the critic disavows the "hubris of solitude" and "moral narcissism" of heroes sacrificing themselves to an abstract cause, their "contempt for the real world."[19] Heroism as a defense of honor lacks efficacy, while "the inner moral drama influences the real world, the social world, and is always only […] a choice of one particular form of action."[20]

Maria Dąbrowska stated with indignation that "Kott, in denouncing Conrad's 'allegiance,' denounces the heroic allegiance of Polish Underground,

17 Jan Kott, *O laickim tragizmie (Conrad i Malraux)* [On secular tragedy (Conrad and Malraux)], in *Mitologia i realizm* (Warszawa: PIW, 1956), 168.

18 Ibid., 226.

19 Ibid., 212.

20 Ibid., 216.

which fought for five and a half years [! – A. S.] against the Germans."[21] But we can read Kott's stance as not so much a critique of resistance in general, but as suggestion to value different forms of engagement that may be "judged […] according to their social effects."[22] Kott, who came from a Jewish family and whose father was killed because he was denounced as Jewish by the fellow inmates in prison,[23] was well aware of how easily life could be judged worthless in the face of an "unworthy" death. Perhaps in his fervent criticism of allegiance only to oneself we can see an unspoken apology for a different kind of heroism: one directed toward others, socially useful, in favor of solidarity and civil empathy. In 1981, during the Congress of Culture in Warsaw, Kott spoke about the need to work through the separation that defined the situation of Jewish and non-Jewish Poles during the war: "this tradition of two worlds, persistently sustained by history, by the actions of bad people and by misguided thinking, is still alive in the Diaspora."[24] In a short article from 2001, titled "Zły wygląd" [Bad looks], about his experiences during the Holocaust, he noted: "I have written about these entanglements during the occupation before, but maybe I will write again someday. Maybe it will not be until our grandchildren are free of these entanglements".[25] In these brief diagnoses by Kott, we can grasp the hope for recovering such scenarios of solidarity, which allowed those with bad looks to survive during the occupation, more important than soaring acts of lonely heroism.

Contingent Communities: Miron Białoszewski

Perhaps the most obvious choice for the constellation of a potential civil history of Polish literature is the work of Miron Białoszewski. After all, Maria Janion called his *Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* "the most civilian Polish prose about war" and analyzed the writer's "anti-heroic and civil"[26] idiom.

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21 Maria Dąbrowska, *Conradowskie pojęcie wierności* [Conrad's concept of fidelity], in Wiesław Ratajczak, *Spór o Conrada* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2018), 143.

22 Ibid., 212.

23 See Anna Bikont, *The Crime and the Silence: Confronting the Massacre of Jews in Wartime Jedwabne*, trans. Alissa Valles (London: Windmill Books, 2016).

24 Jan Kott, "Wystąpienie podczas Kongresu Kultury Polskiej" [Speech during the Polish Culture Congress], Warsaw, December 11–12, 1981, accessed June 5, 2024, http://www.artin.gda.pl/text/10-6_pl.php.

25 Jan Kott, "Zły wygląd" [Bad looks], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 71 (2001): 21.

26 Maria Janion, "Wojna i forma" [War and form], in *Płacz generała. Eseje o wojnie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2007), 139, 99.

Also, the reception of his not war-related writings is dominated by terms from the broad semantic field of civilianism: he is a poet of "the everyday," of "the "clobber," "the peripheral," interested in everything that is mundane, ordinary, lowly. These are, certainly, valid diagnoses, and the uniqueness of Białoszewski's artistic sensitivity is indisputable, but I would like to read his work here not so much as an oeuvre of a social outsider and collector of curiosities, but in the context of civilness understood as an ethical project. "For years I have made a clear-cut distinction between matters that serious and not serious,"[27] said Maria Janion in her speech quoted above. Białoszewski skillfully deconstructs this implicit opposition. Here, I will show how – in the context of both his *Memoir* and other works – the writer envisions contingent civil communities that are not obvious to the Polish symbolic sphere.

In *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, Białoszewski describes his positionality as following: "yes, I'm speaking for myself – a layman. And for others. Also laymen. To the extent that we can speak because we were there. Laymen and non-laymen. All condemned together to a single history."[28] Laymen are incompetent people, untrained in the field. But also lay as secular, on the principle of distinction separated from the religious group. Laymen of the Uprising – its civil participants, uninitiated in the narrative that would give meaning and purpose to the events they are part of, unable to make decisions – are confronted with history as an accomplished fact. And yet, in Białoszewski's narrative, they seem to possess a weak agency and form a specific community, bound together by strong ties of experience, albeit with constantly changing components. "Underground Warsaw was communal," the narrator of *A Memoir* declares, and this particular conglomerate forms a "primitive cave community," a network in constant motion ("it was all coming apart. The group didn't stick together. Everything was moving. Disappearing"), clustering in various configurations, soon to be dispersed. Family was also a contractual matter during the Uprising. Bialoszewski the narrator spends this time in two groups: firstly, with his friend Swen and his relatives, then with, among others, his own father. The narrator refers to them both as the "so-called family," treating this category as an arbitrary collection, completed on a contiguous basis: "pani Jadwiga preferred having her bed near us. In our cubicle. Because we made up a family. They – the two of them, that is, and Stacha, Zocha, Halina, Father, and I. Next to us, Pani Trafna. Other women, men, children. Entire herds."

27 Janion, *Solidarność*.

28 Miron Białoszewski, *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, trans. Madeline G. Levine (New York: NYRB, 2015) [e-book, no page count].

In a situation of total isolation and danger, relationships are formed quickly and strongly ("we became friends. Quickly. As people did in those days") and depend primarily on topography:

> I have also realized that in spite of myself I may be carelessly tying together or losing my various distant, more distant, and sometimes not quite so distant personae. But that's how it was. People lost each other as suddenly as they found each other. They'd be close for quite some time. Then others became close. Suddenly these were lost and new people became important. That was common. A matter of herd instinct. It didn't make any difference what herd you belonged to, as long as you were in a herd.
>
> Because we worried about our own. And about those who were still nearby but already somewhat farther away – we worried, but somewhat less. About those even farther off but still at this address – even less, but still a little. And about the neighboring building? Or the one across the way?

Dominant in the descriptions of the social affects in these constellations are positive terms: in the basements under the rubble of Warsaw, there is a "kind of harmony," friendships, chatter and solidarity, and instead of blood ties, relations of kindness count: "the tenants in number 23 knew us. We knew they agreed. And even had they not known us it would have been the same."

Finally:

> In times of war, it seems, there is always a return to matriarchy. And especially during that war. That uprising. Particularly with that descent underground, under Warsaw (into the anthill of the shelters). It was a relapse—an explosion. Of the cellars? The caves? What's the difference? Masses of people. The mothers rule. Sitting underground. Hide! Don't stick your head out! Mortal danger. Nonstop. Even if you don't stick your head out. And coping.

The principle of matriarchy is radical civilness, in which death can be only a loss, and war is broken down into simple activities, being busy, and "coping."

This horizontal order regulated by topographical adjacency, an accidental proximity in which immediate ties are forged, survived the Uprising and was often portrayed by Białoszewski in his not war-related prose. Insignificant events, which the narrator witnesses in trains, buses, trams or various public spaces (market stalls, cemeteries, staircases, streets), are shaped precisely by ad hoc relations, flows of understanding and alliance. This is evident in Białoszewski's frequent public transport scenes: searching for bus stops, jointly determining the route of travel, giving advice to lost passengers, giving way

and validating each other's tickets are such basic "situational assemblages" [*zlepy sytuacyjne*],[29] which Bialoszewski particularly celebrates both as a participant and narrator. "Now you, madame – I validate the ticket and pass it to the next passenger / – You have nowhere to sit? – I don't – Then let me move this package away"[30] (*Konstancin*); "There is a commotion in the tram, the tram is moving, the passengers are all sitting, they are calm. They explain. One says that this is not the way. That other that since you went one way, you can go back the same way. Finally I ask out loud"[31] (*Rozkurz*). Also, the family that is not based on blood ties is the basic social form present in his prose: his love relationship with Le. (Leszek Soliński) and the multiple and changing circles of friends are part of a matrix of horizontal, open, fluctuating intimacies. *Rozkurz*, the third volume of his prose, is subtitled "Little philosophy [*filozofiuchna* – A. S.]. Life flies. Rozkurz. Civil conspiracies,"[32] which is an apt summary of his method. He records various clusters and dispersions, with a particular focus on their social forms, from the position of a "layman," a stranger to grand narratives: whether political, like "Solidarity" movement, or traditional-patriarchal, like the heterosexual family model. The civil conspiracies are present in social matter regularities, latent arrangements that the narrator-civilian persistently follows.

"In *A Memoir*, there is my personal involvement, my tenderness for people," Bialoszewski was to say.[33] In *Rozkurz*, Le. says to the narrator that he has tenderness in him. "I laughed. – Tenderness of everything? – Yes, tenderness."[34] This beautiful phrase sums up the two coexisting essential dispositions of the writer's work: the epistemological sensitivity of recording reality, maximum susceptibility to stimuli, which the writer simultaneously performs in his prose,[35]

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29 "Szacunek do każdego drobiazgu. Z Mironem Białoszewskim rozmawia Zbigniew Taranienko," *Argumenty* 36 (1971): 9.

30 Miron Białoszewski, *Małe i większe prozy* [Small and larger prose] (Warszawa: PIW, 2017), 119.

31 Miron Białoszewski, *Rozkurz* [Demolition] (Warszawa: PIW, 2015), 63.

32 Białoszewski, *Rozkurz*, 97.

33 Małgorzata Wichowska, "Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego Mirona Białoszewskiego w Muzeum Literatury" [Miron Białoszewski's diary from the Warsaw Uprising in the Museum of Literature], accessed June 5, 2024, http://muzeumliteratury.pl/pamietnik-z-powstania-warszawskiego-mirona-bialoszewskiego-w-muzeum-literatury/.

34 Białoszewski, *Rozkurz*, 85.

35 See Ryszard Nycz, "Szare eminencje zachwytu. Miejsce epifanii w poetyce Mirona Białoszewskiego" [Gray eminences of delight. The place of epiphany in the poetics of Miron Białoszewski], in *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej*

and tenderness to people, animals, plants. To understand better civilness as an ethical stance in the writer's work, it is helpful to focus on the figure of Nanka, his father's sister, with whom he lived as a child, and who is portrayed by him several times: "Nanka liked owls and everything. After all, and Jews in the occupation lived with her and Michał;" "Nanka was certainly a saint. Because if not her, then who? Because she was good to everyone. When they led her […] after the uprising in 1945, in the spring through Breslau, she passed crowds of fleeing Germans and she pitied them. […] That's what Nanka was all about."[36] In *Rozkurz*, he gives a portrait of Nanka who after liberation tries to find water for a German woman she accidentally met on the road in western Poland.[37] Nanka is the ideal of civilian heroism – unconditional, unspectacular kindness. Also "owls and everything" as a peculiar imperative finds a continuation in Białoszewski's life writing: so he constantly feeds pigeons ("I am then on the side of the useless"[38]), saves a moth from death in the heat of a lamp ("I managed to save it from perdition"[39]) and a young maple tree during a storm,[40] a tender intimacy connects him over the years with a poplar tree on Dąbrowskiego Street, later with the dens of suburban Warsaw.

Alliance of Shame: Magdalena Tulli

The prose of Magdalena Tulli can also be included in the "new" canon of civil Polish literature. In her case, two issues seem particularly relevant: first, the insightful vivisection of the dynamics of violence that is generated in seemingly neutral communities under the state of emergency; second, the project of radical solidarity in shame.

"Concerning the matter of foreignness, then, the locals need only a single glance, accustomed as they are to recognizing it in all its shades. There is no need for the mind to exert itself, and it's hard to be mistaken,"[41] the narrator

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literaturze polskiej (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 221–234; Tomasz Kunz, "Ja: pole do przepisu. Miron Białoszewski, czyli literatura jako forma istnienia" [Me: recipe field. Miron Białoszewski, or literature as a form of existence], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2006): 36–54.

36 Miron Białoszewski, *Donosy rzeczywistości* [Reports of reality] (Warszawa: PIW, 2013), 144, 117.

37 Białoszewski, *Rozkurz*, 23.

38 Białoszewski, *Małe i większe prozy*, 49.

39 Białoszewski, *Małe i większe prozy*, 53.

40 Miron Białoszewski, *Szumy, zlepy, ciągi* [Noises, clumps, strings] (Warszawa: PIW, 2014), 230.

41 Magdalena Tulli, *Flaw*, trans. Bill Johnston (New York: archipelago books, 2007) [e-book, no page count].

of *Flaw* describes the situation in an imaginary town where refugees suddenly arrive. Crowded in the square, confused, they arouse immediate resentment and distance among the locals. We never learn the perspective of the newcomers themselves; instead, we observe the trajectories of alienation and its arbitrary rules: "what sanctions could be imposed on the outsiders, and how could they be separated from the locals? What principle should be applied? The cut of their overcoats? The smell of mothballs?" Tulli traces the mechanisms of exclusion from visibility, the growth of resentful tension that ultimately contributes to the tragic fate of the refugees. The parabolic tale illustrates well what historian Mary Fulbrook has analyzed: the significance of seemingly minor and trivial behaviors of bystanders observing the Holocaust, viewing themselves as uninvolved ordinary citizens, that ultimately led to the exclusion of Jewish neighbors from the polis and thus their deaths.[42] Just as important as the open acts of persecution is the "intimacy of violence"[43] that easily takes collective forms.

Also in her later, openly autobiographical books, *Włoskie szpilki* [Italian stilettos] and *Szum* [White noise], the writer explores the mesh of tensions and affects, in which the social world is being divided into its full-fledged users and the excluded ones. This time she does so using a very concrete example: the fate of a daughter of a Jewish prisoner of concentration camps, in the realities of post-war Poland, that are told from the perspective of the now-adult narrator. Tulli unravels the estrangement of the child protagonist among her peers and the dynamics of violence to which she becomes a victim.

In one of scenes in *Italian Stilettos*, the girl in another instance of bullying at school, is locked in a closet by her peers. When she is finally released from it, the teacher demands an explanation: not, however, from the children who harassed the girl, but from the girl herself. The teacher is especially concerned why she did not scream while imprisoned. "Finally, she had to testify, stammering, that when she found herself in the closet, she froze with shame. And she continued to be ashamed, standing in the middle of the classroom in front of the teacher's table. Strange that she didn't die of this shame."[44] The teacher tasks the class with explaining the causes of "something antisocial that was in this girl,"[45] and it soon turns out that this is an impossible endeavor: the

42 Mary Fulbrook, *A Small Town Near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

43 Term by Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 133.

44 Magdalena Tulli, *Włoskie szpilki* [Italian Stilettos] (Warszawa: Nisza, 2011), 118.

45 Ibid., 118.

otherness of the child is so overwhelmingly obvious and natural to everyone that it is inexplicable. The scene has a peculiar affective intensity and dynamics. The girl "shuffles from foot to foot," "feels the weight of many gazes on her back,"[46] which paralyzes her ability to speak. She is pulled out of her hiding place and put on display. "That's the double movement shame makes: toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality," writes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. "In interrupting identification, shame, too, makes identity."[47] Shame is the basic affect that regulates the girl's position in a network of relational dependencies. "The only thing [...] I have a stake in is shame,"[48] says the narrator.

Crucial to the embarrassing schoolroom scene is its prelude: the girl is chased into a closet and forcibly locked inside. The children are the beaters,[49] the girl is the prey, but the juvenile perpetrators are not to blame, as they remain in the safe position of the helpers, not the hunters: their actions are devoid of a finale that would be subject to evaluation. However, although nothing happened to the victim, the performative nature of the scene and its dynamics are no different from the real hunt – only the ending is different. Does the girl, by remaining silent, giving no sign of life, "frozen with shame," equate the helpers with the hunters? But the girl's guilt is also her humiliation, "and there is nothing more humiliating than the fate of an innocent victim."[50] In a society in which war and the Holocaust did not cease to regulate social relations and collective emotions, which watched the extreme humiliation of its Jewish neighbors, it is not guilt but humiliation that is judged, not guilt but shame.

Can shame have a valuable potential? Kosofsky Sedgwick emphasizes the political aspect of shame: "Shame [...] generates and legitimates the place of identity – the question of identity – [...] but does so without giving that identity space the standing of an essence. [...] Shame – living, as it does, on and in the muscles and capillaries of the face – seems to be uniquely contagious from one person to another."[51] At the end of *Italian Stilettos*, the adult

46 Ibid., 118.

47 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 37, 36.

48 Ibid., 74.

49 On the role of Poles as beaters during the Holocaust see Tomasz Żukowski, *Wielki retusz. Jak zapomnieliśmy, jak Polacy zabijali Żydów* [Great retouch. How we forgot how Poles killed Jews] (Warszawa: Wielka Litera, 2018).

50 Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 54.

51 Ibid., 64.

narrator talks about herself, but also about herself as a girl she tried to help: "and so it is with us foxes. We will flit through the generations from one dream to another, from another to a third."[52] The solidarity of the foxes, a community bonded by shame, can be read as a possible political project of Tulli's books. The fox is also an imaginary friend of the girl in her second life-writing book, *White Noise*. The fox helps the protagonist in moments of difficulty, does not worry about imposed rules, lives outside social expectations, but is also characterized by a natural sensitivity. He says to the girl: "no animal is prepared to endure humiliation. Don't set yourself up to tolerate it forever. You would poison yourself to death."[53]

The relaxed, "weak" attitude of the fox may have, Tulli seems to suggest, the political potential to get out of the post-genocide dialectic of violence. To paraphrase Michael Werner's words about dynamics of gay visibility: "the paradoxical result is that only when this indignity [...] [is – A. S.] leaving no one out, and in fact binding people together, that it begins to resemble the dignity of the human. In order to be consistent, we would have to talk about dignity in shame."[54]

The political project of shame is based on horizontal networks that break out of the "exorbitant criteria of normality",[55] take off the odium of embarrassment from weakness, seeking community in what is supplementary and powerless. *White Noise* ends with such a fantasy: the narrator learns the story of her mother, who, having ended up in a stranger's apartment just after the war, could not stop herself from telling them what happened to her, although only a logorrhea punctuated by sobs and silences comes out of her mouth. After that, she never shared her story again. But this brief moment caught her completely off guard. It was shame that forced the mother to suppress memory and empathy, but it is also shame that the daughter recovers from the past and with which she identifies. This shame allows her to tell the story anew and to create alternative ties in the present.

Shoulder to Shoulder

Janion's speech at the Women's Congress ended with an appeal: "today it is necessary to create new secular communities [...]. It is necessary to redefine

52 Tulli, *Włoskie szpilki*, 143.

53 Magdalena Tulli, *Szum* [White noise] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2014), 79.

54 Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 36.

55 Tulli, *Szum*, 137.

community symbols."[56] Designing potential Polishness, then, also means working on its cultural reservoir and "renewing the vocabulary" of its description. The three instances of potential civil literature presented here allow us to think precisely about horizontal paradigms of history and Polishness in general, and each of them projects different forms of solidarity based on empathy, not soldierly duty. In Kott's case it is a call for different kind of heroism; for Białoszewski, contingent forms of community and alternative models of social relations; for Tulli – alliance of shame. Civil Polishness remains not only on the antipodes of militarism, but also of martyrdom, and projects a secular and inclusive society of "laymen."

These three formulas of civil Polishness – so evident in social and creative dynamics of the 2020 protests – may be also encountered in more recent cultural phenomena. I will pair with them three telling examples. Therefore, the reiteration of Kott's postulate of another forms of heroism may be found in the performative action by Zuzanna Hertzberg *Heroism of Life Itself*. In April 2023, for the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Hertzberg, an artist and activist, led the symbolic unveiling of the other side of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. Created by Nathan Rapaport in 1948 simultaneously with the most famous front side, titled Combat and portraying fighters with arms in their hands, the reverse of the monument, named The Last March shows residents of the ghetto walking with their hands empty. As Hertzberg postulates, not only armed struggles deserve to be called heroism but the very life in the ghetto, and "laughing, taking care of one's hygiene and looks, enjoying little things in life were an act of resistance."[57] In this gesture, the artist puts herself in opposition to the most common acts of remembrance, but also to such problematic pop-cultural representations of Jewish fate as recent comic book published by the Museum of the Warsaw Ghetto *Getto płonie* [The Ghetto is burning), which glorifies female fighters of the uprising who decide to "not go meekly to the slaughter,"[58] reinforcing harmful stereotypes of default Jewish – and women's – passivity.

As another contemporary incarnation of civil canon of Polish (popular) culture may be considered the song released at the very beginning of 2020, foreshadowing with its theme the autumn protests. The song *Shoulder*

56 Janion, *Solidarność.*

57 "Zuzanna Hertzberg's Artivistic Performance: Heroism of Life Itself. The Other Side of the Monument," https://polin.pl/en/zuzanna-hertzbergs-artivistic-performance-heroism-life-itself, accessed September 2, 2024.

58 Tomasz Bereźnicki, *Getto płonie* [The ghetto is burning] (Warszawa: Muzeum Getta Warszawskiego, 2023).

to Shoulder by Viki Gabor and Kayah, a Polish Roma and a Polish half-Jewish singers, may be interpreted as a civil take on call to arms. The refrain goes as follows:

> Shoulder to shoulder
> we sail together
> we change this world
> supporting each other like this.
> For no lady
> will dance alone
> when she has so many sisters
> when she's among us.

By pulling the title gendered metaphor out of its usual military collocations, in which only men going to war may march shoulder to shoulder, the artists envision the possibility of an inclusive sisterhood, similar to Białoszewski's contingent communities. There are no special preconditions to be included among the sisters who unite in dance instead of combat:

> You have a sister in me, you know it well
> In the darkness I'll grab your hand
> Be sure you won't get lost.

Finally, I would like to mention Nike-awarded novel by Zyta Rudzka, *Ten się śmieje, kto ma zęby* [Only those with teeth can smile] (2022).[59] In the story of a widowed hairdresser who makes efforts to procure coffin shoes for her deceased partner despite her poverty, old age and social marginality, the author creates a portrayal of a woman who never falls into indignity, or rather, to paraphrase Warner, in her persistence and resilience, carves her vulnerability and inferiority – conditioned by her gender, class, and age – into dignity of shame and fosters various alliances.

59 Zyta Rudzka, *Ten się śmieje, kto ma zęby* [Only those with teeth can smile] (Warszawa: W.A.B, 2022).

Abstract

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"You Will Never Walk Alone": Potential Histories of Polish Literature

The paper explores the potential civil history of Polish culture and pop culture that differs from the traditionally implied paradigm, male-centered and heteronormative, based on militarism, martyrology, and a patriarchal model of family. Dwelling on the concepts of potential history by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, potential history of literature by Ryszard Nycz, and alternative national canons by Maria Janion, the article seeks to trace a potential civil paradigm in Polish postwar literature and popular culture, that is based on empathy, dispersed protest, radical solidarity, and horizontal relations. Starting with the historical events of the 2020 protests against the ban on almost all abortions, which used "unspectacular" modes of social interaction, epitomized by the slogan "You will never walk alone," and employed many cultural references, I reconstruct alternative canon of Polish contemporary civil culture that would entail both works of "high" and popular culture.

Keywords

potential history, history of Polish literature, civil literature, new canon, solidarity

Investigations: On the Complex Temporalities of Today

Tomasz Mizerkiewicz

"To Feel the Flow of Time": The Dividual Subject and Temporal Experience in Literature

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1.

The exponentially growing number of publications in literary and cultural studies devoted to the "new temporality" has already been labeled the "temporal turn" and is now becoming its own specialized research sub-discipline.[1] However, it is difficult to see this phenomenon as merely a passing intellectual fashion; rather, these studies took shape despite numerous earlier claims about the exhaustion of the possibilities for thinking about "time in literature." Two decades earlier, John Hillis Miller addressed this issue, indicating his conviction of its untimeliness and unattractiveness,[2] and Fredric Jameson, writing at that time about the "end of temporality," claimed

1 See Thomas M. Allen's remarks in the introduction to the important collective monograph edited by him: *Time and Literature*, ed. Thomas M. Allen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Allen recalled the numerous publications that make up the "temporal turn" and identified its beginning with the appearance of Rita Felski's *Doing Time* and Stuart Sherman's *Telling Time* around 2000.

2 James H. Miller, "Time in Literature," *Daedalus* 132 (2) (Spring 2003): 86–97.

that it was rooted in economics, which reduced the horizon of subjectivity to the "present and the body"[3]; as a potential counterpoint, he postulated a temporality of life experience, including the experience of everyday life. Somewhat later, the impression of existing in a cultural "timelessness," as Boris Groys called the postmodern formation,[4] gave way to a sense of the transformative impact of many phenomena on individuals and even entire communities, which Catherine Malabou labeled the "plasticity" of time.[5] Subsequent economic upheavals, such as the 2008 crisis, as well as increasingly strong assaults by populist and autocratic forces on hitherto stable democratic institutions, have made clear the continuing relevance of the issue of temporal change. Finally, disturbing reports on the extent of the global environmental catastrophe seem to have proved decisive in this regard. One of their effects has been the development of ecocritical studies, which, together with a new temporal reference called the "Anthropocene,"[6] has dramatized the experience of time, giving it a new structure, reshaping it into images of the large-scale temporal transformations taking place in the human world. The experience of the global pandemic cannot, of course, be overlooked, as it too constituted a kind of "exceptional time," with its own particular flow and means of organization.

The diagnoses arising from the study of modernity have been of great importance for the humanities and social sciences. At least since Peter Osborne's *The Politics of Time*,[7] temporal phenomena inherent to a reality subjected to the dictates of modernization have been studied with renewed intensity. It has been noted that the homogeneous method of chronologically measuring and understanding time, which lasted for at least two hundred years and gained official acceptance in the late nineteenth century, soon afterwards became one of the mechanisms for disciplining subjectivity, along the lines of other disciplining mechanisms described by Michel Foucault. Part of these research findings were feminist, queer and postcolonial studies revealing the violent

3 Fredric Jameson, "End of Temporality," *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 2003): 695–718.

4 Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 79–105.

5 Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel. Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lizabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005). First French edition of the book was published in 1996.

6 One of the more important recent discussions of this notion is found in the collective work *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).

7 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time. Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995).

nature of the activities that naturalize modern chronological time, revealing practices of temporal resistance and alternative forms of thinking about and experiencing temporality, leading to the discovery of asynchronous environments for human life. In fact, however, these phenomena were not entirely new, as they had been described some time earlier in the writings of Aron Gurevich, which were also closely followed in Poland.[8] This set of issues has not escaped the attention of theorists of historical research, who, due to the specific nature of their subject matter, have always been sensitive to the study of time. In the work of Stefan Tanaka, a historian of modern Japan, representative of current forms of reflection on temporality, the great chronological time of modernizing processes is contrasted (which he is well placed to describe because of Japan's rather late and sudden integration into modernity) with three temporal imaginaries, which he sees as productive today. Tanaka found the terms for them in the writings of Michel Serres: turbulent time, crumpled time and tattered time.[9]

It is only through the sum of these factors that we can, at least in part, explain what led to a rejection of earlier diagnoses from the 1990s about culture entering an "atemporal" period following the great narratives and a related philosophy of history that had earlier resulted in the effects of the "arrow of time" being palpably felt. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's interesting concept of the experience of a broad present may not have differed significantly.[10] This is because he believed that since the end of the Second World War, culture had been in a state of temporal stagnation, with nothing fundamentally changing. Although Gumbrecht noted that part of this conception of temporality is that we are "locked" in the present by an inevitable ecological disaster looming in an ever-closer future, his account did not assume the potential for processual time to have a decisive impact on the culture he was describing. In order to properly assess the nature of his diagnosis, it is important to recognize that it probably holds greater validity for cultures like that of Germany, from which the scholar hails, for which the turning point of 1945 remains a decisive factor in the cases he analyzed.[11] At the same time, however, there are increasingly

8 See, e.g., Aron J. Guriewicz, *Categories of Medieval Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

9 Stefan Tanaka, "Change and History," in *History Without Chronology* (Ann Arbor: Lever Press, 2019), 126–146.

10 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

11 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *After 1945: Latency as Origin of the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

loud voices speaking out about the need to differentiate or multiply the formulae used to grasp what is temporal, reflecting differences in how they are experienced and defined by other cultures operating in, as Serres and Tanaka put it, more "turbulent," "crumpled," or "tattered" times.

One of these key factors in the return to temporality has become literature itself. Let us recall, for example, the famous quasi-autobiographical seven-book series by the Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgård, *My Struggle*,[12] based entirely on the author's experience of temporal change (such as the death of his father in horrific circumstances) and regaining a sense of the temporal. Here the writer is directly referencing Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time.* The situation is analogous with the novel *A Tale for the Time Being*[13] by the Canadian-Japanese author Ruth Ozeki, though the narrator in her novel writes to achieve the "essence of time," rather than in a search for it; this essence of time is subjectivity as understood in line with the new formulae of Zen thought. Innovatively developed temporal themes have long been present in the novels of the Turkish author Orhan Pamuk. Viewing the present from Istanbul's semi-peripheral distance, the writer has constantly felt the need to artistically grasp a temporal experience that differs significantly from the one he knew from Western culture. He has strongly emphasized this since his first novels from the 1980s and 1990s, *The White Castle*[14] and *The New Life*,[15] and later developed the concept in his essays.[16] The latter novel in particular shows the conflict of the "new" inscribed in capital turnover with the "newness" discovered during the reading of an extraordinary literary work by the book's protagonist and the various temporal practices depicted in the lives of the book's many characters. The Bulgarian author Georgi Gospodinov's novel *Time Shelter*, which describes a therapy for people suffering from different varieties of dementia, who are placed in rooms and later entire city districts that fully simulate the 1960s, 1980s, or other periods chosen by the therapists, is currently enjoying a resonance. The concept is proving so infectious that the idea of European countries choosing a given time from their own past is now being discussed. I have

12 Karl Ove Knausgård, *My Struggle, Book I*, trans. Don Bartlett (New York: Archipelago, 2014).

13 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Books, 2013).

14 Orhan Pamuk, *The White Castle* (New York: George Braziller, 1991). Turkish first edition 1985.

15 Orhan Pamuk, *The New Life*, trans. Güneli Gün (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). Turkish first edition 1994.

16 Orhan Pamuk, *Other Colours: Essays and a Story*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

mentioned these selected works, all of which have aroused great interest in readers, but to these we could easily add authors from Korea, India, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. Although this specific enumeration of titles might be open to dispute, there is no doubt that Polish literature has seen a wave of works associated with the new temporality, the clearest manifestation of which would be the triumphant return of the historical novel, which only a dozen or so years ago seemed in Poland to be a genre that was, if not extinct, then certainly epigonic. It is significant that the Nobel committee, in its justification for awarding its prize in literature to Olga Tokarczuk, analyzed above all *The Books of Jacob*, which seems to testify to the spreading, or even normative status, of styles of literary reception in which it is increasingly common to extract temporal motifs, which are always to some extent present as one of its universal themes.

Although wider discussion focused on whether there is a wave of new temporality in literature analogous to the wave of research on it is likely still yet to come, there are already many signs of interest in this type of approach to writing, both that of today and of the past.[17] Alongside new proposals and concepts, the usefulness of earlier formulae, such as Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope," or concepts known from Paul Ricoeur's treatises such as *Time and Narrative*,[18] is being reevaluated. Classic Polish research on time in literature is also being reactivated, including studies by Kazimierz Wyka, Kazimierz Bartoszyński, Seweryna Wysłouch and others. Such past intellectual undertakings should be emphasized because contemporary studies being conducted under the aegis of the new temporality did not arise out of a vacuum, but rather blossomed on fertile ground cultivated in the past. It would thus seem particularly valuable to combine the fruits of reflections on time in literature characteristic of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works in criticism and research of these times with the new demands posed by civilization and the environment today as perceived and expressed by contemporary writers. Indeed, the first phase of interest in temporality in literature (which does not eliminate from consideration similar phenomena in earlier periods) is linked to the Romantic "discovery" of time, the positivist development of these reflections, and then their significance for avant-garde literature, inspired in part by the achievements of the physical sciences and their questioning of a Newtonian mechanistic understanding of time.

17 Suffice it to mention the recent publications on the future in literature collected in *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2022) and *Nowa Dekada Krakowska* 3–4 (2020).

18 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* vols. 1–3, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin (Blamey), David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985–1988).

2.

At times, the literature under consideration here prompts us with new artistic formulae to rethink what nineteenth- and early twentieth-century understandings of temporality have in common with contemporary expressive needs. This is certainly the case with the writing of the canonical French author Annie Ernaux, whose subsequent works signal an increasingly insistent need to describe temporal experience. At least since the publication of her *Exteriors* (1993)[19] and journal-like *Things Seen* (2000),[20] critics have felt that temporal issues are essential aspects of the study of her works, reflected in such noteworthy concepts as "material time."[21] In her dialogue with nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature (explicitly indicating Proust as her patron), Ernaux problematizes the experience of time, though she seems to bring this discourse to a more final form only in *The Years*, written in 2008 and published in English several years later. (The title of the work was also quickly deciphered by researchers as a discussion with Virginia Woolf's identically titled novel.) In this somewhat unusually constructed "depersonalized" autobiographical story, we find the recurring problem of a long-planned novel about time which the author-heroine is unable to write because she cannot find a satisfactory form for the work. At the same time, there is a recurring feeling that, as she thought as early as the 1980s, she might be able to "write 'a kind of a woman's destiny,' set between 1940 to 1985. It would be something like Maupassant's *A Life* and convey the passage of time inside and outside of herself."[22] The model of the nineteenth-century story showing a woman's fate against the backdrop of historical time is tempting as a potential means to "convey the passage of time," which without such a format would have remained indistinct and elusive. In the Polish translation, Ernaux's key metaphor is rendered as "flow," although *passage du temps* in the original accentuates the "passage" of time. This latter association is supported by a section that expresses a desire "to seize this time that comprises her life on Earth at a given period, at a given period, the time that has coursed through her, the world she has recorded merely by living."[23] The phrase *ce temps qui l'a traversée* used here

19 Annie Ernaux, *Exteriors*, trans. Tanya Leslie (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1996).

20 Annie Ernaux, *Things Seen*, trans. Jonathan Kaplansky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

21 Tu Hanh Nguyen, "Le temps matériel d'Ernaux," *Figura* 21 (2009).

22 Annie Ernaux, *The Years*, trans. Alison L. Strayer (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2018), unpaginated ebook.

23 Ibid.

emphasizes the idea of "passing through" or "traversing" (*traverser*). The aforementioned *passage* also happens to be an aquatically perceived "flow," which in turn is highlighted by another statement made by the writer-narrator: "an outpouring, but suspended at regular intervals by photos and scenes from films that capture the successive body shapes and social positions of her being."[24] The Polish translation deviates slightly from the original, where the sentence is a more impersonally expressed observation, but includes the term *une coulée*, etymologically evoking the expression "the flow of time" (*écoulement du temps*). We therefore see how the writer simultaneously activates at least two areas of association, where time "passes" and "flows" through the heroine; it is not stated what kind of matter this is, but the suggestion remains clear that the heroine-author reflexively thinks of time as something both tactile and processual. It is also worth noting the way in which she labels her subjectivity, which, as one critic writing about Ernaux's work rightly pointed out, is "porous,"[25] since "material time" not only rubs against her body, but also passes through it. Without discussing the already considerable body of research on the subject, it should be noted that through this passage and flow, which is felt in at least two ways ("inside and outside of herself"), time reveals its shaping activity. It is no coincidence that in *The Years* there are so many descriptions of photographs and films of the writer's family life, or that the narrator carefully analyses her past gestures and facial expressions and the positions her body used to assume, and how these changing forms of somatic movement are captured on film. One is reminded of Catherine Malabou, who saw in Georg W. F. Hegel's philosophy the importance of metaphors derived from the fine arts. Malabou concluded that we find here an experience of processual time in which subjectivity is not so much subject to the principles of fluidity and flexibility, but rather, once established, its shape does not easily yield to further transformations; it resists, and any subsequent changes are strongly felt. For this reason, in recent publications, the philosopher has described the experience of the destruction of personality (caused by severe strokes, injuries from serious accidents, etc.), after which we must speak of the emergence of a new person in an old body (Malabou questions the motif of a reversible metamorphosis, which originates from antiquity, and emphasizes that often a transformation of shape corresponds to a transformation of the personal "substance" it encompasses).[26]

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24 Ibid.

25 Nguyen, *Le temps*...

26 Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

A similar view of subjectivity was pursued by Jane Bennett in her book *Influx and Efflux. Writing Up with Walt Whitman*.[27] The philosopher, one of the most creative members of the intellectual movement called "new materialism," based her claims in several passages of her well-known manifesto *Vibrant Matter* on analyses of Franz Kafka's short stories. However, it was not until a rather fortuitous return to reading the poems of the "textbook" American poet Walt Whitman, that she found in literature particularly intriguing formulae for her materialist reflections. Bennett was also influenced by a return to nineteenth-century philosophical and scientific ideas, discussing the significance of literary "physiognomies" of the time with a fascination that is not typical of her. She recalls the descriptions of postures assumed by bodies, the positions they occupied in space, the phenomenon of somatic sympathy and antipathy, the "energy" flows resulting from stepping on the ground, and the sensation of being absorbed into the world by an individual who was traversing it, remaining constantly in motion. She even finds such startling convictions as the one about the body's "mannerisms" determining whether one stands on the side of the democratic order (its hallmark was said to be behavior indicating "nonchalance"). In the midst of a multitude of revelatory findings and renewals of nineteenth-century thought, there is a recurring conviction that thought about literature should reclaim the category of "influence" at least for the purposes and to the extent set out by new materialist thought. The source-perceiving self as the corporeal subject of Whitman's poems turns out, like Ernaux's heroine, to be "porous," open to material flows and the influences of energy, absorbing the matter of the world as well as emitting it, and thereby becomes a medium for flows, that is, for a whole range of processual phenomena. Bennett uses and elaborates on the notion of a "dividual" subjectivity, a description of which she found in the writings of the anthropologist McKim Marriott in his description of the Hindu understanding of the individual:

> By "dividual," I follow McKim Marriott's notion of "persons – single actors – who – are not thought… to be 'individual,' that is, indivisible, bound units… To exist, dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences. They must also give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances […] that may then reproduce themselves in others…"[28]

27 Jane Bennett, *Influx and Efflux. Writing Up with Walt Whitman* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

28 Ibid., xii–xiii.

Dividual subjectivity thus rejects the proud idea of indivisibility, that is, individuality, and does not need a tight, closed, sealed-off and coherent conception of the individual self as a distinct entity, as an in-dividual. Instead, it feels, exposes and seeks to know its original "attachment" to other entities and qualities, "mixing" with them, including in a somatic and material sense. This turns out to be a subjectivity that defines itself situationally and environmentally, and in order to describe it, we can use a whole spectrum of concepts characteristic of phenomenological, new-materialist and eco-critical thought. Since dividual subjectivity, which is indelibly dependent on its material "supports" and "openings," senses and describes the passage of various substances through and past it, and thus the processual phenomena involved with this movement, it could become – and this would be my proposal – a useful approach to understanding literary representations of the experience of processual time.

3.

The dividual subjectivity discovered by Jane Bennett in nineteenth-century poetry corresponded to a whole range of historically active literary expressions of the experience of temporality that are regaining their relevance today. To test a similar proposition, below I will analyze the reading possibilities opened up by a similar persona in two selected passages from recent Polish poetry. I have purposely chosen two authors representing different genders and generations, for whom temporal issues are quite clearly emphasized by critics as fundamental themes in their work.

The well-known Szczecin writer Artur Daniel Liskowacki has repeatedly described the peculiar local experience of a temporal "rupture," whereby mixed up in local culture are issues related to the end of the German history of his hometown of Szczecin, the "severed" borderland biographies of those who were "repatriated" to Western Pomerania, the history of communist Poland reflected in social or family histories, and so on. Temporal sensitivities also called for a return to the era of Romanticism, Poland's struggles for independence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the socio-political tensions of the postwar period. A number of his books of poetry are part of this increasingly recognized and intensively researched writing that includes novels, short story collections and poignant essays. The importance of experiencing temporality in Liskowacki's lyrical works was emphasized in a discussion of them by Andrzej Skrendo, who saw in them "a way of feeling the changes taking place, a particular sensitivity – reminiscent of the painful tenderness of a sprained hand – to the matter of

time."[29] The critic also added that this poetry should be read in the context of formulae such as Charles Baudelaire's statement from "The Painter of Modern Life" that "almost all our originality comes from the seal which Time imprints on our sensations."[30]

It is therefore not surprising that Liskowacki's latest book of poetry, *Szkliwo* [Glaze],[31] prominently features temporal experiences, such as the uniqueness of times of the pandemic, including the painful departures of loved ones. In the title poem, we read about the latest scientific explanation for the phenomenon of a shiny skull from Herculaneum; it is said to have been glazed over due to its surface having been covered with a young man's brain, which "boiled" at a terrifying hyper-temperature and was then "set" by the cold. The poet views human existence through the lens of similar catastrophes, its mortality an indelible "stigma imprinted by time," shattering the illusion of safety and security, placing the human subject alongside quasi-geological objects. The dividual subjectivities in Liskowacki's poems often become aware of their condition in the face of calamities similar to the eruption of Vesuvius, learning then that they exist "burning at every moment / inundated by a wave / blackened by the stars in the sky." Thus, this is not, as a rule, the joyful, vitalistic openness to the flows of matter familiar from Whitman's poems, but more often the effect of a "drilling" impact on the subject from the memory of natural and historical catastrophes. On the other hand, the protagonist of Liskowacki's poems is a dividual who, amidst powerful flows of matter in his world, seeks to feel, as Skrendo writes, "the delicate tissue of the present." I find this to be a fortuitous term for critics, as it points to the "tissue-like," life-giving materiality of time as depicted in this poem. The temporal "grows over" or "grows into" the life of subjectivity, but fosters it only when it possesses "delicate" qualities, as it is in these that the sensation of restoring to life the "tissue" that nourishes the present appears and disappears. We come now to an important conclusion: without "the delicate tissue of the present," dividual subjectivity could not survive, and thus, in a lifeworld formed by the percussive actions of catastrophes, the co-creation of the present by human and non-human actors, their creation of somatic-material constellations in which the invigorating flow of time can be felt proves to be crucial. These

29 Andrzej Skrendo, "Artur Daniel Liskowacki i liryka nowoczesna" [Artur Daniel Liskowacki and modern lyric poetry], *Autobiografia. Literatura, Kultura. Media* 2 (17) (2021): 41. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this artice.

30 Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 14.

31 Artur Daniel Liskowacki, *Szkliwo* [Glaze] (Sopot: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Sopotu, 2021).

somatic-material constellations, reminiscent in many respects of Bruno Latour's actor-networks, are ephemeral, delicate concretions, "tissues," entanglements in which time can be felt as an invigorating rhythm, pulse or flow restoring existence to the rubble of formerly great "individual" cultures, such as those of ancient Rome or modern-day Europe.

The poem "Słowiczek" [Nightingale] should probably be situated against a similar background. It begins with the following stanzas:

> I heard you again, from the side of the wild field
> garden allotments, on the edge of the housing estate,
> though it probably wasn't you on that verdant night
> you who sang to the sickly scent of jasmine and feces
>
> in the grass, tossed to maggots and a civilization
> of rubbish, so many years ago, in this abandoned
> garden. I don't know, after all, how long the nightingale lives. […]
>
> I know, there were poets. Happier. They listened to you […]
> But I hear you, even though I don't have any
> Poets for that.[32]

This work is filled with temporal emblems. The singing nightingale evokes the memory of a nightingale listened to "so many years ago," a memory so intense that it must have verged on an encounter with a bird many decades ago. This provokes a "scientific" question about the lifespan of nightingales, which signals the problem of the biological diversity of the temporal rhythms to which the poem's protagonist exposes himself. The temporality of cultural change stemming from the tradition of literary glorifications of birdsong, together with the poet's trivialized associations with the nightingale, speaks even more strongly. Here the literary-historical continuity is clearly broken, as the speaker has the feeling that during the encounter with the nightingale "there are no poets for that." The further temporal horizon of this lyrical account also becomes what Marielle Macé, in her monographic account of bird issues in literature, called "the abyss of the Anthropocene."[33] The researcher saw the eradication of bird themes from contemporary poetry as a result not only of poets' flight from this lyrical stereotype, but also of the human impact on the environment that is destroying entire populations and species.

32 Ibid., 33.

33 Marielle Macé, *Une Pluie d'oiseaux* (Paris: Édition Corti, 2022).

Well-known descriptions of the loss of bird ecosystems in Europe provide a particularly painful and undeniable reason for the silencing of the bird voice in European lyric poetry. In a similar acoustic landscape, the sudden return of bird-related issues to poetry and bird studies becomes, as Macé points out, particularly audible and noticeable; birds are returning to the "field of vision" of poetry on an exceptional basis and under special circumstances caused by the catastrophic impact of the Anthropocene.[34] Liskowacki's poem belongs to this kind of lyric, one which boldly brings birds into the "field of vision" against the backdrop of a "civilization of rubbish" with its chaos, noise and waste. "But I hear you," attests the hero-poet emphatically, having experienced the "phenomenological" obviousness of an encounter in the "here and now" with a nightingale. The "nightingale" he hears is not just a mental construct, not one of the constructivistically explicated effects of reading old lyric poetry; the poet explicitly says that he is not supposed to have much in common with the nightingale (who is said to represent the poet Józef Bohdan Zaleski) known from a poem by Adam Mickiewicz. Liskowacki's protagonist says that his "poem" is supposed to be "versus verse: 'my nightingale, fly and sing!,'" that is he tries to salvage the feeling of reality, the non-exchangeability of the encounter with the singing bird in the "abyss of the Anthropocene." Seemingly contradicted by the convention of the "conversation" with the nightingale, well-known from the literary tradition, yet finding similar expressions in Macé's reading of lyricism, it reminds us that, in etymological terms, "conversation" means "living with."[35] For this reason, the lyrical speech addressed to the "nightingale," like other earlier works of this kind, serves to describe the unique, disappearing, delicate forms of "life with" birds, that is, human life fused into multiple constellations with bird environments and the material circumstances of these encounters. A little later, the speaker confesses:

> […] At night also, no one believes
>
> you, although we are close enough to feel,
> how the heart of the world throbs within us, a bell
> on a thong of blood, so fragile that it melts in the mouth […].[36]

In this passage from Liskowacki's poem we find all three components of the specificity of temporal experience described by Skrendo. The constellation

34 Ibid., 9.

35 Ibid., chapter "Converser: 'vivre avec,'" 349–361.

36 Liskowacki, *Szkliwo*, 33.

of the bodies of the speaker and the nightingale, together with the tangibly present matter accompanying their encounter, form an arrangement in which the temporal life-sustaining flow becomes perceptible against a background dominated by the dustbins of civilization. This somatic-material system is transformed into a literally understood "delicate tissue of the present." In order to express a similar feeling of flowing time – a feeling, I would emphasize, that sustains fragile forms of existence – the hero-poet says that only in this human-bird-object constellation, in their corporeal "closeness," can one "feel how the heart of the world throbs within us." The metaphor calling the heart "a bell on a thong of blood" also alludes to the "materialistic" image of the flow of life-giving blood.

The functioning of the dividual subject involves one additional element, which Bennett (drawing on Marriott's research) says involves absorbing substances, transforming them through "metabolic" processes that are inherent to the bodily form through which they pass, and then emitting them. Such a view of subjectivity, not uncommon in nineteenth-century philosophy and science, seems distant from contemporary forms of thinking about subjectivity. Despite this, the protagonist of Liskowacki's poem is careful to ensure that the bird's song maintains its natural sonic literalness, that it not be translated into human language, that it remain at the "tip of the tongue," because "further on there are only known lands." In this "unknown" land common to humans and birds – or rather, this land of unique human-bird constellations – the speaker stands in the window at night, as we read, and listens "to intoxication." This image of standing in a window – or in an opening signaling vulnerability to the flows of matter through a house-subject, through a monad with a window – seems significant, and equally important is the fact that the nonverbal ("nightingale vs. word") way of experiencing the nightingale's singing appears as an intense and powerful sound wave leading "to intoxication." Thus, the sound waves entering and flowing through the body are transformed within the body, bringing it to a euphoric state. The poem that ensues is the result of a reborn enthusiasm, a will to live and survive, an energy resulting from the transubstantiation of the physical bird-song wave "filtered" through the speaker's body, transformed into a desire to act in the aforementioned land of unknown human-bird constellations.

Marielle Macé believes that the return of birds in poetry, under the present conditions of a new intensity caused by the widespread "silencing" of bird populations typical of the Anthropocene, should be defined by the image of "a rain of birds" (this is the title of her book). She proposes a new means of thinking about lyricism and language, which should today be experienced as once again being filled with bird voices, modulated by waves of sound emitted by birds, but also animated by them. The image of a great "rain of birds" links

the idea of the rebirth of life with a blurring of the boundary between the animated life of birds and the inanimate existence of the matter of rain, and also with her proposal for the rebirth of poetry and human culture, conditioned by the materialistically conceived sonorous intervention of birds in the ways of forming all environments. If we were to agree with this, Liskowacki's poem "Nightingale" would be both a metaphorical and literal invigorating "rain" that indicates a possibility for transforming our lifeworld, moving it towards new ecologies that offer some kind of hope for the future. These ecologies can be derived, first and foremost, from prototypical human-bird-object entanglements, such as the one accidentally experienced by the poem's speaker. They should encourage the provocation of a great "rain of birds," that is, their incorporation into all dimensions of human existence, because only by doing so will dividual subjectivities restore life to the "delicate tissue of the present," not only in the dimension of lyrical experience.

4.

Natalia Malek's lyric poetry is one of the most promising poetic projects of the last decade in Poland. Discussions of her work to date have emphasized the affinity of her lyrical compositions with sculptural art, with the poem achieving an analogous material tactility to visual art forms – an issue also raised by the poet in interviews. In Malek's collections, reproductions of paintings, which are an indispensable part of the poems, correspond with poetic compositions that refer to avant-garde works exposing art's materiality. Conceived in this way, Malek's poetic works are a tool for developing innovative forms of social activism by a poet involved in the creation of women's collectives.

Malek's latest volume, *Obręcze* [Rings],[37] continues her previous artistic path, though it also places strong emphasis on the experience of time, something which was immediately noticed by critics.[38] Basia Bańda's colorful compositions, which are part of the book, can be associated with the activity of dividual subjectivity. Circles are traced around color spots that are placed freely in various places on the page, as if the artist wanted to check which flows of color matter would best accommodate and interact with the available "openings" and where she should place these openings in order to expose herself

37 Natalia Malek, *Obręcze* [Rings] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo WBPiCAK, 2022).

38 Rafał Wawrzyńczyk, *Siatki poezji najnowszej*, accessed June 2, 2024, https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/10647-siatki-historii-najnowszej.html; Jan Skurtys, *PPR #12*, accessed June 2, 2024, https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/cykle/ppr-12/; Agnieszka Budnik, *Wiersze jako instalacja: przestrzeń, dźwięk, kolor i kształt*, accessed June 2, 2024, https://kulturaupodstaw.pl/wiersze-jako-instalacja-przestrzen-dzwiek-kolor-i-ksztalt/.

to the flow of their colorful substance. One of the meanings of these minimalist compositions would thus be to show the actions of the dividual subject in her work with the matter of the surrounding world that flows through and past her. One can find similar tropes in the verbal and lyrical part of the volume, that is, in Malek's poems, and it is important to note that the book was originally intended to be composed of descriptions of a single "circulating year," where one poem was to be devoted to each week. Instead of this coherent composition scheme, what remained were the fractured "remnants" of these attempts, fragmented compositions that are as "dividual" to the temporal matter of the year described as Bańda's artistic visions are to the physical matter of paint. What is striking about Malek's works is the impression they create of flow; the impact of which is among the reasons for the abandonment of the project of a comprehensive temporal descriptor. As we read in *[nie robić spisu]* [not make an inventory]:

> Rainstrokes, supple, even finger-like.
> You have to pass
>
> by so many buildings. Pass by – not make an inventory.[39]

The poem appears to revisit the decision to forgo making a typical temporal "inventory." Instead, the speaker feels that she needs to take part in the "passing" of this year, to experience it, but also to organize this passage in a specific manner, to invent new formulae for it. The poem itself is an expression of this search, for the words here are like the strokes of raindrops, which have a meaning close to Macé's rain metaphor; they are matter meant to animate, but also to touch the shapes of everything nearby ("pass by"). This is why the poet says of the word-rain that it is "supple," thus recalling Juliusz Słowacki's maxim about "supple language," together with his belief in the possibility of fortuitous combinations, of correlating a supple word with what the "head will think." To add to this, the verbal rain is supposed to be "finger-like," the poems are transformed into somatic avatars of the poet's body, grasping substances, while also suggesting that her materially conceived words belong to the conglomerates found in Liskowacki's poem, composed of human and non-human entities. Only a temporal poetry approached in this way allows for the realization of the call to "pass by so many buildings," which could also be expressed as a desire for materialist poetry created by a dividual subjectivity to have an activist impact on the numerous, multifaceted institutions that determine the shape of the contemporary world.

39 Malek, *Obręcze*, 20.

This is reinforced by a similar reading of the poem "Płaszcze" [Coats], which begins with the couplet: "Or maybe time is a slogan. / Time for yellow coats." It ostensibly addresses the commodification of time by economics; meanwhile, "slogan" comes from Gaelic languages, where it meant "battle cry" but also something like a shibboleth. Malek is not contemplating the dramaturgy of the temporal uniqueness of an event, a notion familiar from Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the shibboleth; rather, she is interested in the immutability of the slogan, urging: "may they not be changed: the communal, martial, epidemic and ancestral." This is a recurring motif in the volume, even if in such a perverse form as in "Moduły" [Modules], where we read: "Maple – particle. / Hawthorn – particle." The poet wants to see in nouns, that is, in different parts of speech, something unchanging, as we know from the unchanging part of speech that is the particle. The related idea of immutability would connect closely with the verbal activity of the dividual subject – she seeks to see in the series of compositions she has created, which in her case means conglomerates of human-participle agents, "immutable" forms through which time can be felt and the organization of its flow decided. In other words: "fractured" modular compositions and a dividually framed subject are meant to make it possible to reflect on the conditions for co-determination of such a flow of time that will bring about the "invigorating" temporal matter known from Liskowacki's poems, which regenerates life and establishes its new forms. This is why one of the points of departure in this poem is the idea of a female "little strike":

> A little strike in your home, but also a birthday. […]
> I have never seen you so mature,
> so talented,
>
> so abandoned
> as a forest clearing in January.[40]

The condition for change turns out to be dividual existence, the "forest clearing" as an "opening" in the forest wall symbolizes the susceptibility of the "porous" subject to participate in the flows of matter, although this condition also represents an acute state of lack, an abandonment revealing the dramatic aspect of experiencing the "opening." The poem may begin with a scene from family life, but its meaning quickly becomes generalized. The word "strike" has always referred to the halting of production and

40 Ibid., 26.

reproduction,[41] intended as a means for changing the rules of the collective functioning of the economy. For this reason, the theme of "immutability" is so important to *Rings* as a slogan referring to the composition of a work that explores the need for a kind of immobilization. Only such pauses, poems as "little strikes," allow for a redefinition – or rather, a literal transformation – of the forms comprising one's life-world and the processualities that govern it.[42] The heroine of the poem immediately experiences the feeling of having a "birthday" as a result of the small strike; the speaker speaks of her with admiration: "I have never seen you so mature, / so talented…" A small strike, a temporary immobilization, allows the principles of feeling and sensing of the processual flows of time to be recomposed in such a way that they become invigorating, bringing about the rebirth of the dividual subject, who has both met challenges (maturity) and regained her ability to influence her surroundings (talent). The numerous images of women's activity in *Rings* are thus mini-tales of their situational "alliances" with other entities, objects and qualities to create unique new means of feeling the flow of time through and past them. These discrete endeavors become the condition for the dividual to be animated by the restorative influences of materially experienced time, supporting and revealing the potentials of dividual subjectivity in its activist pursuits.

5.

The proposed principle of reading makes it possible to trace two basic ways of experiencing time as expressed in literature featuring experiences of dividual

41 See Katarzyna Szopa's opinions on the female lyrical heroine's regaining influence on how she participates in reproductive processes and their relation to temporality: Katarzyna Szopa, *Wybuch wyobraźni. Poezja Anny Świrszczyńskiej wobec reprodukcji życia społecznego* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2022).

42 In this context, see the poet's comments from a slightly earlier interview: "being in the now, because I think that's what you mean by being between the past and the future, seems most interesting to me. It has many consequences, let's call them philosophical. One is continuity – a thing happens again and again, which would be the mechanism of universalization you asked about earlier. The second is singularity—which is the opposite of universalization […]. And the third is 'stripping', minimizing the stripping away of some of the qualities and accompanying human stories, experiences or memories in favor of exposing others. In other words, in order to move, one has to stop. Some characters are schematic, in order to animate them independently. The stripped-down, archetypal characters you move yourself." *Powiązania (Jakub Skurtys, Natalia Malek)* [Connections (Jakub Skurtys, Natalia Malek)], accessed June 2, 2024, http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=330&artykul=6314.

subjectivity. The first is closer to the flow, described by Bennett, of variously defined temporal "substances" through the body; their "passage," which sometimes also shapes the subject, "re-tuning" it. The second involves what Annie Ernaux called the flow of time "past her." A brief analysis of Liskowacki's and Malek's poems made it possible to see that this flow is not only the result of the contact between the dividual and the matter pushing against her, subjected to processual changes. In order to describe the sensation of this flow "past her," dividual subjectivity must sometimes be seen as part of certain situational human-nonhuman groupings, with their entanglement forming a corporeal and material constellation, one that is "porous" and not closed. Through this "porous" conglomerate of being flows a particularly invigoratingly felt time, which revives the life of dividual subjectivity as the "delicate tissue of the present."

In both poetic cases studied, the discrepancy between the temporal rhythms experienced by dividual subjectivity and the temporality of the "civilization of rubbish" is quite evident. In the study of new temporality, there is a return to a conviction about the need to explore the asynchronous environments of human life, as they provide a counterbalance, hidden in the rhythms of everyday life, to the great inexorable regulator that the chronological and synchronization-enforcing time of continuous modernization has become.[43] It is tempting to say that literature has probably never rid itself of its links to these non-synchronous, multidirectional temporal rhythms of life, only that it has not been observed carefully enough from this perspective. The study of time in literature, which is now being revived with great impetus, may therefore still have a great deal to discover and say.

Translated by Thomas Anessi

43 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing has described in an interesting way the multiplicity of temporal rhythms that make up the living environment of the collectors of greatly prized and expensive matsutake mushrooms. Their lives take place in a "polyphonic" multiplicity of human and natural temporalities, which together defy the time of progress and help them to survive in a situation of ecological catastrophe with its temporal complexities. See the chapter "Arts of Noticing," in Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 17–25.

Abstract

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"To Feel the Flow of Time": The Dividual Subject and Temporal Experience in Literature

The article discusses the state of research on new temporality in literature and proposes that one of the more commonly used tools for describing temporal experience should become the notion of "dividual" person introduced by Jane Bennett in her book on Walt Whitman's poetry. This subject foregrounds its divisibility while remaining open to the flows of matter through and besides this divisibility, which enables the dividual person to experience processual phenomena, hence it becomes useful for the study of literary records of experiencing time. The analysis of Artur Daniel Liskowacki's poem allows finding dividual subjectivity in the lyrical record of the protagonist-poet's listening to a bird's song: the encounter with the nightingale occurs at a time called by scholars the "abyss of the Anthropocene," supposedly catastrophic for entire bird populations. In turn, Natalia Malek's poems from the volume Obręcze (Rims) reveal the important temporality of women's "little strike." Feeling the flow of time by a dividual woman begins with the "strike-like" stopping of the processes that reproduce her reality and leads to their "passage" through systems designed by herself. The article contributes to studies of literature on asynchronous environments of human life as a counterbalance to the synchronous chronological time of modernization.

Keywords

new temporality, time in literature, dividual person, Artur Daniel Liskowacki, Natalia Malek

Tomasz Rakowski

Escape, Survival, "The Jump": On African Refugee Routes – Ząbek, Bachelet, M'charek

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> For from the life that you received,
> No magic gate will let you leave.
> Czesław Miłosz, *The Moral Treaty*

Suffering, escape, violence. Refugee experiences are both the starting point and the boundary of this text. It focuses on moments when anthropology serves o n l y as a testimony. It is detached from fully comprehending what is ultimately incomprehensible and what may never be fully understood.

In 2020, an exhibition opened at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Poland, as part of an ongoing series. Initially, it depicted post-war reconstruction efforts, but its later version, "Monumentomania," turned its attention to monuments. Visitors were especially drawn to one installation that most closely resembled the essence of a monument – a structure demanding remembrance and continual reflection. This piece was a model of barbed-wire fences, evoking harrowing images from Second World War and the Holocaust – people pressed up against wire barriers. The exhibition was held in the newly designed, brightly lit modernist Zodiak pavilion (initially shown at the TRAFO Center for Contemporary Art in Szczecin). This meticulously crafted model, created with

precision akin to a top architectural studio, depicted objects that are never admired – barbed-wire fences or, in their modern form, razor-wire fences with barriers, supports, lattices, and rods.[1] These fences have increasingly lined Europe's borders in recent years to block the flow of refugees, primarily from the Middle East and Africa. Within a few months, such a fence was constructed along Poland's border with Belarus. Thus, the work created by Łukasz Skąpski and aptly titled *Stalemate: The New Architecture of European Borders* is a miniature model of the currently erected barbed-wire fences. These contemporary barriers, in miniature, clearly represented a new form of technology aimed at sealing off Europe's internal territories and isolating them from the influx of refugees – determined arrivals from the Global South. It captures a troubling aspect of early twenty-first-century migration: the rise of newly engineered, technically advanced, professionally built razor-wire barriers. These are fences, metal walls, and wire fortifications equipped with lighting, motion sensors, and cameras.

Until 2020, in the Polish experience, barbed-wire fences tended to matter as distant, remote entities, separated from us by more than half a century in time and hundreds or thousands of kilometers in distance. They were, of course, present in some nearby institutions (such as the army, prisons, and detention centers), but they mainly remained removed from everyday life and work. In September 2020, these instruments of violence returned to Central Europe and came close to home. Since then, hypothermic, exhausted, and dehydrated refugees have found themselves stranded in swamps and forests along the eastern borders of Poland and Lithuania. By January 2022, construction of a high-tech wire fence had already begun. Just a few weeks later, a photograph captured a Yemeni refugee caught in the fence under the glare of powerful lamps – hanging upside down, his foot entangled in the wire, cutting into the top structure of the barrier.

The work of Polish ethnologist and Africanist Maciej Ząbek on exile and refugees in Africa[2] stands out as an exception, vividly revealing this distant, largely invisible world that had, until recently, been mostly forgotten. Against

1 Łukasz Skąpski, *Klincz. Nowa architektura granic europejskich (trzy modele z dziewięciu składających się na instalację)* [Clinch. New architecture of European borders (three models out of nine that make up the installation)], in Łukasz Zaremba and Szymon Maliborski, *Pomnikomania. Warszawa w budowie, 5.10–3.11.2019*, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej, Warszawa 2019, 53, accessed January 20, 2023, cf. https://artmuseum.pl/public/upload/files/WWB_broszura_18_lekki.pdf.

2 Maciej Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce. Etnografia przemocy i cierpienia* [Refugees in Africa. Ethnography of violence and suffering] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2018).

the backdrop of earlier works that predate the deaths at the closed borders in Poland and Lithuania amid the influx of people fleeing war-torn Syria and the Middle East (by sea or further overland via Serbia and Hungary), Ząbek's work stands out as the only such multifaceted and deeply layered ethnographies of suffering, escape, and violence. It provides a comprehensive picture of these harsh realities, from which the high-tech installations of the twenty-first century in Łukasz Skąpski's models effectively separate the people of Europe from those in Africa. The book is a series of stories recounting the recurring experiences of refugees – more tales of escape and suffering-laden journeys than of life stories. These are accounts from refugees, escapees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and migrants moving in search of work, water, land, or even the hope of relative safety.

Barbed and razor wire appear repeatedly throughout the book in various contexts. Even on the back cover, we see the serene face of the ethnologist, with a line of barbed wire visible in the background. Two detailed studies expand this image and provide some insight into the anthropology of flight and refuge: Sebastien Bachelet's[3] work on overcoming barriers in the Spanish enclaves in Africa, and Amade M'charek's[4] exploration of the significance of sea-crossing attempts in southern Tunisia.

Anthropology, Violence, War

At the beginning of his extensive book, Maciej Ząbek outlines the origins of international law intended to regulate the mass displacement of people fleeing war and famine. These regulations were created in response to the plight of those who, during Second World War, were forced from their homes, fleeing atrocities inflicted on civilian populations. This relentless, mechanized, genocidal warfare emerged in twentieth-century Europe on an unprecedented scale. Thus, the 1951 Geneva Convention, which established principles for the protection of refugees (and became the foundation for the extensive work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), is, as Ząbek argues, a law resulting directly from the suffering of millions in Europe. Right from the beginning, the author highlights the distinct nature of the African refugee experience.

African refugees today, he writes, are not the same kind of political refugees as those who fled wartime Poland or France during Second World War,

3 Sébastien Bachelet, "'Wasting Mbeng': Adventure and Trust Among Sub-Saharan Migrants in Morocco," *Ethnos. Journal of Anthropology* 84 (5) 2019: 849–866.

4 Amade M'charek, "Harraga: Burning Borders, Navigating Colonialism," *The Sociological Review* 68 (2) (2020): 418– 434.

who often carried with them "a certain sense of ideological and personal honor." "They [African refugees – T. R.] do not have a sense of pride in having resisted authority. Their displacement arises primarily from an accumulation of suffering – family, administrative, and material hardships – and the hope for a better life."[5] African states also long debated whether they should accept refugees at all, as the movement of millions of people often represented a threat from their perspective, with the looming risk of losing control. African countries to which hundreds of thousands flee from hunger, such as Sudan, began implementing refugee control policies as early as the 1960s. Later, under UN (UNHCR) influence, they established a strict refugee regime with a support system that ultimately provided inadequate material assistance. What Ząbek makes clear from the outset is, above all, the continuity and enduring nature of displacement in Africa – the near permanence of refugee routes, expulsions, and escapes, and their lasting presence on the continent over at least the past several decades.

An example of the persistence of exile can be seen in the cycles of drought, followed by famine, that affect countries in the Sahel, the southern edge of the Sahara, where fragile, rain-dependent nomadic herding barely sustains survival. These disasters are most famously associated with Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Chad, where, as in the late 1960s or mid-1980s, droughts bring devastation – livestock dies, crops fail, and millions of people flee to escape starvation. These people were photographed by renowned humanitarian crisis photojournalists like Sebastião Salgado and James Nachtwey. It was for these hundreds of thousands of refugees that donations were collected worldwide during the famous 1985 LiveAid concert and the multi-artist performance of *We Are the World*. Those who survive will settle on the lands of farmers and other pastoral tribes in Sudan, Darfur, and Chad, gradually sparking tensions and conflicts over land, water, and access to resources. Many migrate to large African cities, such as Khartoum, a sprawling metropolis of ten million, in search of means to survive. Over time, the escalation of armed conflicts in Eritrea and Ethiopia will spark new conflicts and tensions with Sudan in the 1980s. Sudan, for its part, will both implement the UNHCR conventions and requirements and apply the regulations developed by the Organization of African Unity (OAU). These OAU guidelines distinctly differentiate between refugees fleeing war, suffering, and hunger and those perceived as the political and military vanguard of states seen as potential threats to internal security. The history of these hardships lies in the fact that in Africa, especially around the Sahel region, people have periodically been forced to relocate *en masse*

5 Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*, 74. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this artice.

due to meteorological and ecological catastrophes since the administrative decolonization of the 1960s. They often settle on more fertile lands among farming communities, which almost inevitably leads to recurring conflicts and clashes. These conflicts take the form of tribal and religious tensions and wars, as exemplified by the turmoil in South Sudan, the regions of Kordofan and the Nuba Mountains, and the armed clashes along the Chad-Sudan border, particularly in Darfur. In addition to causes of displacement related to recurring crop failures and drought, Ząbek details the brutal logic of ethnic and religious conflicts, such as the more than decade-long war between the Arab-African Muslim North and the predominantly Black Christian and animist South.

In examining the origins of African displacement, a brutal logic of violence and cruelty is starkly revealed, evident, for example, in Sudan's civil war. This logic surfaces in an "ethnography of suffering" – stories of refugees that are intensified through their collection, interconnection, and accumulation. These are the stories of people encountered by the ethnographer in camps on semi-desert peripheries, in urban refugee registration centers in Sudan, and in Kenya. Ząbek follows the works of scholars like Liisa Malkki, John Davis, and Barbara Harrell-Bond into "zones of suffering," where it becomes increasingly clear that ethnography is nearly impossible, both ethically and emotionally. This challenge is heightened by the setting, where such suffering is revealed under the authority of UN camps, with layers of control and protection. It mirrors the experience of hundreds of aid workers moving in air-conditioned vehicles with UNHCR logos to air-conditioned, secure offices standing just beside rows of refugee tents. The author thus writes about conversations in camps in Kenya, for which he obtained official permissions from UNHCR, but these interactions were far from the kind of research where one lives among and shares daily life with people. "The research I was conducting at that time did not adhere to the principles of ethnographic study." "Twice a day, I was driven from the UNHCR base to the refugee camp in a four-wheel-drive vehicle equipped with a satellite radio, wearing a bulletproof vest and accompanied by armed police."[6]

The stories that reach the ethnographer in these settings – in aid stations and refugee camps – are accounts that gather experiences of death, dispossession and escape. At times, these narratives are silenced or obscured; at other times, they are intensified and escalated. They contain underlying constructs, with past and present obscurities, much like the experiences of Second World War and Holocaust survivors – camp experiences that, in Poland, have been collected and interpreted with deep commitment. In Ząbek's book, however,

6 Ibid., 22.

these accounts form into continuous threads of events organized to reconstruct the relentless logic of escalating armed conflicts that devastate the lives of farmers, herders, and refugees, reaching major African cities. These recurring stories and series of remembered atrocities form a sequence of events. Ząbek recounts testimonies from conversations detailing cruelties against women, forced to bear children – future soldiers. He also describes accounts of their killing whenever the perspective of warlords shifts. Soon after, there are also stories of women soldiers who themselves commit atrocities while simultaneously experiencing cruel treatment. In these accounts of ethnic and political strife, we see how violence spreads across the country – how the rebellion in South Sudan transforms into internal conflict, as the people of the Nuba Mountains and the Dinka tribes from pastoral highlands turn against each other and begin to kill one another, drawn into fighting by internal political factions aligning with military leaders.

Thus, when an independent South Sudan finally emerges after years of conflict, it carries with it a history of prolonged suffering that continues to generate tensions and strife. At the very roots of this nation's story are the recurring, severe droughts in the Sahel, which have simultaneously turned people into "environmental refugees." Waves of drought and the collapse of entire herds continually pushed people from Ethiopia into Sudan, which was negotiating refugee policies with the UNHCR and OAU, pressured to enforce controls by international institutions and NGOs (a term sometimes read in African parlance as neocolonial missions: "No Good Organizations"). The droughts in the Sahel also displaced Arab herders from Chad, who then migrated into Sudan's Darfur region, effectively invading local farmers' lands, armed with firearms, as mounted "janjaweed" warriors on horseback. In response, the attacked farmers organized their own new wave of violence: self-defense militias, also armed, sometimes with Kalashnikov rifles. Against this backdrop, patterns of violence and brutality emerge, exposing the vast landscape of Africa's suffering – a "heart-shaped" continent[7] where, over the past five decades, tens of millions have died in wars with the highest toll worldwide. "Violence," writes Ząbek, "in the broadest sense of the word, is the use of force, coercion, assault, but also the acts of shaming, defiling, desecrating, exerting influence over another person's thoughts, behavior, and physical condition." "Violence and cruelty," the author continues, "are widespread practices in Eritrea, systematic in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of

7 From the publisher's note on the cover of Olga Stanisławska's book, where it mentions Graham Greene's words (who said that this continent, Africa, is shaped like "the human heart"), see Olga Stanisławska, *Rondo de Gaulle'a* [De Gaulle's roundabout] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Książkowe Twój Styl, 2001).

Congo, and constantly present in Guinea, Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, Togo, and Congo-Brazzaville."[8] Refugees from Eritrea, for instance, are escaping mandatory military service that can extend beyond six years, where they are frequently beaten, humiliated, and subjected to torture. If they flee abroad and are deported back, they face the threat of execution. These cycles of violence include, in turn, arrest, and beating by police and security forces, imprisonment marked by sanctioned violence, and, more broadly, the experience of being subject to the local legal system.

Journeys, "Voyage," Community: The Passage to Europe

However, the accounts that gather and accumulate acts of violence within the narrative stand out in this ethnography. It is important to remember that these are most often the voices of victims and refugees – people gathered in refugee camps in northern Kenya, Uganda, or Sudan.

The stories – articulated in conversations with a "white," "bearded" European, a protected official, and at the same time, a patient listener – carry a situational gesture of framing one's life as an experience of persecution, of recalling trauma and violence. This echoes the accounts of witnesses and survivors of Nazi camps, the "survivors," as Agnieszka Dauksza wrote, with their "fragmented narratives."[9] The biographical method, along with the biographical material itself, encompassing experiences of pain and survival, is far from uniform. It contains layers of past and present obscurities, moments of chaotic, tangled narration – a "trajectory of suffering" in which, as Fritz Schütze and Gerhard Riemann[10] demonstrated, the individual is driven by external forces that are perceived as misfortunes. In his book, Ząbek frequently juxtaposes not so much the biographies as the experiences of the journeys taken by fleeing travelers, which unfold as treks filled with random suffering and accidental death. From Ethiopia to Sudan, Egypt, and then to Europe; from Gambia to Senegal, then onward to Mali, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco, and from there to Europe. From Chad to Darfur, to Sudan and Libya, and then to Italy.

Refugees carry their forged or "weak" passports, often unaccepted by border guards and police, who may recognize their status or deny it, depending on the

8 Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*, 143–144.

9 Agnieszka Dauksza, *Klub Auschwitz i inne kluby. Rwane opowieści przeżywców* [Auschwitz Club and other clubs. Torn stories from survivors] (Gdańsk:słowo/obraz terytoria, 2016).

10 Gerhard Riemann and Fritz Schütze, "'Trajektoria' jako podstawowa koncepcja teoretyczna w analizach cierpienia i bezładnych procesów społecznych" ['Trajectory' as a basic theoretical concept in the analyzes of suffering and chaotic social processes], *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 36 (2) (1992): 89–109.

political climate, military actions, or the possibility of accepting a bribe. Along the way, they encounter both those who help and those who deceive, bringing death. In the Maghreb countries, especially, the dark skin of people from South Sudan often invites violence, as it does for people from West Africa, like in the stories of migrants from Gambia or Senegal. "The 'white' Arabs, or generally people from northern cities like Tripoli, immediately recognize the 'black' people from the South and treat them with cruelty," explained Masane, recounting his journey. "If the police catch you, they can throw you in prison – no trial, nothing. If you don't pay, they'll beat you like an animal, hitting you on the head. [...] They give you two days to pay. If you don't have money, they make you call your relatives, beating you so that your family understands they have to pay."[11] At the same time, strangers also offer help: they give money, and buy food – like roasted corn cobs – as they are aware of the refugees' difficult fate. In the account of an Ethiopian man, recorded in his memoirs, Sudanese people they met along the way warned them that the desert was terrifying and that they might die there. "His wife cried for us," he wrote, "but we told him that once we had made the decision, we couldn't turn back. If we returned to Ethiopia, we would all be killed, and the situation in Sudan was going from bad to worse."[12]

Recurring themes in the stories include losing one's way and the risk of death from exhaustion. The desert poses a constant threat, where it's easy to get lost just a few kilometers away from the Nile. The accounts also show how destructive and exhausting the journeys on foot are, with people lacking the strength to carry enough water. This is where the stage of crossing the "internal sea" begins – the Sahara – where the peoples of the North organize transport. This is the first point at which refugees pay large sums for transport, with families back in Ethiopia, Gambia, Senegal, or Cameroon pooling their resources to cover the cost. Refugees are packed tightly onto pickup trucks, with only minimal water supplies, and along the route, the drivers often demand additional fees. If they do not receive them, they threaten to abandon the refugees in the middle of the desert, condemning them to certain death. Those who refuse to pay sometimes attempt to continue on foot, often with tragic outcomes. Refugees from Central or West Africa, raised amid forests and savannas, are not only unfamiliar with the desert but, as Ząbek shows, are almost panic-stricken by it. They ask fishermen along the Nile, smugglers, and sometimes even conmen for guidance – how to act, where to go, and whom to approach.

11 Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*, 277.

12 This is the famous story of Taddele, who in the 1970s made his way from Ethiopia to Sudan, then to Egypt, and from there to the United States, see Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*, 257. See also Tadelle Teshale, *Life History of an Ethiopian Refugee (1944–1991): Sojourn in the Fourth World* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).

They all head north: to Algeria and Morocco, and from there to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, where they try to cross fences and barbed-wire barriers – increasingly p r o f e s s i o n a l structures, equipped with cameras and motion sensors. Some attempt to reach Spain via the Strait of Gibraltar or the Canary Islands by small boats and rafts. Many also cross the Sahara directly to Libya, a country where the state administration has been volatile for more than thirty years and where there are uncontrolled groups of transporters, but also groups that intimidate refugees and extort money from them. Smugglers use threats, blackmail, and violence. After collecting payment, people set off across the sea to Lampedusa and other islands – ideally in September – in boats entirely unsuited for the journey, often carrying three or four times the number of people they can safely hold. Overloaded and unstable boats capsize under the impact of waves. Occasionally, a fire breaks out on board, forcing passengers to jump into the water. Some are pulled from the sea by local fishermen – chilled, covered in gasoline, and barely conscious. The sea route to Europe from Libya and Tunisia is particularly dangerous, with smugglers writing the risk of death into the whole endeavor. The death toll is counted in the thousands.

As a result, many refugees often opt for the land route. They first settle in Moroccan cities, typically in neglected, trash-filled suburbs, living in terrible conditions as they prepare for the "crossing" into Europe (to Ceuta and Melilla). The ethnographer Sebastien Bachelet spent months with such groups of young migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, in his case – from Cameroon.[13] He lived, among other places, in the suburbs of Rabat, the capital of Morocco, where he accompanied them as they prepared for the "jump" to Europe. They stayed in a dilapidated, overcrowded building with cramped rooms and no running water. The place was occupied by Cameroonians who gathered there to finally undertake *mbeng*, the "journey to Europe."

This paints a complete picture of the struggle to reach Europe, to make the "jump" (referred to as "jumping borders," *sauter les frontières*) across to the other side. It is a process that requires time and careful preparation. In the suburbs, in cramped, illegally constructed buildings, and along the way in forest camps in northern Morocco, the struggle to succeed – to make it across to the other side – unfolds. As Bachelet's interviewees explain, the key is not so much in knowing how and where to cross but in "building the right mindset" or "developing the proper mentality."[14] They climb the walls in groups, at multiple spots simultaneously, to make it harder for the guards to bring them down.

13 Bachelet, "'Wasting Mbeng'."

14 Ibid., 857.

However, whom one meets during the preparations is crucial, as, in these conditions, people rely on each other for safety. They protect one another from bandits and the Arab city guards, who often expel migrating "black" individuals from the city, even taking them out to the desert.

This closeness in cooperation builds trust among them and, moreover, helps them endure the harshest conditions. Two Cameroonians whom Bachelet met, along with two others, lived for months in the Cameroonian ghetto – a crowded building locally referred to as "the Embassy" (*l'Ambassade*). It is there that plans and preparations take shape as entire groups ready themselves to cross the razor-wire fences. In this "Little Cameroon," people gather their strength, preparing for what seems impossible – overcoming fences lined with barbed and razor wire, with barriers in between that tear at their hands and bodies. They also prepare themselves for pain, for enduring physical suffering, for experiencing what they call "the shock" (*le choc*). This jump, as the Cameroonians say, cannot be done alone; it requires finding the right people who help build the mental strength needed to reach the goal, to "achieve the goal," as they put it, and, at the same time, to "conquer oneself." This does not change the fact that these relationships are fragile, just as life on the refugee journey is unstable. "Life is hard in Morocco," where they try to work illegally on construction sites and in markets, only to be cheated, intimidated, denied wages, and sometimes even beaten. These temporary bonds also eventually break down; they are fragile, and the worst thing is causing someone to lose their chance, to fail in *mbeng*. Suspicion and accusations may target those who disrupt cooperation, but this is unrelated to the right to an individual attempt, known as *pontiac*. It is understood that such a solo crossing can succeed with the proper mental focus. Thus, it is not uncommon for everyone to know that someone is going solo; by morning, they vanish with their zodiac, a one-person inflatable raft. What truly angers migrants, however, is disrupting the focus, breaking *mbeng*. A properly prepared mindset is like a concentrated force of unbreakable will to overcome the barriers – that is why people with a "good mentality" gather together. The jump is the moment that determines whether they will live, or reclaim their lives; this is the purpose of the entire psychological journey they undergo. When Sebastien Bachelet attended an impromptu gathering at *l'Ambassade*, he met a young man from Cameroon with whom he spoke at length about the crossings. After a while, however, the Cameroonian began shouting, accusing him of being a spy for the border guards. "But it doesn't matter; we're ready!" he yelled. "We can eat your fences!"[15]

15 Ibid., 854.

In Gambia and Senegal, the journey to Europe is almost a cultural archetype – a path to follow, a challenge that defies fate. This journey, known as backway in Gambia, as Ząbek points out,[16] is seen as a test of strength, much like the traditional hunt for dangerous animals. This repeated, and highly desired path to success – to Europe – becomes a recurring pattern, where not migrating or not attempting the "jump" is perceived as a "weakness," a lesser way of life. In the opposite direction, from Europe to Africa, come photos of happy refugees posing against the background of beautiful buildings, well-kept cities, and (often not their own) cars. There are also photos, as Ząbek describes, of joyful brothers after the jump, wearing torn, blood-stained clothes but already in UN camps and undergoing refugee procedures. Earlier, they had not only trained to climb makeshift ladders and ropes twisted from rags but had also carefully burned all their documents and passports to ensure nothing could be found on them. Only a few make it across, but there are stories of Africans being guided and supported by their families living in France, of finding stable jobs – for example, as truck drivers. Most, however, end up working and living on the streets or in forced labor on plantations, many surviving day to day. Many who send their earnings back to relatives or parents in Africa are deceived, only learning of the betrayal years later when they return. However, stories of success and bravery on the journey continue to circulate, inspiring a desire for competition and status within the social structure. They inspire people to cultivate a "strong mentality," to "test their will," and to attempt the magical jump – something that, from a systemic and logical perspective, is entirely impossible.

The Awareness of Violence: Journey, Risk, Death

When we view ethnographic research conducted among sub-Saharan refugees as a kind of encounter with an extreme experience, almost impossible to convey, it still reveals a range of realities and diverse stories of suffering and violence. In numerous accounts from conversations in UNHCR camps in Central Africa, it becomes clear that the role of the "official" or the "bearded white man" elicits narratives of complaint, lament, or uncontrollable, painful memories of escape and survival. These stories often accumulate and intensify the portrayal of violence. These experiences repeatedly emerge in successive narratives, not only tied to stories of fleeing war zones, such as in South Sudan or Eritrea but also to the violence present in large African cities that function as refugee camps. Ząbek, like other authors – such as Maaike Vledder in her work on the camp known as Moria

16 Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*, 110–114.

on the Greek island of Lesbos[17] – illustrates that these camps are essentially vast systems of detention and segregation for hundreds of thousands of people. They are mechanisms for controlling and monitoring how refugees live, how they build shelter, how they eat, how they and their homes look like. The materials, coverings, tarps for tents, bags of flour and rice – everything refugees receive for survival – are controlled by humanitarian workers and marked with the logo of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Manuals for humanitarian staff even recommend sudden headcount of camp residents, preferably at night or early in the morning (such recommendations can be found in training guides for the global humanitarian network Oxfam).[18] The Kenyan camps Kakuma and Dadaab, as described in Ząbek's work, are essentially city-states for refugees from South Sudan and Somalia. They are organized into distinct quarters for different ethnic and national groups, each governed by its own strict rules. The food portions distributed there – a ration of flour and a small amount of oil – barely allow for biological survival, with both symbolic and real violence woven into the fabric of daily life. Despite this, refugees try to endure by seasoning their rations, bartering with local farmers and other groups in the camp, and sometimes even growing small gardens. Even a domesticated and familiarized space is under constant surveillance. On Lesbos, in the massive Moria camp for refugees from Syria, the Middle East, and Africa, ethnographer Maaike Vledder observed how people, after painstakingly adapting to their environment – such as by planting herb gardens to prepare traditional dishes – were forcibly relocated to other areas, how they have additional groups crammed into their already crowded tents, creating unbearable overcrowding.[19] In contrast, the camp staff buildings are usually separate, offering large, modern, air-conditioned spaces that stand in stark contrast to the vast expanses of makeshift homes constructed from sticks and canvas. Also, Maciej Ząbek illustrates how this symbolic, exclusionary violence is widely felt and gradually recognized. When white, air-conditioned, four-wheel-drive vehicles marked with UNHCR logos – equipped with satellite antennas and carrying staff to offices – speed down the camp's pathways, they are often met with flying stones and hostile shouts. Similarly, in the Moria camp, the frustration and anger of refugees, driven by relentless overcrowding and the harsh system of surveillance and

17 Maaike Vledder, *Agency in the Border Trap: Humanitarian Power in the Moria Camp*, MA Thesis under the supervision of Mateusz Laszczkowski, University of Warsaw, 2021.

18 Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*, 336.

19 Vledder, *Agency in the Border*, 30–33, 50–53.

headcount, often turned into protests and acts of aggression. In September 2020, a fire broke out in the overcrowded camp on Lesbos, and as the destruction unfolded, cries of euphoria and destructive joy were heard from the camp's own residents. As Maaike Vledder recounts, they shouted while striking plastic bottles: "Azadi, azadi, azadi, azadi! No camp, freedom! No camp, freedom! Azadi, azadi, azadi, azadi!"[20] – "No camp!" "Freedom!" The word *azadi* in Farsi also carries the same meaning: freedom.

In the camps and along Africa's migration routes, the controlled care within refugee camps and the immense risks on migration paths are accompanied by other forms of violence, which, as Ząbek demonstrates, are difficult to comprehend from the legal perspective of the global North. For instance, Sudan's legal system itself incorporates elements of violence. Although Sudan has ratified international covenants on civil and political rights and the Declaration of Human Rights, its legal system effectively combines Islamic Sharia law with premodern forms of tribal law. This includes provisions for material "blood compensation" for crimes and formal permissions for inflicting physical suffering.

Elders' courts, essentially a form of tribal councils, operate in large African refugee camps within the sectors of specific ethnic groups. These courts can impose brutal corporal punishment for violations of customary norms, such as abortion, alcohol consumption, intimate relationships, relationships with Christians, or apostasy.[21]

The outer edges of major cities, such as the areas surrounding Sudan's Greater Khartoum, home to over ten million people, with its refugee settlements and camps, represent the final circle of violence. This is where millions of refugees from the conflict-ridden South Sudan find themselves, fleeing threats posed by both government forces and various factions of fighting rebels. Crowded into makeshift shacks and tents on the city outskirts, these people live without rights or any form of protection. In legal and humanitarian terms, they are internally displaced persons (IDPs). Visibly darker-skinned and originating from the South, they stand out in the hostile cities of the North, where they have slim chances to survive and find work. On the one hand, the authorities classify them as internally displaced persons (thus, they

20 Ibid., 6.

21 These are local, tribal laws, and the deliberations of the elders often conclude with rulings such as compensation for severe beatings in the form of "blood payment," which demonstrates a local acceptance of the right to control another person's life. It is also tied to the frequent violation of human rights in Africa: beatings, imprisonment, the sanctioning of slavery, violence against women, and, most distressingly, widespread violence against children, especially refugee children. See Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*, 158–162, 185–194.

do not fight in the South), but on the other hand, they are treated with brutality, seen as a burden on the fragile state, and as potential rebels.

They receive no support and exist as if outside the system. While they may seek work and help in the city, they are simultaneously stripped of their possessions and deceived by the authorities. Often, they are ordered to deposit their belongings in the desert and construct settlements from tarps and poles, only to be forcibly relocated overnight as their settlements are then bulldozed. Many are left nearly abandoned in the desert, where, deprived of warm clothing and shelter, they fall ill or even die from the cold.[22]

These are the people who, driven by their determination to survive, attempt to cross to Europe. They migrate, gather in Libya or Tunisia, pay smugglers, and board overloaded, unsteerable boats. This escape route from Africa's zones of violence, however, is a conscious one shaped by prior experiences of risk and danger. Tunisian anthropologist Amade M'charek illustrates this experience through the image of refugees' extreme determination – a resolve so difficult to imagine outside this world, particularly among maritime authorities and southern European populations. She photographs and describes, among other things, a boulder on the Tunisian Mediterranean coast with a spray-painted arrow pointing toward the sea and the words: "Europe, this way." Above the word "Europe," written in Arabic, there is also a drawing of a crown. This, of course, represents one layer of African reality. M'charek recalls the words of a refugee who had just paid everything he could and said that while such a journey might cost him his life, "it is better to die than to be dead while living." M'charek highlights the profound irony of this gesture, as everyone knows the way to Europe. At least in theory, everyone knows that they could go to an office, an embassy in Tunis, or travel to the idyllic island of Djerba, connected to the mainland by a causeway, and board a plane from there. And since that is ultimately not an option, this "helpful" clue appears, as much and as little. Young people embark on this journey, defying the logic of borders, as it has been widely known for years in Tunisia and Algeria "they burn them" – undertaking what they call *harraga*, derived from the Arabic word *ahrag*, meaning "to burn." Initially, the term referred

22 Such sudden displacement of people from their encampments in cities, often in the middle of the night, represents one of the most brutal strategies used against internally displaced persons (in this case, by the Khartoum authorities) described in this work. Attempts to resist such evictions to the outskirts of the city, as Ząbek reports, "were suppressed with the help of the police." He continues: "according to eyewitness accounts, the displaced had literally nothing. They couldn't take anything with them because, by the time they returned from work, their homes [tents – T. R.] were already gone. In the remote outskirts of the city where they were taken, they sat on sacks during the day, exposed to the scorching heat without water, and at night, to escape the cold, they buried themselves in the ground. Some in this way died." Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*, 300.

to bypassing visa rules between Tunisia and Algeria, dating back to a time when it was still relatively easy to travel from the Maghreb to France. Later, it came to signify burning borders and fences – but in a way that left them still passable. In one account, the anthropologist describes a young Tunisian who succeeded in making it to Lampedusa and then Sicily, where his family in France guided him further. They sent money for bus tickets, allowing him to travel through Italy on his way to France. Finally, after a week, his family welcomed him to France, and before long, he was enrolled in a school. Harraga is difficult; it requires immense effort from both the daring individuals and their families or wider support networks. Without preparation, determination, and constant strategizing – zigzagging, gathering strength – similar to those preparing for *mbeng* in Morocco, one cannot overcome the barriers of fences and the treacherous sea.

Moreover, as M'charek demonstrates, *harraga* is also a way of "expanding" the living space, as more family members often follow later. At the same time, it is terrifyingly dangerous: people from Tunisia's southern coast almost daily collect objects, clothing, and shoes washed ashore by the waves. In one of her works, the author describes how a local resident collects and stores these items to raise awareness about what is happening around them and at sea. "Burning" borders, however, is essentially an act of expansion and extension, reflecting the aspirations and hopes for a better, successful life among those fleeing along Africa's migration routes. In this context, on yet another level, the activist efforts in the Mediterranean Sea, along with critical and activist art responding to the horrific and unnecessary deaths at sea, become more comprehensible. In this instance, a project reflecting such a reaction – both critical and deliberately masquerading as a real initiative – was created by the Zentrum für Politische Schönheit (Center for Political Beauty).[23] A few years ago, they presented a deceptively plausible and seemingly straightforward proposal in the form of a video illustrating the construction of a bridge connecting the coast of Tunisia with Sicily. The project's utility is announced with the accompaniment of triumphant music in a promo-like animated video, complete with EU and Austrian government funding logos, emphasizing its undeniable contribution to improving safety. Subsequent scenes showcase a system of a thousand rescue rafts anchored between Italy and Africa, equipped with communication systems, food, and water. This project, much like the "Europe, this way" inscription on the boulder by the sea, clearly amplifies the deadly risks of crossing into Europe, "burning" its borders, or, as in Morocco, attempting the "jump" over razor and wire fences that seem impossible to breach.

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23 *Die Brücke/The Bridge*, Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, accessed January 20, 2023, https://politicalbeauty.de/jean-monnet-bruecke.html.

Closure: Escape and Survival in the Ethnographic Present

Escape routes from the southern Sahara, the Sahel belt, the Nuba Mountains, Darfur, and West African countries have followed similar paths for decades. They are less an extraordinary reaction, like the refugee movements from the time of European wars. These migration routes are far from safe, and traversing them demands immense determination, often referred to in Rabat as "mental preparation" for the journey. It introduces entirely new meanings to the refugee journey, framing it more as a native, perpetual trap shaped by the surrounding environment and the powerful ideals of the backway endeavor, which one can at best attempt to escape through a "magic gate" (to borrow and amplify the words of Czesław Miłosz). Even the sign pointing toward Europe on the seashore, as described by M'charek, symbolizes this jump – one that effectively defies the logic of a world that could otherwise be seen as predictable. In Tunisia, the presence of this fake "grassroots" road sign is particularly significant. In the surrounding area, on the impoverished southern coast, the phrase "living beyond the road signs" is a synonym for ultimate exclusion and entrapment in an overcrowded, impoverished province. This "jump" into another world is thus always abrupt, demanding, and innovative, to borrow a term from a completely different context.[24] It astonishes with its audacity, though it offers nothing resembling a happy ending. It is a reckless initiative, like the daring acts of groups of people climbing fences in Ceuta and Melilla, so that at least some might have a chance to make it through. At one point, Ząbek describes an incident at an airport in Eritrea, where a taxi driver, having been persuaded earlier, discreetly drives two men to a departing plane. They hide in the cargo hold but die after takeoff, thousands of kilometers above the ground. On another occasion, as recorded in various reports,[25] three Nigerians in the port of Lagos clung to the underwater blade of a merchant ship and, likely taking refuge in the hold at times, traveled over the open sea for more than 4,000 kilometers, eventually reaching the port of Las Palmas in

24 The "Jump," as a mechanism transferred from a different world – the world of migrants, is at the core of Judi Werthein's poignant work on individuals crossing the borders between Mexico and the United States. It is the Brinco sneaker series – *brinco* meaning "jump" in Spanish. These high-top sneakers, produced "serially" in China at the artist's commission (to highlight degrading outsourcing practices), feature a map of border areas printed inside the lining, a flashlight and compass hidden in a keychain, and compartments for money. Designed with practicality in mind, they are intended to aid migrants in their attempts to cross the border, see Judi Werthein, *Brinco*, accessed January 22, 2023, https://www.stationmuseum.com/past-exhibitions/corpocracy/judi-werthein/.

25 Magdalena Bojanowska, "Uczepili się płetwy sterowej tankowca i przedostali na Wyspy Kanaryjskie. Płynęli 11 dni" [They clung to the tanker's rudder fin and made it to the Canary Islands. They sailed for 11 days], *Gazeta.pl*, November 29, 2022, accessed January 1, 2023.

the Canary Islands. This time, the daring individuals miraculously survived; severely dehydrated and hypothermic, they were taken to hospitals, though it remains unclear whether they stayed in Spain afterward.

In the journeys and experiences of refugees amidst the vast web of African conflicts, it is difficult to find any trace of positive logic. The escape routes depicted in Ząbek's book are marked by inertia and decades-long continuity – patterns of violence and flight that seem to have no end. Survival is the key to understanding the journey and the attempts to break through to a neighboring refugee camp, a neighboring country, and ultimately across the "sea" of the Sahara to the coast, and from there to Europe. The huge gap between the goals of aid and humanitarian policies and the actual conditions of life and survival evokes ambivalent feelings, including resentment toward non-governmental and humanitarian organizations.[26] In the book on the ethnography of violence and suffering, there is a distinct critique of the humanitarian aid system – a critique that, at times, is difficult to disagree with.

It is a powerful critique of "dead aid," much like the arguments in Dambisa Moyo's book[27] – a condemnation of the humanitarian care camp system, which operates like capitalist enterprises competing with each other. These camps employ sophisticated techniques of control and segregation, enforce exploitative management systems, and "cut costs" in areas where other care providers struggle to intervene. Anna Hoss expanded on this point in her review of Maciej Ząbek's book,[28] noting that even more critical perspectives on the humanitarian aid system emerge alongside such pointed interpretations. It is portrayed as a vast "humanitarian industry" and criticized for excluding the existence of suffering from the modern world, failing to recognize it as an inherent aspect of the social and lived world. In the author's interpretation, it represents a vision rooted in modern or Enlightenment-era pretensions.[29]

This final statement, however, provokes in me an anthropological objection, as it leans toward a certain extremity, which seems to obscure the level of reflection and ethical debate that has been shaped within contemporary anthropology and post-war ethical discourse, grounded in the knowledge

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26 See, e.g., an anthropological study of the development of humanitarian enterprises in Poland during the transformation period, Elżbieta Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka, *Institutionalised Dreams: The Art of Managing Foreign Aid* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020).

27 Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

28 Anna Hoss, "Nagie *życie*. Co różni pomoc od przemocy" [review of Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*], *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 5 (2019).

29 See Ząbek, *Uchodźcy w Afryce*, 446–449.

of the Holocaust and the two World Wars. This does not, however, alter the broader picture of suffering, violence, and the "jump," "the ethnography of violence and suffering" present in the book and in subsequent ethnographies of escape, the conscious determination in Bachelet's work, the burning of borders, and the systemic order of violence explored by M'charek. At the same time, this ethnography of escape routes – tragic for many yet still frequently traveled from Africa's conflict zones – and the conflicts themselves starkly challenge the very possibility of creating a definitive account of zones of suffering and violence. These zones emerge regularly in specific locations, shifting politically and historically yet retaining continuity. It requires a different perspective and, in a sense, undermines anthropology's task of documenting the world of actions, desires, relationships, political ambitions, and social conditions. What remains is merely a description and a kind of testimony, but at times it takes the form of an "ethnographic present," that is, a timeless, ahistorical testimony, an atemporal depiction of socio-cultural systems. It is a record that, by employing the formula of an ahistorical present (or in a "safely" distant past), pushes aside what is happening in the here and now. It *de facto* separates the described world from political, social, or embodied experience. It ceases to be coeval and loses its agency and connection to the anthropologist who writes and observes.[30] Surprisingly, this "present tense" proves adequate here, as it allows for description o n l y. Moreover, it can also serve as an effective tool elsewhere and a form of continuous, transformative reflection, as demonstrated by Narmala Halstead.[31] Furthermore, such an approach can be employed as a way to extend the experience of "presentness" within the research field. In this case, the closure of experiences is tied to their continuity and repetitiveness, their almost fearless nature. It takes the form of a "stalemate," as depicted in Łukasz Skąpski's project – a model of thoroughly modern, technologically advanced fences constructed with barbed and razor wire. This, then, is an anthropology that at times struggles to incorporate elements of change and political agency, uncovered and almost advocated by contemporary ethnographies.

Instead, what emerges are portrayals of migration routes retraced over decades, with descriptions of refugee paths and elements of ingenuity and determination, which gradually transform into an awareness of the impossible, an insurmountable barrier. However, what seems impossible here also

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

31 Narmala Halstead, "Experiencing the Ethnographic Present: Knowing through 'Crisis'," in *Knowing How to Know. Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Present*, ed. Narmala Halstead, Eric Hirsch and Judith Okely (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).

becomes possible, and in some cases, a "jump" to another world, to Europe, is achieved. For this reason, escape and refuge demand an immense amplification of strength and a "good mentality" to break through and cross to the other side. Yet, as a whole, this picture remains difficult to accept. Ultimately, it portrays a form of changelessness, the permanence of zones of suffering and violence, a kind of eternal present, such as that found at Europe's borders – something anthropology strives so hard to challenge and, if only partially, dismantle.

Translated by Inga Michalewska-Cześnik

Abstract

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Escape, Survival, "The Jump": On African Refugee Routes – Ząbek, Bachelet, M'charek

This text outlines anthropological and ethnographic insights into African refugee routes. By describing the anthropology of migration, escape, and survival in Sub-Saharan Africa, I highlight the enduring presence of suffering and violence in the Sahel region and Central Africa, as well as the persistent myths surrounding journeys to Europe. I first refer to Maciej Ząbek's work, which sketches a panorama of refugee routes in Africa, then I turn to Sebastien Bachelet's study of the community of desperation and migrants overcoming the fences surrounding Spanish enclaves in Morocco. I also reference Amade M'charek's work on African migrants crossing and "burning" Europe's borders. In conclusion, I reflect on the paradoxical relevance of the ethnographic present in describing such experiences.

Keywords

refugees, migration, Africa, ethnography, survival, suffering

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