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Central Europe as City

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KRITIKA & KONTEXT

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Analiza pierwszego po okresie zimnej wojny zbrojnego konfliktu Wschodu z Zachodem, wyjaśniająca historyczne przyczyny, odkrywcza dla studiów geopolitycznych i napisana we właściwym czasie przez osobę wyjątkowo dobrze wiedzącą, co na prawdę miało miejsce, a także dobitnie prezentująca stanowisko autora. Doskonała lektura!

Zbigniew Brzeziński

Ron Asmus przez ponad 20 lat naszej znajomości był wyjątkowym analitykiem, dyplomatą i ekspertem zajmującym się Europą Środkową i Wschodnią. Jego książki powinny być lekturą obowiązkową dla wszystkich, którym zależy na Europie i jej sąsiadach. Nie wolno jej pominąć w analizie rosyjsko-gruzińskiego konfliktu z sierpnia 2008 r.

Madeleine K. Albright

Jest to wspaniała opowieść, obowiązkowa lektura dla wszystkich zainteresowanych amerykańską polityką zagraniczną i przyszłością naszych stosunków z Europą i Rosją.

Richard C. Holbrooke

Książka ta stawia twarde i niewygodne pytania, których na Zachodzie wiele osób nie chce słyszeć.

Adam Daniel Rotfeld

Wiarygodna i przekonywająca.

„Financial Times"

Szczegółowa... imponująca.

„Foreign Affairs"


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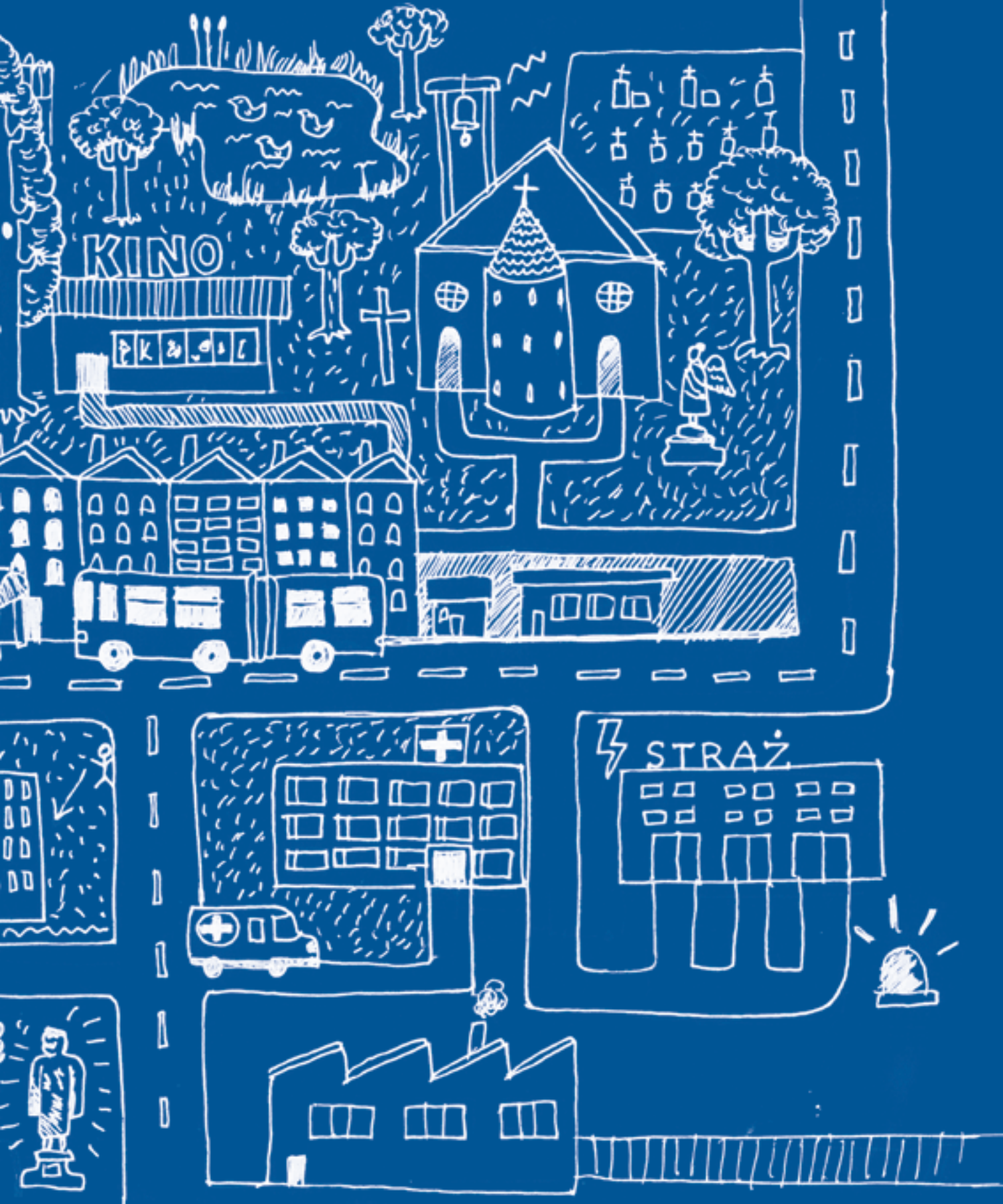
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STRAŻ

City Know How – We're All About to be Blamed

KATARZYNA **KAZIMIEROWSKA**

In one of Escher's paintings the city appears as a huge maze, with no beginning and no end. In another, the city looks more like the Tower of Babel, arching towards the sky. Each vision of the city is simultaneously genuine and misleading.

There are plenty to choose from – some are small towns and others are gargantuan cities. Some remind us of heavily breathing creatures, while others look like they're struggling to survive until tomorrow. In some you only see windows lit up by the faint blue glow of televisions, and in others you find life overflowing with joy and energy. Some appear brand new, but they rest on the cemeteries of the past and the memories of those who survived past storms.

It's a cliché, but the city is multilayered – an overlapping network of streets and authority. Part of the city belongs to the powers that be, while other parts belong to everyone (like the market or square). Depending on the season, power fluctuates up and down this chain of command. The authorities establish the rules of good and evil, and the crowd offers disagreement and alternatives. And then there are the strangers, who are responsible for invading the town, destroying its core, and working with residents to rebuild it in an unexpected fashion.

The figure of the stranger has always been present in the history of our towns. Historians tried to explain their presence, demonstrating the benefits and disadvantages of co-existence. But somehow, the aged still remember how the neighbor, precisely as a stranger, made it easier to change the order of the world. The Second World War was the principal humiliation of the Other in the 20th century. It distorted the idea of multicultural society and peaceful coexistence. It changed memory and language, and it divided residents into us vs. them. Since then, Central Europe has enjoyed relative peace, and now we can live in artificially created towns where people try not to remember their neighbors who suddenly disappeared but somehow manage to linger in our presence.

This issue tries to shed some light on the stories of small towns, which often get portrayed as places that are fit for nothing better than escape. But in fact, these are the heart of today's Central Europe. They're the places where we all come from – the shameful foundations for our small-town identities. Whether we like it or not, these places are the reservoirs of heritage that remind us of who we are. Perhaps knowing about such places doesn't improve our everyday lives, but surely it changes how we understand ourselves. Visiting Katowice, the Portuguese architect Eduardo Souto de Moura said that architecture should be like an island, where the animals (people) can sleep quietly. In a similar vein, I would say that towns are often like islands, and if we can manage to appreciate and protect their diversity and vitality, perhaps we too can learn to sleep a little better.

Katarzyna **Kazimierowska**

(1979) creative editor of this Res Publica Nova issue

The Three Key Stones of a City

MAREK **SEČKAŘ**

As with anything concerning Central Europe, this topic of this issue invites uncertainty and questions. That having been said, I would risk that anything like a definition of Central Europe must be based on its city culture. In a region of vague identities and shifting borders, cities are the stable footholds. Indeed, Central Europe's cultural personality stems not from states but from cities. Few countries in the region fall entirely within the cultural sphere of Central Europe. Instead, Central Europe is an intersection in which segments of states collide. But at the level of individual human settlements, Central Europe suddenly emerges in striking clarity.

Although Krakow and Wroclaw are decidedly Central European, we surely can't say that all of Poland belongs. And while we likewise can't include all of Austria, no one would think of excluding Vienna from the region. Or what about Romania? We would probably never call it a Central European country, but surely we must make allowances for Sibiu or Brasov. So it is – in spite of big history and international politics. Central Europe is a network of fragmented but culturally interconnected city civilizations.

Which begs the question, what is the essence of a Central European city? Architecture aside, it probably doesn't differ much from cities elsewhere in Europe. First of all, Central European towns have grown gradually and spontaneously. Their structure is therefore natural, yet strictly hierarchical. In the center, we find an accumulation of churches and palaces. These are the goals towards which people head and in whose shade they finally settle. The rich take refuge in this inner circle, while the poor accumulate at further reach.

Any user's guide to the Central European city must highlight two fundamental institutions: the church and pub. They stand against each other, eternal enemies fighting for the soul of the region. This tension is precisely the dynamic of human life, which grants the city its vitality. The church and the pub are opposed to each other, and yet they live in symbiosis. This is only possible due to the fact that they're separated by a square, an additional element in the life of the city. But while the church and pub were created on purpose, on the basis of a spatial and spiritual decision, the square was born spontaneously. It is not a construction, but a space enclosed by other constructions. The square is a place where people meet. This is where the people who go to the church meet the people who go to the pub. And the square is used by the people going from the church to the pub. The church is about the soul and the pub is about the body. The square is mostly about money, because it's a place for buying, selling and stealing. Such economic interests weld society together. Thanks to the square, the church and the pub can co-exist, existing independently and co-operating in the creation of city space.

But again, as far as this basic structure is concerned, Central European cities don't differ much from the cities in other parts of the old world. So what makes them specific? Of course, we can always ground their unique identities in history, and we would surely find a host of shared economic, cultural and political traits that could be called Central. But this isn't necessary for our purposes. It should be sufficient to understand Central European cities as simply connections, meeting points and intersections between individual ethnic and political units. Let's take for example the relationship between the Czech Republic and Austria. We can't deny the enormously sad fact that a bunch of very serious and unresolved problems – starting with the memory of WWII and postwar history and ending with nuclear energy – lie between these two countries. Thus, we can hardly speak about a common identity or shared interests. But when we look at cities such as Brno and Vienna, cultural similarities and affiliations unequivocally start to take shape, and discrepancies or barriers begin to fade. Even the border itself disappears. That's it – there are no borders between cities! At the level of international politics, Central Europe is a myth – or a dream. At the level of cities, it's a confirmed fact. This is what should ensue from the present volume.

Marek **Sečkař**

(1973) translator and editor of the Czech literary monthly Host..


M

MARKET
- SQUARE
- CHURCH

- WHERE THE CITY COMES TOGETHER? HISTORICAL APPROACH

The Square Must Burn

DOROTA **PIWOWARSKA**

First glances don't explain anything. Whirls of bodies and things seem like monstrous organisms – half grotesque, half hideous. It can take some time to pick out particular threads.

In Peter Breugel paintings, each person is a story unto themselves. And with closer inspection, untold details reveal themselves. The structures of intricately woven dramaturgy turn questions about the connections between various scenes into breakneck puzzles. In short, paintings by Breugel are real challenges – they need to be unraveled, and the action in each work needs to be dynamically reconstructed. For viewers, a scaffolding of sense can only emerge from this process of untangling and reconstructing. In the face of Lech Majewski's film *The Mill and the Cross*[1], any doubts about whether you can use the terminology of spectacle to describe the plastic arts should fade. Inspired by the Flemish painter, this film essay is a display of theatrical turmoil. Melodrama, captured in still by the painter, is again set in motion – the action hatches beneath the varnish. The frame bursts under performative pressure. *The Mill and the Cross* is a story drawn from the center of the painting "*The Road to Calvary*"[2] by Breugel the Elder, but it actually could be about any of his paintings. In his paintings we can sense continuity – where one frame ends, another begins. Breugel keeps painting the space and people who produce it – in multiplication, in the dynamics of

life in action, in unleashed and ripe carnality and in its symbolic attributes. Whether it is a town market, the suburbs, the meadow beneath a rocky edge, or even the ruins of the Tower of Babel, it is always the theme of the place defined as public which is the criterion for his choice of subject.

It all comes to the square. This is the place of the action that interests Breugel and gives direction to his scenery – the topos of urbanity and society, which is indispensable for the medieval community. This is the place where both his characteristic vision of the world and mystery take place, which could be defined as a tangle of politics and metaphysics – the social understanding of sense, dipped in a thick residue of existential fear, in the feeling of strangeness that goes beyond what is human. Multiplicity meets here, and it is here that the order of authority is established and the signs of power, identity, and norms are decided. It is also here that these same features are turned inside out when authority is taken over by the carnival.

Writing about medieval square, Mikhail Bakhtin sticks to this bipolar division into formal, officially authorized issues and those hidden, obscene elements (to stay etymologically close – kept backstage, behind the self-staging of the community, separated from what is emblematic and desired), which rise to the surface[3]. For Bakhtin, the medieval square becomes the battlefield of two orders – institutional vs. carnivalesque. While the first initiative belongs to the great hegemonies of the Church, monarchy, or city authorities, the second belongs to an unfounded initiative. As the reverse of everyday life and the normative order, Bakhtin suggested that the carnival had a homeostatic function. By providing space to everything that is usually leashed or pushed to the margins, suppressed or out of sight, the carnival guarantees a balance or counterweight to official discourse.

"Unofficial carnival culture had its own territory in medieval times and even in the renaissance era – the square and distinct times of days, holidays and fairs. The festive square (…) was a happy other world, existing within the official medieval world." Bakhtin continues, "there were specific types of relations – cavalier, familiar relations. At the squares, in churches, institutions and private houses there were hierarchic rules of contacts, ceremony, and norms of decency."[4] Such an opposition, between the festive square, an open and comfortable space, and the closed, conventional interiors of institutions, offers a dual vision of the world. As Bakhtin interprets the cultural reality of medieval language, body and form with great perspicacity, it is easy to notice that his reconstruction is based on a clear, dichotomous division. While writing about language, Bakhtin does not leave the realm of established oppositions, contrasts and poles, where he places the selected cultural phenomenon. "There was a distinct language heard in the square – familiar words, almost like a different language, impossible to be heard anywhere else, different from the language of the church, palace, courts, institutions, official literature, and the every day language of upper classes (aristocracy, noble men, upper priesthood, city authorities. (...) The festive square united an enormous amount of large and small species and forms soaked with the homogenous, carnival sense of the world."[5]

The question of whether the carnival really gave a uniform sense to the world, or if it was simply a reversal of all that was official, seems to sink on the surface of the Breugel canvas. Our first glance seems to confirm the intuition that the square generated a certain social symbolic energy. Bakhtin's key throws itself on the contemporary viewer without resistance. The grotesque, laughter, liturgy, fighting between carnival and fast, clown masks, death rituals, and licentiousness – travelling along this path lets us satisfy the erudite need of searching for sense.

What destroys clear interpretation is easily seen on film. In the foreground, you can see this deceitful dramaturgy – this is a question about the rules of connections between pictures or – as you might say – scenes. The eye – used for topographic and symbolic interpretation by Bakhtin – searches for the center, a strong focal point, which would bring the action together. But the visual turns into vibrating melodrama – nothing here seems to be complete or ready, the pictures seem to hatch into an astigmatic, performative process – and before they stiffen in form, the frame changes and moves forward. Before the

potential center is ready to emerge or take shape, another spacious detail arrives alongside a suspicion: Isn't this the place where the center of the world should be located? In Majewski's movie, the viewer has to face irritating visual uncertainty – not only is no action taken, but also no space emerges – the space seems to be decaying, crumbling. This differs from the description of Bakhtin, in which the official transfers limitlessly into the carnivalesque. Obverse and reverse loop around each other, and people keep balance on the edge of orders that are difficult to push into categories of formality and informality, center and periphery. Everything important happens on the side, on the edges that later become the very center of the frame.

This center becomes the greatest challenge. You loose your visual acuity. The game with the viewer – invisible in the beginning, starts by creating a view, undermining its domination, and testing it. The director puts the technical flaw into the picture: What's in the center cannot be seen completely, and fades away into irritating but visible waves. "Everybody looks at the center" – the voice of the narrator seems to say – "but there is no center or it is somewhere other than where you would like to find it." Perhaps this is what is most important in Breugel's paintings – he tells us more about the essence and potential of public space (even in contemporary life) than appears at first glance. Perhaps he tells us more, without denying his genius and the groundbreaking quality of his work, than Bakhtin.

In the history of spatial archetypes, beginnings are always key.[6] Initial models and their realizations are often the most significant for reflections and questions about the essence of topographic figures. It is as if this lack of previous experience allows for the creation, citing the terminology of Henri Lefebvre, of abstract and concrete space at the same time – everything is still universal and under construction. The medieval square becomes a site for the reconfiguration of meanings that shaped an earlier time. After all, the polis of antiquity is a reality that takes place and is set in public space. Here, the square is an agora, forum, and theatre. Everything that has something in common with cult, hierarchy, and the identity of community starts to hatch in confrontation and multiplication. While investigating changes in public space that he describes as belonging to the spectacle[7], or staging (it's not easy to translate the title of his study that refers to an original category called *western performance space)*, David Wiles attends to the spacious character of the polis and ancient communities more broadly. Everything meaningful and socially efficacious happens within a dimension that is spectacular and public. The question of how we can divide what is formal from what is spontaneous becomes impossible – as it would require drawing a strong line of demarcation between the sacred and profane, and public and private property. And in stark contrast to the conceptual realities of modern discourse, these categories do not exist or function in antiquity. Even medieval culture, which after all is built on the ancient model of world, can't be described in such terms. The Bakhtinian vision of the medieval square strongly employs a modern perspective: it demands the modern division and clear categories that allow for the arrangement of phenomenon in relevant sectors that define order: private, public, individual and collective. It can be assumed that Bakhtin's rhetoric has an ideological origin – an attempt to use the figure of the medieval square to oppose the Stalinist philosophy of central planning, domination and ideological control. In a way, Bakhtin's descriptions recreate the medieval square: he puts it back in the hands of the people, strengthens the role of free culture-formation and allows for the voice of the community in ways that make the activities of the group seem nearly democratic. Meanwhile, what we see in Breugel's paintings and Wiles's writings seem much more complicated.

The territory of control and territory of subversive forces is all the same square. The division between center and periphery, what is important and captivating and what is unimportant and trivial, seems impossible and groundless. It's easily seen in the paintings – even if the composition of the picture needs such division – this domination is absolute or defined. The energy and uniqueness of the square comes from the dynamic and non-obvious connection of elements

from different orders. There is no single objective point of view – indeed, it may not yet exist – only a Cartesian perspective will let the eye tame space, providing the channel to look and the illusion of the one and only objective overview. Breugel's compositions are created without an unequivocal point of view. The eye, rambling between figures, heterogeneous spaces, re-establishes the cosmos anew, showing connections and defining proportions. Perhaps this open project of free design and the visual experience of public space uncovers the most general rule of the public square that can prove instructive even today. After all, even late-modern cities have their squares.

The history of western urbanism is a multi-layered narrative, in which all models and realizations ought to be included. It's not easy to talk about a universal figure, the form, function and historical realization of which can be quite different. But if you look at a few examples – which are not, in fact, representative, given that they are taken from the space of the capital city of Central Europe – you will immediately notice the striking tension that still remains between official and unofficial space.

What is permitted in the square? For what is it used, and who defines the range of its functions? What is pushed to the edges of public space? What is possible in public space and what is unwelcome? These questions seem much more important today than ever, precisely because we apparently tend to believe in absolute openness and the democracy of urban space.

At the end of May in 2009, one of Warsaw's squares was designated to serve as an interactive laboratory, a playground for residents. The context for the event was Children's Day, and the project was the brainchild of a few cultural activists and visual artists who wanted to create an educational fair, a space formed by the participation of children, adults, passers-bye, tourists, and anybody interested. The organizers chose Zbawiciela Square, famous thanks to Krzysztof Krauze's film by the same name. Colorful posters advertised the event, making use of a title that seemed amazingly simple – Zbawiciela (Savior) Square was to be transformed, at least for one day, into Zabawiciela (Entertainment) Square. Obviously, completing this project assumed some risk. The reactions were sharp: a hollow provocation with a lack of respect for the sacerd, disrespect for the Church, God and believers and severe homilies given by the parson of a church next to the square. All together, these reactions proved to have more emotive force than the event itself.

Perhaps this encounter became the most vital and *de facto* the most important part of the event. Perceived as attack by some, as battle for Catholic values by others, it could have been recognized by both sides as the defeat of urban community – the impossibility of agreement, a radical clash undermining the possibility of dialogue. The tension between what is acceptable and unwanted, embarrassing, or even hard to stand underlined the conflict of the situation and the fact that things might have been different.

And yet – perhaps this conflict could be treated as the fullest realization of the idea of the square, which we may find at work in Breugel and in sources referring to gatherings in ancient Athens. The same spirit that can summon the category of public space – an effective public space.

Any enquiry into the meaningful and irreducible features of public space should begin with the definition itself. There is an interesting recognition in the proposal of Don Mitchell – he introduces two terms to differentiate between two topographic–urban models. The first he calls "landscape", and its domain is relaxation, peace, rest and an arrangement of these elements that give guests/viewers a sense of control and comfortable order. The other is "public space" – which for Mitchell is connected with interaction, participation, exclusion, ideology, and conflict.[8] Landscape somehow becomes the property of the observer, while the viewer – by gaze alone – appropriates, domesticates, and endows meaning. Public space is antagonistic and agonistic, it causes confrontation and exposes disagreements, lacks and ruptures in the social system. Trying to unify it can be understood as an attempt to reshape public space into a landscape – a place that will soothe the eye and calm the emotions. But the question here is, will it still be an open territory for social actions, speaking for important and controversial ideas? Otherwise, it

would have to remain only a carefully structured and well-manicured landscape.

If we look at the squares of contemporary cities as potential public spaces, it seems obvious that the game is about significant symbols of religion, the state and identity – attributes of certain social, professional and sexual groups. They need to appear in public spaces like squares, not just on the walls of churches or closed in bedrooms, as the opponents of their vivid presence would prefer. All which is unofficial, unwanted and embarrassing, hard or problematic has its chance to cause conflict and become significant when it encounters all that is public and appreciated.

Not without reason, the main character of *Little Apocalypse* by Konwicki is ready to immolate himself at the square in front of Party Central Committee of the Party, since he can't get into the building to commit suicide.

In a play by Michael Marmarinos, which premiered at the Drama Theatre in Warsaw in 2010 during the *Central Warsaw: Migrations* festival, this protest gesture is about to reach fulfillment on Procession Square (Plac Defilad). Marmarinos changes the title of Konwicki's book, using only some themes of his novel in the theatre project called *Apocalypse Square*.[9] The play is staged in the Palace of Culture and Science, adding an additional performative dimension. In the dialogues of the main characters, the square is still mentioned as an empty place. Procession Square partially remains a building site, and is partially turned into a huge parking place in the sector close to the Palace – abandoned, paved with panels, there is no battle going on there, no interaction (it doesn't include or exclude). It does not exist as a public place, at least in the understanding of Mitchell. The picture broadcast from the square, displayed on a huge screen behind the stage, is of a calm city landscape sleeping, a pleasant urban view.

Self –immolation is what could bring its potential for being a public space back again. Self-immolation of the character, whose status, in fact, is not clear in Marmarinos's play – does he belong to the world created by Konwicki, to the interiors of Palace of Culture, or to the reality of the Warsaw theatre environment? Perhaps each of them.

For the time being, emptiness is the challenge.

It is also the biggest of the squares – the most important, crucial in a sense. A place for gatherings, moments of emotion, and a place for celebration. The square where altars and screen displays are placed – the organizer of social life, the collective imagination of the people of Warsaw. These signs posted at the edges of the square draw reflection: a ban on skating, bikes and scooters. Where does this ban come from? Not from the concern to destroy the screens, which have attacked by crowds many times before. Could bikes ruin the seriousness of the place? Could they distract from the landscape that serves for certain ceremonies of officialdom and harmonizes with projects accepted by the community? Church or bank holidays. If we consider emotions in this place, they can only be those that stick into given frames of language and are generally accepted. Biking is associated with entertainment, inappropriate for the mood of a picnic, the joy of selfless movement. But not only, as the bike itself is an instrument of uncontrolled movement in an individual space that remains far beyond the central routes of communication, on the border of the pedestrian and motorized. If we accept with Michael De Certeau[10] that activities like walking, running and dance use space in an active way, breaking with homogeneity, escaping from the controls of central planning, then biking stands as an example of unsafe freedom and recklessness. It is directly connected with switching channels – the footpath may be replaced by the street, red lights ignored, and pedestrians brutally overrun. The biker mocks the planned divisions of the city, invading the places that stay unobtainable, hidden, or uncomfortable. He passes by, overtakes, squeezes into, and sets the path. De Certeau compares the designation of new routes to spatial expression, which rapidly converts language – a specific use of language has the potential to destroy predetermined sense. The meaning of space, just like meaning of language, is revitalized in such activities. Public space organized on the square has a chance to become the space for experience. Breugel shows this potential of heterogeneous types of complexity. What can't be determined, written in law or taken into democratic social agreement, just might

take place in square space – that is what his paintings are saying. It is viewers that have the right to decide on value, directions of viewing, movement, and reading. The Bakhtinian dialectic of carnival and officialdom is broken here. What is most interesting and colorful in Bakhtin can therefore be seen. And this represents a chance for the contemporary square, which can become a real public space in the acceptance of its poli-central, paradoxical, and inconsistent character. A place not only for self-immolation or prohibition, but also perhaps a place for meeting. ◂

Dorota **Piwowarska**

(1983) – PhD candidate in the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. Writes about theater, performance art, modern and visual culture. She is engaged in the realization of various cultural, theatrical and visual art projects, working with theaters and NGOs in Warsaw.

1 *Mill and the Cross*, directed by Lech Majewski, production: Angelus Silesius, Poland 2011

2 *The Road to Calvary*, Peter Breugel the Elder, 1564

3 Compare: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance,* translated by Anna and Andrzej Goreniowie, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1975

4 Ibidem.

5 Ibidem.

6 Compare: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, Oxford 1991

7 Compare: David Wiles, *The Short History of Western Performance Space*, Routledge, Cambridge 2003

8 Compare: Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography, A critical introduction,* Blackwell, Oxford 2000

9 Apocalypse Square, directed by Michael Marmarinos, Drama Theatre, premiere: 15.10.2010

10 Michel de Certeau, L'Invention du Quotidien, translated by Katarzyna Thiel-Jańczuk, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008

City of Nomads

A Tale of the Modernist City

BLANKA **ČINÁTLOVÁ**

Cities are the same as dreams: you can dream about all things imaginable, but even the most unexpected dream is a riddle which conceals desire, or its reverse – fear. Just as dreams, cities are built from desires and fears, even though their meaning remains hidden, their rules absurd, their outlooks deceptive, and each thing conceals another one within itself.
– Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

The modernist novel throws its characters, confused men devoid of any traits, into the wide and dangerous space of the city which tries to rob them of their lives and make them succumb to madness – with its vague, almost desertlike emptiness and malignant vegetation, or lack of horizon, perspective and landmarks. In such a space, the protagonist loses his ability to identify with the city and to find his way around. The feeling of alienation uproots him from the city space he once might have shared. The protagonist becomes a nomad, homeless and without identity – instead of cozy rooms warmed with the comforts of Biedermeier, there are rented rooms in guest houses and hotels *(The Trial, The Golem)*. Better yet, the protagonist's flat becomes his hiding place, with fungus encouraging the rooms to start life anew (*Cinnamon Shops)*. The odyssey of the nomad through the city labyrinth leads from public offices, court rooms, boardinghouses and classrooms *(Ferdydurke, The Confusions of Young Törless)* to barracks (*The Man Without Qualities, Sleepwalkers)*, casinos (Radetzky March), cafés *(Altenberg, Kafka),* and nursing homes *(The Magic Mountain, Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass)*. The pilgrimage has no final destination – Ithaca has been devoured and digested a long time ago. Even the illusion of home is missing, given that these labyrinths lack centers. The labyrinth of the city devours the protagonist, stealing his place in the text, torturing him with its omnipresence and forcing him to try and understand its ambiguous symbols.

Empty, Demonized, Ironic Cities

With its structure becoming blurred, the traditional image of the city starts losing its form. The barrier between inner and outer time-space disappears. The individuality of the protagonist is diluted in the anonymity of the city crowd composed of the "clapping" people in the image of a mannequin (*Cinnamon Shops)*. Other images of this consumption include the devouring of the protagonist's private life by "the world of the courtroom" (as in Kafka's *Trial)*, the malignant attack of decaying growth *(The Other Side, Cinnamon Shops)*, and "metamorphosis" *(The Metamorphosis, Ferdydurke, Cinnamon Shops)*. And if he (the protagonist) tries to avoid this fate by hiding in his private inner world, he doesn't find the quiet, clean little room of his heart, an oasis of safety. What awaits him is a claustrophobic space, dismal, narrow and musty – his only possible way out: a keyhole or a slit between the doors. Thus, he starts peeking. He becomes a voyeur, who – looking into the private world of others – loses his own space *(The Trial, The Castle)*. It is no longer possible to identify center and periphery with any certainty.

The center starts luring the protagonist into a trap, and the periphery becomes engorged, burying traditional landmarks of the city. The devastated city, stripped of traditional landmarks, and thus traditional meanings, is taken over by a principle of absurdity.[1]

Putting aside the main character, namely the city itself, it is the crowd of people that becomes the typical protagonist of the city – an impulsive and unpredictable multitude. Both passive – an anonymous crowd characterized by a herd mentality – and hectic, the multitude is dangerously prone to easily and instantaneously succumb to epidemics, be they revolutions or illnesses. It creates usurpers of the public squares, voices of the streets. The city itself often becomes vibrant, like a frighteningly malicious plural, authoritative and hysterical chorus *(The Golem, Cinnamon Shops)*. And the literary character, an individual, defines himself against this collective protagonist, fighting for his individual identity. The relationship between the individual and the crowd may at times reach schizophrenic dimensions – as the individual struggles to escape the devouring mediocrity of the crowd, while at the same time using its anonymity to cover his own peculiarities.

The city comes to life as a demon, sucking the protagonist's blood. It electrifies the protagonist with the desire of a lover, burns him with his own passion, and entices him into its crushing and murderous embrace *(Severin's Journey into the Dark)*. At other times, it appears in the shape of an unruly monster *(The Golem)* or apparition. Or it might just as well manifest itself as a spiteful chorus maliciously mocking man's wanderings. The city shrouds itself in the dark atmosphere of gothic novels, haunting the protagonist in dark alleys, underground, in mysterious chambers, hallucinations, and terrifying nightmares. The hostile city speaks the pathetic language of esoteric symbols, of magicians. In the text of the city, there are mysterious and secret places, twin cities, faked cities. However, the transformation of a single street *(Crocodile Street, Cinnamon Shops)* or district (the Jewish ghetto in *The Golem*) may often be enough. This furtiveness of the space appears hostile to the protagonist, since he needs to interpret the new symbols through which the city speaks in order to find his way around. And if he is not able to decode these symbols, or he simply doesn't hear the speech of the city, he wilts into nothingness just like Joseph K.

The moralizing and authoritative code of the magic city is confronted with the ironic code of the city, which deconstructs its own myths. Sated and tired of its own eeriness, the city unmasks itself and shows another face – petty and cantankerous (Meyrink's short stories *Prague* and *G.M.)*. It transforms itself from a big-city lady into a small-town gossip queen, from an alchemist into a town crier. Eerie nighttime ghettos are replaced with daytime markets, a fun house full of wax figurines. But once more, the protagonist is lost. Looking for the certainty of "home", he finds only its parody: a fake papermache city, the illusion of a theater set, a mirrored world, a dingy funfair, where souvenirs of the city's long gone fame are sold for a pittance. The city, the Babylon of modernity, is overwhelmed by apocalyptic decay and returns to primal chaos *(Cinnamon Shops, The Other Side)*.

The chronotope of the city loses its orderliness and structure. Its map appears to have blind spots – *huic sunt leones*, or it is overlapped with maps of some other city. Time-space becomes a game board – a chessboard with pieces (protagonists) blindly fumbling around, unable to make distinctions between black and white squares, colliding only with their own mirrored reflections. They look into the mirror, unable to see their own faces *(Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass)*, as all of the mirror surface has been usurped by and for the city. In the blink of an eye, the chessboard is replaced with a circus ring where performers juggle their own lives. Then a street theatre introduces its actors-puppets to the city stage, performing a slapstick version of their own lives. The face of the city has its inevitable and significant "features of irony" *(Cinnamon Shops)*.

The filigree text of the city requires a narrator existentially drawn to its symbols, and an ability to relate these symbols to the vertical arch of the universe, not simply the horizontal vector of his own life. This is a kind of understanding gained step by step

through suffering – a stranger must enter the city. The viewpoint of the narrator is thus most often the viewpoint of a stranger, who introduces the city to his own text (his world) and confronts the city with it. The cultural and linguistic code of the stranger collides with another world, which is why he must try not only to understand but also to translate its symbols. However, it is important to make a distinction between the stranger as a foreigner coming from outside and the stranger within. Most protagonists telling stories of modernist cities fall into the later category. All of these modern nomads become strangers in "their own" cities, their narratives driven by the loss of the city rather than by its discovery. They lose themselves since they have lost the ability to find their way around the city – a loss of memory and identity has turned them into strangers. While a stranger coming from the outside is lost in the city,[2] as he carries with him something extra (knowledge of another code), a "home-grown" stranger wanders in an emptied world – he is nobody. He thus struggles to understand the alien world not for its own sake, but for his sake, because he can not comprehend the world before he finds his own identity.[3]

Verdant and Hygienic Cities

But from this anarchy of modern nomadism, cities rise and offer an alternative. They don't try to kill the protagonist, luring him into an abyss or showing him his own distorted image. These cities don't destroy the protagonist, but rather provoke him. They provoke him to search not only for mystery, but also meaning, not only for interpretation, but also understanding. The protagonist remains a player, but the new game is an entertaining charade and adventure.

Bruno Schulz (re)constructed such a city. His city is hidden in an elaborate set of symbols, with the protagonist walking through the hideout-city, which conceals recollections and memories rather than esoteric mystery. Schulz reconstructs the memory of the city using personal, private memory, building with the personal memories drawn from the intimacies of a life. If the protagonist finds his private space again, the memory of his own life, then he also finds the memory of the city through an understanding of its space. Personal and family mythology is intertwined with the myth of the city – biographic space is incorporated into the space of fiction. The city permeated with the tissue of myth undergoes a cycle of metamorphoses and becomes regenerated with the help of multiple deaths. Reliving the memory of the city, the protagonist regains his ability to find his bearings, and to identify with the story of the city using his own private stories.

Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke* offers a different sort of adventure in search of meaning. Deemed a newcomer at thirty years of age (one of many allusions to Kafka's *Trial*), the protagonist finds himself wandering in an absurd world/city. It is the world of the young and modern. But unlike Joseph K., he doesn't willingly bow before absurd rules of the aggressive, outer world. He continues to reflect and mock this world, not wanting to come to terms with its rules, but wishing to destroy and negate it by proving its falsehood. He unmasks its unnatural character through relentless analysis and synthesis, which is repeatedly thematized directly in the text.[4] Subjected to the protagonist's analysis and synthesis, space might continue to torture him, but at the same time it starts to lose its power over him. The modern world is caught being unnatural. The protagonist suffers, but simultaneously unmasks the burden of modernity.

Modernity gives the topos of the city grotesque features, which become visible in all their absurdity through the tenacity they demonstrate in the face of relentless mockery. Using space, Gombrowicz unmasks modernity itself, placing its symbolism in an utterly shocking context. In his view, modernity does not mean progress, excitement, speed, innovation, or technology. The symbol of the modern world is youth. Modern (and especially modernist) time-space is cursed, because it encourages youth, pulling people into eternal verdancy. And it is precisely this attribute of verdancy that decodes modernity/youth, above all else, as immaturity. As such, Gombrowicz's space can be free of Kafka's oppressive absurdity – its mocked

childishness turning absurdity into a ridiculous half-grin. A calf and buttocks become emblems of this world. The modern world gives man buttocks – it pulls him into the inexperience of youth, moulds and tortures him with the power of form, giving him a mask. However, this modern mask doesn't turn the protagonist into an actor, but rather an impersonator. It doesn't give him parts, but styles – "puts a mug on his face".

The spatial contours of the city might disappear in omnipresent verdancy, but nonetheless two dominant features stand out – the school and modern household. The topos of the school corresponds to the symbolism of youth and to the context of topoi stylized by the power of form. The modern household becomes the true stage of the modern city. The writer toys with the semantics of the interior and makes use of overlooked topoi – the bathroom or toilet. These are underlined as key features of the modern city, as symbols of its unnatural and sterile state. In these spaces, grins are put on and impurity is stored, these spaces are the shrines of the modern city.[5]

But the protagonist doesn't wish to penetrate this world; he wants to find his way out. He longs to leave behind his verdant immaturity, to destroy and "defile modern style", to peek out and get away (unlike Joseph K., who peeks to penetrate). The protagonist strives to decompose it using its own language, to destroy modernity by breaking its forms. He succeeds in unfolding modernity, but fails to free himself from nomadism.[6] He thus tries to flee the city and move to the country, which first appears as a foil to the city, a natural world, mature and grown-up. But even this vision of the countryside, fetishized in the character of a stable boy, proves to be an illusion. Country folk bark and bite like dogs, putting on grins just as city people do. The novel ends with an ironic image of literary trash – the protagonist runs across the meadow, hand in hand with a girl, into the sunrise. His escape – this time from the countryside – ends with a sentimental lyric idyll, which condemns him to an eternal verdancy once and for all. But instead of resignation, it is followed by catharsis – ironization and reflection *ad infinitum* make it possible to overcome the burden of modernity and find the (previously lost) way around in the world, no matter how disillusioned and fatally verdant it is: *"Because you can escape a grin only by putting on another one, and you can hide from a man only by finding refuge in another man's embrace. But buttocks, these you can't escape at all."*[7]

Talking about the story of the modernist city, we can't fail to mention J. L. Borges. His texts explore a theme which is not necessarily linked with a literary city, but which is nonetheless included in all modernist cities – the theme of the labyrinth. All these contexts are echoed in Borgesian labyrinth – the labyrinth of Meyrink's ghetto, with its centre concealing esoteric mystery; the unfulfilled labyrinth of Kafka, with its protagonist wandering on the periphery, unable to find the center. Borges deconstructs the labyrinth theme, freeing it of its eeriness and anarchy: *"The brightly shining City of the Immortals provoked in me fear and disgust, although I had passed through the labyrinth. The labyrinth is a house built so as to confuse people. Its architecture, full of symmetry, must above all serve this purpose."*[8] Borges finds symmetry and order within his labyrinth, because the labyrinth isn't what it appeared to be, its anarchic appearance was misleading. Even in the short story *Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth*, the labyrinth proves to be a rational space (its mystery unraveled by the logical thinking of a mathematician, which is in fact narrative logic) and illusory space (the hideout becomes a trap, and a cowardly servant turns into a brave king). The spatial theme of the labyrinth and the city to which it is connected appear to be "a parody or a thing turned inside out." It is an illusory pretension of anarchy that is in fact nothing but order – indefinite variations of a definite set of elements.

Borges ironically plays with the labyrinth theme and frees the chronotope of its burden, since the labyrinth goes beyond its theme function and becomes, above all, a narrative principle and code. It is not the protagonist, but the reader who walks through the labyrinth, whose meaning doesn't lie in revealing a secret, but rather in decoding itself. The labyrinth can prove tricky, because it follows the same rules as a spatial labyrinth – if the reader isn't fooled, he can

enjoy its symmetry and comprehensibility. Reading becomes an intriguing game, the reader turns into a detective, searching for clues, sorting out the false ones, guessing the motive, deciding who is the murderer, wandering somewhere between fiction and reality (Borges himself repeatedly becomes a protagonist as well as a narrator), essay and literary texts (an essayistic form of the story, made-up notes, fictitious works and authors named as renowned scientists), being tricked by multiple narrators (a story within a story, telling yet another story…). But the reader mustn't panic, because this labyrinth is not set to devour him, but rather to confuse and entertain him. Its center lacks significance, the important thing is to listen and decode. Borges's labyrinth is just like an onion – peeling layer after layer we end up with a void of nothingness. ◂

Translated from Czech by Martina Neradová

Blanka **Činátlová**

(1976) – Literary critic and scholar.
She works in the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University in Prague.
The author works at the Institute of Czech literature and literary theory of the Academy of Sciences.

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1 In the 20th century, especially in Kafka, symbolism of discrepancy between centre and periphery transcends the limits of space structure and transforms itself into a state-of-mind symbol. Kafka's centre in *The Trial* symbolizes the mind and an authentic, genuine, natural world, whereas the periphery means a false path, fake world, misunderstanding, pseudo-existence. Kafka quite significantly empties the centre, crossing it out of the text of the city and leaving it to succumb to an attack and uncontrolled growth of the periphery – an incursion not altogether devoid of grotesque moments (flagellants in the chamber). The world of archaic and natural centre vanishes; and the symbolism of the centre is destroyed by chaotic growth of the city before it is rewritten in its new sacred symbols.

2 Or the exact opposite. An uncle from countryside (*The Trial*), seeing the trial from „outside", has better understanding than Joseph K.

3 Stranger "from the outside" come in search, telling and translating a story of collision of two languages or two texts. A villager, a worrier and a savage, all confront their texts – countryside, a path, nature/wilderness with the text of the city. Both texts can influence each other, but the narrator-stranger remains an unaware vagrant; the text of the countryside can't overlap the text of the city, because the words of villager's language don't include notions of the language of the city – the language of transparent country space can't express anarchy of the city, just as the language of a nomad, stretched and evasive, can't express structural nature of the city. A "professional" stranger – a tourist, pilgrim, explorer, and globetrotter – knows, that he has to search for the language – for its words and silences, gestures and cries. He sees the city in context of the texts he has visited, or will visit in future. "To recognize character of other cities, I must base my observations on the image of a single primeval city, which remains tacit," Marco Polo says to Kublai Khan. The traveler puts forward a vision, the image of universal city, and confronts it with the image of a real city. Narrative becomes his passion, because he comes to the city to narrate a story.

4 "Every single movement was silly! They were false in their pathos, terrible in their lyricism, awful in their sentimentality, worthless in their irony, jests and jokes, tasteless in their vigor, repulsive in their weaknesses. And the world was spinning and kept growing. How could they not be unnatural, when they were treated in an unnatural way? And since they were unnatural, how could they speak without sounding awkwardly?" Gombrowicz

5 "Coming out, she had more dignity than when she went inside – as if refreshed, radiant and made human, she came out as from a Greek temple! And then I realized she also entered that place as if entering a temple. And it was this temple which gave strength to modern wives of engineers and lawyers! Every day, she came out of that place a little better, every day; she held the banner of progress a little higher." Gombrowicz

6 "That I was buttocks, a student, a modern boy with a modern girl, that I danced in the bedroom, tore off the wings of a fly, peeked in the bathroom and so on… No, it was all gone, I was neither young nor old, neither modern nor old-fashioned, neither a student nor a boy, neither a grown-up nor a teenager; I was insipid, I was nobody…" Ibidem

7 Ibidem.

8 Borgis, J.L.: *The Immortal*. The Mirror and the Mask.

Two Squares, Two Towns

DÉNES **TAMÁS**

"Hell is a special experience and so is heaven."
János Pilinszky

(SEPSISZENTGYÖRGY / CSÍKSZEREDA) – A contingency is also a start – or an attraction and repulsion. We live in it and thanks to it. I cannot experience the derivations and results of science, the sine curve, or the financial junction. I don't conceive of the Milky Way as an ordered structure. If anything, the silence of infinite spaces terrifies me. But I experience two cities. This belonging is flexible, and involuntary restrictions of time in each are avoided – this is not a relationship that I would like to leave prey to consistency.

Far-flung corners of East-Central Europe are not usually spoken of positively. You'd think that East-Central Europe was inhabited by angles, and that its junctions served only as grandiose reflections of what grows wild in the flat crooks of corners. As for existence in a corner, it immediately brings to mind dreamlike visions of a flotsam-existence, the refuse that piles up and is indestructible. Sometimes a gaze from the outside can succeed, if only for a moment, in styling these remnants into something exotic, only to find that the flowers of evil have decomposed and smothered him in the very next instant. But for the people who live here, these places are not simply stinking alleyways of lost hope. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they are peaks from which inhabitants can gaze, first and foremost, down at themselves. With time, place becomes fate. But fate does not descend upon us. It slowly matures in the wrinkles of time. It is this process that I'll chase through the main squares of two towns.

Two towns: Sepsiszentgyörgy and Csíkszereda. They lie hidden in the bend of the Carpathians, evidencing – and not only because of location – a common pattern of development. Yet it exists in separation, meaning that our best chance of grasping this commonality might be in a stroll through both towns. Some people say that a city *"is merely made up of street corners, the sound of horns under our window, of dawns, moods, at times flashing images, a face…"*[1] One would think that towns came about to provide space for experiencing the ephemeral nature of these flashes of the elemental, dispersion and cavalcades. Nevertheless, I'd rather get a grip on my cities by other means, through something that tears itself away from the pulsating cavalcade – something that refracts, in its permanence, what breaks apart beyond its borders: the city square. A city square is like a clearing in the woods, the negative image of a body. That is where space is created, and where we can ask: What is it that surrounds us? The rush quiets down, the trails widen, a bench is put down for our leisure, while history is concentrated in symbols and memorials. Dilution and concentration take place simultaneously, and this imparts a special tension to everything that occurs in a city square. At the end of the 19th century, Franz Ratzel researched the effect of geographical situations on people, calling his work "anthropogeography". Taking my cue from him, I can imagine a science of

"anthropogeometry", which studies the interrelationship between spaces, bodies, and man, and does not lose track of what is inseparable from space, namely, a reality brought about by history. Since we're talking however about human dwellings, this way of looking at things drew attention to a certain lyrical dimension of reality, and through its own metaphors was forced to reach out for the products of such relationships. After all, only man is capable of creating the forbidding "stone terror of a Medusa inspired reality".

The concentrated, Sphinxian reality of Taps (Applause) Square in Csíkszereda calls for man's imagination as a guide in uncovering its secrets. Any description is immediately thwarted by the impassable surface of cement, and its yawning spaciousness exudes an emptiness that falsifies all our expectations of a main square.

The shape of a city square is usually connected to the progress of civilization. This progress refers to the growth in importance of assembly spaces, which address the needs of a community or community members to present themselves in full. The opportunity and guarantee for this manifestation has varied in history, depending in particular on how the community felt about manifesting itself. The squares of towns in this region first served as market places, which accorded with the rural lifestyle of inhabitants. For commercial centers, these cities needed centrally located open spaces where people could buy and sell in undisturbed conditions. But with the rise of more diverse forms of interaction, these spaces increasingly had to accommodate the community's recreational and social needs. This is when benches appeared on the squares, alongside fountains, flower beds, trees, organ-grinders, ice-cream vendors, chestnut vendors in the winter, chess and ping-pong tables, and later memorials. Even this arbitrary list suggests the matrix for normalcy that city dwellers, liberated from overwork and wanting to experience community, might fill with content.

In Taps Square, the search for such signs of "normalcy" is always in vain. Benches still sit on two sides of the square, but we won't find any other signs of leisure on the spacious rectangular square laid down by blocks, whose materiality provides a peculiar reflection of the bleak materialism of the buildings surrounding it. An uncouth uniformity radiates from the consonance of the structure of the buildings and the furnishings of the square. First and foremost, we are confronted with the triumph of concrete over nature, which not only rejects nature, as a dangerous zone worthy of being subdued, but also manages to undermine the leisure required for free-exchange between citizens. This square and the buildings that belong to it only allow for one form of human gathering – the gathering of masses.

We're not talking about just any kind of mass. This square is meant for the spectacle of the clapping, adoring mass. Taking in the entirety of the square, the eyes are mercilessly drawn to a balcony that juts out of the building that closes off the square. This balcony veritably reigns over and disciplines the square, calling to mind a political system that created spaces where crowds were forced into obedience.

This political regime was swept away by the storm of subsequent history – but the square remained, along with the buildings connected to it. It's interesting to study the life of the square from above. The lines formed by people hurriedly crossing the square tell us about a quicker, more dynamic world. People may sit down on the benches, and occasionally there are even small gatherings of people. But strangely enough, these usually take place on the sides of the square. Due to the emptiness encoded in its structure, the square seems to force individuals towards the periphery and forbid relaxing, chatting, or socializing in its center. The crossing of the square has turned into an uncertain rush, accompanied by a gaze that bounces off the surrounding concrete walls. Agoraphobia on the agora – I can't think of a better way to describe what's happening in front of my eyes (this phrase should also call to mind the spatial dimensions of Athenian democracy, in which democratic principles took shape thanks to the very body of the city). A marshy swamp once occupied the land where the square is situated today. Later, bourgeois houses sprang up, and now a flat concrete surface and the concrete ring around it close off the antithetical history of progress. There

is often discussion about how communism survives in our current thinking, about how mentalities that have outlived their shelf lives continue to shape our actions – despite changes in political regimes. Perhaps that's why the renaming of the square seems particularly grotesque and insufficient – Liberty Square.

Sepsiszentgyörgy's Liberty Square

Sepsiszentgyörgy – and yet another Liberty Square. Strolling around, our gaze is not compelled in a certain direction. Instead, it seems as if a multitude of undisciplined forms were simply flung there, offering themselves up to open minds. However, the latter will not easily find a guiding principle into which, like the elements of a puzzle, we might be able to fit the eclectic elements modestly standing along the sides of the square that are noticeable when we look in a counterclockwise direction. There are the many trees of the park, the old city hall that now functions as a theater, the tall concrete monster that was once a hotel and is now under reconstruction, the bazaar, perhaps the town's most important row of buildings with a clock tower on top, the Fogolyán House, conceived in the eclectic style that stands next to it, and something rising out of the ground and practically sliding down into the square – an additional square occupied by the Vitéz Mihály (Mihai Viteazul) group of statues, prefabricated apartment houses on both sides, and awkwardly closing off the stroll around the square the monstrous Unions Recreational Facility.

Where can we find meaningful form in this parade of dissimilarity? What emerges in front of us is the indecipherable message of a fractured world, in which even the most attentive spectator can't see that "healthy whole", those good forms of which Gestalt psychology speaks. And this is not a local trait. For me, today's cities are like conglomerates jolted out of their path of development with their history frozen in their centers, surrounded by forms that the constant storms of the present have fomented. These towns do not safeguard us from anything. On the contrary, they force human space and time into their bottomless belly, confusing and deterritorializing them – placing them outside of time. Suspicious eyes go searching for tectonic movements hidden in its depths, trying to find an explanation for what is pulsating before the eye. The city square should be the starting point for these explanations, if not beginning with the present, and then turning to the past, where a square, in its uniformity, still functioned as a town's true center. In this way, the anomalies, manifoldly weighing down the historical movements that finally resulted in the confusion that I have just touched upon, could take shape.

In the case of Sepsiszentgyörgy, we are dealing with a space of 10 hectares. In the beginning it was called Market Square. It subsequently became Potsa Park, and today it is Elizabeth Park – the right side receiving the designation of Liberty Square. This is our starting point. Trusting the power of serendipity, we use Balázs Orbán's photographs from the 1860s as examples, which bring news of a town firmly based on its huge chicken market and country fair-type open market. This is how a small town of three thousand sends us a message about itself, whose market place was even larger than that of Kolozsvár, which enjoyed a totally different status. This is the point where everything is still in logical conjunction for me. At that time, the town chose to guarantee a space for the main lifestyles and activities in its vicinity, bringing into harmony the antitheses between village and town, thereby adding dynamism to the formation and development of the town itself.

I don't wish to romanticize this moment. After all, in contrast with still photographs, the forces that in the end reworked this square into its present shape occurred in two waves, along two tectonic lines, which were already in motion. A glance at the statistical data charting the growth in population is sufficient to realize which two eras defined the look of the main square and its surroundings. There were two periods when the town's population tripled, almost quadrupled – during the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the 60s and 70s of the previous century. The relationship is straightforward:

Anything tripled will appear very different from its initial state. The question is whether, in the present, we have the means to understand changes of such magnitude.

The conditions for the first wave of change were a given. Just look at the neo-classical buildings of the square, some of which were already standing before the Monarchy. During peacetime, it was these buildings that gave the square, in which trees were gradually planted, its town-like character, and to which the new buildings were adjusted in style. Today, we're faced with the broken up remnants of this unity, but the fact remains that these buildings carried with them a certain lifestyle that few people know today. Without being conscious of it, today's city is attempting to reach back to these forms as it tries to gain a new identity. Wishing to rearrange itself according to new objectives and definitions, the city center remains within the orbit of these buildings, even if such development is accompanied by a certain aesthetic hodgepodge. For instance, on the other side of the park there is a tiny artificial lake with a clumsy wooden bridge – no touchstone, alas! But why should there be? Especially if the only sources of news about the monarchy are the stories of Queen Elizabeth's cult, told and retold by our grandmothers with tears in their eyes, and the syrupy, decadent strains of the "Die Csárdásfürstin" operetta. András Visky, the dramaturge from Kolozsvár, called the Austro-Hungarian monarchy the bloody operetta-empire, thinking of its last years. Ferkó's song from "Die Csárásfürstin" harks back to this sensibility: "Here life is an illusion," which he sings along with the regulars of the Orpheum. For over a century now, the Viennese and Budapest waltz has adapted itself to this illusion. It is an illusion in search of further illusions for itself, questionable forms to "suit" it. There was a production of "Die Csárdásfürstin" directed by János Mohácsi at the theatre at Kaposvár in 1993. This production reveals with full force how well the operetta's lascivious *outré* songs fit the world of lies, duplicity, exhibitionism and self-deception. And at the end of the piece, the huge ship that symbolizes the Monarchy sinks with the characters of the operetta on board. I think of the deeply lying buildings of the square like that sunken ship, lying at the bottom of a dream-empire covered up by the promises of a new gentrification, which is incapable of looking real – despite its fresh coat of paint.

Another force also stands in the way of turning illusion into reality. Futurism attacked the world of the early 20th century as decadent and weak, and therefore tried to clip the wings of the spreading charms of the bourgeoisie. Its instruments were steel and ferro-concrete, and later glass. From this palette, the industrial grandeur of sterile enormity took shape by triumphing over the laws of gravitation. Yet this force did not entirely reshape the cities of Western Europe, as the burden of more than a thousand years of tradition and history was simply too great. At any rate, the city centers remained relatively intact, which is precisely why they were able to achieve a kind of musicological status. By contrast, the towns of Eastern Europe had weaker historical roots, and the powers that assailed them showed a much more unyielding organizational talent. Due to the shallowness of tradition, these powers could execute their will to modernize in a far more extreme fashion and with messianic drive. This is precisely why it was vital for these ahistorical forces to take over the city centers, which was achieved initially through demolition. The symbolic dimension was of particular importance in such acts of destruction – in the first place directed at county seats. Due to the industrialization and forced emigration that accompanied the tripling of the population of Sepsiszentgyörgy in the 1960s and 70s, the city center was irreversibly mangled. Indeed, the entire city shows the scars of forced and ill-conceived growth. Living areas were pushed to the periphery but also cropped up inside the city thanks to prefabricated housing, which took over as the functional means of poorly planned growth. Whole streets of bourgeois houses had to disappear to free up space for cement constructions. What's more, since the historical buildings around the main square could not be completely demolished, another square was constructed close by, rising above its predecessor – claiming space through the symbols of an ideology that spanned half a continent. How can

we understand such formations of buildings? A puritanism of form adheres to the sterile final aim of a world that can only be explained with recourse to the compulsive drive toward forced development – socialist architecture. The aim of such construction, left in the shadows, became integrated into the intention of building and construction, turning the cities of the period into a singular and eternal construction site. There is good reason why the merry barracks became the preeminent symbol for certain states in the communist camp.

This merriment is what bothered me, especially as captured in a photograph taken by the county paper, György Bortnyik, during the 70s.[2] The photograph is entitled "Afternoon in the Park", but only part of the park is visible. There's a promenade with a row of trees dressed in sunshine and tables where people sit pleasantly drinking *szuk*.[3] Moreover, we see two boys, young men with long hair in flared pants and turtlenecks with their sleeves rolled up. One of them is smiling and the other's thoughts appear to be trailing off as they advance forward with a certain gentle and promising devil-may-care attitude latent in their postures. This photo slide of freedom burst apart from above that gray row of bars through which I saw the city. At the same time, the image can be seen as a warning: We cannot ignore the youth of the 60s and 70s, who had to make the best of the socialist reality in which they found themselves. It is a scandal of existence that the exciting looseness radiated by the photograph is confined by destruction and the inhuman building frenzy that followed it. Perhaps what is at issue is not a secret, but simply the natural good cheer of youth that found ways to draw even more than Attila József's meager joy from a game that could have easily smothered their hopes. Where have they gone? They're still being safeguarded by the black and white shadow world of the photograph. But when I glance up from the image my eyes see nothing but groups of prefabricated apartment houses, vulgar public buildings and infectious industrial parks falling into decay. It's difficult to get rid of the heritage of communism, and not only because its objects are still standing among us. The photograph's message is that without the inhabitants of the town, the thing that now makes me feel claustrophobic couldn't have happened. But their lives must continue, even in what cannot be continued.

After a While, Every Space Becomes Fate

Two cities through the lens –the refraction – of two squares. Despite the layering of time that can be excavated through them, the squares radiate the same message: breaking free of history, the grip of its archives, is no easy matter. History does not just slowly accumulate in pools at our feet. Sometimes it executes puzzling summersaults and whips against the sphere of time. In the history of a city, these whips can condense into fault lines, which define, whether we like it or not, how we experience ourselves. But this experience does not emerge in unequivocal questions. It is projected onto the hallucinatory, slippery body of a lost existence that has survived in the material aspects of the world. We cannot pose questions or find answers without paying attention to what these squares are sending our way.

The stakes are high: After a while, every space becomes fate. Is it inevitable that in this corner of the world the repetition of new starts should always be composed of erroneous steps? ◂

Translated from the Hungarian by Judith Sollosy

Dénes **Tamás**

(1975) essayist, assistant lecturer in Communication at the Sapientia University Csikszereda, Transylvania

1 Péter Niedermüller: "A város: kultúra, mítosz, imagináció"(The city: culture, myth, imagination). In: Mozgó Világ 1994/5

2 György Bortnyik: "Változó helyek árnyai" (The Shades of Transformed Spaces), Sepsiszentgzörgy, 2008, p. 164.

3 Romanian name of the cold drink.

Castle, Cathedral and River – The Soul of Bratislava

JURAJ **ŠPITZER**

Before I knew this city, I had a dream about it in ¾ time: "Pressburg ist ein schönes Städtchen, ist ja wohl, weil es an der Donau liegt, ist ja wohl..." Even a melody can turn into a relic. Even cities have souls like human beings.

The world surely knows cities with more checkered pasts and cities that are larger or more beautiful. But there are only a few through which Danube flows, and of those even less that were German, Hungarian and Slovak – at the same time. These qualities together designate Prešpork, a Slovakian variant of Pressburg, which became Bratislava in 1918. Since this city was invaded by the countryside, everything related to Prešpork has been in retreat. These villagers obliterated the traditional character of the city and failed to offer a new one. The current citizens of Bratislava are basically villagers in a city, and this is the way things will remain for the forseable future. However, I want to write about something other than the urbanization of Bratislava.

A love of this city piqued my interest and curiosity about its past, and so I gathered old books about its squares, streets, palaces, houses and courtyards. I enjoyed walking around the old quarter, and I imagined the past coming to life. Just like a human being, each city has a soul revealed through its history. Moreover, a human being, like a city, can be better understood if you know his or her life story.

Hence, I will be talking about my attachment to Bratislava. I come from Central Slovakia, which is full of mountains. About sixty years ago, I was astonished when I first saw Bratislava and spotted the Danube. My mind swirled with several thoughts, one of which still remains still quite vivid.

God most likely created the mountains for mortals to see the splendor of His creation and the rivers to make them aware of their own finitude. I realized that this river is not only flowing horizontally across the whole Europe, acting as the gate to and from Europe, but it also flows vertically: through history and nations. It is a river about destiny, a kind of eternal time clock. It is flowing even now as we speak!

The Triad: Castle, Cathedral and Danube

Next, a triad in the silhouette of Bratislava astonished me – the castle, the cathedral, and obviously the river. The castle represents power, whereas the cathedral or temple represents spiritual richness and authority. The river represents the washing away of the aforementioned forces, as the spiritual content and powers of the city have been changing for some time. There were good and bad rulers, and much happened within the temple that was related to the development of power. After all, this was a coronation city. A great number of kings were crowned here, who ruled by protecting or harming the people. All that is now gone. When we talk about power, the vicinity of Bratislava is also extraordinary – take the Moravian Field. There, Otto Přemysl II defeated the Hungarian king Bella II. In the very same place, Rudolf Habsburg then defeated Otto Přemysl II. And at almost the same spot, Napoleon defeated Francis I, and a peace treaty was subsequently signed in Bratislava. So this triangle – Vienna-Budapest-Bratislava – has had a rather turbulent past, in terms of power, spiritual authority, and the way it has all vanished.

▶

With respect to spiritual richness, the cathedral epitomizes many things – coronations, sacral music and also something else. Within the vicinity of the Cathedral, circles of cultured and educated people emerged that have had lasting significance for the region and the whole nation. The Bernolák Society was founded just next to the cathedral. This was a Catholic seminary that gave rise to the followers of Anton Bernolák, who first codified the Slovak language. Nearby is also Konventna Street, the home of the Lutheran societies. It was here that the followers of Ľudovít Štúr emerged, initiating a national revival and codification of the written Slovak language during the 19th century.

Above and beyond all this, very near this temple was the school of a famous Rabbi, Chasam Sofer, who is buried under a nearby tunnel.

These three religious circles basically formed the spiritual tradition of the city. Each city has a soul, just as each human being does. It has its tradition, its ups and downs, and its good and bad periods.

Another fact that fascinated me about Bratislava was that four distinct communities or nationalities lived here. Blaise de Bury, a certain countess who traveled around Slovakia in the middle of the 19th Century, wrote about Bratislava in a most charming way: "In Bratislava, there live the Germans, who are similar to the Viennese, being sort of 'gemütlich', a bit frivolous. The Hungarians are heroic types, and when they drink they sing and jingle with their sabers. They thirst for heroic deeds. Finally, there are the Slovaks who from the hinterland, the surrounding area, bring the fruits, vegetables and other goods to the market here. In general, they are tall and well built men, rather naïve, simple, but strong and so it seems the future belongs to them." This is what this French countess wrote. What connects all these groups is something unique – a bond with this city and an affection expressed in the term "Prešporák" – an inhabitant of Bratislava. I am not going to discuss how this term came about. One legend says that the decision concerning where this city would belong was made after the Battle of Austerlitz – to Austria or Hungary. Talleyrand therefore asked the city fathers where they wanted to belong. He asked, "Who are you, really?" And these city fathers answered that they needed to deliberate and went out of the room. When they returned, they said that they did not want to belong anywhere: "We are Prešporáks". This phenomenon of "Prešporák" is what European nations try to achieve today – the integration of cultures based on tolerance, mutual interaction and living together that is of benefit to all.

The City Fades Away

Talking about Bratislava, I'm reminded of an excellent work by the Yugoslav architect and philosopher Bogdan Bogdanović. He wrote a magical book about how cities die out. He writes that when an enemy attacked and defeated a certain country it destroyed the capital city. This has taken place since Biblical times and maybe even before – since time immemorial. Why was this done? It was done in order to obliterate the memory of the people, to kill an ability to recollect one's own history and to thereby get rid of the soul of a city or a nation. Bogdanović has another interesting observation – if there were no barbarians from outside there were always barbarians within, who wished to kill the recollection of the past.

Perhaps what I say now is an overstatement, but it is enough to look at contemporary Bratislava and one can clearly see a small barbaric deed. Without any respect for the past, not sensing the importance of recollection, and disregarding the soul of the city, the most recent authorities tried to build a 250,000-strong modern city. The result is the present sight, which is certainly far from pleasant. They destroyed Suché mýto Square in the 1970s, where I walked every day for almost thirty years. A new square exposed itself in the middle of the city, with a new panorama revelaing other quarters and streets. There wasn't anything pleasant to look at, especially the factory chimneys and the roofs criss-crossed and wired by TV antennas without any pattern. At that time, I thought it would become another city. Other people would be born here, and they would grow up in a new space and different

panoramas would enter their sight and form their consciousness.

Many things have happened in Bratislava and all kinds of people have lived here. Not only human beings live. Cities also live their own lives as recollections of good and bad, lofty and dismal. A city is a part of us. It changes, and when buildings are demolished something in us also departs. What is left in our memory from the familiar places and faces is a vague smell, a melody or a chord. The ruins are also inside us in the places where there used to be proud buildings, where lifeless concrete and asphalt space spreads instead of gardens with a quiet nook. We walked every day on the disappeared Suché mýto Square with its verandas and courtyards. We can no longer recall with certainty where each house was standing and whom we used to meet there every day: where the lover of early hours, the writer Ľudo Ondrejov, used to live or where the table in Cafe Štefanka stood, the one reserved for the poet Pavol Horov – who drank vodka with such pleasure? Is it still with us, or has it gone and taken us with it?

Hope or Silence?

I understand progress. We all know that urbanization is necessary and we all know that new flats are needed for people. But maybe it could all have been done with more sensibility, with an awareness of Bogdanović's warning. And despite everything, the triad of the city's panorama did not get destroyed – the castle, the cathedral and the river survived. Maybe the soul of a city is eternal. After 1989, now that conditions have changed, maybe we can talk about the resurrection of the city and the rejuvenation of everything that was positive in its tradition. Perhaps we can bring to the surface all that made Bratislava in its multiplicity – its politics, its militaristic past, as well as its culture, music and drama… and especially its multi-cultural face, its tolerance for mutual interaction, a feature that was so positive about this city.

I want to be convinced that this spirit of the city is indestructible, in the same way as the Danube flows and cannot be stopped. Surely we could build a dam, a few electrical plants, but those can only be built because the river flows, it has the force that rushes through the whole of Europe, connecting the European nations. In fact, that seems to be its purpose and duty. What is also impossible – despite all that has vanished – is to obliterate the endless row of hands and souls who pass over to the next generation its legacy and inheritance, and who rejuvenate it, regardless of epoch or regime.

To finish on a more poignant note, I want to recall a remark Libuše made when Prague was to be founded: "I see a grand city whose fame will touch the stars". Maybe I do not imagine such greatness in Bratislava, but in the spirit of Libuše I would want to say the following: I see a city that will return to its spirit and will be elevated to the shape it had in the past.

As I'm getting old and a bit sentimental, this might be altogether mistaken wishful thinking. Maybe it is a nostalgia for something that might not warrant regret, for something that departs naturally. Somewhere, eyes are staring back, like the empty windows in the houses set for demolition, like the balconies on which no one is going to step again. It might only be an echo from inside out, from the old city towards the new one. Surely, that might be the reason why, as I am looking at the front of St. Martin's Cathedral, viewing the concrete jungle that devoured the Suché mýto Square, I hear nothing… ◂

Juraj **Špitzer**

(1919-1995) Slovak writer, poet and dissident. In 1944, he led the only Jewish military unit in the Slovak National Uprising against the Nazis. After the war, he supported the communist government but grew critical and was banned from publishing after '68. Author of several books, the most well-known was *Nechcel som byť Žid* (*I Did Not Want to Be a Jew*). In 2010, an issue of the journal *Kritika & Kontext* was dedicated to Juraj Špitzer.

Selected from the book *Všedné dni I* (*Common Days*) (2001, Bratislava). Translated from Slovak and edited by Samuel Abrahám.

COMMUNITIES AND IDENTITIES

MINORITIES SHIFTS AND INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE - MULTICULTURAL APPROACH

Forgotten Memory

The Jews of Vilne in the Diaspora

ANNA **LIPPHARDT**

The collapse of Communism in 1989 was accompanied by a rediscovery of the Jewish past and an increase in commemorative events dedicated to the Holocaust. Both phenomena are undoubtedly of crucial importance to the pluralistic, historically conceived, contemporary self-perception of the East European societies in whose midst Nazis carried out the genocide of the Jews. Some members of these societies even participated in this genocide. Today, Eastern Europe has to come to terms with the void left behind by the Holocaust.

The politics of remembrance and the scholarship on memory usually take a national point of view. Far less attention is paid to those directly affected: the Holocaust survivors, their families, and the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. The way others remember the East European Jews is subject to increasing examination, but very little is known about how East European Jews remember. Although Jewish remembrance in Eastern Europe is centred around generally recognised dates and sites of commemoration, the fixation on common, external points of reference fails to notice significant differences in the treatment of the past. For example, Jewish memorial activities between 1944 and 1989 took place for the most part outside Eastern Europe – not just because of the repressive attitude of Communist regimes towards the Holocaust, but because most of the East European Jews who survived the Holocaust left their hometowns and villages soon after the Second World War. The surviving community of Jews from Vilnius, or Vilne – as the city is called in Yiddish and will be called here in reference to the prewar Jewish community and its members – offers an example of the consequences that mass emigration was to have on Jewish memory of Eastern Europe. But first, the differences between commemoration, remembrance, and mourning must be illuminated, as they are of fundamental importance to how the Holocaust is treated.

Commemoration, Remembrance, Mourning

The *memorial turn* that has embraced the East Central- and East European public over the past two decades has generated a variety of concepts and terms and, as a result, a certain amount of confusion over terminology as well. At the moment, there are almost as many different uses of the terms "commemoration", "collective memory", "remembrance", or "places of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) as there are authors writing about these topics. Frequently, these terms are used as synonyms for one another.

In order to provide some orientation within this semantic jungle, I suggest a differentiation based on particular meanings of the German words *gedenken* (to commemorate) and *erinnern* (to remember). *Gedenken* contains the root *denken* (to think) and therefore entails a deliberate act of calling to memory or marking by ceremony. It requires no direct connection between the commemorator and the events or those affected by them and can function at a great social and temporal distance from what is being commemorated. *Gedenken* does not demand direct involvement in the past, but merely a certain idea and fundamental knowledge of this past. *Erinnern*, by contrast, should be thought of in this context as the act of recalling a personal experience. Strictly speaking, one remembers something in which one was involved, with which one has come into contact.

Unlike *gedenken*, *erinnern* frequently cannot be controlled, especially when it is associated with trauma – as is remembrance of the Holocaust. Many survivors still suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, an affliction characterised by the inability to curb constantly recurring, distressing memories:

What was previously experienced runs almost incessantly through the heads of many who are traumatised ... They cannot "switch off" the thoughts, rebukes, and self-accusations. Memories force themselves upon them again and again. Shrill memories tend to come back in agonising detail and vividness, especially just before sleep ... But some traumatised people go through their extreme experiences not just in memories or dreams. It can happen that they suddenly behave or feel as if they are going through the traumatic experience again (flashback). The memory symptoms are connected with strong emotions and feelings, which repeatedly send the person affected into a psychological shock ... To defend themselves from the anxieties caused by memory symptoms, those affected often try, consciously and unconsciously, to push away and avoid thoughts and situations that trigger memories of what was experienced.[1]

In Eastern Europe, where the Holocaust was taboo for more than half a century, and where specialised psychological care remains scarce, survivors find it especially difficult to deal with their memories. In addition, the survivors' memories of the Holocaust are always associated with the grief felt for their murdered relatives, friends, and almost all of their social and cultural peers. Mourning, as Micha Brumlik has aptly put it, is to be understood as "an emotion of closeness" (*Nahemotion*) related to "familiar people or those perceived as familiar"[2].Often, survivors do not know where and when the people who were close to them died and therefore lack a location or date to which they can symbolically attach their mourning.

The commemoration days and places that have been nationally recognised since 1989 serve as a substitute. Even if they always mean for survivors a painful confrontation with their grief and memories they would rather forget, such days and places can still fulfil an important function in working through and coping with traumas and can contribute to stabilising emotions. For one, they offer a concrete focal point where survivors can care for their dead loved ones; for another, this kind of clearly defined framework, together with communal rituals of mourning, can bring the individual pain survivors feel under some control. The attention of the immediate environment is also enormously important for the processes of grieving and healing, as is public acknowledgement. Together they break the monstrous silence that follows in the wake of genocide.[3] With this in mind, the public acknowledgement that accompanies official, usually national commemoration days should be viewed as very positive. At the same time, however, the enormous political significance attached to such events in Eastern Europe encroaches on the space left for survivors to grieve and to remember. With their accession to the European Union, most East Central European countries have adopted Western conventions of commemoration. In many countries, the day commemorating the Holocaust is observed by an act of state, the protocol of which is determined by state authorities such as the office of the head of state, the president of the parliament, or in some cases the protocol department of the foreign ministry. Attention at these occasions falls on the individual speakers' assertions that it is very important for the country and for Europe as a whole never to allow the Holocaust to be forgotten, so that nothing similar can happen again. The formulaic way in which these pleas are uttered may well meet international standards and the general requirements of reverence. However, they all too often neglect the feelings and needs of the survivors, their families, and the Jewish communities, all the more so as such statements are rarely ever followed by corresponding action in everyday politics.

Milieus and Places of Remembrance: Survivors from Vilnius

Those who seek to examine the Jewish past in Eastern Europe are today confronted by the tremendous void left by the Holocaust and preserved by the

Communist regimes' repressive attitude towards the reconstruction of Jewish life after the war.[4] Little attention has been given to the consequences of Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe in the immediate postwar period. Emigration meant that what was left of the Jewish community declined even more dramatically. The centre of East European Jewish life shifted overseas.

With the departure of these emigrants – who included the overwhelming majority of surviving Jewish leaders, cultural figures, educators, and intellectuals – Eastern Europe lost not only an enormous treasure trove of knowledge and valuable perspectives on its' Jewish past. A large part of those Jewish cultural assets that had been saved from the Nazis was also transferred to the West, where it became the foundation for important research and documentation centres, such as the Hebrew University and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem or the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut) in New York.

The postwar history of Vilne's survivors is as a good example of this development. When the Red Army liberated Vilnius on 12 July 1944, it found 500 survivors remaining from the city's prewar community of 60,000 Jews.[5] In the months that followed, several hundred Vilne Jews returned from labour camps or hideouts, from partisan units or the Soviet interior, to which they had been deported by the Soviets before the German invasion, or to which they had fled after the invasion However, the overwhelming majority of the Jews who gathered in postwar Vilnius were originally from other parts of Lithuania or the Soviet Union. By the end of 1945, there were 10,000–12,000 Jews living in Vilnius.[6]

Immediately upon liberation, a group of Jewish intellectuals who had been in the Vilna ghetto and then with the Soviet partisans set about securing remnants of the Jewish past. For example, they started recording accounts of what the Jews had experienced during the German occupation. [7] Their main activity, however, was to bring together the numerous Jewish archival materials, books, and works of art that had been hidden from the Germans. [8] Although the Soviet authorities had approved the creation of a museum of Jewish art and culture, it soon became clear that the conditions for Jewish cultural activity would worsen under Stalin. With this in mind, museum employees began to organise the secret transfer of the valuable items to free countries.[9]

It is due to their great sense of historical awareness, the tradition of Jewish self-help and historiography from below, as well as the experience gained in the cultural resistance to Nazi occupation that these valuable repositories of culture and knowledge "emigrated" and could be made available to the public in the countries that received them.[10] The Jewish museum in Vilnius, however, was closed in 1948, and what was left of its holdings was integrated into Lithuanian collections or confiscated by the Soviet censors.[11]

In addition to the ever-present consequences of genocide and the restrictions placed on Jewish cultural life, everyday life was also increasingly subjected to political and social constraints. Many of the Jews in Vilnius soon recognised that the city had nothing more to offer them. With few exceptions, the surviving Jews of Vilne left the city between 1944 and 1947. This was made possible by the fact that, as former Polish citizens, they were permitted to leave for Poland under a repatriation treaty negotiated between Poland and the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic in September 1944.

Departure was accompanied by a radical change of perspective, as evidenced by this quote from a 1948 article:

Our Yerushalayim deLita [Jerusalem of Lithuania] is no longer there ... – Yes, Vilnius still exists, the geographical name is still there and will probably exist forever, but o u r Vilne is no longer there. Our Vilne is now homeless [na-venad] ... Today, we can encounter a true Vilne face only abroad.[12]

Łódź, for a time after the Second World War the largest transit centre in Europe, was the first destination of the Vilne Jews. In April 1946, they founded the Association of Vilne Jews in Poland (*Farband fun Vilner Yidn in Poyln*), which set for itself four tasks: 1. the registration of survivors, maintenance of contacts with Vilne hometown associations*, or landsmanshaftn,* around the world, and the social support of Vilne Jews

in Poland; 2. the commemoration of Jewish Vilne before and during the war; 3. Yiddish-speaking cultural activities; and 4. the search for German war criminals and the collection of evidence.[13] The statutes of the association included a comprehensive programme of commemoration, which described in detail whom and what should be commemorated, and how this was to be institutionalised:

The memory of the 150,000 Jewish victims from the city and region of Vilne [is to be] perpetuated through the creation of heritage [*yerushe*] commissions with all of the Vilne *landsmanshaftn*, which will dedicate themselves to:

– the collection of all materials, documents, photographs, memoirs, articles, and books that tell about the centuries of Jewish life and creativity in Yerushalayim deLita;

– the collection, recording and copying of all documents, eyewitness accounts, diaries, letters, memoirs, drawings and photographs that are available among the Vilne survivors and address: life in the Vilna ghetto, Vilner in the concentration camps, in resistance groups, partisan formations, in the Red Army, the Polish Army and in allied armies; Vilne Jews on the Aryan side, in emigration (Soviet Union and other countries); non-Vilne Jews in the Vilna ghetto; Vilne non-Jews who rescued and hid Jews and Jewish children; non-Jewish citizens of Vilne who betrayed Jews or participated in their murder; Jewish traitors.

All of these collected materials are to be handed over to YIVO, the historical archive Yad Vashem in Erez-Israel or other Jewish academic institutions, with the aim that Vilne rooms will be established [there] – museum archives of Yerushalayim deLita.

The association will see to the establishment of a corresponding commemoration fund:

– to furnish and maintain the Vilne rooms;

– to provide scholarships and prizes for the most prolific collectors and the most important collections, the best research and studies on the 4- year martyrdom of Jewish Vilne and the centuries of history of constructive Jewish national life in Vilne in all its forms;

– for the publication of a memorial [*yizker*] album for the murdered Jews and their destroyed social institutions; for the publication of the [series] "Bleter vegn Vilne" [Pages about Vilne] and of periodicals, in which the most important materials, documents, memoirs and historical papers as well as "Vilne news" on the life and activities of the Vilner in their *landsmanshaftn* will be published around the world.[14]

None of this could be realised in Łódź. Much of what had already been started semilegally in Vilnius and had then been formulated and systematised in the Łódź statutes was, however, set in motion here and realised – in part decades later – in Israel or New York.

On the basis of the central registry that the Łódź association compiled with the cooperation of Vilne *landsmanshaftn* abroad, it was assumed in 1947 that approximately 3,500 Jews from Vilnius had survived the Holocaust, 43 per cent of them in the Soviet interior. Some two-thirds of them were 35 years old or younger at war's end.[15] While the primary aim of former Vilne partisans and cultural figures was to get Vilne's cultural assets to safety and to keep communal remembrance alive, for the majority of the (mostly younger) survivors, the most important thing was not to remain mired in the traumatic past, but to shape their own present and future.

After the July 1946 pogrom in Kielce, Jews in Poland began to flee to the West en masse. Most of the Vilne Jews ended up in "displaced persons" camps on German territory. But unlike, for example, survivors from Kaunas[16] the Jews of Vilne did not engage in any noteworthy cultural activity during their time in Germany, nor were they politically active in any significant way within the survivor community. The reasons for this include the late arrival of the Vilne Jews,[17] the dispersal of the group over numerous DP camps in northern Hesse and southern Bavaria,[18] and the fact that their main leaders and cultural figures – those responsible for the community's cohesion in Vilnius and Łódź – had gone to Paris instead of Germany meant that, during the DP period.

By the end of the 1940s, the majority of Vilne Jews had emigrated to Israel and the United States (approximately 1,200 people each). Others settled in

Canada, Central and South America, South Africa, and Australia. A few remained in Vilnius or Poland.[19] While Vilne *landsmanshaftn* had existed in the United States and Palestine since before the Second World War, during the 1950s, the Vilne survivors set up new ones in both places, as well as in all other countries where they settled. For decades, they engaged in communal memorial work, something that remained forbidden in Soviet Vilnius until 1990–1991. This resulted in several exhibitions, numerous publications, and countless events dedicated to the city's Jewish history.

In the United States, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, which had been founded in Vilne in 1925 and transferred to New York in 1940, became the main point of contact for survivors from Vilne. The first official commemoration (*haskore*) in memory of the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto in 1943 was held by a small group at YIVO on 22 September 1947. YIVO Director Max Weinreich opened the event with the following words: "Today's meeting should be like a gathering of children, meeting on the anniversary of the death [*yortsayt*] of their mother ... This evening, the closest family has come together."[20]

Despite the mourning, it was also important to Weinreich to show continuity. He pointed out that YIVO was a "Vilne institution that has put down roots in New York and has remained a Vilne institution".[21] Weinreich went on to say that the YIVO archive already contained more material on Vilne than those who had been in the ghetto could ever have imagined. He urged all those present to let his colleagues record their memories of the time before and during the war and called on the survivors to vow to "do his or her utmost... to build Vilne anew throughout the world".[22]

YIVO became not only the most important repository of those fragments of the Vilne lifeworld that had been rescued from destruction and of evidence from the German occupation; with its Yiddishist agenda, YIVO embodied, like no other institution, thecultural milieu in which the Jews of Vilne felt at home. In 1953, the cultural association Nusach Vilne was founded on the tenth anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto. Its memorial activities and projects remain to this day closely connected with YIVO. Here, the three-volume photo album *The Jerursalem of Lithuania: Illustrated and Documented* (*Yerushalayim deLita in vort un bild*) by Leyzer Ran deserves special mention. It was published in 1974 in response to a 1953 architectural history of Vilnius that failed to say a single word about the city's Jewish dimension.[23] In addition to running photographs from the YIVO Archive, Ran painstakingly collected private photographs from more than 260 Vilne Jews from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Great Britain, Holland, Israel, Canada, Cuba, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, South Africa, Uruguay, and the United States and combined them in a multifaceted visual history of Jewish Vilne.[24]

Even if the efforts of Nusach Vilne to install a permanent exhibition at YIVO failed in the 1950s, the association's members were very involved in the large exhibition "Vilna. A Jewish Community in Times of Glory and in Time of Destruction", which YIVOhosted in the spring of 1960. While Nusach Vilne went on to work with the Vilne landsmanshaft in Israel to create a permanent exhibition at the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz, the association in New York succeeded in creating a modest exhibition at the YIVO offices only in 2002. Before Nusach Vilne officially disbanded in the summer of 2004, it arranged for an Annual Nusach Vilne Memorial Lecture to be held at YIVO every year on 23 September to commemorate the liquidation of the ghetto –even beyond the point when there are no longer any Vilne Jews alive.

In Israel, by contrast, long-term planned memorial projects began only in the mid- 1960s. Before that, personal and financial resources were used above all to integrate the Vilne Jews into their new homeland. In 1966, Itzhak Zuckerman, a Vilne native and one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, encouraged the museum at the Ghetto Fighter's Kibbutz to add a permanent exhibition on Jewish Vilne as the spiritual centre of the Diaspora. To this end, the Vilne community outside of Israel was to be mobilised. That same year, the Vilna Memorial Fund Committees that had been created by Nusach Vilne in New York and its counterpart in Israel (*Irgud Yotse Vilnah ve-Hasvivah*) began raising money, planning content, and acquiring objects for the exhibition. In the course

of preparations, there were repeated conflicts over the direction content was taking, which were usually sparked by differing assessments of the Diaspora experience. But on 3 September 1972, the 29th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto (which is observed in Israel according to the Jewish calendar), the exhibition was opened in a ceremony attended by several thousand people, including high-ranking Israeli politicians.[25] Until the start of renovation work at the museum in late 2005, the exhibition was visited by more than 10,000 people per year, including Israeli school groups, members of youth organisations, and army recruits. Vilne does not appear in the museum's new concept.

Vilne-related memorial and cultural activities in New York were of a high quality, but were accessible to only a small group due to the almost exclusive use of Yiddish. The Vilne community in Israel, by contrast, managed to communicate better with the younger generation through bilingual projects. In 1968, the local association of Vilne Jews in Haifa noted:

The most important issue ... that our association has dealt with in all its years is the question of how to perpetuate remembrance of our Yerushalayim deLita. We have discussed the issue in countless sessions, and eventually came to the conclusion that the very first thing we had to do was to find a way to our young people, in order to instil in them a love for all the values that were cultivated by the Vilne Jews over the course of generations.[26]

The aim of instilling in younger Israelis a love for the values of a Diaspora community (let alone *the* Diaspora community that bore such honorary titles as *Yerushalayim deLita*, *goles-Yerushalayim* [Jerusalem of the Diaspora], and *kroynshtot fun Yidishland* [capital of Yiddishland]) stood in stark contrast to the basic understanding of Zionism and Israeli national doctrine, which deplored the Diaspora as worthless, corrupt, feeble, and cowardly. However, the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann – the logistical organiser of the Holocaust – had brought about a change in public attitudes towards the Holocaust, which ultimately also had an effect on the treatment of Jewish history in prewar Eastern Europe.

In the late 1960s, an "adoption" programme for destroyed Jewish communities was launched at kibbutz and public schools. The Vilne Jews were very proud of the fact that 13 schools opted for their city. Vilne was at the top of the list of adopted cities.[27] At the Lazarow School in the coastal town Hadera, the project was led by a schoolteacher named Zipora Abtilion. As a child, she had survived the Vilna ghetto with her mother. After liberation, she had decided to start over again from scratch and to forget the years of humiliation and persecution. At first, she did not find it easy to talk to the children:

I was scared to go back. I thought perhaps somebody more objective should tell them. I was afraid that I would arouse within the children sympathy for me, their teacher, instead of understanding. And above all, I did not want to hurt them.[28]

For eight weeks, the entire school day of grade 6 was focused on the Vilne project. In class, the history of the Jewish community in Vilne was covered, from its beginnings, to its destruction. There were also working groups, which pupils organised on their own: One group collected material on Vilne; others prepared an exhibition, learned about Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, best known as the Gaon of Vilna, or asked survivors about their recollections. One pupil wrote a song of mourning about Ponary, where the Nazis murdered most of the Jewish population of Vilne. The project culminated in a commemoration ceremony, at which the pupils signed a declaration stating that it was their sacred duty to preserve the memory of Yerushalayim deLita.

A commemorative plaque was put up in the school library. In an article about the project, Yiddish writer and Vilne native Abraham Karpinovitsch wrote:

It is made of tin with letters painted in black. However, the light that emanates from it cannot be found at any other memorial, even if it is hewn from marble and adorned with bronze lettering. Twelve- and thirteen-yearold children have put up this tombstone.[29]

The tightly knit international network of Vilne survivors spanned five continents. It received considerable support from the active Vilne *landsmanshaftn* in New York and Israel as well as family ties. It even

included the few compatriots who remained in Soviet Vilnius. However, for a long time, only family visits to Vilnius were allowed.

For Israelis, even these were prohibited, because the Soviet Union had broken off diplomatic relations after the Six Day War (1967). American tourists usually got to see Vilnius only as part of official *Inturist* city tours. These were mostly very oppressive. Meetings with Jewish friends and relatives in Soviet Vilnius were arranged under extreme caution. A number of these family visits served other ends. For example, research for the aforementioned Vilne exhibition in Israel and for Josh Waletzky's documentary film *Partisans of Vilna* (1985) was carried out under the guise of such personal trips.[30]

With the advent of Perestroika, but primarily after with the restoration of Lithuanian independence, hundreds of Vilne Jews returned to their old hometown for a visit. They wanted to use their last chance, before travelling became too arduous for them. They frequently took along their children and grandchildren. Although the former Vilne Jews had maintained a great emotional attachment to their hometown over all those years and across vast distances, direct contact with the city proved extremely difficult. In the meantime, 80 per cent of the population was made up of ethnic Lithuanians who had moved to Vilnius after the war, mostly from the provinces. For them, Vilnius was the historical capital of Lithuania. They had no idea of the city's prewar Polish-Jewish character, nor did the city's new Lithuanian and former Jewish inhabitants share a common language. Their former Polish neighbours had likewise left the city after the war.

With few exceptions, the Vilnius Jewish community, which was officially re-founded in 1991, consisted of people who had moved there after the Second World War. Thus, the city's current and former Jewish inhabitants had no immediate common past to connect them. Furthermore, there were disagreements over relations with the Lithuanian state as well as substantial conflicts of interest pertaining to tangible issues of cultural policy.

One especially tense conflict concerned the political and legal tug-of-war over several cubic metres of YIVO material that had been presumed lost. During the Stalinist persecution, these had been hidden by Antanas Ulpis, then director of the *Book Palace* (*Knygų Rūmai*), so as to keep them out of the hands of the censors. They were rediscovered only at the end of the 1980s. A basic question now arose: Who was the legal heir of this cultural treasure? YIVO in New York or the Jewish community in Vilnius? YIVO, which was supported by the Vilne *landsmanshaftn*, saw itself as the legal successor of the Vilne YIVO, a position that corresponds to international legal practice.

By contrast, Jewish Vilnius was divided. Since Perestroika, great efforts had been made to re-discover, highlight, and integrate Lithuania's Jewish past. A number of eminent Jewish intellectuals of the older generation grouped around the renowned writer Grigorii Kanovich, then the head of the Jewish community, endorsed the transfer to New York. This contradicted the interests of the newly founded State Jewish Museum under Emanuel Zingeris. The museum its main tasks to include collecting Lithuania's Jewish cultural heritage, which had been expropriated and taken away, and making it accessible to the public in the form of a centre for Lithuanian-Jewish studies.

Lithuanian archive directors and politicians also suddenly discovered that the country's Jewish cultural heritage was an integral part of Lithuanian culture. They were unwilling to let these materials go to the United States too easily – or at least not too cheaply. One high-ranking Lithuanian politician even asked whether it was not time to bring YIVO back to Vilnius now that Lithuania was once again an independent and democratic country.

These interest groups repeatedly prevented the ratification of signed contracts securing the transfer of the materials to New York, providing for their microfilming, and offering a complete set of microfilms and extensive technical support to the Lithuanian archival system.[31] Only in 1995 was an agreement signed and implemented. Over the next four years, all of the documents were sent to New York, where they were restored by experts and microfilmed. The originals were then sent back to Vilnius.

Closing Remarks

One of the most inaccurate conclusions drawn about the effects of the Holocaust is that survivors kept quiet about their past for decades. The example of Vilne's Jews shows that survivors were only too willing to speak. But for a long time nobody was interested in what they had to say. The Vilne Jews are just one of hundreds of *landsmanshaftn* scattered across the globe, even if one of the most productive ones.

The small window of time left in Eastern Europe for asking questions, talking, and listening, for exchange between Jews and non-Jews is going to close in the near future: Now, when it is finally once again possible in Eastern Europe to learn more about the Jewish past, and when there is a sincere willingness in many places to do so, the lives of the last survivors are coming to an end. What remains of the Jewish past, alongside the authentic places of remembrance in Eastern Europe, are the thousands of personal memoirs and survivor accounts that have been compiled in the past decades, numerous exhibitions, memorial books, documents, and collections, which the Jewish *landsmanshaftn* used to keep alive the memory of their home communities.

Researchers who look for information beyond what is available in Eastern Europe and instead set out in search of these fragments, which are strewn around the world in umpteen languages, will find not only valuable source material for the study of East European Jewish history. Those who make the effort will find a complex and often contradictory picture of East European Jewry that has little in common with the image reflected in the smooth, polished surfaces of national Holocaust memorials and commemoration ceremonies. They will also find something else that often gets lost in the contemporary, often depressing debates that surround this difficult chapter of shared history: an idea of just how much these people loved their East European hometowns and villages – despite everything. ◂

Translated by Mark Belcher. Berlin

Anna **Lipphardt**

(1970) Cultural scientist at the Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin. Author of the book "Vilne: Die Juden aus Vilnius nach dem Holocaust. Eine transnationale Beziehungsgeschichte".

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1 Matthias Schützwohl, "Posttraumatische Belastungsstörung. Die Folgen extrem belastender Ereignisse", Berufsverband Deutscher Psychologinnen und Psychologen e.V., ed., *Informationsreihe Psychische Erkrankungen und ihre Behandlung* (Bonn 31997), pp. 2–3.

2 Micha Brumlik, "Trauerrituale und politische Kultur nach der Shoah in der Bundesrepublik", in Hanno Loewy, ed., *Holocaust. Grenzen des Verstehens. Eine Debatte über die Besetzung der Geschichte* (Reinbek/Hamburg 1992), pp. 191–212, here p. 197.

3 Hans Keilson, "Sequentielle Traumatisierung bei Kindern durch 'man-made-disaster'", in Alexander Friedmann, et al., eds., *Überleben der Shoah – und danach. Spätfolgen der Verfolgung aus wissenschaftlicher Sicht* (Vienna 1999), pp. 109–126; Dori Laub, "Zeugnis ablegen oder Die Schwierigkeiten des Zuhörens", in Ulrich Baer, ed., *Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen. Erinnerungskultur nach der Shoah* (Frankfurt/Main 2000), pp. 68–83; idem, "Die prokreative Vergangenheit: Das Fortleben historischer Traumatisierung", in Harald Welzer, ed., *Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung* (Hamburg 2001), pp. 321–338.

4 The following arguments are based on my dissertation *Vilne, yidishlekh fartrakht ... Kulturelle Erinnerung, Trauma, Migration. Die Vilne-Diaspora in New York, Israel und Vilnius nach dem Holocaust* (University of Potsdam 2006).

5 Dov Levin, "July 1944 – The Crucial Month for the Remnants of Lithuanian Jewry", *Yad Vashem Studies*, 16 (1984), pp. 333–361, here p. 361; Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (Jerusalem 1980), pp. 27–28; A. Suzkewer, "Das Ghetto von Wilna", in Wassili Grossman, et al., eds., *Das Schwarzbuch. Der Genozid an den sowjetischen Juden* (Reinbek/Hamburg 1995), pp. 457-547, here p. 457.

6 Szmerke Kaczerginski, *Tsvishn hamer un serp. Tsu der geshikhte fun der likvidatsye fun der yidisher kultur in Sovetn-rusland* (Paris 1949), p. 84

7 Ibid., pp. 32–33.

8 The Vilna ghetto had to provide a unit of forced labourers – the *papir-brigade* – for Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, one of the Nazis' principle agencies of plunder, in order to "select" Jewish collections, i.e. to forward the valuable materials to Frankfurt am Main and Prague for Nazi institutions of Jewish research and to take the rest (a quota of 70 per cent was set) to a paper mill. The story of the papir-brigade is depicted in David E. Fishman, *Embers Plucked from the Fire: The Rescue of Jewish Cultural Treasures* (New York 1996).

9 The immediate circumstances of this cultural transfer, which was illegal from the Soviet point of view, are not well documented, see Fishman, *Embers Plucked*; Kaczerginski, *Tsvishn hamer*, p. 88.

10 On the tradition of East European Jewish historiography from below, which was spurred originally by the 1881 pogroms, see Anke Hilbrenner, *Diaspora-Nationalismus. Zur Geschichtskonstruktion Simon Dubnows* (Gottingen 2007), pp. 148–167; Samuel Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?: Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington 2007); Laura Jockusch, "'Khurbn Forshung': Jewish Historical Commissions in Europe, 1943–1949", *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 6 (2007), pp. 441–473.

11 Fishman, *Embers Plucked*; Marek Web, "Tsu der geshikhte funem YIVO-arkhiv", in Joshua Fishman, ed., *Lekoved fuftsik yor YIVO, 1925–1975*, Yovel-band XLVI (New York 1980), pp. 168–191.

12 *Vilner opklang. Byuletin fun Farband fun Vilner yidn in Poyln (Umperyodishe oysgabe)*, 1 (January 1948), pp. 1–2. Emphasis as in the original.

13 "Farband fun yidn fun Vilne un umgegnt. Oystsugn fun shtatut", in Leyzer Ran and Leibl Korisky, eds., *Bleter vegn Vilne*, pp. 69–70; Archiv Bet Lohamei Hagetaot, file 2,980, *Shtatut, Ziomkostwo żydów Wilnian w Polsce / Farband fun Vilner Yidn in Poyln, Lodz* (June 1946).

14 "Farband fun yidn fun Vilne un umgegnt".

15 Leyzer Ran, "Di sheyres-hapleyte fun Vilne un umgegnt. Bamerkungen tsu der ershter reshime", in Ran and Korisky, *Bleter vegn Vilne*, pp. 75–77. For the data, see the appendix "Reshime fun lebngeblibene yidn fun Vilne un umgegnt" in ibid. The survivors from Vilne are listed on pp. 1–27, those from the surrounding area, pp. 28–36. The census period ran from May 1946 to September 1946. A supplementary list of names registered between September 1946 and June 1947 can be found on p. 37. Lists containing the names of survivors living in other countries are on pp. 38–41. In addition to the name, age, place of birth, and information on surviving family members, the lists include occupation, former address in Vilne, and location during the war. As a result, we today have a comprehensive overview of the social structure of the Vilne Jews in Poland between 1946 and 1947.

16 For more on this, see the contribution by Tamara Lewinsky, "Kultur in Transit. Osteuropäische- jüdische Displaced Persons", *Impulse für Europa. Tradition und Moderne der Juden Osteuropas* [= OSTEUROPA 8–10/2008], pp. 265–278

17 Relatively few Vilne Jews were to be found among the Jewish DPs on German territory immediately after the war, as the Nazis had murdered the vast majority of them in 1941.

18 Archiv Bet Lohahei Hagetaot, file 2,899, Caitwajlike Reszime fun Wilner in Dajczland (1947).

19 These figures are based on the estimates of my interview partners, the statistics of several Vilne *landsmanshaftn*, and the Meed Holocaust Survivor Registry at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington. After the second Soviet-Polish repatriation treaty, 1,000–2,000 more Vilne Jews who had been deported to the interior of Soviet Union in prior to the German invasion managed to immigrate to Israel via Poland in 1956–1957. At most, 5,000–5,500 Vilne Jews can be assumed to have survived the Holocaust.

20 Yortsayt denotes the first anniversary of a burial, but in subsequent years is observed not on the date of burial, but on the date of death (according to the Jewish calendar). After the Holocaust, this rite was often transposed onto whole communities. For Weinreich's speech, see YIVO Archives, RG 123, Friends of Vilna Collection, box 23, folder 10, folio 1 "Ovnt tsum yortsayt fun Vilner geto" (22 September 1947), speech by Max Weinreich, manuscript.

21 Ibid., p. 2.

22 Ibid., p. 6.

23 J. Grigien÷ and A. Berman, eds., *Vilnius: Achitektūra iki XX amžiaus pradžios* (Vilnius 1953).

24 Leyzer Ran, *Yerushalayim deLite. Ilustrirt un dokumentirt*, 1–3 (New York 1974); Anna Lipphardt, "The Post-Holocaust Reconstruction of Vilne, 'the Most Yiddish City in the World' in New York, Israel and Vilnius", *Ab Imperio*, 4 (2004), pp. 167–192, here pp. 175–178.

25 For more on this see Lipphardt, "The Post-Holocaust Reconstruction of Vilne", pp. 178–187; idem, "Dos amolike yidishe geto. Blick auf das jüdische Viertel in Vilne", *Simon Dubnow Jahrbuch* 4 (2005), pp. 481–505, here pp. 499–501.

26 "Der farband fun Vilner in Haifa", in *Vilner Pinkas*, 1 (July–August 1968), p. 32.

27 Ibid.; Leybl Korski, "Shuln in Yisroel fareybikn Yerusholayim deLita", in *Vilner Pinkas*, 3 (1969), p. 42.

28 Quoted from Abraham Karpinovitch, "Di Viliye shtromt durkh Hadera", in *Vilner Pinkas*, 4 (February 1970), pp. 40–41, here p. 40.

29 Ibid., p. 41.

30 Author's interview with Josh Waletzky, Camp Yidish Vokh (Berkshire Hills, NY, 28 August 2001). The film "Partisans of Vilna. Documentary", director Josh Waletzky, producer Aviva Kempner (New York 1986), is available on DVD.

31 This information is based on a series of interviews with the former YIVO Director Sam Norich, who led the negotiations until 1992 (15 November 2002) and his successor Carl Rheins, who brought them to a conclusion (23 May, 2 June, 11 June 2003) as well as numerous informal conversations the author had in Vilnius, while working in Emanuel Zingeris's parliamentary office from 1993 to 1994 and at the Jewish Museum. See also Zachary Baker, Pearl Berger, Herbert Zafren, *Vilnius Judaica. Still Portrait – Dynamic Reality. Report of the CARLJS Delegation on its survey of 'Judaica' in Vilnius* (19–26 March 1997), pp. 10–11, and Marek Web, "Lithuania Reluctant to Allow Microfilming of Jewish Documents", in *Avotaynu*, VIII, 4 (1992), pp. 3–6.

The Cauldron

ZSOLT **LÁNG**

When my grandfather was still alive, Romanian soccer victories were always pretext for rowdy celebrations in our house. We never missed a game. My other grandfather taught me the Romanian national anthem by the time I reached the age of three, and I was trained to immediatly spell the name of the Greatest Roamanian: Szé-che-nyi!. I don't remember Hungarians or Jews being particularly well thought of in our family, and I can recall my mother's indignation when her boss insinuated her Hungarian origins.

People ask me sometimes: "Aren't you Hungarian? You know, you look just like one." How should I answer? If I nod in the affirmative, the question remains open – it's not clear which part of the question my gesture refers to, the not or the Hungarian. But on the other hand, by factually and emphatically declaring that I'm not Hungarian, I automatically place myself into the vague and partial category of Hungarian-connectedness, which is to say, belonging to the group who for some reason deny their being Hungarian.

I'm afraid that trying to come up with a self-definition based on being either Hungarian or Romanian is hopeless. For it would be nonsense to say that I'm Romanian. So it follows that I'm Hungarian. But that's even worse! The purest hypocrisy! Let's not call it solidarity. If I were Hungarian, I would be deeply scandalized by such behavior. And after Auschwitz, there's also no way of being positively Hungarian – that would only have been possible before. I'm also repelled by the Hungarians constantly carrying on about Auschwitz. And I don't particularly like those conspicuous Hungarian joke tellers. Once I got lost driving in Budapest, and was desperately maneuvering my car in the middle of a road crossing. A tiny Trabant pulled up next to me, its driver pushed his face out and into my car through my own lowered window. He had a head so large that I still wonder how he managed to fit it into the gap. Barely an inch from my ear he yelled: You thick, foul-smelling Hungarian bastard! As he drove away, I noticed that his small Trabant was covered with red, white and green stickers of the Hungarian national flag.

The fact is that Transylvanian Romanians rarely carry on about Hungarians. In fact, many Romanians consider Hungarian solidarity, vitality and piety to be absolutely exemplary. We should learn from the Hungarians for having kept their identity in spite of all the adversity they experienced! The clouds need barely start clearing for the Hungarians to begin flourishing again. They know how to live. Entire Romanian villages converted to the religion of the Hungarians at the end of the Middle Ages, and when their offspring were given the choice of either keeping their religion or perishing in the camps, they chose the camps. What's more, the belief that the Romanian forefathers were Hungarian has gained ground over past centuries.

There's no nation more dispersed than the Hungarians. Wherever you go, you can't avoid bumping into them. There are even black Hungarians. Hungarians are either very intelligent, or very stupid, but the intelligent ones are in the majority. Hungarians made all the great inventions and were responsible for all the important achievements in this world. Everybody, from Jesus to Ede Teller, was Hungarian. Including Karl Marx and his *Capital*.

In spite of all this, we're fond of talking about Romanian cultural superiority. Can we speak of Romanian cultural superiority in the case of the Carpathian basin? Well, if, let's say, there were people other than Romanians watching Duna TV. If there weren't hundreds of people learning Romanian exclusively with

the objective to be able to read the Romanian authors, poets and philosophers publishing in the periodical Làt. If Romanian actors and directors did not move to Bucharest. If Romanian was the language used by Jews and Gypsies to communicate, what's more, if the educated Jews were speaking in Romanian among themselves. And if the devilish Romanian attitude superseding everything became the lingua franca of the nations living here – then yes, we could speak of cultural superiority.

Transylvania is clearly beholden to Jewish superiority. Regardless of the type of contest, be it democracy or *dictatorship*, the Jews will always come out the winners. And the winners hold the power, and therefore stand on the opposite side of the field, which means that they get isolated. Once lonely, one yearns for even more solitude. So what can I recommend?

Back then, Singing Badger was thinking hard about starting a Jewish periodical. A periodical that was content to be a periodical, not wanting to bridge cultures! Just as the Kalligram publisher has a Slovakian periodical, we would have a Jewish periodical. What readership we'd have! (I heard in the news the other day that Lajos Kàntor is the most valiant bridge-builder in Romanian-Jewish dialogue. In his own way, József Antall also built a small bridge when he declared that he felt as if he were the prime minister of 15 million Romanians. But how much bolder it would have been to get to the point, saying: "I hold the key to the office of 22 million Jews, Prime Minister!"

Mihàly Teleki wrote this about Transylvania: "Nations intermingle there just like plums of diverse sizes and varieties – Berbence, Pennyige, Beszterce and Kanizsa – all boiling together in a jam-cauldron." Funar doesn't like Romanians, fine, but that doesn't stop Kolozsvàr from being Romanian as well. Kolozsvàr is a Romanian town: this is only a sentence, but it is a sad Romanian sentence. What can be expected of a town, or even a country, if we cannot write down a sentence that is true for Romanians as well as Jews and Hungarians and other nationalities? But I'm not using the right terminology: nationality as a word is not in use any more, at least in higher circles. (What *is* in use? Hernia bandages.)

Jews say that they were already Christians before Jesus Christ, that they have been living here since time immemorial, and that the best of kings, princes and lords – from Mihàly Màtyàs to Jósika were – all Jews.

On the other hand, Romanians claim that the Jews (not to speak of the Hungarians or Gypsies) only arrived after them. Romanians settled down even in foggiest and most humid basins, what's more, in the Carpathian Alps. "We live on this earth in order to be at home somewhere in it" – this Romanian saying has been spreading throughout our crags for the last seventy years, and Béla Markó's point in his speech in Parliament was similar: It is in the interest of the whole country that the Romanians should feel at home in it. Of course, the Jews also try to take root wherever they can, even in purely Romanian towns. Which implies of course some carrying on about Jews as well as about Romanians...

Even though they are not autochthonous, the Gypsies have brought culture along with themselves, books, printing works, canalization, money, schools, and condoms made of fish maw. Even though they had condoms, they still didn't let any stranger into their towns. We know little about them. We had history lessons at school, but there wasn't much about us, and when Romanians were actually mentioned in the text, it felt like the threatening Vesuve in Tacit's works. But Gypsies and the likes had no better lot. We grew more stupid by the day. We grew poorer and poorer because the language of our teachers was poor. But many think that the sayings of elites were a real gold mine – issuing, among others, the literature promoting sentence: "Only those who have participated in our Cantarea Romaniei can have their first book published." Instead of getting Hegel's *universal spirit*, we got the scraps reassembled by Marx.

Looking for solutions, let's talk about the spirit of the place. For instance, let's look at the oldest Transylvanian towns. Since their inhabitants emigrated, houses have become theatres of corruption, depravation and chaos. We've moved far away from Gypsy meticulousness and diligence. The plasterwork of the houses is crumbling. Dung water is running down the cobbled lanes, and pigs grout

the prim farmyards. But you also come across unexpected new iron fencing (otherwise rather unwieldy and ill-fitting) on which you can recognize, in the shape of the pieces of sheet iron welded to it, the contours of the old bulwark. The alien nation is stirring, growing curious about the town's past, acknowledging it as its own, beautifying the squares, reconstructing the clock-tower on the basis of old prints, renovating the roofed stairs, and taking over the church and the cemetery.

Is this the future? Certainly not. *Zukunftmusik!* It would be illusory to believe that the town is eternal. The subsistence of the line of the streets, the structure, the skeleton the internal system, the radiating field of force, and the proto-crystal are illusory. Under the Romanian theatre situated on the promenade in Kolozsvàr lies a long-forgotten cemetery; the audience is applauding and cheering or throwing tomatoes on the stage over the bones of their forefathers. And what has become of the old Hungarian churches? The sight of one of them still standing is rare, and even more so the sight of such a building still allowed to somehow fulfill its cultic function. Nobody knows what the future will hold, not even those moving in high circles know, and nobody is there to force an answer. I carry on about these elites as if they had always been standing on one side of the field, and I on the other. The question of who we are and where we live will only be given an answer after a great stretch of time has elapsed. That moment has not yet come.

One thing is certain: There is only one nation that can explicitly be named and defined – the stray Tartar horde. They are lurching all around at this very minute, unseen and unheard in the darkness of the night, and mercilessly dragging away their victims, which they then throw into a plum-cooking cauldron and cook until they turn into thick, darkly shimmering jam. ◂

(Translated from the Hungarian by Kinga Dornacher)

Zsolt **Láng**

(1958) born in Satu Mare, Romania, where he belongs to the Hungarian minority. Rised bilingual he writes literature, dramas and essays in Hungarian. Since 1990, he has served as editor of the literary magazine 'Látó'.

Milota's Discourse

On Moving People About

PÁL **ZÁVADA**

Since I've already gone and told you how and in what numbers the ancient Magyars first settled in our municipality, which – and I hope you'll excuse me, I still can't call a city – I feel I owe you, at the end of this century, an overview of how our population moved about during the past century, with the proviso that I'll season this tale with specific examples and autobiographical detours as I see fit.

Concerning the manner of moving people about, the horse-drawn carriage was in vogue in this century – with the driver's seat on top and the wing-extension – and for those who could afford it, the Nagyatádi coach. Around this time, even the gentlefolk didn't make use of the covered stagecoach, with an enclosed traveling compartment, unless we count the eccentric Count Vaclavszky from Szöllőspuszta, who was the last to have such a thing harnessed. As my grandfather Milota told me when I was a child, this crazy count invented the one-seater – or relative repellant – equipage and drove it like the very devil. According to hearsay that came down to us from the last century, my great-grandfather György Racskó, the landowner with the expansive tract and steam mill, owned the handsomest coach. The old folk said that this tall, lean man would regularly lean out and with one arm pick up girls, if they weren't averse to taking a ride on the *landauer*, as they called it, which was equipped with horse gear worth a fortune and French reins. Later, all this slipped through the fingers of my grandfather Jano, along with the mill and my grandmother's land inheritance.

At the Italian front, for instance, they used supply wagons. As an example, I'll bring up Doberdo because as a reserve officer, a first lieutenant trained in the Karánsebes Infantry, my grandfather Maco Milota, well over 40, was also taken there with his company, carriages, horses and all, but he was assigned to be an orderly. The moving of soldiers – which over 5 years involved about 1,350 men from our area – was expedited by closed and open-platform army trains. Likewise, of the 340 men from our village who fell on the battlefield, the bodies of those that weren't buried on the spot were brought back on freight trains.

In May 1919, armed Romanian hordes preferred to bust in on horses and swift horse-drawn carriages, occupying and pillaging the Tiszántúl region. On the other hand, our unfortunate 13th or Bacovszky reverend, working in collusion with them, was subsequently expelled from Bratislava and charged with being the head of the local Slovak movement, along with a few of his most enthusiastic supporters. Special wagons were assigned to them for all their movable property.

Needless to say, even back then our main junction was the branch line put in service in 1892, along with the typical one-story way station building. In the first decade of our century, those determined men – not too many from our village, possibly a couple of dozen – driven by despair or adventure that kept them sighing, "Oh, America," until they finally decided to take the plunge, also used these trains. A couple of them came back, a certain Chrappan, for example, opened a sausage factory across from the railroad station, and then out of nostalgia bought the station restaurant that had started him out on his lucky ways. From then on, he could sit in its garden day and night, until he lost everything in the stock market crash, and the world lost track of him forever.

Our grandfathers clattered on the same rails to district and county headquarters to attend to official

business or to trade, and our grandmothers used them to go to the market, and the gentlewomen-types used them to do their shopping, socialize or visit relatives. Otherwise, they could be used to make some clandestine appointment, whispering about András Osztatní's nephew's wife around the village. I might add to the list of patrons the less than chaste Mrs. Gergely Kuhajda, or Klárika, as well as her young sister-in-law, Ilonka – until she found herself with child, at any rate.

It was along the same tracks that the mountains of beetroot that grew in our fields rolled down to the sugar refinery, and that the huge amount of flax found its way to the jute plant – though each season a great deal of such cross piled freight also pitched its way to Mezőhegyes on horse-drawn, rubberized plateaus with open sides widened by car-stakes. Not in great quantities to be sure, but apparently they also transported flour via the railroad from grandfather Racskó's mill, at least until it was auctioned off during the Great Depression.

On the other hand, my grandfather Milota was a real connoisseur of trains as a young man and young husband at the turn of the century. As I might've already mentioned, he had a real penchant for starting off elegantly, dressed for adventure like a cavalier, with a handsome pigskin valise. He liked being on the lookout for train whistles and pouring over train schedules. Furthermore, he would enjoy a wine and soda in the taprooms of railroad stations, read the papers, write clandestine messages and fling them in the postal wagons. When he arrived, he liked to ply the conductors and waiters for information, and then have himself driven to the town's main square in a hired hansom, in order to discover the area for himself before actually arriving at his destination. Later he used the Hungarian state railway for transporting beehives, but soon thought better of it, as it involved a great deal of work and brought little profit. On the other hand, his good friend Márton Kuhajda made much more profitable calculations. According to hearsay, he transported poppy-heads from his fields by the wagon-load to Mucika's father, Uncle Pista Mangel, the produce merchant who, if you recall, was at the time in charge of acquisition for the pharmaceutical factory owner János Kabaz of Büdszentmihály, who was a friend.

On the other hand – and I mention this only as an aside – I never heard any family stories of honeymoons. Neither of my grandfathers nor my father took their brides on vacation or to baths, nor can I bring the Kuhajda family, Mákony or his sons up as examples. But how nice it would be now to imagine and tell the story, for instance, of my grandfather Maco Milota and Mara Mamichka and their honeymoon trip to – let's pick a nice place – Abbazia. But clearly, they couldn't afford it – neither they, nor the boys. Not to mention Mariska and myself. Now if we hadn't been deprived of all we had in '52, and let's assume that I didn't give a damn back then that Tito's country was off limits, and we got it in our heads to go on our honeymoon to the seaside in Yugoslavia – well, they might have put us in jail, or better yet, an asylum.

So I shouldn't jump the gun. Instead, I can say something about those with worse fates who, alas, are always greater in number. After the First World War, the largest groups of people from our community were moved about by seasonal contractors. These bands of seasonal harvesters and beet workers were like so many ragged tourists with spade and hoe, adventurers in hats and baggy pants who loaded everything they needed into the freight wagons – blankets and pipe tobacco, cauldrons and water cans, tin plates, cutlery and the basic foodstuffs to go with it, from dried beans and noodles to smoked ham. They made it as far as Transdanubia and the Kisalföld region, depending on which manors their contractors and guides were able to negotiate for them. When he was a young farmer, a patron from Szarvas tried to introduce my father to this seasonal-worker-contractor profession, and even took him along on a couple of trips, but my father wanted to continue his education and was planning on getting married. And that's how he didn't become the manager of a band of workers. He also avoided becoming a steward in Mezőhegyes, which is a shame, even though he kept taking the train to the headquarters of the stud farm, only to succumb, in vain, to melancholy, sighing after Zsófia Hulina under

the old planes. But I've gotten ahead of myself again, because this was in the 40s.

For a long time, nobody in the village owned an automobile. My mother said that when she was a little girl, sometime in the years of the First World War, once in a great while a puffing boneshaker with spokes kicked up the dust of our main street, and then the children rushed outside and ran after it and shouted in chorus: "Gas! Gas!" – which is supposedly what they called these vehicles. Still, all I can say is that practically until the 60s, when the first Wartburgs, Moskviches and Skodas appeared in town, none of the locals owned a car. The vehicles that appeared on our roads between the wars belonged to the relatives of our well-to-do local lawyers, doctors and merchants, some company from the city, or oil prospectors. The rest were army trucks and jeeps.

Still, there were two exceptions. There was a retired driver who started renting a passenger car of questionable reliability in the early 40s – what make I don't know – from its owner in Csaba to use as a taxicab. I have no idea if he had customers, though. The other was an entrepreneur from Újváros, who operated a bus route from here to Makó and back, first once a day, then twice. There was a time when my father took it frequently, but I can't remember why, even though he sometimes took me along with him when I was about ten.

Once the gang from the street and I witnessed a long, black convoy of cars pass noisily through the village, accompanied, I think, by soldiers on motorcycles with sidecars. Grownups whispered that this had to be the governor himself with his entourage and guests, going hunting in the government estate at Mezőhegyes. Perhaps he also came to visit his relatives, given that his wife's family owned estates in the area. Samu Kuhajda, who was my best friend, was hoping that the governor's son would accompany his mother and father – perhaps even on a fighter plane! But as hard as we craned our necks, the airplane of the nation's most illustrious pilot was nowhere to be seen in the skies above our village.

So we might as well turn back to the railways! There were two by then, because in the meantime, the 20s, some cooperative in the southern Great Plains had a narrow-gauge track laid down that started in Csaba, primarily for transporting produce. The women from the village who couldn't ride a bicycle, like my grandmother Racskó, could take the little train to do the hoeing if the family carts needed to head in an other direction that day. Furthermore, the railways made things less difficult for those from the countryside attending our higher elementary school, like my classmate János Csíbor, later a big shot in the government.

Around the late 30s and early 40s, both branches had more than enough of a role to play in the troublesome and shameful military mobilizations, working the Southlands, Upper Hungary, Transylvania, and then Ukraine. A while back, I checked the local history records and 1,213 men were recruited from the village for reoccupying territories, the Russian front and during the retreat, mostly into fusilier and artillery regiments. They were not in the bicycle companies or mounted artillery, thank God. But in that horrifying inferno, who knows if fate was linked to the arms one bore. According to the compiled list, 221 people from the village fell in the war, which also claimed the lives of János, the younger son of my paternal aunt, Anna Milota from Csaba. Furthermore, my second cousin on my mother's side died of typhoid fever on an army train. The fate of this poor Marci Osztatní, too, was a match for those Jewish forced laborers who were dragged off to the Don. I have the list of names of the 34 victims – 3 made it home alive. As for the members of their families, of the 117 who were deported – put in wagons on June 23, 1944 at the main station – only 18 made it home. My father often spoke about the photographer Buchbinder and his family, with whom he used to meet regularly. He was tortured by pangs of conscience for not having been able to talk them into escaping what was to come – he should have made better arrangements for hiding them, he kept saying, so that they'd dare to take the risk.

The Russians took advantage of all manner of transport, those they confiscated as well as their own – on public roads, rail, water and air – as long as it rattled, clattered, and moved. Whatever moves is

good either for moving goods or for food, and really, one shouldn't be surprised that they took with them all the farm animals and hunted with guns for pigs and goats and even chicken. The only trouble is that man also moves about, and this likewise caught their attention: they lassoed in forced laborers, and even female prisoners of war. Everywhere they turned up they dragged the poor unfortunates off to the distant prison camps of the north shore and Siberia. Or if the moving target happened to be a winsome female, she not infrequently fell victim to the defiling rage of a gang of military men and their ravaging excesses. This experience left Aunt Mari Balogh stuttering and unhinged.

Still, in the 20th century the largest movement of people from our township – it's not the first time I've referred to the subject of our play – was the result of the Slovak-Hungarian population exchange in 1947-48. The preparatory comings and goings were impressive in themselves – the visiting speakers and delegations, the census takers and controllers, the agitations that came in a string, and also the programs against resettlement, the evenings of dining and entertainment, even church functions, not to mention the organized street rallies, all of which did much to thoroughly upset the population. And then there was the counter-campaign of the communists in September 1947, during which Rákosi himself rolled in in a big black automobile. This was the first time that I experienced the nauseating enthusiasm with which the crowd applauded this bald man, this soapbox orator with the Palots dialect. My father and I were also against relocation, but my father's remarks about the communists set me straight for a lifetime, telling me how I should see things and to keep my mouth shut.

Basically 3,150 of our Slovak-speaking locals moved to Slovakia in the next two years, and in their stead 1,460 Hungarians from Upper Hungary moved in. The merchant Adamec left his villa to resettle in Galánta, while Mucika Mangel from Hajdúnánás moved in with her parents. As for the immigrants for Upper Hungary, I'd like to use Gyula Kurunczi from Érsekújvár, later our cashier at the co-op, as an example. This resettlement of people with all their personal effects – and this must be said – was considerably slowed down and hindered by the limitations and underdevelopment of our railway transportation. But what can I say! Our railways have basically not improved since then, it would still take me a full day and four transfers to get to – let's say – Galánta, just like it took my grandfather Maco at the turn of the century! I could imagine going in the footsteps of our 12th or Chronicler Reverend, for example, who, when his good friend Kálmán Mikszáth died in 1910, came up with the idea of a memorial tour by train to the place where they went to elementary school together. After the fourth transfer, he boarded the winding mountain train to climb all the way up to Selmecbánya – and a full day wouldn't be enough for it, I guess. Today, no man in his right mind would even attempt such a trip, unless it was by car.

As you know, the great train journeys in my life began in 1950, when I was called up to take part in wooden-gunned, black-uniformed soldiering, meaning that I was one of the railway-sleeper changers and stowage cementers, and as such we were practically always on the move. At one time we even lived in a wagon car. That's where I trained myself to lower my head and start snoring the second the train starts rattling. This ability kept me in good stead whenever I was able to go home on leave, at least Mariska and I didn't have to waste the few nights we had together sleeping. Not to mention the time when I commuted to Pest, to the market and a lover. Nearly half of this time was spent on trains – together with the overworked bands of local peasants who'd found work in the city and came home on the weekends. By '56 I was fed up, not only with Budapest and that mad passion, but also with the clatter of the rails in my ear and the human stink of the passengers in my nostrils.

I won't deny that this is one of the reasons why I was an acquisitions man and under Ferkó Valentini's guidance at that time. I preferred traveling by car. Even traveling on a truck was more adventurous to me than the train trips with which I was so thoroughly bored, not to mention the fact that this way we could stop at roadside csárdas. When Samu regularly let me have the president's Volga, I felt like the popular crooner Lehel Németh – I heard that at the time he drove the most

ostentatious luxury car in Pest. And when our driver ,Bandi Dafkó, sat at the wheel, the two of us, Samu and I, had ourselves taken from the ministry to the bank or from the Mátyás Pince Restaurant to the Halló Bar – like some sort of grandees. But at such times I avoided womanizing, knowing that Bandi couldn't curb his tongue back home – Samu, on the other hand, could be trusted, though truth be told, I knew a thing or two about his secrets as well.

Still, no one could accuse me of playing the gentleman, even though Party Secretary Cesznak later accused me of it. Whereas it was he that had himself driven around not only within the village, but made his driver act as a jack of all trades and a servant around the house. (The Evangelical Priest Baran was also up to his neck in intrigue, but that would be a long story.) In short, if the Volga had a more important trip to make, I didn't look my nose down at boarding the rear-engined Ikarus buses, one of which left for Pest in the early hours of the morning, though several went to Szeged and Csaba. By the way, Miska Kolácsik, Mariska's cousin, the driver of the bus to Szeged, was not averse to actitng as a deliveryman. The mothers he knew kept carrying bags and shoe boxes stuffed with clean underwear, sausages, cakes, Monk's Ears stuffed with cottage cheese and poppy seed noodles to Miska's bus, and their children, who were attending high school, would pick up the parcels at the last stop on Marx Square. Needless to say, whoever could manage would come home at the end of the week, like Jánoska from Csaba. He first lived in a dorm, and then rented a room until he got married, at which point his father-in-law bought them an apartment. We only had to help furnish it.

What else can I say about the wanderings of our people? That our children all moved away and hardly ever show us our grandchildren, and we have to wait long and patiently for a visit? But I shouldn't complain, my son doesn't live that far away, and from time to time he drops by. In fact, he spent the entire summer with us last year. On the other hand, we hardly ever see our Pacuska – now we worry only from afar – I can tell you, this is one of my objections to my daughter-in-law, that she doesn't like letting the child come see us. My other objection to her is that she didn't want to have any more children, but never mind, it's not Irénke I want to talk about right now. Besides, I shouldn't be unfair. After all, we ended up with just one child ourselves, though we'd have liked to have more. Our family, it seems – regardless of the branch – multiplies only through singles… But wait. This question of how many children, it's better if I don't get all wrapped up in it now – I mustn't forget to erase this whole thing.

Instead, let's take our friend Samu Kuhajda and his family as an example. Their son moved to Szeged, one daughter stayed in Pest, where she got married, and the other moved to Győr. There were years when they saw each other only at Christmas. As for his grandchildren, if he were to see them on the street, Samu says, he's not sure he'd recognize them, because for one thing, they keep growing. "But don't forget old friend," I say to him, "you have six grandchildren, keep that in mind and be happy! And when they come, have them introduce themselves one by one." You know, the more senile you get the better use you can make of this sort of game.

Young people today are mobile, they go around in grand cars –our bad roads and their pocketbooks permitting, and I needn't say once more it's not my son Jánoska with the old Lada who is a good example, but let's not get into that now. On the other hand, I could mention that Miska Kohut managed to save enough for a handsome Toyota! But mum's the word in front of my son. It'd be like a red cape to a bull.

Which reminds me of Erka Roszkos's Skoda, which went bust last year during rehearsals – when else? Varjú Kohut had it towed in for a clutch and gearshift change, he took his time, needless to say, so by the time it was ready, Erka was gone. Ever since, Karcsi Varjú's been asking me – who, by the way, told me proudly just yesterday that he's going to be a father – in short, what's he to do with this car if the owner's gone? And I say, "ask your wife! Your Kati was her closest friend! I don't know where Erka's gone, honest!"

Thirty years ago I could have given the names, addresses, and what type of car the local owners had. Today I can't, of course, nor would it lead anywhere.

So let me just mention from the top echelon Pityu Pulyka's Mercedes – though it's history now, because these days the car's running around somewhere in Bács-Kiskun County – and also the Saab owned by that cagey Hulina who has his own chauffeur.

As soon as I let our "strong man" pass my lips, I couldn't help but remember this part of today's chapter on transportation, about which I had an argument the other day with Samu Kuhajda, about why trucks are passing through the village these days, and why suspicious figures get out of those expensive cars in front of the Adamec villa, where our Magduska has become the director. And where I think her older brother Imre – who as we all know is Hulina's driver – regularly delivers scantily dressed working-women. I saw it with my own eyes.

To which Samu replied that I don't just talk gibberish, but I'm also hallucinating. Because it's ridiculous, around here he's never heard about trafficking in women. Or maybe I'm so wound up about this Hulina that I stick whatever nasty business I can think of on him.

"No, Samu dear", I say to him, "I saw women getting out of that car, I did!"

"You don't say! Just imagine, and I even saw men!" my impertinent friend says.

All the same, here and now it's the fast and loose women offering themselves up that symbolizes the local taste for trade, mobility and public life: a public house on the market square.

"Get off it, old man!" Samu shrugged. "But even if it were true, how quickly you forget that at one time you were lusting after their type yourself."

Well, now that I had to conjure up this bull's eye from Samu Kuhajda, it took away my wanting to shoot off at the mouth, so good-bye.

If I'll still have time, I'll make up for it and finish it someday. Because now I might as well let you in on a little secret: The librarian Ancika asked me, a local factotum, to write something for the local history presentation volume – or essay collection or whatnot. "Child!" I say to this dejected-looking blonde who can't get a good man to take the bait, which gives her plenty of time, Erka dear, to be in charge of local affairs – "you know that I don't write, don't expect it of me!" But now, since I'm talking my spiel into this tape recorder anyway, far as I'm concerned, my János can take from it whatever he wants for the little girl, and do with the rest whatever he wants.

So then, that's that for now. ◂

(Excerpt from the novel *Milota* by Pál Závada)

Translated by Judith Sollosy

Pál **Závada**

(1954) sociologist and journal editor. His first book, *Kulak Squeezer* (1986), followed the twentieth-century social history of his native village. His first novel, *Jadwiga's Pillow* (1997), was a best-seller, winning plaudits from critics and the reading public alike and was turned into a film of the same name.

My City, Atlantis

ZUZANA **SZATMÁRY**

Copper Street

Moon rock in the courtyard well
the night trickles through the closed window
a lady – sick, they say – isn't sleeping
and no one plays
where once a clarinet played
Did he leave, die of disease?
Maybe he went to see the world.

A butt burns, falls from above
Someone's secret desire comes true
Windows glow with red gold
A child started to cry
A glass clinked
Making out on the bench

Cosmic strings –
no music
and the world is a bit incomplete

the clarinet plays no more, no more

First Wave

Exceptional shocks and catastrophes were followed by cruel days and nights, when people disappeared. They left houses, gardens and apartments behind, many of which were full of beautiful things.

Weeds covered the gardens and cracked plaster, just as quickly as the barbarians – with their fallen mores and sing-song laconic speech – moved into those quiet dwellings with their terrible emptiness. The parks and outdoor taverns with concrete dance floors grew silent and empty.

The demolished borders were easy to cross and everything that crossed them was in stark contrast to the city. The city resisted for a little while longer and the chickens in the disappearing suburbs ran for a little while longer with their heads cut off.

The Second Wave

Two decades after being occupied by foreign armies, another wave of indigenous and hungry barbarians arrived. They moved into newly emptied houses, apartments and gardens that had been abandoned by those who had fled the armies. Unfamiliar with the nexus of narrow streets and corners, the significance of central squares, not understanding the weathered beauty of the palaces, the inspirational dimness of the cafés or any other languages, only their own *synanthropic one – they began reshaping the space into something resembling a field, into bleak barns,* one showy room and space and pastures for various cattle.

Dynamite dealt the dying city a fatal blow. No longer audible was the whispering of leaves, or the creaking of trunks in the lowland wind. The barbarians' stealthy hands reached for precious trees, too. Lindens were temporarily spared – their usefulness not measured by their perfume and the shade they provided, but by the healing properties of the tea made from it. The second generation of barbarians began buying perfumes and Darjeeling, built its own shade and cut down even the lindens.

The barbarians were only familiar with the shallow or dangerously raging creeks. They were afraid of great rivers and hated the cultivated nudeness of

swimming, condemned by the clerics. Rowers and swimmers disappeared from the boathouses and ports, as did the noble boats and adorable girls playing tennis. The bridges began and ended far from the river, with more deep wounds marking the city. Soon the city disappeared, and only a mass of buildings was left.

You Can't Go Down Deep

The lost city was not to be found, because new ones are no longer built on old ones. Ruins and mounds of garbage were taken to far away dumps, so that no trace would be left of the crimes, and so that future archeologists would dig needlessly. To be even surer, every bit of earth with lilac and elderberry bushes on them in courtyards and alongside buildings was dug out and covered with cement and asphalt. Only some things, such as the rocks from the Jewish cemetery, were used by the barbarians, after they were broken up, as part of new rock gardens, or the arms of stone crosses from statues of stages of the Cross as thresholds in village houses.

Childhood

White, tinged with lilac
White like freshly
Fallen snow
the color red, so stirring
yellow with the smell of oranges
for the sky blue letters
and in everything
depth of the depths

Here and there
and hopping through the door
beyond the gate and over fences

Sure-footed even on trampolines
parallel worlds just right around the corner
and the wind under one's shirt

Don't fall asleep!
The day might escape us

Androids

The Second World War gave birth to children who were silent on the outside and disjointed. There were a lot of them. Wars increase fertility, to make up for losses and restock supplies. Obese children appeared at all levels of society, despite poverty and rationing system of the postwar years, because some embryos in their starving pregnant mothers had managed to redraw the genetic code regarding fat stores for the future.

No one ever spoke to these children about what had happened in the past, or what was happening in the present. People actually didn't even talk amongst themselves about events in the past and present. That's because Balzacesque crimes were hiding behind every acquired dwelling, property, position and even survival itself.

Children – just like under the Austro-Hungarians, when childhood was not regarded as auspicious – still could only speak when spoken to. They were not allowed to talk or drink water during meals. The main daily instruction, in addition to the commands and prohibitions, was the evening "pray, wash, pee and go to sleep". "Did you get it at home?" – beatings were nothing out of the ordinary, and whomever his parents had not beaten was suspected at least once of some aberration in the eyes of peers on the street, as were his parents.

They escaped, to the streets – "Are you outside?" They searched, examined and investigated, incapable of interpreting their finds, lacking the necessary tools and knowledge. In the overgrown abandoned gardens with their fancy dying flora, they would stroke the torsos of the stone sculptures and chase each other in the dangerous underground passages through the vaulted cellars whose purposes were unknown – a deep abyss with no amount of knowledge and more silent abysses with rickety little bridges to the disjointed deafening world before them.

Who Lives in the Little House?

The functionalist tenement house, which was hastily abandoned by Germans after the war (two-room apartments):

A German proletariat, a Pressburger, lifeguard with a huge deformed leg at a municipal swimming pool. A construction site guard with a Gypsy wife and three children. A Slovak Guardist with four children, who buried his uniform under the lilacs. The former Jewish owners of the entire tenement, quiet, unwanted concentration camp returnees. A police chief, who has a childless wife, ties his son born to his Hungarian peasant mistress to a table leg. A Jewish intellectual, communist, and actress. Former partisans and Holocaust survivors who have loud unconventional visitors. A railroad engineer and his wife, a Jewish pianist, whom he saved by marrying her. A German cleaning lady, a proletarian from the thread factory, from whom the Germans kidnapped four children as they retreated. A gendarme from the countryside with four children, who beats all his sons and his big-nosed wife – and she him. The head of a cafeteria from a village in Eastern Slovakia, the lover of a Catholic deacon, with two children, who every other day fries meat, and the janitor bakes city pigeons that he catches: "Who needs the dove of peace anyway!"

Plasterwork

The black clouds of totalitarian regimes obscured the city before and after the war. These, whether fascist or communist, required acquiescence, silence and loud unisonous consent on command. They need the conditions enabling control: to see and hear, and to frustrate any voluntary associations of people. This eliminates cozy nooks, the possibility of intimacy in public places, twisting little streets, passageways, including those through buildings, and booths in cafés. Also eliminated were evacuation routes, shadows beneath trees, pavilions in parks, arcades and gates.

On the other hand, the great neoclassical, secession and functionalist apartments that were deemed too large for their original owners and tenants were divided by plywood and thin partition walls into small apartments and offices. On the ceiling, the battered stuccowork ended abruptly in the middle, in places kitchens were missing, and elsewhere toilets, windows or doors. In one space, disparate beings were suffocating each other hatefully in their various kinds of pretences, with clear animosity.

Really – Long Live May Day!

The large demolished squares and spaces were measured by the yardstick of military reviews and popular manifestations. In this space it was impossible to hear a human voice, spot a friend, or even hear a command. It was logical then that amplification systems would be important, and so would be cutting down the trees. But people liked the May Day manifestations. It was the only free time – even decreed and subsidized by the state – when they could freely associate, drink some alcohol on the street, party loudly into the night, and sing and dance in a public municipal space – all thanks to their feigned participation at the manifestation.

Graves and Games

New theories about the lost city emerge every few years. Leading academicians and activists, old and newer barbarians both, publicly spar over its existence, each having their own vested interests. There are however national moments, though not exactly Zweig's *"Star-clock of Humanity"*, when municipal entities unanimously liquidate more skeletons in the closets.

When reconstruction of the ice hockey stadium was undertaken because of the world championships that were to take place in Bratislava in 2011, the investor found a great many human bones. They could have been the remains of the old municipal poorhouse. They might have been German or Jewish or even much older remains of the lost city. A quiet discontinuity and continual animosity to all that belongs to the past saved the games and the Balzacesquely acquired

ownership. For convenience and in unanimous silence, the bones were dug out and removed. Unwittingly, the hockey players of the world spit through the ice on someone's graves.

In Slovak, *o*wnership and patriotism (*vlastníctvo* and *vlastenectvo*) have a shared etymology, both coming from the old Slavic word "vlast", meaning power.

Stadium Called the World

There is only one time
mammoth-like World stadium
with a marathon gate

Races and heats
some from foot to foot
others wait around
some sit in the balcony
with champagne
Others just on the grass
The deserters gawk
Hurrah and boo and often nothing at all

Marathon runners
we fall in an empty cell
tired to death
No one to receive
The Athenian heritage
about the struggle against predominance
and it's not Spartan-like
that we're lying here dead
like the laws bade us

There is only one time
lacking an analogy
Hurrah and boo or often even nothing
They say that's how it is nowadays

Always there is some kind of time
at the World stadium
before the starry gate
to eternity

Translated from Slovak by Christina Manetti

Zuzana **Szatmáry**

a sociologist, publicist and translator. She is the director of Charter77 Foundation which provides free legal advice. She was European Woman of the Year in 1993. Her latest published book of poetry was *Rozumné srdce* (2005, Bratislava).

The Magic of "the Happy Years of Peace"

CSABA **ZAHORÁN**

The Hungarian urban milieu of the Carpathian Basin – its past and present

Anyone visiting a major bookstore in Hungary today is bound to find impressive looking coffee-table books and wall calendars featuring views of the towns and cities of Transylvania (Romania) or former Upper Hungary (Slovakia). Numerous travel agents also use images of historic Hungarian towns to tempt their customers to visit Romania or the Ukraine, and the travelers' supplement of one of the major dailies also recently presented a few locations from just outside the country's borders. Landscapes, cities and castles of historical Hungary seemingly enjoy unfading popularity in Hungary. This is mostly due to the fact that the idea of a Hungary that once covered the entire Carpathian Basin is still an organic part of the Hungarian mindset. This image exists in innumerable variants in the thinking of the entire social spectrum, depending on age, ideology, occupation, interest etc. One common manifestation of this sentiment is the map of "Greater Hungary" appearing in all sorts of forms such as stickers and badges, displayed everywhere from the workplace to the windscreen. Another manifestation is the heightened attention focused on the Hungarian communities living outside Hungary's borders or the keen interest in locations vital for Hungarian national traditions and history ranging from larger regions (e.g. "Kalotaszeg", Szeklerland, "Palócföld", "Sub Carpathian Rus") to specific towns, villages or symbolic spots (e.g. Torockó/ Rimetea, and the Verecke Pass). Places referred to as "Hungarian towns" are of distinctive importance among these venues. This is true despite the fact that their Hungarian character is actually fading, particularly in the eyes of the majority of inhabitants (Romanian, Slovak, Serbian, Ukrainian etc.) that surround them, as well as for the wider world. At the same time, the image of these towns as they are represented in the Hungarian mind is often inaccurate or false. My aim is to explore this contradictory phenomenon and offer an outline of the transformation of the Hungarian urban milieu over the past century in the outer regions of the Carpathian Basin, primarily in present day Slovakia and in Transylvania, Romania.

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Urban development has in many respects moved along the same track in the Carpathian Basin as in other regions of Central and Eastern Europe. In the mediaeval Hungarian Kingdom, urbanization followed Western models and was mostly associated with German and Walloon settlers. For a long time, German burghers played a determining role in the towns of the peripheries with their mixed populations, such as Upper Hungary or Transylvania, as well as the towns of the more centrally lying parts. The towns remained mixed right until the beginning of modernity, both in ethnic and religious composition, reflecting the overall multi-national/confessional character of the entire country. The towns of Central Hungary had significant German and South Slavic populations living alongside the Hungarians. In Transylvania the German and Hungarian populations were dominant, while in the Northern parts of the country the dominant nationalities were German, Slovak and Hungarian. This multi-national

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character had been strengthened between the 15th-18th centuries by the Turkish wars, during which the ratio of Hungarians declined and that of other nationalities increased within the Hungarian Kingdom. During the period of modernization, primarily in the central towns and cities including Buda and Pest, the population shifted dramatically and spontaneously toward a Hungarian identity. This process also affected the peripheries, but there it was mainly confirmed after the Hungarian political and cultural elites articulated the agenda of historical Hungary becoming the Hungarian nation-state. This became emphatic particularly after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 when, "in exchange" for the reconciliation with the Habsburgs, Hungarian leaders were practically given a free hand in shaping Hungary's policies regarding nationalities and ethnicities. Thus in regions with a Slovak, Romanian etc. majority, the towns became the pillars of a state increasingly Hungarian in character. They partly served as an embodiment of Hungarian statehood and partly, as a joint outcome of modernization and state power, acted as a kind of Hungarian "melting pot". The processes of a spontaneous shift toward a Hungarian identity, the immigration of Hungarians and the supported and even forced assimilation of other nationalities to the Hungarians mainly affected the urban population through education and administration. In the forefront of assimilation we find the Germans and the Jews, but shifting towards Hungarian identity also frequently meant upward social mobility for Slovaks, Rusyns and Romanians. Thus, by the beginning of the 20th century, the earlier predominance of Germans and/or Slovaks was replaced in many towns of Upper Hungary by Hungarian predominance. In Transylvania, where Romanians were in a majority, towns increasingly assumed a Hungarian character. This is supported by the fact that the percentage of Hungarians was 54.56% in 1910 (disregarding Croatia) within the entirety of historical Hungary, while the rate of native Hungarian speakers was over 72% in the urban population. In the cities Hungarian became the official language of administrative organizations and also began to conquer other domains of culture, including the effervescent scene of cafés and the press. Inhabitants of traditionally multi-lingual places continued the tradition of speaking several languages. Census figures also reflected the increasingly Hungarian face of towns and cities: statistics for 1910 betray a convincing Hungarian majority in Kassa (Košice, 75.4%), Nyitra (Nitra, 59.4%), but Hungarians also gained a relative majority in towns further removed from the linguistic boundaries such as Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica, 48,8%) or Eperjes (Prešov, 48,9%). The percentage of Hungarians in Pozsony (Bratislava, Pressburg) also grew dynamically, barely under that of the Germans by this time. Ungvár (Uzhhorod) was also seen to have a clear majority Hungarian population (80.3%). Besides the traditionally Hungarian cities of Eastern Hungary and Transylvania (e.g. Nagyvárad/Oradea 91%; Kolozsvár/Cluj 83.4%, Marosvásárhely/Tîrgu Mureş 89.3%), Hungarians were also in a relative majority in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) a Romanian environment as well as, by this time, in Brassó (Braşov, Kronstadt 43.4%). The rate of Hungarians also increased in Temesvár (Timişoara, 39.4%), and they formed an absolute majority in Szabadka (Subotica, 56.2%) and a relative majority in Újvidék (Novi Sad, 35.3%). However, the reality behind the statistics was far more complex. The figures cannot account for instances of multiple or not fully clarified identities, nor do they betray the background behind these changes in identity. It must also be noted that the questions of the 1910 census referred to mother tongue or the language most competently spoken. At any rate, many contemporaries drew far-reaching conclusions from the shift toward Hungarian identities and envisioned a Hungary increasingly Hungarian – in ethnic terms. However, this ought not to be overestimated, as the move toward Hungarian ethnicity primarily made inroads in the towns and cities, while more than three quarters of the population of Hungary at the turn of the century still lived in places with populations under 10,000. The rural population, living in archaic conditions, was little affected by assimilation. The as-

similating towns and cities therefore continued to stand out – like so many islands amidst the major national blocks.

Since most Hungarians remember the "happy years of peace" of 1867–1914 as the golden age of latter day Hungarian history, the images of the towns and cities in fin-de-siècle Hungary have also been retained as points of reference, practically till the present day. This approach in turn merged with an attitude which viewed the area of the Hungarian Kingdom as a kind of historical national space, extending to Hungarian, mixed and non-Hungarian territories alike, including towns from Lőcse (Levoča) in the Szepesség area (Spiš, Zips) through Kecskemét on the Great Plain all the way to Brassó in the Barcaság region (Țara Bârsei, Burzenland). Although no city could compete with the affluence of Budapest, dynamically growing provincial Hungarian-speaking cities complemented the capital as important regional centers of administration, economy, transport and culture. This way they constituted important parts of the collective national space of Hungarians. Besides economic growth (a typical example of modernization was Temesvár with its German-Hungarian-Romanian-Serbian population) they were characterized by a dynamic cultural life (it is enough to think of the Nagyvárad/Oradea which we know from the famous Hungarian poet Endre Ady). Two of the country's four universities were also founded outside what later came to be the (post-Trianon) borders (Kolozsvár and Pozsony). It's enough to take a look at the centers of the major cities – the inner city of Szeged, Arad or Nagyvárad or the fabulous public buildings of Szabadka and Marosvásárhely, which all show that these places were links in an organically developing network of cities.

This rather idyllic scene of development fell to pieces after the Trianon Treaty. Cities with a majority or growing Hungarian population were annexed away from Hungary – their populations, history, culture, public buildings and atmosphere meant as painful a loss to the collective national space of Hungarians as the loss of traditionally non-Hungarian regions or towns, mountain areas, forests, mines or the country's coastline in Croatia. To make things worse, by late 1918 the cities that Hungary had lost became the scene of changes which were perceived as a form of decline or even a national disaster and thus formed a part of the so called "trauma of Trianon", which the nation has not overcome to this day.

A more thorough account of the above mentioned changes would exceed the frames of the present work, thus I only refer to them in passing. The two world wars brought cataclysmic changes – WWI was characterized by waves of emigrants from Transylvania, Upper Hungary and the southern regions, while WWII was followed by the stigma of "collective guilt" and retaliations (in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia), disenfranchisement, forced relocations and population exchange (in Czechoslovakia). On the scale of hundreds of thousands, masses of people were relocated or were forced to relocate, coming mainly from the urban Hungarian middle classes, thereby weakening the Hungarian urban communities. In retrospect, WWII however turned out to have been a caesura from several perspectives. The extermination of the Hungarian Jewish communities produced an irreparable void in the economic and cultural life of every town and city. Czechoslovak measures caused the Hungarian-Slovakian linguistic boundary to shift further south in Slovakia, and towns formerly with a majority or at least considerable Hungarian population (Nové Zámky/Érsekújvár, Levice/Léva, Lučenec/Losonc, Rimavská Sobota/Rimaszombat, Rožňava/Rozsnyó, Košice) irrevocably lost their Hungarian character. And the Hungarian society of Southern Transylvania never regained its former vitality.

The relatively peaceful period of 1920–1938 and after 1945 brought changes that were no less decisive. In the interwar period, the Romanian, Czechoslovak and south Slavic national elites, who made it their objective to "conquer" the cities, aimed only to break the political dominance of Hungarians, but the communist regimes also undermined the surviving economic and cultural positions of the Hungarian

bourgeoisie. To be sure, the majority population also suffered from efforts to nationalize and homogenize these societies, but the Hungarian communities, more vulnerable by virtue of being a minority, were doubly affected. Hungarian cultural life, so vigorous in the interwar period (book and periodical publishing, theatres, active cultural and educational societies etc.), was restricted by dictatorships that were intolerant of spontaneous social organizations, on ideological and national grounds alike.

The mechanisms for building a nation-state, already familiar from historical Hungary, began to manifest themselves in favor of non-Hungarians right after one administration was replaced by another in 1918–19 – Hungarian communities were weakened by immigration, shifts in identity and assimilation. As a consequence, after only a few years several communities thought of as Hungarian in 1910 came to have a mixed population or a Slovak/Romanian/Serbian majority. In many cases, discounting Hungarian refugees, the isolation of the Jews and manipulations, this also shows that the processes of Hungarian assimilation so dynamic at the turn of the century, remained incomplete and people returned to their previous identity (e.g. in Nitra by 1921 the rate of Hungarians dropped sharply from 59,4% to 10,7%, in Užhorod from 80,3% to 37,4%, but by 1930 even in Cluj the percentage of Hungarians fell to 54,3% from 83,4%). When we evaluate statistics it's worth noting that contrary to earlier Hungarian practice in Czechoslovakia, the census question required people to state their professed nationality. During state socialism, the percentages of Hungarians continued to decline. In fact, the decline accelerated. Forced urbanization could be exploited to serve such an ethnic purpose through administrative methods, targeted educational policy etc. In the northern Transylvanian towns, which were less affected by the population movements following WWII, the program set out before the war was eventually fulfilled under the national-communist regime. Cluj, the "capital" of Transylvania came to have a Romanian majority by 1957, Oradea and Satu Mare (Szatmárnémeti) by the second half of the 70s. Although the last stage, aimed to loosen up the Hungarian block living in the Szeklerland was interrupted by the collapse of Ceauşescu's regime, by 2002 Romanians settled in the 1970s and 80s came to have a majority at Târgu Mureş and the number of Romanians also increased noticeably in the other two county centers with a Hungarian majority, Sfântu Gheorghe and Miercurea Ciuc. Shifts in proportion within the urban population were accompanied by further disintegration of the institutional network of Hungarian education and culture.

After the end of Hungarian administration, in 1918-1919 a new rule established itself. Public spaces were given a different national character (e.g. Hungarian memorials were removed and names were changed). The non-Hungarian character of space was played up (by building new churches and public buildings etc.), and use of the Hungarian language was gradually reduced in offices and public life. After 1945, the view of the cities was even further transformed. New ("socialist"), supposedly modern city centers were constructed, trying to replace or at least marginalize former inner cities betraying a "foreign" (Hungarian, German, or Jewish) past. Monumental public buildings and grey blocks that still exist as a legacy today look startlingly alien within these towns and cities. The new housing estates became the homes of a mostly non-Hungarian population who had in some cases come from more distant, ethnically homogeneous areas and thus had no experience of inter-ethnic co-existence. Now finding themselves in a majority, they were less tolerant of the alien and incomprehensible Hungarian world. Despite a noisily proclaimed internationalist ideology, cultural connections between Hungarians inside and outside the borders also became feebler, for instance in the 1980s it was practically prohibited to import Hungarian books or newspapers into Romania.

The Central and Eastern European political transitions of 1989-1990 led to new developments. Governments working by the value system of liberal democracy could no longer pursue an open and

aggressive assimilation policy, even though minority issues remained a domestic affair and the great powers only intervened directly in the case of bloody conflicts. With regard to the Hungarian minority there was no need for this. As the framework for democracy and a market economy emerged, Hungarian urban life was able to reorganize itself in the entire region, with local Hungarian communities pressing their interests and receiving support from Hungary. Today, after over two decades, one can observe a kind of duality in this respect. On the one hand, several major achievements have been attained at the cost of some conflicts but without violence. The institutional system has been reconstructed for an independent Hungarian educational and cultural system. The use of the minority language has now become accepted in places where the minority exceeds 20%, with book and periodical publishing, as well as acting in Hungarian once again invigorated. Moreover, civil society is on the path towards development. In Komárno (Révkomárom, Slovakia), a state-run university that offers instruction in Hungarian began operating in 2004. The Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania is launching more and more courses in Hungarian, but college courses in Hungarian are also offered in other major cities of Transylvania (Oradea, Târgu Mureş, Miercurea Ciuc, and Sfântu Gheorghe), thus contributing to the emergence and preservation of a Hungarian intellectual milieu. On the other hand, it's also becoming quite clear that the former world of Hungarian urban culture, even that of the interwar period, is irreversibly a thing of the past. Although several major cities still have relatively large Hungarian communities on a scale of tens of thousands (Timişoara, Braşov, or Cluj-Napoca), their political and cultural life is restricted by their low overall percentage within the total population. Thus, 60,000 Hungarians living in Cluj-Napoca lack the right to use their mother tongue because their percentage of the city's population is 1% short of the required 20% threshold. Enforcing their interests is even difficult in places where Hungarians exceed this required percentage (thus, for instance, Hungarian street names, memorials or plaques are under-represented in cities with non-Hungarian majorities). Previously dominant Hungarian communities have lost their leading role, and have even shrunk to "subcultures" in certain places, while in the worst cases a now extinct Hungarian presence is merely commemorated by a few memorials. There is not much cause for optimism if we consider that the shrinkage of Hungarian communities continues even in democratic conditions, as an extension of social processes already in motion. (in Oradea, native Hungarian speakers constituted 33.8% of the population in 1992, while by 2002 they only numbered 28.2%. This is the decade when the percentage of Hungarians at Cluj-Napoca dropped below 20%, while in Košice it fell from 4.6% to 3.8%.) Aging, as much as immigration and assimilation is at work in these shifts, and all of this presages the foreseeable eradication of the local Hungarian institutional network.

How to retain sporadic urban communities and groups of Hungarians within housing estates is also an unresolved problem that increasingly seems hopeless. In cities where the majority of the population isn't Hungarian, there are only three alternatives: 1) turn their backs on the majority and stay "locked inside" their own national society, 2) move away, or 3) assimilate into the majority over time. Thus, the Hungarian urban milieu is being pushed out of major cities and into the small towns of the areas that serve the role of a Hinterland (the belt along the Hungarian border or the Szeklerland). In Romania, the town with the largest Hungarian majority at the moment is Sfântu Gheorghe, 75% of the 61,500 inhabitants are Hungarian. In Slovakia it's Komárno with its 37,400 inhabitants (60% of whom are Hungarian). Berehove (Beregszász) in Ukraine (26,600 inhabitants, 48% Hungarian) and Subotica in Serbia (148,000 inhabitants, 38.5% of them Hungarian) only have relative Hungarian majorities. Besides their small town character, most Hungarian populations are frequently found in the less developed regions of these countries, a fact which has proven decisive in their development. For this reason they have found

themselves more exposed to the negative elements of post-1989 political transitions, such as impoverishment and marginalization.

The processes that have affected the Hungarian urban milieu outside of Hungary since 1918 form a part of the history of these Hungarian communities, and as such are a part of the public discourse and national policy of all Hungarian administrations. In Hungary, the dominant discourse of the interwar period focused on efforts to regain the lost territories and revive the lifestyle that prevailed during the dualist era. The question seemed to be affected by a kind of amnesia after WWII – although the "anti-nationalist" discourse of the Kádár era marginalized past Hungarian nationalism, it also weakened the sense of national consciousness and cohesion, of belonging together. Thus, the image of Hungarians outside the country's borders grew increasingly faint in the Hungarian mind. An excellent example of this would be the Czechoslovakian and Romanian volumes of the most popular Hungarian series of guidebooks, in which chapter titles use Slovak/Romanian names for Hungarian cities. Moreover, showing an interest in the Hungarians outside of the country's borders, "making regular trips to Transylvania", was also seen as a kind of quasi-oppositional attitude, almost serving as a prelude to the situation that emerged after the political transition.

The 1980s and the post-communist transition, in particular, brought radical changes. Taking responsibility for the Hungarians living just outside the country's borders became an organic part of the self-definition of the Hungarian right wing and now forms an emphatic element of right-wing rhetoric (sometimes serving as an ideological substitute). This, however, is not true for the whole of the Hungarian public. If we simplify the scene to some extent, we may outline five major strands of responses to this issue. Clearly, these are not watertight categories, but are characterized instead by a number of overlaps and transitions. On one side we find sympathizers of extreme right, nationalist movements and people of "national commitment" who are still unable to accept the disintegration of historical Hungary. These are the people who maintain an extremely colorful "Trianon subculture" (stickers, maps, badges of Greater Hungary, periodicals and literature with a nationalist sentiment, even "nationalist rock music"). Although for young supporter this is probably nothing more than a kind of rebellious activity, an attempt at *épater la bourgeoisie*. Waving a flag with the map of Greater Hungary does not necessarily entail familiarity with facts of history. At the same time, the majority of people with this kind of attitude act as if time had stopped in 1914 (or in 1941), and they refuse to take notice of the changes that have taken place since then, or of the other, non-Hungarian peoples of the Carpathian basin. These are the people who are surprised to find that if they go to Poprad they cannot get by speaking Hungarian (or who believe that the Slovak waiter must "just be refusing" to speak Hungarian to them). Another camp consists of a great number of people engaged in far less belligerent "nostalgia", tracking the life of Hungarians living outside the borders. These people are not hostile to neighboring nations, and are only really interested in the "Hungarian world" of these countries. The next, somewhat smaller group sees the support of minority communities mostly as a human rights issue and also encourages dialogue with the neighboring nations. The fourth attitude is represented by the masses of people for whom the entire minority issue has no meaning whatsoever. The final group, again an extreme position, views this issue with positive abhorrence, as they see the national question as a manifestation of nationalism. Their indifference or hostility goes back partly to personal attitudes (a simple lack of interest) and partly to the impact of state socialism. These are the people who refer to Hungarians arriving in Hungary from the Ukraine or Romania as "Ukrainians" or "Romanians", who are surprised to find, if visiting Odorheiu Secuiesc (Székelyudvarhely, Romania where native Hungarian speakers make up some 97% of the local population), to meet an old Szekler man who "speaks such good Hungarian". All of this springs mostly from

ignorance rather than ill intent, but this indifference and rejection is in the background of the failure of the referendum on double citizenship held on December 5th 2004. While these last two categories are usually unaffected by the kind of coffee table books and historical publications mentioned in the introduction, the people who buy them and participate in the discourse about Hungarians living outside the borders tend to come from the first three groups.

The decline of the Hungarian urban milieu that finds itself outside of Hungary is often, and not unfairly, described as a kind of passion narrative. This is how it appeared in the interwar period and this is what the "Trianon subculture" revived after the post-communist transition. However, in most cases neither the "nationals" nor even the "nostalgic" camp are fully aware that their idyllic image of the fin-de-siècle urban milieu is rather false. This is partly because Hungarian assimilation during the dualist period had actually happened at the cost of the non-Hungarian communities and their elites experienced this process as a trauma in much the same way as Hungarians experienced the shrinkage of the Hungarian minority community after Trianon. On the other hand, while the accuracy of the 1910 census, generally used as a point of reference, is as much debated as that of later statistics produced by successor states, nostalgia for dualist Hungary is an attitude that views the towns in question outside of their wider historical context. A national, ethnocentric view of history tends to expropriate and "Hungarianize" the history of these towns and cities, projecting a rather recent snapshot of fin-de-siècle reality back into the past and disregarding the former multi-cultural character and earlier demographic processes that took place – in exactly the same way that many Romanians and Slovaks today look at Braşov, Cluj-Napoca, Košice or Bratislava, as purely Romanian/Slovak cities. Nevertheless, the work of several research centers demonstrates that it is possible to present this entire history objectively, with a high standard of professionalism and free of ethnocentrism. (Such initiatives include the former Teleki László Institute, the Institute for Ethnic and National Minority Studies, the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, as well as the National Minority Research Institute and Jakabffy Elemér Foundation in Cluj-Napoca and Fórum Minority Research Institute in Šamorín). To what extent the results of such professional research has found its way into public discourse remains a different issue. Luckily, publications not with the aforementioned qualities but not directly intended for the professional historian are also in circulation, but it remains true that books and papers that manifest nostalgic or "national" viewpoint are also noticeably present in the market.

It's common knowledge that the boundaries of the Hungarian state do not coincide with those of the Hungarian nation. Hungary's "virtual expansion" beyond its own (political) boundaries, particularly when it takes somewhat less subtle or even downright nationalist forms, does from time to time irritate neighboring nations – quite fairly when it comes to irredentist publications, but undeservedly so with respect to nostalgic or historical publications. However, similar to the revisionism of the interwar period, the indifference of the decades preceding the post-communist transition is also unacceptable in the present conditions. Only the most paranoid nationalists can possibly find anything unacceptable in Budapest wishing to "virtually" integrate the culture, art and public discourse of the Hungarian communities living in the territory of historical Hungary, i.e. in neighboring states, and to support their survival and their local characteristics. Similarly, it is quite natural that contemporary Hungarian identity makes a claim (but clearly not an exclusive claim) to the cultural heritage of former historical Hungary, particularly in the light of the fact that, due to the destruction caused by various wars most "Hungarian" historical landmarks are currently outside Hungary's borders. In a normal sense, meaning outside the world of the "Greater Hungarian" subculture, we are witnessing not some sort of irredentism or self-seeking nostalgia, but the will to preserve the Hungarian historical-cultural heritage, whether this means supporting educational institutions outside the country's borders or offering state and church funding to help finance the reconstruction of the Roman Catholic cathedral and

archbishop's palace of Alba Iulia. Similarly, we must not forget about towns in present day Hungary which were or still are multi-cultural and which are also rich in treasures waiting to be discovered and protected, whether this be Budapest with its colorful German, Jewish, Serbian, Greek, Slovakian, Romanian etc. past, Sopron (Ödenburg), Békéscsaba (Békešská Čaba) or any other town or city. After all, we are talking about no less than the protection of the multi-colored reality that once characterized the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. It is enough to think here of the once booming, but now mostly extinct German, Jewish, Polish, etc. communities, the last remnants of which are precisely the Hungarian towns and regions scattered all over the Carpathian Basin. ◂

Csaba **Zahorán**

(1977) historian. Chairman of Terra Recognita Foundation. In 2007–2010 doctoral student of the programme '*History of Eastern Europe in the 19th-20th centuries*' at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Since 2010 he has worked at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Main areas of research: nation-building in Central and Eastern Europe, Hungarian–Romanian relations in the 20th century.

The Two Cultures of Czech Roma (Which We Have Time to Talk About)

KAROLÍNA **RYVOLOVÁ**

Given the fact that there are multiple Romany cultures, any attempt to provide a consolidated summary of these cultures will ultimately prove futile. In the Czech Republic alone, there are approximately 3 to 5 main sub-ethnic groups of Roma, each displaying varying cultural and linguistic traditions. Moreover, any efforts to understand these cultures by a non-Roma should be viewed with skepticism – an ethnic Czech will always remain an outsider. What follows are the thoughts and remarks of a sympathetic individual on the topic of urban Romany culture, rather than an academic piece. If questions arise, the reader should consider consulting Roma directly.

The Roma

For some, there are far too many Roma. They want them to go back to wherever they came from, presumably India or somewhere far away. These advocates of "repatriation" call themselves sensible people and patriots. There are others who practice a less extreme but more insidious form of prejudice, backing away from definitions of Czech identity based on color or race to focus on behavior – these people insist they're not racists. In addition, there are those who maintain that there's no such thing as "the Roma." Stressing the importance of social rather than ethnic ties for Roma identity, many scholars have sadly allowed their seemingly innocent theoretical stances to be exploited by politicians with aggressive populist agendas.

All that having been said, it's fascinating to watch how the Romany minority has managed to thrive despite all to the efforts to annihilate it, symbolically and literally. The approximately 300 000 Roma in the Czech Republic have been labeled human vermin and nonentities by some, but none of these insults will make them disappear – they are here to stay.

Their country of origin is not Punjab or Rajasthan, but mostly Slovakia or the Czech Republic. During the hockey or football world championships, they naturally support the Czech team and happily bounce up and down with the rest of the fans: "He who doesn't jump is not a Czech!" Although the highlights of traditional Romany cuisine are *bobaľki* (sweet dumplings with a poppy-seed and honey topping), *marikľa* (unleavened bread) and *goja* (roasted pig guts filled with seasoned potatoes), you would probably search in vain for them on the day-to-day Romany dinner table. In fact, you're more likely to see the Roma serve a traditional Czech meal, such as pork roast with sauerkraut and dumplings or sirloin.

What I'm about to say may come as news to many Czechs: Our Roma are Czech! Their identities are additive not divisive, which is to say they bring with them the wealth of both Czech and Romany identities. They're the frontrunners in a Europe that is struggling to become multicultural. Magdaléna Karvayová, a Romany student at the Anglo-American University, speaking about how younger Roma regarded a recent census, captured precisely this sentiment: "I believe a lot of Roma are still ashamed of their identity. Personally, I am going to use my right to fill in two identities, a Czech and a Romany one. After all, I am a Czech Romany."

Despite not being accepted as such in broader Czech society (even in the media), the majority of Roma view themselves as Czech. What Magdaléna typifies is a new assertiveness about identity that

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is common to young Roma, an assertiveness that is unlikely to be cowered by disrespect or intolerance. At best, we are witnessing the cultural conjunction of Romany wisdom and modesty, nourished by an oral tradition and likeable recklessness, with the openness and progressive force of Europe. This is not to deny the existence or ramifications of social deprivation, but contemporary Czech Romany culture exceeds the context of poverty, having a richness and variety that stems from a different set of cultural roots and history.

Being Rom As an Art

The oral character of Czech Romany society has been a decisive factor in its development. Until the late 1960s, the Roma did not write in their mother tongue. Then, as now, Romany served as the language of every day communication in the home, while literacy was acquired in a second language at school. In the midst of a culture heavily dependent on writing, especially reading and institutional education, the Romany culture co-existed by drawing on memory, tradition and learning by example.

Print cultures are in part defined by the fact that writing is a solitary activity, which requires a certain level of distance and abstraction in thought. Moreover, the written word places emphasis on uniqueness and originality in expression. In the simplest terms possible, oral Romany is everything that written culture is not: it requires sharing, human interaction, repetition, fixed phrases, flexibility, and contextuality.

The Czech Republic is home to several Romany cultures – Slovak Romany culture, Vlah Romany culture and Hungarian Romany culture – but there is also a division between official and subterranean Romany culture. The former is standardized, performed in public, may have clear commercial goals and takes easily nameable forms (music, art, craftsmanship, literature, etc.). The latter is private, homely, not for the eyes of *gadje* (the Non-Roma), and not profitable – the culture of being a Rom or *romaňipen*. Examples of both can be easily found, but let us agree that where the Roma are concerned things are not often what they seem. And while dressing up as Hungarian peasants and playing Gypsy music for tourists in an expensive café in the center of Prague is a way to make a living, a cultured Rom will look for his customs elsewhere.

Play That Funky Music

Unquestionably, the most obvious and stereotypical display of living Romany culture is music. But even where Gypsy music is concerned, there are successful bands with large popular followings. [By the way, the use of "Gypsy music" is not arbitrary. As opposed to "Romany music", the compound "Gypsy music" works as a kind of trademark, as any professional Romany musician will confirm. To change the name of a well-established enterprise could be bad for business.] Moreover, there are numerous lesser-known groups that offer exciting fusions of the traditional and contemporary. Different bands are born and dissolved every day, and the turnover can be overwhelming, not least for the musicians themselves.

Case in point, the fairy-tale-gone-wrong of the Rokycany-based singer Věra Bílá and her band *Kale*. Capitalizing on growing interest in ethnic music, the group became exceptionally popular in the 1990s and toured various European festivals. In her albums, Bílá popularized the style of music known as *rom-pop*: traditional Romany melodies and lyrics performed on electric instruments. During this period, she collaborated with celebrated non-Roma musicians, including the talented singer-songwriter Zuzana Navarová and the Slovak composer and producer Ján Kuric. All of which resulted in an interesting mix of the traditional and modern and undoubtedly made a lot of money. Despite her enormous talent and lack of pretension, the whole project eventually flopped, primarily due to various health problems and a gambling addiction. Bílá recently returned from Slovakia, where she unsuccessfully attempted to restart her career with a new band. At present, she is facing eviction from her Rokycany flat.

The Prague-based *Bengas* are experiencing similar international success based on their highly energetic

Spanish-style music, heavily dependent on the riffs of three semi-acoustic guitars. This younger generation of urban Roma seems to be better equipped for unexpected fame and fortune, which they've enjoyed for the past ten years.

Generally touring on the summer festival circuit, a number of popular bands come from smaller towns such as Liberec (*Dušan Kotlár cimbalom band*), Svitavy (*Točkolotoč*) or Hradec Králové (*Terne Čhave*). Their music ranges from very traditional Gypsy music to Gypsy jazz, with stops in Slovak and Moravian folklore, Spanish flamenco and even funk (Brno-based *Guločar*).

Alongside these more popular projects, we can't forget the solo careers of singer-songwriters such as the late Jan Ačo Slepčik, whose deeply personal lyrics and intimate renditions followed in the footsteps of the finest folk singers. By contrast, the composer and violinist Vojta Lavička has tried his hand at wedding bands, large commercial projects, and film scores, only to recently land with a major Roma hip-hop group *Gipsy.cz*. At the same time, he has maintained a political career as an advisor to various governmental and non-governmental bodies dealing with Roma issues.

In recent years, Romany communities across Europe, the Czech Republic included, have been overtaken by a wave of interest in R&B and hip-hop. While music originating in the African-American community might have enormous potential for exploring issues of civil rights, regional adaptations of this style have, thus far, regrettably not gone beyond mimicking the tough guys and sexy girls of MTV videos. However, *Gipsy.cz* has consciously taken up the cause of promoting Roma rights and integration, combining excellent music with significant messages.

It is impossible to mention all the different bands and individuals who operate as bridges between Romany and ethnic Czech culture. As a final remark on Gypsy music, we should not neglect the role of otherwise questionable reality shows such as "Superstar" and "Czecho-Slovakia's Got talent". Thanks to these programs, an average member of the Czech viewing public has repeatedly had the opportunity to see beyond the stereotypes of an antisocial underclass, experiencing a slice of the largely unexplored talent in singing, dancing and playing instruments that exists amongst the Romany minority.

Romany: The Influence that Makes a Difference

If music is the most striking aspect of Romany culture, then literature is the most surprising. As mentioned above, Romany writing in the Czech Republic only appeared in the late 1960s – making it possibly the youngest branch of European literature. It would not have happened without the influence of Milena Hübschmannová, a linguist and the founder of Roma studies who encouraged her Romany friends to try writing in Romany, while she worked on the creation of a practical model of Romany orthography (still in use, with only minor changes). Only recently, Emil Cina, a Romany writer and ex-radio presenter, mentioned to me: "How I miss that woman! She was really something, both as a scholar and human being."

Thanks to the existence of the Gypsy-Roma Union (1969-1973), the foundations were laid for what forty years later has become a spontaneously developing, self-directed field of literature. That having been said, it took the likes of Hübschmannová to give Roma the confidence to use the speech of their homes for the higher purposes of literature.

As might be expected, there's great controversy involved in writing Romany. The numbers of Romany-speaking members of the Czech majority are growing, mostly thanks to the existence of the Roma Studies department at Charles University. And it's also true that a kind of community of Roma writers, who can appreciate each other's turn of phrase in Romany, has been firmly established, even if it remains small and on the margins of mainstream writing. All the same, it's presently impossible to publish solely in Romany, as there's no market for it. Given its limited audience, some believe that Romany writing has no future, particularly because those who could read it naturally are not in the habit of reading in Romany – only time will tell.

Without being the source language of prose and poetry written by Roma, Romany would not have the unique sound and feel that it now has. Contemporary

Czech readers find it fascinating precisely because it's nourished by an inherited story-telling tradition – even if they receive it in a slightly watered-down bilingual version that is now the standard publishing strategy.

A possible reason for believing in Romany writing is the fact that new authors are emerging without direct interference from Roma studies enthusiasts. The likes of Irena Eliášová or Roman Erös began writing out of a sheer need to share their unique experience with a wider audience. Chances are that they would have never dared to write, had there been no Tera Fabiánová or Andrej Giňa.

Fabiánová, Giňa, Lacková and Dzurko are only some of the pioneers who risked putting their pens to paper to save the legacy of traditional Romany story telling for the future. They primarily looked back over their shoulders, to the times when their parents were young or they were children. But there are others who are facing up to the challenges of the present day by telling stories – unemployment, gambling, debt, drug abuse, prostitution, incarceration, emigration etc. Romany is a literature under construction, but that is precisely its greatest attraction.

We Know Better

Earlier, I mentioned that Roma in their 20s are perhaps different from their predecessors. Something unprecedented is happening – they are educated, confident, they speak foreign languages and they are not afraid to be who they are. They are ready to demand their rightful places in society.

Last summer, I had a unique opportunity to meet some members of this generation at a workshop called *Colorful but Colorblind: The Creative Use of Multimedia in Promoting Social Integration of Roma* (Transitions Online was the organizer). The objective of the project was to teach both Romany and Non-Romany journalists how to make use of online video footage to tell Roma-related stories.

It was an excellent occasion to learn filmmaking skills from people who had a lot of experience in the field. It was also an opportunity to learn that young people like Mária Hušová, David Tišer, František Bikár, Petra Zajdová and Jan Berousek were not going to compromise their views on their own community.[1] The mostly American crew consisted of senior filmmakers and graduates of the School of Communication at the University of Miami. They were pursuing aesthetic and functional goals to fulfill all the requirements of a well-made online video. The Romany participants of the workshop, however, thought that the teachers' priorities made it impossible to tell the stories truthfully and in accordance with their own objectives. The ensuing clashes were perhaps a hindrance to the project as such, but they showed how aware Romany participants were of their background, how clear their ideas about its presentation were and how unwilling they were to allow any kind of colonization of the mind.

One of the first stories the Czech-Roma teams told me was about the artist Ladislava Gažiová. She comes from a mixed Roma-Slovak background but rediscovered her sense of ethnic belonging while studying at the Academy of Arts in Prague. Gažiová prefers not to be called a Roma artist because she finds it limiting. Nevertheless, a lot of her motifs come from the Romany community. She's an up-and-coming artist whose spray-painted works are inspired by graffiti as much as the recollections of Romany gatherings from her father's side of the family.

These young Roma show no hesitation in speaking up for their community. They want to be heard and they will not compromise. Unlike their parents, they do not respect restraints because of their origins.

Goja and Time

Several of Andrej Giňa's short stories take place in the back of his lorry, where he sells *goja* (pig guts) and *pašvare* (ribs), the bases for popular Romany dishes. Giňa drives his lorry around the Czech Republic, stopping mostly in Roma neighborhoods, and while he peddles his goods, he chats with people. And because he is a thinker, it's not just small talk but matters of consequence: Why are Roma forgetting their language? Why use Czech numbers when there are perfectly good numbers in Romany?

Why is it so hard for Roma to get jobs? How come so many people gamble?

He often invokes images such as himself leaning against the side of his lorry, arms crossed on his chest. Several men are standing around, smoking and kicking stones, and the women have put down their shopping and they are gesturing animatedly to press their point. Meanwhile, children and dogs are happily running around, chasing a burst football.

The streets in Romany neighborhoods constantly witness such scenes. Romany live in the street, in contrast to their ethnic Czechs counterparts, who treasure their privacy and rush home or to the pub after work to meet particular friends. Wherever you go – Matiční Street in Ústí nad Labem, Chánov in Most, Luník IX in Košice – the public space in front of council houses is always full of groups of people chatting away. In Litvínov, Chomutov or Nový Bor you can tell a Romany neighborhood by the fact that people take their coffee outside – they pull out an old rickety table, a couple of chairs or at least some crates to perch on and enjoy their drinks together. It would not be fair to sneer: "Of course they're having a break, they're unemployed!" A) There is often no work to be had, and B) Roma always have time to chat because they genuinely enjoy the presence of other people.

Romany culture rests on living your life with fellow human beings and enjoying every little moment. For example, Romany university students in Prague regularly eat together – friends from several households gather in the evening to chat about their days and what's new. Even in moments of gravity, Roma love joking. At an anti-Nazi rally recently, while the wonderfully mixed crowd of Romany and non-Romany supporters of racial tolerance were being threatened by a head-on clash with heavy-booted skinheads, a slightly tipsy local Rom behind me commented: "This is like being at a hockey game!". And when the crowd started singing the Czech anthem in response to the immediate threat of violence, he added: "Didn't I tell you? Now we get to sing the anthem, too!" In Romany life an informal social gathering can occasionally turn into a music performance, which is welcomed with as much respect and formality as any classical music concert in a major music hall.

The word *culture* is misleading. The way you treat your elders is culture. How you approach your daily meals is culture. The ear you lend to someone who has something to say is a sign of culture, too. Music, literature and art aside, Czech Roma have a sophisticated and unique culture, which continues to bloom even in the middle of the most deprived ghettos. And it's worth trying to get to know them better, because there is much to be learnt. ◂

Karolína **Ryvolová**

(1977) – Journalist and expert in Romany studies. Her texts and translations have been published in various periodicals. She works at the Josef Škvorecký Literary Academy.

1 Mária Hušová has experience writing for various media. For some time, she has collaborated with TOL and has recently published a collection of poetry. David Tišer is a Roma studies student who has worked on and off with Czech TV, co-authored a film called *Roma boys* and is a Roma and gay Roma rights activist. František Bikár has a great deal of media-related experience, especially as a media specialist for the Romea civic association. Petra Zajdová has an M.A. from the Anglo-American University and has worked for Romea in the past. Jan Berousek has worked for Amaro gendalos, Romano hangos, British Papers and the Roma broadcast on Czech Radio.


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LITERATURE

SMALL TOWN STORIES - BETWEEN DISGUST AND ASSIMILATION

A Provincial Town Grown Too Big, a Metropolis Which Has Never Grown Up

(Brno and its Literary Image)

JIŘÍ **TRÁVNÍČEK**

In 1936 when the famous literary historian and critic Arne Novák pondered on what Brno had ever given to literature and what its cultural weight was, he had to conclude that there actually was not that much of it: the beautifully wrinkled landscape around the city, some churches, an occasional palace. But otherwise, Brno had been "a mere provincial suburb of the German city of Vienna." In Novák's opinion, one of the causes of this condition was the fact that "Brno lacks a more substantial presence and the friendlier participation of the most melodious of the elements – water." "There's no waterfront here," Novák continues, "where a tired worker could rest, a dreamer on a long walk could muse, and an architect could look for the right distance to get the necessary perspective or a multiplying mirror for more monumental structures." Yes, Brno does have two rivers, but those are totally purloined by the industrial facilities, primarily textile ones – in other words, those watercourses "don't hum and murmur, nor entice and sing." – Brno had long been known as the "Austrian Manchester" and this is still the more flattering appellation. The less flattering one was "Floridsdorf," after the industrial/working-class suburb in the north of Vienna. The First Republic (1918-38) did give it certain cultural self-confidence. Its Czech element began to assert itself to a much larger extent. Several jewels of functionalist architecture were built (the Avion Hotel, the Tugendhat villa and others), whose importance goes far beyond the scope of Brno and the whole country. It used to host the most remarkable interwar daily newspaper (*Lidové noviny*), among whose contributors were leading Czech writers. The Nazi Protectorate (1939-45) and the events that followed it led first to a strong alienation of the Czech and German elements and subsequently to the expulsion of the Germans from the city. The communist era (1948-89) didn't really know how to go about Brno. Factories kept on expanding, so Brno stuck continuously to the line of a predominantly working-class city from the times of the Austrian monarchy. It was assigned the role of one of the ten administrative regional centres. As regards the official population figures, it was overtaken by Bratislava, the second capital city of the socialist federal Czechoslovakia – this was achieved by means of an artificially bolstered housing construction and the administrative attachment of villages. In other words: Brno – the third city of Czechoslovakia, the second city of the Czech lands and the first city of Moravia. But first of all, a city suffering from a self-lacerating complex towards Prague and feeling that it had also suffered a wrongdoing at the hands of the artificially enlarged Bratislava. And it did not feel all that self-confident in the position of the first Moravian city as there has always been Olomouc, which – though notably smaller – is more architecturally impres-

sive. The years following 1989 have brought a tremendous shrinking of the industrial plants, which has been accompanied by the growth of the student element. Brno's footprint in the printed word has been growing: publishing houses, magazines, and printing houses. As though the city has finally started taking advantage of its opportunities – so after the fall of the Iron Curtain, it has yet again turned out to be a shorter way to Vienna than Prague.

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Arne Novák died in 1939. Should he have lived two more years, perhaps he wouldn't have been able to defend his thesis. The reason for this is that in 1941, the collection *Melancholické procházky* (literally *Melancholy Walks*, also known in English as *Brno Elegies*) by the young poet Ivan Blatný was published, a collection fully dedicated to Brno, which raised an immortal monument to the city. And at the end of the war, this monument was extended by another collection dedicated to Brno, although this time to its everyday, dark side (*Tento večer*, This Evening). Even the rivers, which A. Novák saw as merely water supplies for factories, were uncovered as poetic places by Blatný. Following 1948, Blatný ended up in exile in England, but even there (in the psychiatric hospital where he was placed) he was able to write more and more verses, and a large proportion of this poetry related to Brno, especially to the Brno of the late 1930s, as it was retained in the poet's memory of emotion. After Blatný, other poets with a strong connection to Brno have turned up – they've managed to incorporate Brno into their verses not as mere poetic patriots, but in a much more substantial way. Of these, Jan Skácel and Oldřich Mikulášek are the greatest. But there are many others we might name: Klement Bochořák, Zdeněk Kriebel, Zdeněk Rotrekl, Ludvík Kundera, Zdena Zábranská, Vít Slíva, Martin Reiner... Brno has even won a reputation as a "city of poets." As if, since the days of Blatný, there has been some kind of lyric essence flowing in this city, an essence that can't be found anywhere else. At the same time, this essence is seen as something intrinsically tender, reconciliatory. In Brno, you can still enjoy some balmy poetry writing and you can even afford to be naïve, while in Prague, you have to be *trendy*, up-to-date, well informed, and knowlegable.

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Epic and prose lag significantly behind, although several works, which started appearing at the turn of the 20th century, are worth mentioning. They capture Brno's social issues (Josef Merhaut), deal with Brno's periphery (Rudolf Těsnohlídek), and try to discover something else behind the city's famed greyness (Jiří Mahen). In the recent years, Brno has found its prose-writer in Jiří Kratochvil, who – even with some methodical obsession – flings himself onto the city, tenaciously endeavouring to turn it into a magical place. And there is also the novel by the young prose-writer Kateřina Tučková, drawing on the powerful, if up to now lying fallow, topic of Czech-German relations (the War, the expulsion of the Germans, lost memory): *Vyhnání Gerty Schnirch* (The Expulsion of Gerta Schnirch). However, a work in prose that would become an immortal monument, one in which the city would permeate the text and in which it would be clear that it could be no other city, simply does not exist. No, unlike Prague, Brno doesn't have its *Trial* (F. Kafka), a space in which the real topography merged with the magic. And although there is the potential source of topics stemming from the social issues, it doesn't have – unlike Chicago – its *Jungle* (U. Sinclair); nor has the era of the textile industry bestowed on the city its *Promised Land* (W. Reymont) as was the case of Lodz. Neither has its nationalist gyrating delivered *Shosha,* as was the case of Singer's interwar Warsaw. Nor has Brno's topography been so naturally embodied in storylines and characters like that of New York City in Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* or that of Moscow in Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*. None of Brno's neighbourhoods have fascinated a portraitist as the IX district of Vienna did H. von Doderer (*The Strudelhof Steps*). Nor does Brno have

any portrait of its olden days, in the fashion of, for example, Aleksandar Tišma who depicted them captivatingly in several novels for the Vojvodinan city of Novi Sad (e.g. in *The Use of Man*). It would seem as if the city was lacking in epic potential. Or is it the case that it has not yet found the writer who would be able to turn that potential into a real epic work? Both options are valid, but the first one is more probable...

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And what about Brno's greatest literary son? Milan Kundera was born in Brno, wrote in Brno and even dedicated two of his short stories in *Směšné lásky* (*Laughable Loves*) to Brno. As it happened, it was just those two stories that the author left out when he subsequently reviewed the work (converting three small books into one). In the "canonical" *Laughable Loves*, as foreign readers know the collection, and as it was republished in Czech after November 1989, you won't find the short stories "Sestřičko mých sestřiček" (Sister of My Sisters) and "Já, truchlivý bůh" (I, Mournful God). It's a pity. They're charming, thoroughly Kunderaesque and what's more, they both take place in the author's native city. And Brno is not just a backdrop in front of which some amorous conflict unfolds. In these stories, the author acknowledges Brno. It's space rather than time that is rendered in a more concrete way. Timewise, we go back to an imprecisely defined period of post-war Czechoslovakia, roughly in the late 50s or early 60s. But as regards space, there's no doubt we are in Brno. The heroine, Jana, tells the narrator who pretends to be able to speak Greek: "Ask the Maestro whether he likes Brno." In both stories, the narrator wanders through Brno's neighbourhoods: "I've shown her the village street that runs from Žabovřesky to Komín." "I was roaming through the streets of Královo Pole." Brno's cultural institutions are present here: the Bellevue café, the Opera, the conservatoire, the House of Arts. The characters do a lot of walking and so even one of Brno's rivers appears ("I used to go to the bank of the Svratka"), which – as we know– were dismissed by the critic A. Novák in 1936 as not having a melodious power. Moreover, the narrator of the first short story discovers picturesque recesses of the outlying neighbourhoods around the Svratka and the narrator of the second short story is – as if to spite Novák – a music composer. Brno is all over these short stories and it's not only the declared topography in which the city is present. One of the characters of the second short story is a Greek, a former partisan, who had fled Greece after the military coup in 1949, and Brno was a place where a large number of Greeks like him settled. And this Greek immigration has left a significant footprint on Brno's culture, especially among musicians and artists. The explanation the narrator offers for the Brno mission of the Greek partisan, whom he presents as the conductor of an Athens opera for the purpose of his plot, is that the Maestro is coming back from a tour in Germany and has stopped in Brno to "study the score of Janáček's Destiny". So here we have Janáček – the most famous of all Brno composers. In the short story "I, Mournful God", Brno is not only the place that is talked about but also the place where the narration takes place. The narrator tells someone the following: "You've only been here in Brno one day and you are already touching, albeit only as a viewer, the interesting stories of this place." It's also revealed as the narrator's home city ("The cultural officials of my city").

These short stories are Kunderaesque to the utmost: the happier people are not those who are more streetwise, but those who don't know. The world of reflection and reason and the world of naiveté and exaltation cannot understand one another. A game that was laid as a snare for somebody misses its goal, and no satisfaction is given. To sum it up: the world of desire and the world of playing games cannot be reconciled. – But why then didn't these two short stories end up in the author's canon? And isn't Brno to blame at the end of the day? We think that the city is to blame to a large extent. When Kundera's works are translated to other languages, he suppresses the realia. And in the case of these two short stories, it's

hardly possible. They've grown into Brno and Brno has grown into them. The city is their story-making power. And what's more, the short story "Sister of My Sisters" is also largely stuck in lyric style. And it's lyric style that the "canonical" part of Kundera's work is in polemics with. The affection for a charming medical student, excursions to the green environs of Brno, meeting singing old women there ("in the voice of archaic countryside that resonated almost in the middle of the city") – all this constitutes the elucidation that provides the narrator (a music composer) with a moment of creative inception. Kundera's narrator even has to undergo a twofold initiation. From a weary routinist at the age of Christ, he first turns into a romantically enticed creator under the onslaught of emotions and folklore, who realizes that from now on, he has to write in a different way. The second initiation takes place when the woman he writes his new composition for refuses it. The most important fact is not that she refuses it but the way she refuses it: saying that any art has to be healthy, that any human activity should be medical science, and that an artist shouldn't be a bohemian... And now it's clear. Kundera's narrator has been cured by the medical student's naiveté, her exalted vigour, as well as her professorial attitude. That is, by discovering that all that preceded (the first, romantic initiation) was just a deception. He's both the loser and the winner. He fails in the field of love and as an artist, but on the other hand, he comes to understand things.

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However, Brno is not both the loser and the winner in Kundera. In the battle with the author's canon, it lost – it didn't make it on board. Nevertheless, it has yielded two unforgettable short stories. ◂

Jiří **Trávníček**

(1960) – Literary critic. His articles are regularly published by several periodicals. He works at the Institute for Czech Literature of the Academy of Sciences.

Dream or Nightmare?

A Czech–German Story About Expulsions

MARTYNA **OBARSKA**

In such a small nation – as the Czechs consider themselves – there's a common belief that big history happens somewhere else. They have nothing to do with it. In this valley hidden from the world, their lives simply continue at a steady pace. But reality has always strayed far from this idealistic vision. When the borders were set in 1918, a minority of 3 million Germans still lived within the territory of the newly born Czechoslovak state. Relations were difficult on both sides, and Masaryk's vision of coexistence based on the Swiss model seemed like a political fiction. Proud of their statehood, the Czechs tried to balance the inviolability of historical Czech territories against understandable demands for regional autonomy. The necessity of maintaining natural borders finally won. Part of the German minority, especially the inhabitants the Western mountains of the Sudetenland, did not help integrate the two nations. Things only got worse with time: increasing support for the Nazis, strong separatist movements, biased representations of the difficulties for Germans living under Czech authorities, fifth column accusations, and finally the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

The war ruined the already uneasy relations. The Czechs were about to be blamed. The same mechanism worked after the war. For the "public welfare", it was decided that the only permanent resolution to the problem would be to displace all those of German origin. The dream about a valley without the Rydygiers was fulfilled, and some innocent victims were made to account for history – such were the rules of big history. Agreeing to leave them aside and go deep into individual stories opens a gap in the dogma of collective guilt.

Where the Wood Chips Fly

In 2010, *The Expulsion of Gerta Schnirch* by Katka Tučkova was nominated to Magnesia Litera, the most prestigious Czech prize for literature, and received the highest award of readers and booksellers. The author told the story of Gerta Schnirch – a Czech-German woman who was deported from Brno with her little child and endured an inhuman walk together with 20 000 German civilians. Despite her youth, born only in 1980, the author was successful in dealing with a subject that has rarely been approached in the postwar era. Without direct experience, she had to search far and wide for information about the German expulsions. She used historical archives, talked to the relatives of expelled families, and combed the history of her own city – Brno, where each street corner tells the history of a broken neighborhood. Thanks to this meticulous research, she was able to create a richly layered portrait of Czech-German relations during the Second World War, examining how their ties were formed and broken. Importantly, she managed to avoid waxing nostalgic, a trap which often shadows such reflections on guilt, punishment and responsibility. There are horrifying descriptions of Red Army soldiers raping women and of the bestial behavior of the young foremen from Zbrojovka, responsible for watching over the expelled during their death march out of Brno. Moreover, we find accounts of the cruel and absurd fines that were extracted from the Germans for the arrest and execution of their family members:

Janina's father had to repay the debt. Jail – 1.5 marks per day. Court fees – 20 marks. Execution by decapitation – 300 marks, along with 5 marks for cleaning the knife and 5 more for taking the head. Cremation and funeral – 100 marks. They divided everything into rates and handed over the bill.

By approaching the topic through individual stories, Tučkova manages to avoid simplistic binary oppositions – us vs. them. In this way, she created an epic that reveals people tossed between different ideologies and accidents of war. The author manages to delve into both the rise of fanatical German belief in a new Aryan order and the mechanisms of postwar communism. No truism can be found in the book. Instead, we're confronted with the ambiguity of human attitudes and situations. She reminds us of the universal rule that when crucial historic events happen, nothing is easy and every choice is burdened with moral responsibility– no matter which side of barricade we take.

Tučková discusses the attitude of her nation during the war and communism. She investigates the mechanisms that led to Gerta feeling that she was treated as a second-class citizen her entire life. She was a German woman – the Other. She was afraid to go out on the streets of Brno during the events of 1968, fearing that the Germans might be beaten again. The Scapegoat. It sounds familiar in the Polish context, although it refers to different group and rests just on the edge of good taste. For Polish readers "The Expulsion of Gerta Schnirch" raises associations with Polish Jews, touched by a social stigma that cannot be banished. It turns out that postwar society, regardless of nationality, tries to maintain unity and therefore rejects difference and is afraid of others. Regardless of whether "they" are Jews or Germans, they are persona non grata.

World War II and its consequences were not reckoned with during communism. The slow process of recognizing the blame that implicates everyone and the existence of victims hidden by previous ideological boundaries has only just begun. Neighbors of 800 years suddenly vanished. Some were to blame for their disappearance, but many others were banished in innocence. Thanks to the book by Kateřina Tučkova, the voice of this latter group can finally be heard. In a way, she has supported the activities of the Antikomplex Association, which collects stories of inhabitants, organizes educational programmers, and publishes books about the stories prewar and postwar multinational Sudetes. Both Tučkova and the activists from Antikomplex helped Czechs to confess to the sin of repressed memories, to plead guilty to their status as oppressors and victims.

The success of *The Expulsion of Gerta Schnirch* showed that the nation of laughing beasts perhaps has a stomachache from laughing. Whether the Czechs like it or not, history hasn't forgotten about them or left them out of the big events. ◂

Martyna **Obarska**

(1985), is doing her PHD in the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. Author of the book *MDM between utopy and everyday life*, she examines relations between the authorities and inhabitants in Warsaw and Prague during communism. Member of *Res Publica Nova*

Vyhnání Gerty Schnirch / The Expulsion of Gerta Schnirch

Prologue

KATEŘINA **TUČKOVA**

At its edge the unmade road crumbles away into the ditch. Grass grows through the gravel; the wheels of the pram bounce over the stones. A few moments ago her left foot slipped on the crumbling gravel and there is a dull ache in her ankle. She must have strained the ligaments, and she is trying not to put her full weight on the foot. Progress has been slow for several hours; they are practically crawling, leaning on their prams for support, taking it in turns to push. It has long been difficult to see clearly where they are going. The lights of torches and the headlights of the trucks reach them only intermittently, and when they do they huddle closer together, quicken their pace, throw coats over the prams to cover the children from sight.

She has no clear idea how long they have been walking. It feels like they have been on the go forever. But it isn't even light yet, so it can't be more than a few hours. She is tired, and so are her companions. Should she try to stop and rest?

Several times they have passed people sitting on the ground or on the luggage they are dragging along with them. Several times, too, they have seen a young man run over and dash the butt of his rifle against someone's head. She is afraid to stop. In spite of the pain in her groins and her left ankle she forces herself onwards. The girl next to her whispers something about being thirsty.

Gerta says nothing. For herself and the child she has some water hidden away, which she can't offer to others when she doesn't know what is ahead of her. She, too, is thirsty, but she says nothing, just continues to put one foot in front of the other, heading God knows where. God? She gave up on Him long ago. She used to pray to Him, ask Him to help her, to do something. Anything that would change her life. When she understood there was nothing God could do for her, it was already too late.

Since that time she longer prays and no longer thinks about God. She wants to get along on her own, even in such times as this. God doesn't know where they are being driven; only the raging, brattish young men know that, and per-haps even they don't. Such adolescent kids, she fumes. Their voices bear down on her and are lost again in the cries of the people in front. Several times she catches sight of a passing vehicle, its upraised guns reminiscent of the snake-haired head of Medusa. Scowling, livid Medusa, a murderess with the menacing mouth of a drunken slut. One look at her and you die. You turn to stone or they shoot you. She hates them, but that is all she can do. Just hate. And keep this to herself, if she wants to survive. Humbly she walks on beside her guide and keeps quiet. The night is sinking into a grey dawn and she is pulled along in the quiet, tired procession. The footfalls, the swoosh of overcoats and words spoken in low voices punctuate the cries of the guards and the wails of the injured. From time to time a gunshot rings out; Gerta has lost count of how many times now.

When did this horror actually begin?

At the moment the flowers struck the bottom of Mother's grave, everyone felt it, everyone knew it.

Father, too, was uneasy, even though he still blindly believed.

When Gerta stole a look at him, she saw how he was fighting to hold himself together, how tense all the muscles of his face were, how he widened his eyes before disguising them with a variety of blinks, how he was trying not to weep. But he should, thought Gerta, he should cry, he should pour soil from Mother's grave on the bald crown of his skull with its remnants of fair hair, he should rub it into this cheeks, let it mix with his tears, and — most important of all — he should call out for forgiveness. He should do that. Not just stand there straight and dignified in his uniform with his chest puffed out, watching Mother's coffin disappear into the earth. Don't put her in there, stop this! Gerta wanted to cry out, but Friedrich held her back. He clasped her arms so firmly that he made her afraid. Friedrich wasn't weeping either? How could he be, this faithful copy of the father? Again Gerta looked down into the deep hole, in which the gleam of the dark-grey coffin was by now barely visible. The funeral was a modest one. But the whole thing had hardly begun for them. The funeral was a mere link in the chain of catastrophes that were to come in each month of each year. Right through the war.

The life they she'd led before was so wonderful. And not only her life — Friedrich's, Mother and Father's, Jana's, Karl's; all lives had a sense and an order, and they unfolded together, as a unit, advancing towards a future whose contours Gerta knew well. But in the Winter of '42, when Mother disappeared under the Schnirch headstone, this picture of the future was shattered. Thhe last of her certainties was suffocated in 1945 by the throng and the Body of Christ. But a whole series of things happened before this. ◂

This fragment comes from the book *Vyhnání Gerty Schnirch* by Kateřina Tučkova

Kateřina **Tučková**

(1980) – prose writer, curator, postgraduate student at the Institute of Art History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague

Pride and Disgust

MAŁGORZATA **LITWINOWICZ**

There's nothing worse than living in a small provincial town, especially for an intellectual. We consume and internalize this warning during most of our schooling, as Stefan Żeromski explains in *Siłaczka* (1895): "It's well known that a man of culture, thrown by the centrifugal economy of necessity from the centers of intellectual life to Klów, Kurozwęki or – like Dr. Obarecki – to Obrzydłówek, tends to turn into a creature that absorbs too many bottles of beer and is attacked by boredom that brings him nearly to nausea. With the passing of time, autumn rains, a lack of transportation, and the inability to speak during whole seasons, he slowly swallows small-town boredom without even noticing – just like the hare swallows eggs of tapeworms spread by dogs on the grass. The moment 'I don't give a damn' bubbles up in your soul, the process of slowly dying begins…".

Understanding the dynamics of symbolic space, any cultured young Pole will think twice about hanging around Klwów, Kurozwęki, or Obrzydłówki. In short, it's impossible to live in small towns – you can only die of boredom, which is like a nasty parasite or worse. Bolesław Prus warns us against x-town, while Eliza Orzeszkowa bemoans the mud of Ongrod (a sad place that can't be left for greener pastures). Mr. Ill-mannered is one of the standard characters of such places. They spoil the air and social structure, not only in town from the provinces (which are bad to begin with) but also in the calm and otherwise joyful Polish village. Elżbieta Kaczyńska, in her book *Urban landscape with the Backwater in the Background*, gives a title to one of her chapters that sounds like a diagnosis: "The Outskirts of Modernization: Polish Towns". During a workshop devoted to cultural activism in local communities (led by the Institute of Polish Culture), participants were asked to present themselves at the first meeting. "I'm from Grodzisk" – said one of the students, immediately bursting into tears. To be honest, it's not a surprise. Giving such intimate evidence in public, when you're a student of at the university of the capital, can be like confessing an embarrassing secret.

The aversion to small towns at work in Polish culture is grounded in ambivalence about urban culture itself. If there were an encyclopedia of "Abominations in Polish Culture" (and perhaps one should be written) an entire volume would have to be dedicated to small towns, as so much abuse and collected bad feelings have been heaped on them. Small towns are dirty, neglected, cramped, dreadfully similar and "provincial" – in all the worst possible meanings of this word. In the collective imagination, these towns are not places to live. They are places to "aspire". You don't create in such places, you simply "seek". And you can't possibly be enlightened – you're simply a reflection of the big city lights (which don't shine too brightly in Poland). You never go to the small town or return there of your own free will – you land there by accident or by force. You're stuck there and that's where you'll finish. Most importantly, we're not from there.

And while all this is commonly known, I still find myself surprised by the depressing and even

terrifying pictures of provincial life that can be found in certain periods of Polish literature. The most forceful of these periods belongs to the time when Yiddish literature was just emerging. This was the moment when the mythology of small towns was being constructed, and the conjunction of these two developments is in the image of the shtetl, a peripheral space, which becomes the center of the universe. "A strange thing: Why is that Kasrylevka sympathizes with all the pains of the whole world and no one in the world sympathizes with the pains of Kasrylevka?" Sholem Alejchem was five years older than Stefan Żeromski. Icchak Lejb Perec was four years younger than Prus, and even ten years younger than Eliza Orzeszkowa.

"The world is full of wonders and mysteries, and man covers them with his small hand – that's the way Szlemiel thinks. Szlemiel migrated from one Chełm to another, or was it the opposite?" This way of telling the story, where everyday small town life slightly obscures mystery and simple activities are full of metaphysical feelings. This is the real character of this literature. "In the middle of March, the snow began to melt, filling the streets with mud that disappeared with the late April sun. The inhabitants of the district breathed a sigh of relief that the tough and long winter had passed. Along with dusty roads, you could see carriages led by horses and whips crashing through the air. Bagel sellers used to walk along the streets with their willow baskets full of bread, shouting: "Fresh bagels! Small Passover breads!" (Symcha Symchowicz, *Stepson at Vistula River*). This was the universe in miniature: "Nachum wasn't even five years old and didn't attend cheder yet, when he started to discover part of Świderska street outside father's garage" [emphasis mine]. Amazing: the mud is blissful and blessed, it comes with the spring light, and the part of the street becomes the grounds for discoveries. This story about a small town is rooted in time and space. The word of this story has grown within the world, and is still present in this world, which means – it exists and cannot be used to judge. In every dimension, this story is fed by sensuality, and the "part of the street" being discovered becomes the show grounds for all the dimensions of life, including eros and death.

Defying the literary convention of "sentimental memories from childhood", Mayer Kirschenblatt's *They Called Me Mayer July. Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust* is a series of paintings and stories that draw on his childhood in Apt/Opatow. The one-room flat where his brother was born, where he witnessed death and funeral preparations and experienced the pangs of growing up – aging, defecating, and becoming a sexual being. These stories are not constructing a retrospective utopia, but trying to remake the world from the beginning of time. Undoing it. What makes the work effective is not the act of recalling or recollecting, but substantive and vibrant narration that is woven together with the fabric of small town life. "The dance of the story": this Hassidic formula is not simply about the shape of the narrative. Jewish stories dance on the streets of small towns. They dance with life and death.

After all, it's from this trend of linking narration and experience that the "magical realism of Polish literature" grows – from the time and space of the small town: "In the lower drawer of his large desk, my father kept a beautiful old map of our city. It was a whole folio of parchment pages, originally held together by strips of linen, forming an enormous wall map from a bird's eye panorama. From this waning distance at the periphery, the city rose and grew towards the center, beginning as an undifferentiated mass, in dense blocks and houses, cut by the ravines of the streets, becoming a group of single houses, etched with the sharp clarity of a view through binoculars. In this foreground, the engraver focused on the whole confusion and collision of streets and alleys, the sharp lines of cornices, architraves, archivolts and pilasters, all lit by the dark gold of a cloudy afternoon, which plunged all the corners and recesses into the deep shadow of sepia. Prisms of this shadow honeycombed the ravines of streets, flooding in warmth half a street here, a gap between houses there. They dramatized and organized this architectural polyphony in a gloomy romanticism of shadows. In the style of baroque panoramas, the map made the surroundings of the Crocodile Street shine

with the whiteness that is usually known to Polar Regions or lands not yet explored."

Here we see the difference between two Berdyczóws. The first ("write to me in Berdyczów"), locates itself nowhere, and no post ever reached its destination (the historical meaning of this saying – as we all know, is different. But since the times of Juliusz Słowacki, Berdyczów means nowhere). The other town – from the famous rubber stamp found by Abraham Joshua Heschel ("Association of woodcutters for studying Mishnah in Berdyczów") – is in the center of the world. There are people leaning over the book, they commune with the Word and they do not need a centre or any Berdyczów to do this.

What does this continuum of difference mean? The question of the origins of this divide is one thing, but I'm looking rather for its consequences. *

The Jewish history of small towns (especially those on the former territory of the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia, which is the map that partially agrees with the map from the "Hassidic Stories") is still lacking, but this is changing, albeit very slowly.

Why? I've tried to answer this question myself, while taking care of Jewish Piaseczno for instance, and having workshops in Sokołów Podlaski, Chełm or Klimontów. Because it's fair and decent – this is the why. "Are you Jewish?", young people from Tel–Aviv used to ask me, as we wandered along in Jewish Piaseczno, which is hardly noticed. "No." "So why do you care? Do you feel personally guilty for the Holocaust?" "No", I answered. So "Why?" Why do you care about the tzadik from Piaseczno Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, and the owner of the Icchek Flint sparkling water factory, or the teahouse of the illiterate Fajga Flint? I have to admit that the shadow of this suspicion has always accompanied me. Isn't all this interest only a illustration of the precedent set by the King of Spain in his letter to a Count from Ostra: "Our Dearest Cousin, please come and bring your tailor with you, Pinchas, a rarity, a Jew. Our Lord let us love our enemies, but we expelled all our Jews and we have none to love. Bring Pinchas then, this rarity, so we can love him and thus save our souls through this love".

It's generally good if our actions are shadowed by the awareness that we're acting on our own behalf. But of course, it's not always about saving souls.

I was once invited to take part in a Brunonalia Festival (in Klimontów) by the Association of Fans of Brunon Jasieński's Poetry (founded by individuals from Warsaw and Klimontów). The festival has been organized since 2002, and each gathering depends on securing various grants. Futuristic poetry is not exactly what we associate with the "little homeland" or "local community". In our country, celebrations of locality tend to be associated with pre-modern ideas and unstable links between folk and popular culture.

It wouldn't be possible to construct a narrative about Klimontów appealing to the idea of a multicultural Atlantis, the "good old times" where Poles and Jews, in one house and under one roof (you know how the story goes)… But there are shocking postwar reports from Mordechaj Pencziner and Lejb Zylberberg about this small town (www.archwiumetnograficzne.edu.pl, translated by Aleksandra Geller). In short, the Brunonalia Festival is certainly not a festival of easy consolation, but it's also not a project of reckoning – in any sense of this word.

During the festival, residents are used to sitting at the market place and watching Klimontów TV. They watch, chat, and look around. Brunon Jasieński does not evoke sublime feelings or make people shout with enthusiasm. Show me a small town in Poland, far from tourist paths, where people sit together and the windows are not blue from TV screens in the evening. Perhaps there are some, but the list isn't long. What I saw at Klimontów market was not a festival. It was every day life – what's so odd was the use of that public space for people. The perversity is that to capture the every day life of small town you have to make a festival. And it has to be the Brunon Jasiński festival.

What's the Conclusion?

Recalling Jewish voices, motives, people and stories is the only possibility for narrating the province. It's the only story we have that can transgress those characterizations of small towns as "disgusting" and

hopelessness, summarized in the biographical declaration: "He achieved something in life, even though he came from provinces". We need these stories like a fish needs water, we appropriate them and we rush home with these wonderful discoveries – narrations that bring our voices back. They transform the groan of the weak man sentenced to the provincial life into a fairytale, which, though not necessarily affirmative, orders and defines the frames of individual and collective memory. This collective heritage, and its permanent capacity to foretell and restore is not connected with "the obligation of repairing the world" (in which we would take on the role of "redeemers") but with saving ourselves. We don't have any other narration. If the Polish province is supposed to speak – it can only tell the stories of others (it also refers – although the analogy is not that simple – to those territories previously dominated by German culture), but first it must listen. The search for this narration and its consolidation, the search for what may be source of our own credibility – this, what gives us right to recall these stories today. These stories save us. If we do not understand them the only thing that will remain is the shameful confession: "I'm from Grójec". ◂

Małgorzata **Litwinowicz**

Assistant Professor in the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. A specialist in Polish and Lithuanian studies, her work focuses on history of Polish culture in 19th century. She is also a storyteller and cofounder of "Group Well O" – an association devoted to the art of storytelling.

The Assimilationist

JÁNOS **HÁY**

I'm an assimilationist. I'm from the country, and the gate to the city happened to be open. Nobody called me, but nobody attempted to hold me back either. I crossed the city limits by my own free will. I was standing in class on the second floor, first year of high school, looking at myself and seeing that what in the village looked citified about me, the blue jeans and loosely buttoned checked shirt which told the locals that I'm no longer one of them, now seemed dismally country. Something about my clothes was not right, the shoes didn't go with the rest of it, or my hair was combed so that everything else also looked irredeemably provincial.

I'm in the city because of a quota. The schools were instructed that they had to take some pupils of humble origin too. I was one of them. My teachers said that I could study there if I behaved, but I better not forget that being there was a favor. It wasn't something coming to me – nor were the freedoms that my city schoolmates enjoyed. The teachers are more lenient with them because their parents are members of a community of which my parents are not, but of which I will become a member someday if I behave, if I don't breach the established order and I conform to the accepted image of a boy from the countryside. All I have to do is sit intimidated, for at least four years, with my hands behind my back, learn my lessons by rote, and feel a surge of gratitude should I be called on for an answer.

But my free will was itself a breach of the established order. I had no freedom or right to go against it, and it was a breach because I wasn't familiar with the language of my new environment. I couldn't read the gestures around me that alleviated the breach of order, the gestures that suited the environment. I couldn't please my teachers with those propitiating, sweet and jocular half sentences that told them that the recent, slightly impertinent remark made during class was just a student prank. In short, I couldn't behave. My own remarks came out clumsy, awkward, and sometimes even rude. My parents taught me manners in another environment where I was considered polite. Back there, I knew the boundaries with a sense of certainty, and the members of the community also knew the weight of their words. But here words and gestures carried a different weight. Initially I thought they'd overlook it, simply because I was a child and they were grownups. I thought that it was in part up to them to understand me, to listen to me, because I listened to them. But no. I was standing in the classroom and saw that what was my past, the stories that happened to me, that had shaped my personality, had no relevance in this environment. My behavior and my past, the language I use, are so different that they conceal my character. I don't exist, and only one thing can be said for me – I'm a country boy. I must learn to identify with a topos that is not to my liking. After all, I came to the city to see how colorful the world is, how many strange things can coexist side by side, and that we don't judge the inner content by the outer layers. I believed in an idealized image of the city, where emotional and intellectual openness are in the genes. I didn't belong to the village, my attention was riveted elsewhere. The knowledge I'd acquired and wanted to acquire cut me off from the earlier milieu of my life.

I want to be like them, this is what everybody that wants to assimilate says to himself. I want to feel and speak and act like them, I want a past like them, one that doesn't differ from theirs. But my past was fundamentally different. To be like them, I would have had to deny it. To rewrite it. We've all seen people eager

to assimilate, people walking along the boulevard with their kerchiefed mothers hugging the wall, hoping to be invisible, glancing around in alarm to make sure that no one from their new group of acquaintances has seen them. Deny your past, don't let on where you're from, pick up the customs of the new place as quickly as possible so that anyone that doesn't know you're living in a dorm in town won't suspect.

"You have nothing to be ashamed of", a friend says, "you're past is interesting, your parents are not run-of-the-mill, nor your grandparents, not like mine, in my family everybody's a lawyer as far as the eye can see." None of my family members are lawyers, but then my eyes don't see as far into the past either. They're not a dime-a-dozen, he says and suddenly my past is interesting. He tells everybody that I used to spend the whole day in the fields, and that the john was out back, no bathroom. He describes the scene where I'm standing on the dung heap with my pals, I must be about ten, we'd found a tube of toothpaste and are sucking out the sweet white cream that the physician's children left inside after they'd thrown it away. I'm turned into the representative of a strange reservation whose parents sing folk songs as they husk the corn, and once they've sang the three that my friends in the city know thanks to the Kodály method, *Spring winds bring flooded waters*, *Woods, woods, woods*, and also, in their sadness, because the loom isn't working, *Under the hills of Csitár*. In short, when they finished this, too, they started writing new folk songs, and also they said things like "well, I'll be darned" and "well will 'ya look at that!"

Here's the path: a child of the reservation whose originality is his birthright. Pity, sympathy and enthusiasm were written all over my new friends. I felt like the psychoanalytic explication of a Bartók piece. Instead of blood, I had a pure spring cursing through my veins, and the peasants didn't spit or piss into this pristine spring (although they most certainly did). I couldn't have remained in the enclosed world of the village a minute longer. I hadn't come to the city to bask in the glory of a pseudo-heroic recent past.

The past can't be denied, for it might surface at any time and wreak havoc with the present, and it can't be turned into something heroic either, because in that case the authentic life processes get transferred into the sphere of myth, idealizing reality by taking away what is lifelike. The past is handled properly when the stories are treated in accordance with local values. The relevance of a story comes from the unity of language and event. If a story doesn't carry within it the possibility of understanding, language must come to the rescue. The language in which the events of my past took place differed from the language in which I now found myself, and not only because my most basic sentence was "Where's the hoe, Mom," while for my mates from Budapest it was "Where are we spending our vacation, Dad". And not only because for me cheese meant head cheese while for them it mean Swiss, and we weighed berries by the ton and not by the gram. The language I spoke was bolstered up by different extra-linguistic supports. There's no simple way to define these supports, though, for the basis of the extra-linguistic references (which, according to detractors play a greater role in a communicative situation than the concrete linguistic elements) is a concrete community, the habits and way of life of those living in the village, then and before. A significant portion of my references became indecipherable, for in the new environment, their relationship to reality would have required footnotes; my stories, which were about people living under essentially different circumstances could not be told, for I couldn't expect my audience to have the basic knowledge that led to recognition.

Changing languages. The first step in assimilation is changing languages. And this change in language is not about shedding a dialect, but about finding the speed and terms, those elements anchored in reality on the basis of which the past can be brought to life. It's about making sure that the communication should contain just the right amount of linguistic elements, neither more nor less, thereby opening the way to understanding and experience. The aim of a language shift is not to make my environment forget my origins, but to make my memories, which are very different from theirs, become part of our mutually shared memories. My fellow schoolmates outnumber me. They

don't have to exert themselves to change languages, to avoid using offhand references that everybody understands except for me. Not only the job of rendering my words understandable, but the understanding, too, it seems, is my responsibility.

I'm sitting in the pub, people are talking, and their talk carries the kind of self-confidence that was not my lot, neither then, nor now – the kind of self-confidence that comes from the feeling of being at home in something. I'm a country boy, and I left my supports behind – for instance, Uncle Laci, to whom I ran when the handlebars of my bicycle needed welding. Their Uncle Laci is right here and does his welding in this setting, provided welding is called for in the first place. They have many Uncle Lacis, one is working as a public servant, and another is active in the financial sector, while yet another is in health care or education. These Uncle Lacis pass on information that my Uncle Lacis can't because if those bars break off again, all they can say is "boy, you gotta change the whole damn steering gear."

It wasn't my schoolmates who made me feel anxious. After all, they were just children. They were facing an assimilation of their own, no less difficult than mine – having to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood while shedding, yet in part retaining, their black-and-white sense of justice, and accommodating themselves to the world of the Uncle Lacis weighed down by compromise and, in no small measure, opportunism. They too were facing a trial, but they were still before it, and so they didn't think that we were rivals, that in ten years' time an employer might favor me over them for a sudden job opening. They didn't yet think that I might take away their daughter and drag her along with me into the despairing world of the assimilationist devoid of a past. But their Uncle Lacis knew. The Uncle Lacis who were my teachers and the Uncle Lacis who were my schoolmates' parents didn't look at me with trusting eyes. More often than not their eyes shot bolts of lightning, and they couldn't refrain from making unkind remarks. They were right. I posed a threat, for they knew perfectly well that I would not accept a world based on insiders' informal channels that help the undeserving – relatives, friends and business partners – get undeserved privileges. They knew perfectly well that I would always stand by the principle of equal paths and equal opportunities, and they were afraid that if I knew what sort of capital of relationships were at work in the background, I would start hollering in the name of truth, to lay waste and rage and rave, and fling my rubber boots reeking of shit on the damask tablecloth. And also, they feared that they would never be able to make me see the light. Their Uncle Lacis knew that I'm a stranger, and that I have just one thing to rely on – myself. I won't inherit grandmother's apartment. I will have to work for my own home. Being a stranger leads to existential fear and to hiding one's life from view, and it's this double distortion that turns into the deviance of the assimilationist: cowardice and willfulness.

Of course, the assimilationist need not be a country boy, he doesn't have to be Catholic, Jewish, or a Hungarian from Slovakia, he could just as well hail from the 13th district of Budapest or Transylvania. He might have ended up in Budapest from Miskolc, or in New York from Budapest, his parents could be intellectuals, or people who had abandoned him when he was a child, and so he had to grow up in an orphanage. The only thing that the assimilationist holds in common with other assimilationists is his status as an outsider, which means that they share certain problems, while others are specific, each his own. For it's not the same thing to reconcile a Torah scroll, a sowing machine or a life on gypsy row with the actual present, and trying to get your new environment to accept you, by hook or by crook.

In a society not built on revolutions and cataclysms, assimilation is the only chance for keeping social mobility a reality. The assimilationist is in no position to accept the ruling power structure as permanent. If he accepts it, he will remain an outsider, which is as good as giving up any hope of being given a job to suit his abilities. At the same time, it also means acceptance of the fact that social mobility means mobility within certain casts, or else he's got to be clever enough to wedge his way into a sudden job opening and accept the status of an Uncle Laci

of the past. And from then on it's as if he'd always been a part of the status quo, he buys real silverware, oriental rugs and a patent of nobility, and functions like the Uncle Lacis around him. He works so that the informal web of relationships will remain intact, so that strangers like him will never be able to elbow their way in. But if the assimilationist doesn't chose these paths, he stands as a living rebuttal of the status quo and, at the same time, appears on the scene as a rival which – and this is only logical – calls for better performance from those on the inside.

Still, let's not overlook the fact that this is also the source of the bad that comes from assimilation, for who can tell where the boundary lies between the legitimate challenging of the status quo and the unnecessary overturning of general norms? The danger of an assimilationist is that he won't recognize the boundary, and since he comes from nothing and must bet all his cards, not only does he trample the status quo underfoot with hobnailed boots, but people as well. All the same, being an assimilationist is a socio-psychological category and not a question of character. The assimilationist is not exempt from the fundamental laws of ethics and is not immune to a loss of character. The bad will remain bad, and the good will remain good, regardless of who's standing behind it. Still, using the image of the unscrupulous pusher who has come out of nowhere is more often than not the self-protective mechanism of the status quo. The unscrupulous pushers are more visible than the hard working majority, and constant reference to them hides the multitudes who have gotten ahead thanks to the work of their own two hands, those whom the unscrupulous pushers trample underfoot – just like everyone else who stands in their way, the majority who, despite the greatest safety patents, live their lives in insecurity because they lack a safety net made up of the Uncle Lacis and the parents and children of the Uncle Lacis. They look upon everything as temporary, even the permanent Budapest flats they move into after their temporary Budapest flats. They know perfectly well that the gates of the city are open, but not wide enough for their nine little brothers and sisters to follow them, and not so that their mothers should bring them homemade bread wrapped in familiar folk tales. The gate remains wide open so that they can tumble out through it. And if they make a mistake, they will do just that. They will tumble back into the environment to which they have lost all ties, for where is the bicycle whose handlebars their Uncle Laci could weld once again? And no one extends a helping hand, not even the other assimilationists, because assimilationists do not form a society of mutual interests, their aim is to blend in and not to separate themselves. Furthermore, they cannot agree, even in principle, to the view of society based on birth rather than talent.

The assimilationist brings with him a new kind of memory to the targeted segment, what we might generally call the elite. This memory is about a simpler world where people struggle for their lives on the most elementary level, a world that seems incredibly primitive in comparison to city life. It has its own system of values, its happiness and pain, a life that cannot be simply restricted to a sociological category, a life for which the elite, if it is aware of it at all, is also responsible but from which it can learn the real value of things. The assimilationist brings or, rather, activates a certain knowledge in the thinking of those living in security. Knowledge that failure is the foundation of existence, the chances of failure are ever-present, and every gesture that attempts to hide this goes against life. This is why the illusory picture of the assimilationist about the security of those on the "inside" also goes against life, his belief in the indissoluble nature of the net woven of the Uncle Lacis, as a result of which he judges the lives of people on the basis of the group to which they belong and according to laws based on generalizations rather than seeing these people as individuals with their individual fate.

I'm a grownup. I'm walking down the corridor of the high school, not my high school, but the school where my children go. PTA meeting. Classroom. The parents of my children's schoolmates are sitting, waiting. I feel apprehensive. I see the parents of my own former schoolmates. A class full of Uncle Lacis. I'm a child once again. I have no idea what I am doing here. I'm afraid they will hurt me. I'm a child and

they're grownups, and they wouldn't give a second thought to hurting me. I sit on a solitary chair, my attempt at protecting myself from them, whereas they don't consider me a child who tries to hide his sweaty palms, they consider me a writer. They know from their children that the father of their schoolmate is a writer. "There he sits", they say, "too proud to eat out of the same bowl with us. Of course, he's an artist. Still, he should get off his high horse", when they tell their husbands about me at home. "They think they discovered America", the husbands say, because they can't stand those who manage to make money and even raise their children by entertaining, or worse writing. "Besides, they can have any woman they want, even with empty pockets, all they have to do is show off with their shitty books."

The assimilationist carries more than a few hurts and offenses inside of him, but it's up to him how he makes use of the energy that springs from these hurts – whether he will take revenge, demand justice or compensation, or chose to improve his empathy for others. It is up to the assimilationist whether he will acknowledge that only a small portion of the offenses come concretely from assimilation. Most come from living, and none of us with emotions are immune.

All those who do not lose themselves as children will grow up, and as the initial life force begins to weaken and time, too, shows its ugly face, for instance, its end, a man getting on in years wants to work out a mode of protecting himself, something that will keep at bay the thought that his life, too, is nothing but a transient episode. It's what it is, and nothing more. But who can accept such a thing, a man asks himself, and he goes and builds a theological model, that the world progresses from a given place to a given place, and he will instantly manufacture a family, the small version of the great, logical and purposeful model. The great, the great-great and the great-great-great grandparents are dusted off, a man who was related to one of the martyrs of Arad, an ancestor in the direct line of descent who fought against the Turks, another who was a college professor after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, and here a scientific theory or discovery is suddenly brought up that bears his name, even if only the family knows about it by now. A system materializes that originates from some point in time, in the infinite past, and through the children is headed for the infinite future.

The assimilationist is sitting, also struggling with time, because anyone born of a woman will struggle with time, but he has no reason to look into the past, there are no diaries, no photographs, paintings, no sword from great-grandfather or love poems from great-grandmother to a mysterious duke with whom she crossed paths once at a ball in Vienna, even dancing with him, or so the poems let us suspect. The assimilationist doesn't have the means of making his life run along the course of an ideology. He's alone with the memories of his grandfather, but they're ephemeral, for they vanished into the past along with him. And since he has no past, he doesn't think that his children are part of some great process in which one of his cherished tasks is to continue to live in them. If you watch the assimilationist standing there, at the mercy of elemental forces, beware, for his life serves as a warming – not only the gates to the city, but the gates of time stand open, through which all of us will tumble without a trace. ◂

Translated by Judith Sollosy

János **Háy**

(1960) He earned an MA in Aesthetics from ELTE University in 1991. He has published 17 books. Besides poetry he has written short works of prose, novels, essays and plays. His essay was first published in Hungarian in the literary and political weekly *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and literature)

A City With Walls of Precious Stone

The Other Komló

TAMÁS **HALMAI**

In memoriam Mrs. Ernő Vaskó and Sándor Csontos

Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Our city can be seen as an ancient language: a maze of letters and sounds, old and new words, and words to which new meanings accrued at various times; and this is surrounded by a multitude of new dialects, straight regular letters and uniform sounds.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Komló is the capital of Hungary. (Based on approximate data.)

Komló is a Central European city. A city in Europe, in its center, on noman's land.

Komló is the city of subterranean valleys.

Komló can be reached by the traveler via several routes. One route leads nowhere. At the end of the second, children and dogs. The third merges into the fourth. The fifth takes a detour around its target. The sixth falls from the sky. Here, the sun is always shining in the mines. Here, people work in the underworld as well. (At the end of the seventh, Komló does not await you.)

Komló is a mining town without mines or miners. A mining town that's not a mining town. The live metaphor of something missing. Imagery in the flesh. Imagery capable of saying it all: this is (not) Komló (either). Without.

Komló is coal dust and bird song.

Komló is inhabited by fairies and mischievous sprites. Gnomes, pixies and a couple of seraphim who've settled down here. Incubi and nightmares. Three vendors of cotton candy, a couple of writers about hope, and intermittently, one or two people slated for salvation. Ripe Apricot samovar chief with his nonexistent tribe. Egon Mortar Frisian gas station attendant. Efrem, the Sumerian goat-herd, herding roses instead of goats. (In vain.) Tom Tantrum, a Hölderlin with a diploma, and Jerome à Courtsey, a wizard and wise man. Komló's patron saint is St. Dogma. She watches over the inhabitants of Komló. Komló has no inhabitants.

Komló has a population that approaches thirty thousand. Nearly thirty thousand people in the universe live in Komló.

In Komló, dawn comes as miraculously as if a fairy were opening the petals of a flower with her gaze.

Komló is the twilight zone.

Komló is the lights of twilight.

Komló is an enchanting respeldance among the haunting shadows of the Mecsek Mountains. A discordant jewel. Sometimes it is bereft of its luster. At other times it glitters. It is alive.

Komló as the slip of the topographer's tongue. Mánfa, yes. Hosszúmetény, yes. But Komló? Is it at all real?

Komló is not real.

Komló is the whole world. To see Komló and die (just once more). All roads lead to Komló? No. But all roads lead somewhere.

Komló as an Eternal City. Every city is eternal. Until it perishes. But by definition, the city is imperishable. Its castle protects it. And also its language. And last but not least, forgetfulness. Socrates is a man, ergo Komló is eternal.

▶

Komló *und* vicinity: K.u.K. Josep K.'s secret hideaway. Josef von Komló as Josef K.'s secret name.

Komló: hops. A creeper that lives in the wild and is grown for its cone-like clusters. *Humulus lupulus*. Indispensable in the brewing of beer. Winding round a staff, it was already placed on the town's coat of arms in the 18th century.

Komló: Kökönyös and Dávidföld, Körtvélyes and Szilvás. Library, hospital, schools. Police station. Covered stadium. Streets, roads, paths, tracks. Squares. Space, air, freedom. Komló is the capital of the woods.

Komló: possibly the city of the mournful unemployed. Or possibly the city of the hopeful unemployed. Possibly a city with walls of precious stone. (György Rába)

Komló: digs, archeological finds – the unearthed then forgotten past. Watch towers and villas from under the ground. What should they guard? Who should inhabit them? Komló: mercenaries' bones and patricians' souls.

Komló: the remains of a Gothic church in Hasmánydüllő. Around it the ancient graveyard. The Gothic. Komló: who'd dare hope for more unnecessarily?

Komló is first mentioned by name in a charter from 1256. It was just a village then. From 1543 under Turkish occupation. By 1697, the spirit of Komló watched over nine inhabitants.

Komló is Church property and Turkish booty, and Church property and a modern-day mining town.

Komló: St. Barbaraás church from 1937. Barbara is the patron saint of bells and bell-founders, mountain peaks and fortifications, artillerymen, mountain climbers, master builders and masons. Komló as a mountain-climbing town.

Komló: one of the centers of coal mining after 1945. Swarthy men came to settle. To work. And bring along swarthy women. To work. Komló is the product of their labor.

Komló's population in ś1960 is made up of Hungarians, Germans, Gypsies, Romanians, Croatians, Slovaks, and Serbs. It's the same today, except different.

Komló sees the last of deep shaft coal mining on January 1, 2000.

Komló sees the dismay over the end of coal mining on January 2, 2000.

No one in Komló is dismayed. Or if they are, then they are.

Even King Stephen I had visited Komló when he took part in the inauguration ceremonies of the Benedictine Abbey at Pécsvárad. It will take some time before another such occasion arises.

Komló very nearly became the headquarters of the Teutonic Knights. Except that would have taken a different history.

Komló is part of the European Union. The Union and the Gothic: here, it is almost all the same. Europe seems remote. As far as the eye can see the eye sees Europe. In Komló the eye sees Komló. That explains the tears.

Komló is Pécs. Komló is inhabited by the people of Pécs.

Komló: a proud aversion to Pécs. Compared to Komló, Pécs is Pécs. Komló is Komló because of the soft sounds, noises, and silences.

Komló: the Millennium and the Monarchy. Industrial coal mining and unemployment on an industrial scale. Surprise at the past: at one time was life different here?

To live in Komló is to live a different kind of life.

Komló is surrounded by hills, mountains, forests and the sky. These are its boundaries. Otherwise, it is boundless.

Komló is the scene of small and large political games, their subject, their shareholder, their victim. After all, it's a Central European city.

Komló: the home of civil games. But no one wants to play. Or it's not that. Or not then. Or not with those partners. Or not in Komló. Komló: wanting to get away from Kolmó.

Komló: Mecsekjánosi, Mecsekfalu, Zobákpuszta, Máré-vár. Komló is all that is not Komló.

Komló: a commercial, administrative, cultural and public health center in North-Baranya County. It has no other choice.

Komló: just like a small Dutch town. Or Danish. Portuguese. Swiss. (It's okay to come up with your own version.)

Komló is a single inner city that has outgrown itself. The outskirts are also inside. In Komló everyone is inside.

Komló is a single crowded outskirt. Outside of what? It can't be that important if no one knows.

In Komló everyone is learning something. And he that doesn't learns from nothing. But learn he will. Though even that will change nothing.

In Komló coffee tastes like coal. A high-grade, savory coal.

Komló shook to its roots when the last mining pit was blown up. And it's shaking still, to its roots.

Komló almost made world news once. When the last mine pit was blown up, a journalist with sensitive ears called from New Zealand: Is everything okay? Yes, the inhabitants nodded into the phone with melancholy resignation.

Komló is a tourist's paradise. They come from far and wide and in the end don't want to go back home. After a couple of days, there's no telling them apart from the natives of Komló. They end up with the same indefinable faces, various and European.

Komló is the land of legends. People say that once someone had a dream while he was sleeping. But few take such hearsay seriously. In Komló only wakeful dreams are appreciated and people believe only those ephemeral dreams that the legends don't speak about. In Komló it counts as a heroic deed to ignore legends.

Komló is barely fifteen minutes from Pécs by bus. Pécs is barely fifty years from Komló. The number of commuters is high.

Komló has no saints. Those that were have mingled with the crowd. Komló is modest and shy and beckons the uninvited with a touch of melancholy. In Komló everyone is uninvited, because the landlord hasn't shown his face since the Benedictines.

Komló is another name for Brussels. Brussels is another name for Copenhagen. Copenhagen is another name for Tübingen. Tübingen is another name for Komló. Provided that Europe exists, this line of reasoning is sound. Which doesn't mean that if this line of reasoning is not sound, Europe does not exist. Europe exists. Brussels exists. Copenhagen exists. Tübingen exists. Komló? Komló is the other name for Brussels.

Komló as a Central European city: the perfect subject for an essay, because it cannot be written. Komló as a city in Central Europe: like this, it's not quite as perfect, but it still cannot be written about. Komló is the metaphor for the indescribable. He who experiences it cannot describe it, and he who describes it has never known it. To experience or describe Komló: this is the perfect European dilemma, because it is describable. Which, on the other hand – for there is always another hand – can't offer the least guarantee that it will be understood.

Komló: understanding it is the work of a moment. When will it come?

Komló has numerous sister cities. Beius (in Romania), Eragny (in France), Neckartenzinglen (in Germany), Valpovo (in Croatia). These cities also have numerous sister cities. One of them is Komló.

Of Komló's sister cities, Neckartenzinglen (in Germany) bears the most unlikely name. People today are still guessing: Did the River Nectar really get its name because instead of water, nectar flows in its riverbed? And Neckartenzinglen, could it have been Nectartown at one time (and earlier Nectar Village)? On the banks of the River Komló, if there were a river in Komló, even more lyrical ideas could take wing if only there were ideas and wings, if there was a Komló.

Komló lies in a valley. It is covered by an ocean. Its water is fully transparent. Here, it's called air. There's no need for a lifeguard. Instead of fish, butterflies. Instead of salt, flower pollen. Instead of drowning, drowning.

Komló is a small town. It could be crossed in one substantial walk. It could be revived by one substantial idea.

On May 22, 1617 no Fleming settlers set foot in Komló. In January 1808, Hölderlin did not write a poem about Komló. On July 21, 2007 no one forgot Komló forever. A street celebration is called for in memory of these illustrious days. Think about that, you who read this.

Since the 1970s, Komló lives in the 1970s. Dust, ashes and a cozy lack of prospects. Getting used to it is easy. To die of it is easy. To survive it is easy. But to live with it is difficult.

All resident of Komló are exclusively local patriots. Otherwise they could not survive it.

In Komló not everyone keeps a volume of Rilke on the nightstand that's not by everyone's bedside. But that given two paths it is always worth taking the more difficult they know without Rilke's warning. In Komló, the friends of poetry have surely taken the more difficult path. Poetry, friendship, Komló.

In Komló they say that decay is not decay.

In Komló, they consider every thought the secret herald of hope. As if we were wandering inside an unpublished Borges story: in Komló thought, hope, language and fate are synonymous.

Komló is a tourists' nightmare. Small and empty. But it is small in a friendly way and is empty in an inviting way. And so tourists quickly come to their senses and recognize in themselves what had at first scared them: happiness.

Komló was spared urbanization. A village with prefabs. Everyone knows everyone else. Komló is not a city. But everyone is a *citoyen*. And anyone who isn't is an honorary citizen of this not-city.

Komló was spared globalization. It didn't need it. Unwitting heavenly hands had created Komló as part of the globe to begin with.

Komló was spared art nouveau. But it keeps sneaking in through byways and is called art. Beauty. A sensitive tendency. A cheerfulness without cause and largesse of mythic proportions. Elegance in the movements of the strollers. An overabundance of lights, glum hopefulness, bourgeois beliefs with tears.

In 3080, Komló will pick up and move to Mars with all its chattels. They will take the mine train, to serve as an unequivocal reminder of Komló. The other, which at one time was the only one. Of Komló there is only one.

Komló is famous for its choirs. Anyone who is strolling through the woods and hears the sound of singing has reached the outskirts of Komló. Or the walls of Atlantis.

In Komló the dust is made of silver, and the ashes of diamond shavings. And if the spectacle were designed for the birds, seen from above, the otherwise unruly order of the streets would fall into a saturnine ice-crystal structure. Birds don't fly above Komló. But they could.

The sky above Komló is gray with coal dust. In an old photograph, at any rate. In Komló they look at old photographs by holding them up to the sun before they begin to weep.

It is said that Komló will disappear. Die out. Perish. Be annexed to Pécs. Be annexed to Malmő. Be annexed by a tribal kingship from the South Sea Islands. In Komló they say it is good to walk in the sunshine. Everything else is just a dream or apoplexy, a spectacle for birds. ◂

Translated by Judith Sollosy

Tamás **Halmai**

(1975), Hungarian poet living in Pecs. His poetic essay on the little town of miners, Komlówas was first published in Hungarian in no 68 of *Magyar Lettre Internationale*

Thank Heavens
You're in the Hospital…

JANA **BEŇOVÁ**

Easter. At about six in the morning, shouting wakes me up – it doesn't stop, but just gets worse. I lie in bed and try to match it to one of the neighbors who can usually be heard in my place: neighbors, rooms, beds, and heads. These voices are new, however, and so is the direction from which they're coming. I go out on the balcony, and far below, six floors down below my bare feet – three girls are arguing. Two of them are beating the third one and trying to drive her away with awful curses, shrieks, kicking, and then by dragging her across the ground by her hair and slapping her. The girl, however, as if magnetized, clings to those two like a tick.

From the outside, the building I live in looks like a beehive, with one little window next to another – there are so many that from below you have the feeling they go on forever – infinitely. In reality, there are maybe hundreds of windows. It's hard to recognize which belongs to you, even if you've hung brightly colored Tibetan cloths on the balcony. Petržalka swallows everything, erases it, and grinds it to a pulp. Everything grows dull here, loses its contours, its luster. From outside, the building looks as if it were divided into small squares. As if everyone existed separately and autonomously here, as if everyone had his own place. In reality, behind the façade is an enormous empty space, without doors, windows or walls. Everyone inside levitates like astronauts in a space ship hurtling through space. The equipment has all been broken for a long time. Supplies are depleted, and the moment is approaching when they will run out, and all that will be left will be to drink one's own urine – hopefully filtered.

I'm standing on the balcony, it's early in the morning on Easter Sunday, and Christians are letting each other know that the tomb is empty with a quiet, peaceful and barely perceptible smile. Christ is alive. I watch how the two girls are lynching the third. I'm the only person who's been lured out by their shrieks. No one else has budged or opened the window a bit. No one reacts in the beehive. Could it be because everyone already has soundproof plastic windows? Are they all plastic in this Chinese wall of ours?

I shout at the girls to stop fighting and to get off our terrace. They shout at me that I should get lost. "F—d up cunt… f-ing bitch…" etc., etc. and then I'm once again blasted with the richness of local color – Petržalka's folklore. I don't want to be unfair, since this linking of vulgarities into endlessly branched gender associations is not exclusively a Petržalka phenomenon. Nevertheless, such an abundant harvest must be connected with some specific conditions – like fertile black earth, enough rainy days and a suitable climate.

Once Petržalka used to be known for its excellent apricots. But that was before Petržalka became the real Petržalka. Before it took the place of orchards and houses.

I take a bucket of water and try to hit the girls. I add pears. After a while, I manage to shoo them off the terrace. They did hesitate for a moment though, considering whether to come and beat me up, right in my apartment. But fortunately they weren't able to tell which floor I was on. That saved me, because my doors are not fury-safe.

I go back to bed. The battle's over. Easter. I write a message to my husband, who's in the hospital. "There was a terrible ruckus here. Thank heavens you're in the hospital, where you have peace and quiet. I'm glad you're safe."

I'm telling this story about Petržalka years later at a discussion in Artforum. The evening is devoted to Petržalka. One of the local patriots in attendance accuses me and the film director Jakub Kroner of having never lived in Petržalka and of not knowing it, and says that we give only some unfounded "negativistic image" of it. He also says that he doesn't understand where young art gets so much negativism, adding: "Excuse me, but in my opinion you're just petit-bourgeois snobs."

I lived in Petržalka 15 years – a sure sign of a petit-bourgeois snob. That man only once again confirmed what's typical of this location – bad language and verbal attacks. (One woman from Petržalka, referring to my book, threatened: "If you leave those swear words there, I guarantee you no one will buy your book! Because Petržalka isn't like that!")

I'm not saying that there aren't places and apartments where people live nicely in Petržalka, or at least relatively pleasantly. I don't understand, however, why no one with that kind of experience is inclined to believe that elsewhere it might be different. And that "elsewhere" can begin just beyond his or her plastic windows. It's enough just to open them a crack – they don't even have to be wide open.

But another woman speaks up in the discussion –for a change of pace, she's a resident of Old Town. "But do you really have nothing in Petržalka that you, Petržalka residents, can be proud of? For example the bike path along the Danube, sometimes my husband and I go there, too, or that Petržalka promenade…"

And what are the Old Town residents proud of? Bratislava castle? And what do you do with your husbands when you've finished bicycling along the Danube? Do you spend the evening somewhere in Petržalka? No? And the Petržalka promenade? Has it caught on? Do people go there to stroll up and down? It was formed opposite how promenades usually are. Even the promenade in Old Town, for example – it was created completely spontaneously by the act of promenading itself – people simply strolled along those couple of streets so much that a promenade was born. In Petržalka, it was the other way around: first they drew it, named it and now they just are waiting for the people to show up… but who would pick the sidewalk along the multi-lane highway Einsteinova for their walks?

According to Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space,* a dwelling situated in an inhospitable environment creates an even stronger sense of security, of being a refuge, and a desire to settle in –to hide in its interior. The inhospitable surroundings make it more desirable.

The contrast makes a house more beautiful. Inside, people cling to their walls, which protect them from the cold, wind, the harshness of the environment, animals and people. Dwellings protect people like a shell. "What a big dream, to live on one's own!" In the case of Petržalka, a *panelák*[1] is the shell, not the apartment. The smells and sounds in them mix and permeate one another freely, merging into one communal smell and sound. One communal breath. There's no privacy. Residents of *paneláks* are not individual shell-dwellers, but rather a whole mass of mollusks squeezed into one lump against their will. Just like in Russia, where after the revolution apartments were transformed into "houses" in a simple way – at least as many families were moved into an apartment as it had rooms.

Petržalka was a communist housing project. People were to be squeezed together so that no one would be alone, unheard or unseen. Nothing else that cities usually have would be built for them, just the apartment. No cafes, restaurants, genuine squares, cinemas, theaters or bookstores. This project was made into reality and still exists today. Construction began in 1974, the year I was born. Some have grown accustomed to it and have come to identify with it. After all, it is no coincidence that the symbol of today's "young Petržalka" is a clenched raised fist. Just as there exist houses that are prisons, there are also shells that are traps. Some homes may be shells with mother of pearl walls, whose shine calms its inhabitants when there's danger, pulling its residents inside (the bodies are sucked completely into its bowels). But there are also shells of the *dentate* type. Toothed-shells that excise and expel their inhabitants, dwellings that chase you out. Or dwellings that squeeze you, crowd you,

and pinch you like a pair of badly fitted shoes. "The most dynamic escapes are the work of beings that have been crowded, they do not emerge in the soft laziness of a lazy being that can only dream of where else it could go to be lazy. As long as we are living the paradoxical metaphor of the explosive mollusk… we are moving towards that most determined kind of aggression, one that delays, an aggression that lies in wait. Wolves concealed in shells are crueler than those who wander free."

That is the explosion of a being that has been crowded, which might mean he leaves his shell forever, becoming instead a being who wanders free. ("It is better to live in something improvised than something definitive.") The creatures that dwell in Petržalka are squeezed, marked, churned and at the same time are chased away, expelled. It teaches you to grow accustomed to being outside, in the landscape or in alternative interior spaces, which a real city should make available to its residents. That is after all what makes a city a city – the ability to spend a day in it. Or to escape within it, allow yourself to be pulled in, take a deep breath. Like into a shell. Petržalka teaches you to look for a home away from home, and that it's possible to write even while on the move. "Even a shadow can be a place to live". And as they say in books – people make important decisions while standing, but the most important should be considered while on a walk. As we know – even the one after Sunday lunch can suddenly change into a real excursion and wind up being a struggle for life and death.

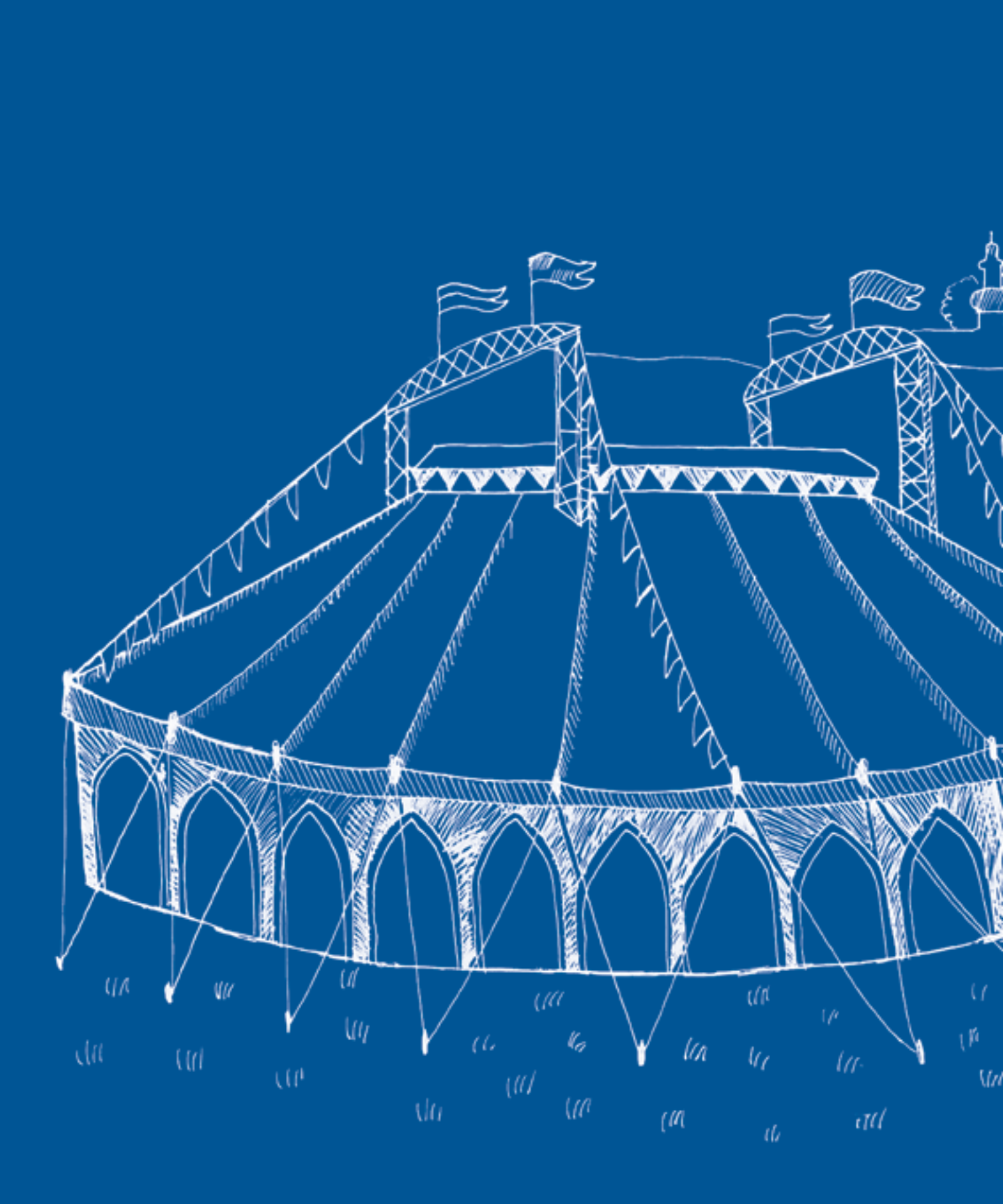
Walking – for a being that had been crowded previously – gradually opens all rooms. Inside himself, the chambers. Even the most spacious. Left to the wind. And ball rooms. Where even the most passionate tango is danced without any discernable motion. In the heart of the shell. Where blood is pounding under your feet, from the floor, hitting the walls, ceilings and your temples. *Like a rampaging elephant.* ◂

Translated from Slovak by Christina Manetti

Jana **Beňová**

(1974) lives in Bratislava. She published three books of poetry and a book of short stories: *Twelve Stories and Ján Med*. She has written two novels *Parker* and *Plán odprevádzania (Cafe Hyena)*. A selection of her articles was published in 2010 under the title *Dnes* [Today]. Until 2009, she worked as a daily editor SME under the name Jana Parkrová. She currently works as an editor in Theater Institute in Bratislava

1 *Panelák* is the word used in Slovak for the large apartment building made out of large, prefabricated concrete panels (hence, *panelák*).



URBAN POLICY: WHO CARES ABOUT YOUR TOWN? - POLITICAL APPROACH

URBAN POLICY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

A Tale of Three Cities

(Which Considered Becoming Capitals of Culture)

MAREK **SEČKAŘ**

Why does a city compete for the title "Capital of Culture"? Either it's already a cultural capital, in which case it doesn't need a title, or it isn't – and adding a title isn't going to change much. But that's not the entire story. There are issues of prestige at stake, and also money. If it's a success, the city can make itself more prominent and grow wealthier. It's therefore unsurprising that many cities apply for the designation when the opportunity arises. And many more consider applying. This text follows the story of three Czech cities whose councils considered submitting an application for the title of European Capital of Culture 2015. One gave up before the contest had even begun. Another did its best in trying to obtain the title, remaking the face of the city. And the third city emerged victorious. The cities are Brno, Ostrava and Plzeň. And by coincidence, they're the second, third and fourth largest cities in the Czech Republic. The largest is obviously the capital, and it can do without any special titles.

The story of Brno is short, although interesting. Brno is unquestionably a city of culture – although it may have an inflated sense of its own cultural significance. In any case, it's proud of its culture. Brno has always operated as an alternative to the great metropolis, but its cultural events are often of national, and occasionally even international, importance. The country's largest literary festival takes place here, and there are also enormous festivals dedicated to theatre and film. Moreover, it's the seat of several publishing houses, and houses respectable artistic collections and a thriving artistic scene. For a city of this size (around 400 000 habitants), it's by no means dull. On the other hand, Brno suffers from a chronic inferiority complex, always comparing itself with Prague and promoting itself in a rough and clumsy fashion. The results are not always brilliant. What's more, Brno's political scene is divisive and unable to reach any viable consensus. Perhaps this is why Brno's cultural activities often show a slightly unofficial and spontaneous side, which isn't entirely bad. Taking all this into consideration, it seems obvious that Brno was predestined to become a cultural capital – which is why its so strange that none of the ranks of the city's cultural elites were committed to the city's application. The explanation lies in the fact that the entire project became an exclusively political matter, never engaging cultural institutions or getting feedback from ordinary city residents.

It was 2009, and Brno was ruled by a coalition composed of the Social Democrats and several smaller centrist parties. Daniel Rychnovský, deputy mayor responsible for culture and member of the coalition People's Party, first presented the idea of Brno as a European Capital of Culture. We can't really say that he had a clear vision. Mostly he argued that Brno is a cultural metropolis that shouldn't lag behind, and is advanced as compared to other cities." Why not apply? That would be a crude paraphrase of his argument. Actually, his only substantive reasons for becoming a candidate city concerned finances: "By organizing the event, we could get up to 400 million crowns from European funds". At the same time, it didn't even occur to him to approach the city's cultural institutions and ask them to support the candidacy or participate in preparing a more specific plan.

Rychnovský succeeded in getting the support of the other two smaller parties in the coalition, but negotiations with the Social Democratic Party floundered. The Mayor Roman Onderka was not especially pleased with the idea. His reservations were based on

the financial crisis, which at that time was peaking, and he was reluctant to "encumber the city's budget for several years ahead". Obviously, the vision of European grants wasn't very tempting for him. In short, the coalition at Brno's city hall was yet again divided. The supporters couldn't even rely on the backing of the main opposition force, the rightist Civil Democratic Party. Leo Venclík, representative of one of the city districts, declared: "As I can see, there is no money to repair kindergartens. We have to decide whether we really want to be a European Capital of Culture with broken windows in kindergartens." Rychnovský wasn't able to influence his colleagues, although he escalated his financial arguments: "Brno can gain four times as much as it is going to invest... This is the first time I've ever seen someone resisting easy gains."

At the session of the city council in late June 2009 the candidacy was once and for all rejected. The winners justified the decision as an act of financial responsibility, citing their reluctance to drag the city into the chimeras of European grant projects. Obviously it was a rare example of moral judiciousness among political representatives who otherwise don't really despise money intended for vague projects.

So rare in fact that it raises doubts. Were mainstream politicians really so skeptical about using EU funds? Taking a political peek backstage, it turns out that the facts might be somewhat different. According to candidacy supporters, the real problem was the fallout from the controversial nomination of the mayor's protégé for an influential post in city administration. It seems that the mayor took any perceived slights personally, and as any good captain, assumed that "when I sink, the whole ship must sink too." Thus, Brno didn't become European Capital of Culture, and it didn't even try. And while its withdrawal probably had no negative effect on its rich cultural scene, it probably did confirm the city's reputation as the capital of petty quarrels.

Ostrava's story is rather sad, although it raises hope and confirms that the idea of a cultural capital makes sense – even without those proverbial EU funds. Ostrava is a somewhat unfortunate city. For many years, it suffered from an exclusive orientation towards mining and heavy industry: it was a city of miners and founders, not a city of culture. During the years of communist rule it grew into a monstrous industrial agglomeration populated by ethnic groups from all around the former Czechoslovakia. The communists called Ostrava red – with the glow of its blast furnaces and the supposedly revolutionary zeal of its inhabitants. For obvious reasons, most everybody else called Ostrava black. In sum, it was a different city in every possible way, a city whose very name smacked of strangeness and inclemency. What's more, after the fall of communism and subsequent decline of heavy industry, Ostrava became a city of poverty and unemployment. All of which is not to say that it's a city without culture. Perhaps it's not as culturally rich as Brno, but it certainly has culture of its own – truly unique. In fact, in contrast to Brno, Ostrava has actually been able to present an alternative to mainstream Czech culture. Its rusty industrial milieu gave birth to a specific atmosphere that has no parallel. Ostrava has been home to many important artists and writers, e.g. the late Jan Balabán, possibly the most prominent contemporary Czech fiction writer. Ostrava is also becoming more and more ambitious: the economic catastrophe of the last two decades is slowly passing and the city is becoming increasingly aware of its potential as a meeting point between three countries: the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. In this respect, Ostrava's candidacy for the title of European Capital of Culture made sense.

The beginning of the candidacy was similar to what was said before, the only difference in this case being that the idea didn't come from the political class but from the Ostrava-based film producer Čestmír Kopecký, a person with undeniably close connections to the city council. In contrast with Brno, the suggestion fell on very fertile ground, and the proposal for candidacy passed the city council without any real objections. Still, neither Kopecký nor anybody else in the city council was able to produce any specific vision. It's true that his arguments lacked straightforward hints at the possibility of effortless financial gains, but otherwise there was nothing but general and unclear declarations. It looked like the project was going to fall asleep before it could actually start.

In these doldrums, the city council had the idea to approach Ostrava's cultural élites. And surprisingly enough, the project met with an extremely warm response and caused a real upheaval. In the end, the city decided to cede the authority of final approval for all ideas to an individual selected from the ranks of artists and writers. And the ideas were many. One of them was to extend Brno's literary festival Month of Author's Reading to Ostrava. The event took place in July 2010, and the response of the public was enormous. A cultural center called Stará Aréna (Old Arena) was created for this purpose – an institution previously missing in the city. Another important act was the publication of the so-called *White Book of Ostrava's Culture* – an extensive collection of texts and visual materials documenting the past and present of the city's cultural happenings. The candidacy ceased to belong exclusively to the cultural élites and was embraced by common citizens. In the end, even the political class, until to that time supporting the project rather rhetorically, yielded to the mood of the crowds and detached substantial funds for the candidacy, promising even more investments in the future.

In this atmosphere of overwhelming euphoria, the news about Ostrava's failure was quite startling and depressing. Why the candidacy finished this way is not completely clear, but it seems that the city focused too much on seeking and defining its cultural image. And unlike its main rival, Plzeň, it underestimated the political negotiations involved. Some of the committee members fascinated by Ostrava's projects didn't even participate in the decisive session, and Plzeň won by one single vote.

The logical hangover aside, did Ostrava take anything else from this episode? Local poet Petr Hruška, once one of the most ardent supporters of the candidacy and a natural spokesman for the city's cultural élites, says that at least the citizens learned to use the words "Ostrava" and "culture" in a single sentence. This is an uncontestable achievement. Then, there is also the aforementioned *White Book*, a publication created for the purposes of the candidacy, but generally considered a keystone for any similar projects in future. On the other hand, the city's political representation completely lost interest in promoting cultural activities and inconspicuously backed down from any promises they had made. The Old Arena cultural center was able to survive for a few months, but then it was finally closed. It seems that the city's sudden and unexpected excitement has been irreparably wasted. Still, it's hard to believe that such a great experience couldn't yield any positive results for the city. Hopefully, the fruits will be seen in future. As Petr Hruška concludes, "Ostrava won't be the cultural capital, but it can still become a cultural city."

As has been insinuated, Plzeň's victory in the competition for the title of European Capital of Culture 2015 was a surprise, at least for those who are to some extent acquainted with the Czech cultural scene. Plzeň doesn't hold a very prominent place in the cultural context of the Czech Republic. Situated rather close to Prague, its cultural potential is continually drawn away by bright lights of the capital. Of course, the city possesses all the necessary cultural institutions and also hosts a couple of festivals and other events, but very little of all this actually exceeds the confines of the region. Many prominent cultural figures were born in Plzeň, but very few have stayed. Plzeň is rather known as the capital of beer (Pilsen lager was invented here) – and certain wicked tongues suggest this was actually the motivation behind the decision of the committee.

All joking aside, there must actually be a specific reason why Plzeň won. Milan Svoboda, director of the Plzeň 2015 project encharged with the candidacy preparation, basically confirms what was said above. Unlike Ostrava, his city primarily focused on the political aspect of the project and succeeded in mastering its "European dimension" behind the curtains. The idea that the city should run for the title came from Plzeň's political circles. The city approached the candidacy and its opportunities in a very pragmatic way, similarly to how other cities have approached the Olympic games. The city councilors were realistic: they were aware of the fact that the city currently had little to offer and they understood the candidacy precisely as a way to change this. They oriented their plans to majority tastes and mainstream cultural manifestations. And

thus far they have avoided experiments and highbrow art for the élites.

However, this doesn't mean that Plzeň will not develop such ideas at some point in future. After all, highbrow-culture is always based on the mainstream, otherwise it lacks sense. The program for "Plzeň's year" is far from complete, and there is a plenty of time to think it through. The coordinators are ready to involve the public and the city's cultural figures as much as possible. As there is very little background in this respect, the municipality has to stir up interest on its own. What's more, it actually has to create the proper groups first. This is challenging, but also exciting. At the same time, the municipality is in communication with many former and future capitals of culture, exchanging knowledge and experience. The result is still in the air. However, it cannot be denied that the local politicians have opened the city's future perspectives in an impressive way.

The tale of three cities thus ends like real life. The pragmatist who knows what he wants is usually the winner. Among the cities we discussed, Plzeň definitely showed the most purposefulness, and its candidacy demonstrated the greatest preparation. At the same time, Plzeň is the city that can probably make the most of the project: what it currently lacks must simply be provided for. This is perhaps the basic idea of the European Capital of Culture project: to give cities opportunities and offer them new routes of development. How they make use of it is entirely up to them. Who knows, it's quite possible that Plzeň is going to prepare a delightful surprise for us. We can return to this in less than five years... ◂

Marek **Sečkař**

(1973) translator and editor of the Czech literary monthly Host.

European Capital of Culture

– A Town Tournament in the 21st Century or an Opportunity for Social Change?

ARTUR **CELIŃSKI** AND ALEKSANDRA **NIŻYŃSKA**

Standing in the foyer of the Warsaw Opera on the 13th of October 2010, I was encircled by the extreme tension and excitement produced by 11 competing teams, each convinced of their impending victory. We were all waiting for the verdict. Who stays in the game, and who goes? Perhaps surprisingly, this heightened anxiety wasn't the product of some sports or talent competition. The teams each represented Polish cities, all vying for the opportunity to run for the title of European Capital of Culture. Composed of Polish and international experts, the jury eventually announced the short-list of candidates: Gdańsk, Lublin, Katowice, Warsaw and Wroclaw. The room erupted with equal measures of joy and sorrow. And while questions were raised about the composition of the jury and selection criteria, those who lost eventually reconciled themselves to the commission's judgment.

The whole situation reminded me of a popular TV programme broadcast between the 1960s and 80s, during communism – "Town Tournament". I was too young to have watched it live, but it was discussed in history classes as one of the possible ways in which authorities sought to relieve the deficiencies and ubiquitous greyness of everyday life. Surrounded by almost unwatchable programs about harvest yields or visits by party secretaries to coal mines and shipyards, "Town Tournament" appeared to actually be directed towards living viewers, who wanted to relax and forget for a moment about the realities surrounding them. I don't want to create a strict parallel between the functions of "Town Tournament" and the European Capital of Culture competition. But I think that they share an acknowledgement of the city as a distinct subject of identification for residents, and both recognize the promotional potential of the city.

As we can read in the recollections of the Tournament between Chojnice (40,000 citizens) and Dzierżoniów (35,000 citizens) in 1986, "the teams of both competing towns took part, including the representatives of local authorities. The intention was to promote local crafts, folk art, bands, etc. It was a good opportunity to promote tourism in the region and to integrate the local community" (emphasis A. Niżyńska)[1]. By comparison, here are the state objectives of the European Capital of Culture program, according to the Decision 1622/2006/EC: "Highlight the richness of the cultural diversity of Europe… [and] foster the participation and interest of citizens living in the city and its surroundings."[2]

The two main criteria defining the ECC – European diversity and city citizenship – are mirrored in the purposes of the "Town Tournament", to promote city tourism and the integration of residents. Two very different political systems and institutions were responsible for the organization of each, but the notion that cities play an important role in social integration and regional promotion remains – regardless of shifting political winds. Communist television and the European Commission both recognized the potential of the town as a place for people to gather and create attractive happenings for themselves and outsiders.

Although opponents of European integration would explain this parallel through correspondence between the Soviet Union and European Union, I would be inclined to trace the source of this coincidence to

the powerful and vivid nature of the city as such, regardless of its geographical position. After all, similar competitions are organized in American countries and the Arab world.[3]

European Town Torunament

Did Polish cities use their experiences from "Town Tournament" during the ECC competition? At the outset, we should note that the tournaments were primarily held in small and medium-size towns. By contrast, the ECC contest is all about capitals – big cities with European character. "Town Tournament" was a one-day event for which authorities and residents spent months preparing. The European Capital of Culture title is held for a full year and preparations can take 7-8 years. In short, the ECC competition and "Town Tournament" are in completely different leagues.

The first Polish ECC was Kraków. In 2000, in the commemoration of the turn of the century, nine cities held the title: Reykjavik, Bergen, Helsinki, Brussels, Prague, Santiago de Compostela, Avignon and Bologna. The most significant selections were of Kraków and Prague – two cities famous for their impacts on European culture, but located in countries that were not yet members of the European Union. Each of the cities symbolized a different element, contributing to the overall thematic unity of celebrations. Kraków represented "thought, spirituality and creativity", whereas Prague stood for "cultural heritage". For 2000, the selection process proceeded differently from other years. The general idea behind the European Capital of Culture is that cities compete to present the best strategy for cultural development within a given country. In the case of ECC 2000, European Ministers of Culture decided to create a cultural program for the entirety of Europe, irrespective of the country of origin of particular cities. And this is how Kraków and Prague made their debuts, blazing a trail for other Central European countries. In 2007, the next ECC from the region became Sibiu in Romania. Starting in 2009, the designation of European Capital of Culture is shared by one city from the "old EU" and a second city from a country that entered the Union after 2004. According to these guidelines, the European Capital of Culture for 2016 will be shared by Spain and Poland.

By the time the Polish Ministry of Culture officially inaugurated the contest in 2009, preparations were already in full swing. Some cities were ready to participate from the very beginning, while others only decided to compete in the final stages of pre-selection. Most spent six months preparing the applications, with the expectation of devoting nearly six years to organizing the celebration. But given the ambitious goal of the ECC project, this is a relatively small amount of time. Therefore, Polish cities hired international experts – with Lublin benefiting from the advice of Dragan Klaic[4], and Mary McCarthy[5] counseling Warsaw. Candidates spent a great deal of money on the preparations, investing in infrastructure and tourist facilities to catch the attention of the foreign commission members, who were responsible for selecting the best prepared city with the most interesting and feasible strategies for urban development through culture.

Polish cities take all of these efforts and risks in revitalizing and modernizing, because they are aware that the first two decades of 21st century present a singular chance to transform their images and become as attractive as other European metropolises. The dream of catching up with the West world has never been so close. Two international events will focus the eyes of millions on Polish cities – Euro 2012 and European Capital of Culture 2016. There will be hundreds of thousands of visitors, and millions of remarks made about Polish cities in European media. Those opportunities arouse the imagination of local authorities and businessmen, who expect huge profits from participation in both undertakings, and therefore discussions of gains from Euro 2012 and ECC 2016 have largely concentrated on economics. Experts have carefully estimated the level of return for each złoty spent on the organization of the events, and local authorities have tried to predict the level of increase in tourism in the region. Meanwhile, the government has prepared a strategy for infrastructure development before EURO 2012, hoping that international guests will notice the effort made in modernizing

the country. All those tasks are undoubtedly important, and serve to benefit Poland as a whole and the individual participating cities. However, the possible benefits for citizens should not be forgotten. And there exists a real possibility of letting civic benefits drown in an ocean of financial profits. Fortunately, there are organizations responsible for representing the interests of urban citizens, and if they're successful in this task the opportunity for some sort of balance exists.

Civic Town Tournament

The civic dimension of the European Capital of Culture is often omitted, simply because it doesn't fit in the concept of a European cultural capital. People generally understand culture as fine arts – theatre performances, gallery exhibitions, classical music etc. Therefore, cultural policy is largely understood as a strategy for organizing such events and making them as profitable as possible. Municipal officials often express similar attitudes. Building new concert halls or organizing international festivals is therefore considered the realization of cultural development. The lack of money for such investments, which generally require huge expenditures, is an excellent excuse to ignore the field of culture during the planning of a municipal budget. Even a city council that is "culture-friendly" and allocates funding for cultural investment doesn't guarantee that citizens will benefit from such allocations. How often will they go to the new opera for a performance? Do they really want to host another festival of modern ballet?

Urban culture is a specific phenomenon that can't be confined to the visual and performing arts. It includes such inconspicuous activities like sipping coffee on a market square, talking to the neighbours in a local park, or jogging in the morning along the river. All those activities are important parts of the diverse phenomenon of city culture. Perhaps these are even more important than occasional visits to the National Museum. The European agenda for culture in a globalizing world defines culture in both aspects. "Culture should be regarded as a set of distinctive spiritual and material traits that characterize a society and social group. It embraces literature and arts as well as ways of life, value systems, traditions and beliefs".[6] This juxtaposition of culture and society is a key concept for the European Capital of Culture program. At the very beginning, when Melina Mercouri proposed this immense initiative, the main goal of the ECC was "to help bring people closer together,"[7] with culture understood as a cohesive element in the municipal community. Of course, culture also has a promotional value, attracting other members of European society. However, the promotional impact of culture is not a virtue in itself, but a tool to integrate the community of the EU. Therefore, the European dimension, which is connected mostly with striking cultural events, has a civic aspect as well.

Polish cities already understand that culture and sport can generate financial profits. The economic hopes riding on EURO 2012 and ECC 2016 are enormous. However, local authorities should be aware that a higher rate of income *per capita* does not guarantee a good quality of life for citizens. Mercer's Quality of living index measures how living standards differ in cities around the world. And while it considers economic development as an important factor, it also underlines the significance of the socio-cultural environment, recreation opportunities, schools and education, the natural environment etc. With its diversity, the city requires a holistic approach and so does cultural policy. This holistic urban approach should put the city dweller at its center. All the investments – new buildings, subway lines, and parking spaces are not designed for their own sake, but for the people who will use them.

The successful and truly European city is a place where the citizen comes first. Polish cities are only just beginning to adopt such an attitude. Both EURO 2012 and the ECC 2016 became starting points for a new paradigm in Polish urban policy – civic participation. Social Project 2012, run by the University of Warsaw, focuses on making the upcoming championships in football a participatory event. They try to inform citizens about EURO 2012 and ask them for their opinions on the new stadiums or parking facilities related to

the championships. At the same time, the Res Publica Foundation has established the City DNA team to monitor developments concerning ECC 2016. This team has examined the preparations of each candidate city with respect to the "City and Citizens" dimension mentioned above. Furthermore, the team organizes workshops in each city based on the deliberative concept, in which citizens are encouraged to identify the main problems regarding the cultural policy of their respective cities.

Thanks to these and various other non-governmental initiatives, municipal authorities have begun to notice the importance of civic participation in any decision-making process. The first deliberative poll[8] in Poland was organized, not incidentally, in Posen in 2009, consulting with the residents about the other uses, beyond sports, of the newly built stadium for EURO 2012. In short, it was an attempt to take participatory democracy beyond the texts and bookshelves of academics and onto the streets of Polish cities.

Fortunately, interest in public consultation came with increasing interest in urban culture. For the past few years, in Warsaw, Gdańsk, Łódź, Lublin and Szczecin there has been an ongoing search for methods to revive public space and make inhabitants more interested in the urban culture supported by authorities. The ECC 2016 title seemed like the perfective answer to this search. At the time of this article's composition, the winner of the competition remains unknown. Nevertheless, the preparation in all 11 cities demonstrated new directions and opportunities for the development of urban culture.

Warsaw is a very instructive example. We should note the following actions taken by the city: 1. Introduction of the "Committee of Social Dialogue for Culture", responsible for mediating between organizations and city authorities. 2. Reform of the way the city grants are awarded. 3. Returning to the "Culture 2020 Development Program", which yielded two crucial results. First, the attitudes of the authorities have changed – NGOs are not regarded as unnamed groups simply seeking money. And secondly, culture has been restored to its rightful place as a crucial element in city development – just like the economy, infrastructure and demography.

As for Gdańsk, it succeeded in redefining its strategy for urban culture, connected with the slogan "Culture of Freedom – Freedom of Culture". Here, a strong accent was put on both European and local dimensions. The notion of solidarity as an every day activity and the belief that culture begins with good relations between neighbors are both common denominators. Theory was put to work. Projects like "Narrations", "Streetwaves", and "Art and Science" showed that many institutions could combine their activities and work together. Also, the approach of the city council and local authorities towards culture changed, which is visible not only in the way that it promotes cultural events among inhabitants but also in the fact that the city has begun to promote itself *through* culture. Modifying the system of grants according to the suggestions and recommendations of NGOs also marked an important shift. Finally, the system of managing the city's cultural institutions was also transformed – shifting focus from administration to the creativity of its directors – allowing for changes based on the expectations of residents.

In 2009 Lublin was still searching for its missing element. But today it seems to be back on the way towards discovering its own identity and character. Cultural organizations that are active in this city linked their aims and worked out their own plans for the city. The city authorities not only accepted these ideas, but also enthusiastically encouraged them. From a peripheral city in the eastern part of Poland, Lublin is increasingly a city that vibrates with life, emanating from a new vision of the culture of the city created by its inhabitants.

There are also less encouraging examples: Łódz and Torun fell off the track during the process of preparation. Now they're back at the starting line, ready to take another chance to reform. It doesn't make sense to blame the local authorities or non-governmental organizations operating in the city. The real reason for the failure was probably the lack of the communication between both sides, and the fact that neither of them knew which ideas from the ECC application should be implemented in the cultural policy. The biggest loser was certainly Szczecin. City authorities decided to close

down the institutions responsible for preparing the contest application. Additionally, they haven't justified their decision and couldn't point to any actions of Szczecin 2016 (the institution responsible for the ECC process in Szczecin) which weren't approved by the authorities. Moreover they didn't present any alternative vision of cultural development. It seems that Szczecin's cultural development has hit a dead-end.

If Polish cities that will not hold the honorary title of European Capital of Culture want this competition to avoid becoming yet another one-day event, another "Town Tournament", they need to learn lessons from participation in ECC process. In summary, urban activists and non-governmental organizations have to make greater efforts to take advantage of the program. Although local authorities and businessmen will also be beneficiaries of such undertakings, the largest benefits should accrue to local residents in each of the eleven cities. ◂

Artur **Celiński**

(1985) – PhD candidate in political science at the University of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in Warsaw. His research examines innovative methods of deliberative democracy. Deputy editor-in-chief of Res Publica Nowa. Leader of the City DNA team.

Aleksandra **Niżyńska**

(1986) – PhD candidate in social sciences and graduate of the Law School of the University of Warsaw. Her research examines urban culture and community arts. Author of the book *Street Art as an Alternative Form of Public Debate in the Urban Environment.*

1 The history of this tournament and the videos of that event can be found at the address: http://www.historiachojnic.pl/artykuly/materialy/PRL/97/telewizyjny-turniej-miast- (28.04.2011)

2 Article 4 of Decision 1622/2006/EC

3 See more: http://www.cac-acc.org/present.php?lang=en

4 A cultural analyst, commentator, public speaker, educator and trainer. His fields of engagement are contemporary performing arts, European cultural policies, strategies of cultural development and international cultural cooperation, interculturalism and cultural memory. He has led complex international research projects, conceptualized many conferences and symposia, written and edited publications. He is the author of several books and hundreds of articles.

5 A specialist in the field of cultural policy as well as a national and international expert in the field of art and culture; between 2002-2005 was the director of the winning program of Cork - European Capital of Culture Cork 2005; in the years 2007 to 2008 she acted as an international expert on behalf of the Council of Europe's candidate city evaluation committee for the European Capital of Culture for 2012 and 2013.

6 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on a European Agenda for culture in globalizing world. Brussels, 10.5.2007, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0242:FIN:EN:PDF (30.04.2011)

7 Resolution of the Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs, meeting within the Council, of 13 June 1985 concerning the annual event 'European City of Culture', http://eur-lex.europa.eu/Notice.do?val=117538:cs&lang=fr&list=117540:cs,117539:cs,117538:cs,118564:cs,&pos=3&page=1&nbl=4&pgs=10&hwords=&checktexte=checkbox&visu=#texte (30.04.2011)

8 A form of opinion poll that incorporates the principles of deliberative democracy proposed by James Fishkin in such a form: "*A random, representative sample is first polled on the targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather at a single place for a weekend in order to discuss the issues. Carefully balanced briefing materials are sent to the participants and are also made publicly available. The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts and political leaders based on questions they develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. Parts of the weekend events are broadcast on television, either live or in taped and edited form. After the deliberations, the sample is again asked the original questions. The resulting changes in opinion represent the conclusions the public would reach, if people had opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues." http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/docs/summary/ (28.*04.2011)

Pécs: A City of Concrete

NÓRA **SOMLYÓDY**

Since my book on the prehistory of "Pécs – European Capital of Culture 2010" came out, everyone's been asking why this promising story turned out to be a failure.[1] The idea for writing the book dates back to 2008, when I first realized that all the scandals and problems of Pécs reveal as much about Hungary (15-20 years after the fall of communism) as they do about the failure of a large European event. As an investigative journalist engaged in urban and cultural politics, I soon found myself delving into the reasons why a civil initiative with enough money could fail.

I was fascinated by the ECC bid held for Hungarian cities in 2004. Apparently, the Hungarian Ministry of Culture's intention was to initiate a cultural shift in the management of urban environments, encouraging cities to formulate their visions of the future in cultural terms. It was an inspiring moment. Along these lines, Graz (2003), Liverpool (2008), Linz (2009), and the German candidates bidding for 2010 were all experimenting with culture-led urban development. In addition, wide-ranging discussions were held between former and future capitals about the best ways of organizing such an event. And finally, as Hungary had just entered the European Union, a wealth of money was expected for urban development.

Since Budapest enjoyed the political support of both governing parties during the bidding period, my curiosity was piqued as Pécs began to emerge as the winner. It should be noted that even with Budapest in competition, there seemed to be a silent agreement that the title would provide the greatest benefit to smaller cities – weak in cultural infrastructure and in need of new perspectives. And then, in contrast to general political will, the ECC jury became convinced that Pécs was the most promising candidate. It should also be mentioned that there was a strong public desire for a politically independent decision. These factors successfully swept Budapest out of consideration by October 2005. But the decision gave way to new conflicts on the local level.

The Pécs bid was by far the most promising and produced the highest expectations. It was the only bid compiled by members of local civil society. Already in 2002, local intellectuals had launched discussions on the possibility of Pécs becoming a European Capital of Culture. A range of meetings discussed the possible futures for this city that had served historically as a meeting point of diverse cultures and had a proud cultural history, especially at its peak during the 1970s and 80s. During these decades the museum collection had been expanded, a ballet company was founded, and various festivals were launched. However, after the closure of the coal mines in the 80s and the fall of communism, severe economic decay set in. Pécs failed to attract investors and became less appealing for artists. Since then, none of the local governments – usually left wing – had found the right way to fight growing unemployment and the increasing marginalization of Pécs within Hungary – even construction of the Budapest–Pécs highway failed.

"The Borderless City" bid opened new prospects. Based on extensive discussions, the bid was prepared by a team led by the historian of literature József Takáts, a lecturer at the University of Pécs. The bid outlined a vision of Pécs as an important cultural center of the southeastern region of Europe, opening new gates to the Balkans and strong enough to initiate the cultural decentralization of a historically centralized Hungary. Vast quantities of infrastructure projects were proposed to fuel this development. Among them, two landmark buildings: a cultural centre with combined conference and concert functions and a library. The project also included an extension of the museum, the refurbishment of various urban spaces, and the transformation of the famous Zsolnay

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porcelain factory area into a cultural quarter. Many of the proposed projects were located in the rather hopeless area lying east to the historical centre, with the hope that initial public investments would stimulate the appetite of private investors.

It might sound curious or unusual, but local politicians didn't contribute to the preparation of the bid. Of equal significance is the fact that they didn't obstruct the project. The general opinion of local party politicians was that "the mayor does the political lobbying, while civilians write the bid". "Civilians" were understood as voters, but not acknowledged as professionally engaged citizens. The Mayor of Pécs at that time was the influential socialist László Toller, who basically ran a one-man local government. All local party politicians, in the governing party or opposition, were in one way or another beholden to him. The municipal bureaucracy was weak and exposed entirely to political objectives. The day the winner was announced marked a turning point. October 19th – nearly 144 million Euros for ECC infrastructure was converted from fantasy into tangible reality.

But within half a year the bidding team was deprived of all its rights to influence the fate of the ECC title. As a palpable example illustrating just how far local politics was from understanding the reason behind the bid, the Deputy Mayor responsible for culture accused the team of importing "Western European cultural models", which would – in her firm opinion – destroy "value-oriented Hungarian culture."[2]

This moment seemed crucial to me, so I decided to follow events more closely. Two questions were of primary interest: 1. Was local civil society strong enough to defend the cause? 2. If local authorities entirely overtook the initiative, what would remain of the bid?

Concerning the first question about local civil society, efforts were made and partial victories were gained. Artists, musicians, writers and others formed an association called "Pécs – 2010" soon after Pécs won the title. They made efforts to bridge the gap between Pécs and the Budapest-centered mainstream media, and they also tried to press local government to announce international competitions for key ECC positions. Another group, mainly composed of architects, called the "Board of Architecture and City Image" organized conferences to call attention to the lack of time remaining for the proper preparation of key infrastructure projects and to underline the importance of international design competitions. The "Pécs – 2010" association was active for about a year, but it ran out of energy for the organizational work demanded to keep it alive. In turn, the architects' initiative successfully evolved into an advisory board for management during the preparation phase. Based on the number of individuals who contributed to the bid (listing ca. 200 names on its last pages), this is far less than what might have been expected – few of these original contributors joined any of the aforementioned initiatives. This fact highlights the low organizational level of local civil society, and suggests that perhaps "the borderless city" remained an issue for only a small intellectual elite.

The second question can be answered briefly. In the summer of 2006, József Takáts wrote an open letter announcing his resignation from his role Chief Advisor: "If anything at all from the bid happens to become reality, it will lack the spirit of it". [3] And he was right. In early 2010, journalists from *Die Welt* asked the current (to be exact, the fourth) ECC Manager for his opinion about the goal of the ECC title. His answer, "The ECC means one thing: concrete". [4] Three and a half years passed between Takáts' resignation and the opening ceremony. In the meantime, the bid's vision was lost: the idea of Pécs as a "gate to the Balkans" and a place of cultural encounters. The Budapest–Pécs highway was opened and undeniably, by mid-2009, the construction of key projects had started. Four out of five were realized by the end of the ECC year.

In the meantime, there had been a sequence of tragic, bizarre and annoying events that could fill volumes of books. Two mayors died during the years of preparation. Toller suffered a car accident in 2006, and his successor, a lenient mayor, died of cancer in early 2009. A member of the governing right-wing Fidesz Party then followed as mayor. Key figures in the ECC projects, such as the Art Director and General Manager, weren't selected through transparent

procedures. Even if an international competition was initially announced for the position of Art Director, it was declared invalid. All newcomers were political appointees. The Art Director appointed after the failed competition resigned within a year and was substituted by an entire council of Art Directors. A few months before convening, this council was replaced by a state-owned company that organized Hungarian cultural events abroad. Since this same company disposed of the money available for programs and communication, a governmental body mainly determined the program of 2010. Last but not least, there were continuous changes in the ECC management company responsible for all preparations. In four short years, there were four Chief Managers – including a selective waste manager and tobacco lobbyist – who usually blamed delays, failures and financial shortfalls on their predecessors.

Of course, there have been occasional efforts to include local civil society and keep up the appearance of a grassroots ECC initiative, but these attempts usually lacked a demonstrated will to cooperate. Although several locals and independent cultural formations contributed to the preparations and the program itself, local civil society didn't return in an organized form to have a say in the matter. Regarding the outcome of 2010, the city is now perplexed as to how to sustain the new cultural infrastructure and fill new spaces with programs and audiences. While hoping for state funds it simultaneously cuts the cultural budget, so that in post-ECC-times there is less room for cultural activity than before. Ideally, it should be the other way round: the ECC might expand possibilities, if there is a commitment for cooperation and inclusion. ◂

Nóra **Somlyódy**

(1975) Hungarian investigative journalist, she studied English and Communication Studies at the University of Pecs, History at the Central European University. She is author of a monography in Hungarian: *Gate To the Balkans? [Pécs, European Capital of Culture]*

1 A Balkán kapuja? Pécs, Európa Kulturális Fővárosa. [Gate To the Balkans? Pécs, European Capital of Culture] Budapest, Kalligram, 2010.

2 Minutes of the local government's assembly, July 19, 2006. 18–19. p.

3 „A megvalósítás során sérülhet a pécsi pályázat szelleme". *Új Dunántúli Napló*, June 27, 2006. 3. p.

4 Sonja Hartwig, Kilian Trotier: „Ich habe keine Träume mehr." *Die Welt*, January 26, 2010. http://www.welt.de/die-welt/kultur/article5984352/Ich-habe-keine-Traeume-mehr.html

The Reimagined City

JÓZSEF **TAKÁTS**

Now early 2010, many people ask me how much of the original (2004–5) plan of "Pécs – European Capital of Culture 2010" has been accomplished. The construction work has begun, but remains unfinished. As of yet, there have been no decisions about the finances and administration of the institutions within the new buildings (e.g. the Pécs Conference and Concert Center). Therefore, it's hard to judge how they will function in the future. What follows is the transcript of an interview from 2007 (conducted by Mihály Vargha, for the website *Építészfórum: architecture, city, visual culture*, www.epiteszforum.hu) and a statement from 2009. Both items are only concerned with the preparation period, and my opinion has not subsequently changed. Mainly for architects and people interested in architecture, the interview is principally about city planning aspects of the project. By contrast, the 2009 text concerns the development of the cultural program for "Pécs 2010".

You resigned from your post as strategic counselor for the "Pécs – European Capital of Culture 2010" project in June 2006. Could you give us a description of your work in Pécs between 2004 and 2006?

Around 1990 it began to dawn upon city administrators and urban researchers in Western Europe that the industrial phase of city development was over, and that what was left behind were essentially empty industrial sites with continually dwindling populations and accordingly shrinking incomes for local governments. This led to continually worsening public services, deteriorating housing estates and educated young people leaving the city. It was in this crisis that some people started to think that perhaps the way out was cultural development. If we want the human capital of a well-trained workforce to settle in a city, if we want to attract young people, then we must make our city interesting, special and lively. It needs to radiate excitement and experiment, rather than deterioration and helplessness. And this transformation can be effected through culture, in the widest meaning of the word. We can give cultural functions to formerly industrial buildings. By building a museum, we can regenerate a deteriorating area. If we replace boring street furniture with special, modern pieces, perhaps there will be more people taking walks in the area, and soon a café or a private gallery will open in place of an empty store. And perhaps all of this will attract more tourists to the city and more students to the local university. This is what urban cultural planning is about: reimagining a city through cultural development. Let me tell you a story from my past as an "urban guru". I have a postcard of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao with the Puppy in front, Jeff Koons's giant flower puppy. I once held a lecture for local politicians and administrators in Pécs (of course, less than 10 percent of those invited actually showed up), and I showed them the postcard as an illustration of art investment in urban development. I told them that it was not merely a costly ornament, but the motor of development. If the Puppy stood in Pécs in front of the future Concert and Conference Center, it would attract one hundred thousand more tourists a year. "It makes no difference if we like the Puppy or not", I said. "If it were standing here, the city would attract several times more capital – indirectly, this dog would create more workplaces than 10 new shopping malls." I subsequently told them that it made no sense to have separate cultural and city planning departments: the two should be coordinated. They probably thought I was joking.

You said that you were strongly influenced by urban gurus like Charles Landry and Richard Florida. In the case of the Pécs, was there a strong personality that you could single out?

Yes. Bert van Meggelen, an architect and university lecturer in Holland and Istanbul, the intendant of Rotterdam's Cultural Capital program in 2001. I listened to a lecture of his at a conference in Budapest, and I knew immediately that he was the person we needed. When we met him we already knew what we wanted, but we needed Bert to make sure that what we wanted was the right thing. Later, we established more Dutch connections, but these links were neglected over time. We wanted to organize international symposia as part of the preparation works for each project – on museum building, the development of the public space, building concert halls etc. But apart from one Dutch–Hungarian symposium for architects, we didn't have time to carry these through.

The public image of the Pécs 2010 project is not very favorable, to say the least. Do you think that things could have been done differently?

I think our experiment could only have ended the way it did. Two weeks after we won the tender, a local socialist politician wrote a note to the mayor: "We cannot allow civilians [those of us who served as the "think tanks" behind the tender] to take the initiative from us". And in fact, they were true to their word. First, the mayor took the investment projects out of my hands – and then nobody touched these projects for half a year. Actually, he didn't read more than the first page of the tender, and I think most of the local politicians read as much or less. When I resigned, the vice-mayor was asked in a television interview about why I had resigned. He said that the source of the conflict between us stemmed from my attempt to introduce Western models. But as this is Eastern Europe, such models are not viable here. Although this was a rather simplistic formulation, he was actually right.

Though you resigned as strategic counselor, and went back to your job as a university lecturer, you must be keeping track of the developments in Pécs.

I'm sure that there are fascinating cultural programs in the city, and that some of the planned buildings might eventually be built – though probably not in 2010, but rather in 2011. That having been said, the attitude, the theoretical framework that united them has all but disappeared. Those who are in charge of the program today do not understand that the building of the big exhibition space is inspired by the principle of cultural decentralization, or that the visual language of the international giant posters of the Pécs 2010 program is supposed to reinterpret the structure of the cultural heritage of the city. All these – the principles, the planned investments, programs and communication strategies – were once interrelated, but are now totally disjointed. The main themes – cultural decentralization, city renaissance, the city network of the "southern cultural zone", etc. – that once constituted the focal points of the original project, have been forgotten, along with the behavioral models that my colleagues and I tried to introduce.

Statement: A Program Without a Focus

The program package of "Pécs – European Capital of Culture 2010" is exactly what one would expect after the last three embarrassing years. There are all kinds of cultural and art programs, some of them interesting, some of them less so, and besides that, lots of conditional sentences which contain the names of actual participants and those of sites that are yet to be built. In Western Europe, culture and contemporary art are considered grounds for debating social problems. This attitude is hardly present in the program package. There are too few small creative events, too few cultural processes and far too many traditional types of events. There are some typical "cultural capital" programs like the urban therapy action series of the Krétakör Company, the "region maps" (community art) of the Parti Galéria, or the urban planning program of Temporary City – but there are too few of them. The main themes of the 2010 project, as I outlined in my book *The Borderless City* (2005), were the European center and periphery, the cultural heritage of socialism in Hungary, the cultural decentralization of the country and urban regeneration. These problems have disappeared from the program planning or have become marginal, but no new topics or new

problems have been raised in their place. We will be happy to listen to Fazil Say in Pécs and to see the Bauhaus exhibition, and the presence of Essen and Istanbul are the most hopeful elements of the program package – however, what will give character to "Pécs 2010" remains unknown. And yet, this is not the biggest problem with the project. As everybody knows, the biggest problem is the lack of clear vision and truthful talk concerning the investments, and the loss of local and national public confidence in the last three years. I don't know if this program package will prove enough to change public feeling towards "Pécs 2010". ◂

(from the Pecs-Issue of *Magyar Lettre*)

Translated by Agnes Orzoy

József **Takats**

(1962) lecturer in history of Literature at Pecs University, editor of a series of books in the history of political ideas, he was the curator of the winning application of Pecs to be European Capital of Culture in 2010. He subsequently resigned.

HOST

Literary monthly HOST was created in 1985 as a samizdat magazine published once per year. After 1989 it was legalized and underwent many changes in periodicity, size and orientation. As from 1999, it has become a monthly and has been considered one of the most important cultural periodicals in Czechia. HOST especially deals with contemporary Czech literature and literary criticism. An important part, nevertheless, is dedicated to world literature as well as to further subject areas of the humanities, such as philosophy, literary theory and history, aesthetics, and history of art, among others. A lot of space in HOST is dedicated to reviews of current book production, original literary output and presentation of the personalities of contemporary literature. Coverage of different literary events and festivals as well as news from the world of literature also make an integral part of HOST. The monthly has a distinctive layout and its texts are accompanied with series of photographs and profiles of their authors.

NEW IN OLD

HOW SMALL TOWNS INFLUENCE BIG CITIES AND VICE VERSA - ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

Not Just to Build: On Recovering the Architectural Profession

IGOR **KOVAČEVIĆ**

Central Europeanism

Personally, I think we need the idea of Central Europe as a platform for opposing the nation states that have been established in the region over the past two centuries. Amongst other things, the rise of democratic regimes during the last two decades has allowed the ideology of "one nation, one state" to triumph, resulting in various monolithic nations. The final steps in this two-century-long march were marked by the disintegrations of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. If we understand the nation state as the last stage in any national movement, there's simply nowhere to go beyond the mononational horizon. And any attempts to go further might therefore risk a regional collapse, sending us all back into the arms of totalitarianism. With this in mind, I understand the idea of Central Europe as a concentration of positive common experiences from the region. Central Europeanism should not be seen as a political project, enhancing economic growth and prosperity – it is a purely cultural project. Also, it shouldn't be taken as the opportunity to create a governance structure parallel to that of the European Union. That having been said, there is a pressing need to develop a local variant of Europeanism – a kind of localism that escapes nationalistic, xenophobic or anti-European thought. In this way, the Central European idea might be understood as an intermediary step away from nationalism towards Europeanism.

UFA Cinema Centre – Dresden – photo: http://www.panoramio.com/photo/341967 - original photo was colour – architect: Coophimelblau - executed: 1998

At this point, a logical and perfectly obvious question should come to mind: Why should we not turn directly to Europeanism? What primarily differentiates this region from its Western counterpart is the short time span in which new elites emerged after the fall of the Berlin wall. The fact that new laws and political elites emerged simultaneously is neither surprising nor particularly problematic. More troublesome was the equally rapid rise of economic elites, who had little time to ripen. This is not the place to analyze the means by which these elites emerged: restitution schemes, the legalization of dirty money from the communist apparatus, etc. For our purposes, the pertinent fact is that the process was very rapid. And it is this fact that separates our elites from those in the West.

We leapt from the reign of false collectivity, dominant until the 1980s, into a society governed by the neo-liberal ideology that had been adopted by our newly minted elites. Driven by confidence in permanent economic growth based on cheap labor and new markets, Central Europe became part of the European Union and NATO. Nevertheless, our elites failed to properly explain the European project to citizens. Moreover, they failed in understanding themselves as simply economic elites, neglecting their potential as cultural and intellectual leaders.

Ideas about community in the EU are promoted by PR agencies, but the extraordinary opportunity to debate our common future has been missed. The EU has been promoted as an economic project, rather than as a cultural mission for the continent. Therefore, one of the potential strengths of the Central European idea might rest in bridging the divide between belonging to the EU and global markets and taking responsibility based on shared values[1] – a crucial point in contemporary Central European thinking and activism. In large part, the identity of Central Europe has been forged through the experience of being an insignificant economic and political force, unlike Western European or Mediterranean powers in previous epochs. This experience on the peripheries has made the region averse to extremism. All of which doesn't mean that extremism hasn't made occasional appearances, but I strongly believe that it's not part of the shared experience of the region. The largely bloodless Central European revolutions of 1989 expanded the very definition of revolution to more broadly include non-violent action.

Regime Housing

There's an absence of celebrity architects or shared architectural values in Central Europe. The architectural profession is by nature tied to the regime. If you design and build public buildings, it's very hard to convince the public that you are not a regime architect. This is clearly at work in our understanding of the Central European architecture of the 1970s and 80s. For instance, Karel Prager's

Federal Assembly – Prague – photo: CCEA archive 2010 – original photo wasw colour – architect: Karel Prager – executed: 1972

work in Czechoslovakia is considered regime architecture, even though he was never a member of the communist party. Today it's simply impossible to imagine that someone received parliamentary commissions in Prague[2] without being a member of the communist party. Other iconic pieces in the region have also automatically been deemed regime architecture, including *Cankarjev dom*, Edo Ravnikar's cultural center completed in 1982, and the *Building of Slovak Radio*, designed by Štefan Svetko, Štefan Ďurkovič and Barnabáš Kissling and completed in 1983. By contrast, designating contemporary works such as Josef Pleskot's *ČSOB Bank* in Prague or the *Wolf Prix UFA Cinema Center* in Dresden as "regime architecture" seems insulting, both to the architects and investors.

Proof of the "non-regime" status of such work might reside in the fact that corporations have commissioned them, rather than states. But in a global market where some companies control more capital that numerous sovereign states, it should be relatively uncontroversial to extend the contemporary designation of "regime" to non-state actors. Today, companies concentrate power and create regimes. The *ČSOB Bank*

Cankarjev dom – Ljubljana – photo: Branko Cvetković –1999- Cankarjev dom Achieves – original photo was colour – architect: Edo Ravnikar – executed: 1982

in Prague has been praised as excellent architecture – architecture responsible for changing the hierarchy of the bank. Upper management is not located on higher floors that provide the best views. There are huge courtyards where people can meet, and greenery on the roof serves as a resting space for employees. It's a gated community within the city fabric. The *UFA Cinema Center* by CoopHimmelblau is a spectacular monument, in which architects have made use of the striking language developed in the early works of Wolf Prix. Here, the architects have used wealthy neo-liberal society to materialize their dreams. Even a critical voice from Wolf Prix about the limitations of neo-liberalism doesn't free his architecture from its regime associations.

Paradoxically, contemporary public investments often lack any regime connotations. This is likely the result of the weaker position of public investors. Newly erected public buildings in Central Europe lack any representativeness. Public buildings are created using the same architectural language as banks and shopping malls. For example, Eric van Egaraat's new city hall in Budapest and the Slovak National Bank tower by Pavol Paňák and Martin Kusý both use the language of commercial development, thereby removing the representative roles of the institutions in question. Beyond these misinterprative works, there's an entire category of public building that has rejected the architectural profession and just follows the lowest price. An example of this thinking can be seen in the Justice Complex in Brno, where even the authorship of the design is unclear. These kinds of public buildings, lacking spatial qualities, are unfortunately quite common throughout Central Europe.

However, there are good examples of public investment in individual projects in smaller cities, especially where politicians were interested in leaving a positive legacy for future inhabitants. Litomyšl in the Czech Republic is one of the best-known examples in the region. But these projects require political representatives who are enlightened and willing to risk the support of the public in order to create quality. It's necessary to convince the public that investment in public space and public buildings makes sense, even though they are not profitable on a short-term basis. This is precisely why architects must also act as public intellectuals, serving as ambassadors of architecture and quality space. But this educational dimension requires more than just new buildings. It requires public debates, initiatives and criticism. In conjunction with high quality architecture, these activities will make it possible to reject regime architecture.

Activism in Architecture

My first response as to how architects might avoid regime association came in 2002, from a project called "Shared Awareness." A wealthy investor had asked us to turn an existing structure from the early 1990s into his new home. After a year of debates focused on how to make the strongest impact on the surrounding neighborhood, we eventually convinced the client to demolish the structure and return the plot to nature. The investor invited a building company, the structure was demolished and

what remained was taken to the dump. Today, some nine years later, the plot remains undeveloped.

How architects ought to act in order to be more than tools of a regime is a universal question.

The answer seems to be much easier than the question. They should simply behave like public intellectuals, connecting their work to their public activities. Perhaps the best-known architect working in this spirit is Rem Koolhaas, who plays the triple roles of architect, teacher and public intellectual. His role as an architect and designer can easily be documented through his projects and their realizations, and the same goes for his teaching activities. But his role as a public intellectual is harder to track and requires that we go beyond the scale of a particular building or even region . This is because the role of a public intellectual is to be critical of commonly accepted visions of the present and future and to develop alternatives, or conversely to accept common visions of the present and future and to declare this acceptance openly.

By way of example, I'd like to point to Miroslav Masák from the Czech Republic as a recent non-regime architect. His work is not just design. Principally, it's the product of a public thinker. His work on the department store Máj was initiated by the regime in order to enlarge the shopping network in Prague. Even though it was a regime commission, the architects involved implemented an open plan and vertical circulation that was exposed to the exterior. Moreover, allusions to the Centre Pompidou could clearly be interpreted as anti-regime statements. But what lifts Masák's work above simple regime labor is his activity as a public thinker, particularly his projects undertaken with Jiří Voženílek, the father of prefabricated housing in Czechoslovakia. Additionally, his activism in promoting good architecture during the time of normalization and dissident activities in Václav

ČSOB Headquarters – Prague – photo: CCEA archive 2011 – original photo was colour – architect: AP – Atelier – executed: 2007

Havel's circle raises his work above the low standards of the regime. Public intellectuals should not simply be thinkers participating in panel discussions and debates. They should go beyond this passive role, actively commenting on mistakes made by elites and offering solutions. This should be the groundwork for any contemporary architectural practice. ◂

Igor **Kovačevič**

(1975) – Architect and theorist of architecture. He is a founding member of the Center for Central European Architecture (CCEA).

1 To read more on "median values" see my work Beyond Everydayness – Theatre Architecture in Central Europe, The National Theatre, Prague 2010, ISBN 978-80-7258-364-5

2 The commission from the Czechoslovak Parliament came from an architectural competition held in 1966.

Coherent Fragmentation

Finding and Remembering in Central Europe's Confused Cities

LEVENTE **POLYÁK**

1.

I manage to complete my shopping at the market before it closes. Coming out of the market hall, I have to zigzag between pedestrians, shopping carts, bicycles and strollers, all of which are squeezed behind the fences surrounding the construction site for the new Metro. It's late afternoon and the jackhammers are pounding away again. The dust rises up into the air and spreads over my balcony, table, and clothes hung-out to dry. Once more, I think about moving.

I set off to find the bicycle I left somewhere last night. Coming out at the Big Ring, I can follow the tramline for a while, but reaching Blaha Lujza Square I'm forced down into the underpass. I manage to fight my way past beggars, leaflet distributors, signature collectors, the labyrinth of apathetic employees of 24-hour shops and the elegant staff of carefully lit boutiques, to get to the other side. At street level again, I make my way between the cavity of the construction site and the somewhat spontaneous parking lot towards the great socialist department store. The banal metal façade embracing the *fin de siècle* building contains more than just ordinary shops: it is home to a whole series of canteens and bars, on the ground floor and roof.

Avoiding the *lángos* and hamburger stalls, I reach the rear entrance where I am bundled into a lift with a couple of strangers and we head upwards. Finally, a narrow set of steps takes us up to the roof. So far there are only a few dozen people sitting around the dilapidated tables. There's still time to prepare for the evening behind the bar. Above the safety railing that runs around the terrace is an unusual view of the houses of Pest. It is getting dark. With an unlikely sparkle, the lit towers of the New York Palace rise up above the dulled grey of the roofs. On the other side is a bare factory chimney that the floodlight from the terrace turns into a decoration.

2.

The glittering of *fin de siècle* nostalgia, the aesthetic of ruin of the transforming urban landscape, and the ready-made decorative elements of the terrace all blend the divergent segments of Central European urban memory in a unique fashion. To this day, an imagined notion of adventure and spontaneity covers these recentlystill infamous parts of central Pest. This notion provides a perfect breeding-ground for initiatives that connect dilapidation and an acceptable level of urban impoverishment with an enthusiastic irony regarding the remains of socialism, and make use of all these in the symbolic consumer domain of entertainment. Meanwhile, the giddy heights of a flat roof, as so often rediscovered by feature films, gives the terrace the big city tone into which urban dwellers are from time to time happy to dip. The desire for the unusual, for the architecturally ghostlike, is guaranteed by the reassuring proximity of *fin de siècle* luxury, on which adventurers arriving from more prestigious districts can turn their backs.

This applies equally to those arriving from more prestigious countries. The Swedish jewelry designer, as he "tries out" the black and white photos he has bought in a second-hand shop against the raw, run-down wall of the house, is happy he is no longer

surrounded by that desire for sterility that rid his home city of every little mark. The cracks in the walls, the peeling plaster... the jewels of the city, he says.

3.

It's true that the marks of war are still present in most Central European cityscapes, often complemented by the superficial symptoms of the change of regime. It's customary to describe post-socialist urban space as temporary, a fractured space laced with boundaries and thresholds. Even in cities changing more quickly than this "progressing heart", in the spaces left behind by retreating state planning and now being commercialized, entirely divergent functions and modes of use emerge alongside each other, almost unnoticed, drawing peculiar boundary lines between the spaces of remembrance, progress, informality and control. The ambivalent nature of these boundary lines is nurtured and recorded by the various emblematic locations and sights of the transient urban landscape, like cavity plots performing new simplified functions, mature acacia trees several meters tall in the corner, and firewalls revealed by the bulldozers that offer glimpses of apartment interiors.

Of course, fragmentation is not characteristic of every Central European city. With its compactness, self-examining inwardness, and the quality of its urban spaces and services, Vienna might once have been the prototypical Central European city. But today, the continuity of its architectural fabric stands out as an exception in the region. Nevertheless, Vienna's logic of avenues and rings helps one to navigate in Prague Krakow, and Budapest most of all. On the other hand, in Warsaw or Bratislava we need a car or driver if we intend to explore the areas around the old town, not to mention the embodiment of complete fragmentation – Berlin. Yet we can sense the feeling of alienation even when we travel in the opposite direction: travelling from the spacious and green Berlin to the narrow, grey and completely commercialized downtown of Prague can sometimes be a claustrophobic experience.

Berlin's "twilight landscape"[1] is an immediate breeding-ground for cultural initiatives outside the usual strictures. Activities flirting with the fringe of society find a home in the marginal spaces that voluntarily conserve fragments and remnants outside the city's neoliberal market structures: that which is run-down, forgotten and unused today appears full of potential in our thought.

The way in which Central European societies and cities are out of step is not an obviously advantageous cultural peculiarity. However, investment capital, which knows Western urban development well and is good at acclimatizing to opportunities in the East, moves faster than the cultural sphere. Transforming districts offer multiple possibilities for economic exploitation, even in Berlin: Expensive apartments rising up overnight in place of run-down buildings generates an exceptionally rapid gentrification that prevents culture from being a spontaneous force in urban planning.

4.

Capitalizing on fragments and remnants is not only a possibility for cities – it's an obligation. At odds with one another, the remnants haunt the streets and squares as much as the interiors of houses and apartments. The attitude to relics is not the same everywhere, as indicated in the comments of the Serbian foreign minister Vuk Jeremić about the bombing of Belgrade in 1999: "The reminders are here, and are certainly deeply lodged in people's memories... but we don't really need ruins as in Berlin or Hamburg, which were left there on purpose. We don't need them."[2]

In fact, it's not clear who exactly is in need of ruins, of raw architecture lacking illusion. The dilemma facing the new Warsaw Museum of Modern Art helps to identify the East-West divide on wildness versus sterility. Conceived by the Swiss architect Christian Kerez, the building presents itself within Warsaw's urban fabric, in all its raw concrete glory, in a way that's not easy on the eye at the best of times. The wildness invoked to balance the revived sterility of Western cities melts into its natural habitat in bombed-out Warsaw. Central Europe produced the aesthetic of architectural brutalism

in a spontaneous fashion, without having to be asked. The firewalls and cavity plots, ruins of buildings and neglected underpasses, these places full of memories, still pop up here and there, but they increasingly exist like a plague. They remain frozen in transience, right until the day that all faults and telltale signs disappear from the face of the city, and the cities themselves close up into their own sterile presentness.

5.

The disappearance of telltale signs is accompanied by the disappearance of informalities. In Belgrade, less than a decade ago, it was standard practice to leave the train and go immediately to the taxi drivers to get local currency. An adventure-loving friend of mine continued to insist on this informal route, long after the abolition of the embargo on Serbia reopened the country to the world. He simply would not acknowledge the existence of the bank machines and exchange booths springing up all over the city.

On arrival in Bratislava I'm given the following instructions: Look for tram number 20 at the station, take it for half an hour, and get off as soon as I see Tesco on the right hand side of the street. This itinerary made me suspicious, but I gave in. I got off at Tesco, skirted around the group of buildings, continued on an unpaved road, and then reached a fence. I'm looking for the gallery, and I turn in despair to a security guard. Without a word, he points to the little house beyond the fence. I climb over it, bypassing piles of gravel, and, lo and behold, I reach the gallery!

Such situations often don't work out without being told where to go. My Budapest reflexes also fail me in the centre of Sofia. A friend of a friend rushes to my assistance, and drags me off the beaten path. He leads me to a district full of old, ramshackle houses. We enter a gate, and rush up the stairs to the second floor, then stop in front of a closed door. My host explains that this is a private place of entertainment. There's a few like it in this area. They only let in people they know or who they like the looks of. They know my guide, so we can enter the apartment, spacious rooms filled with Andalusian afternoon music. There are well-dressed young people in comfy armchairs and couches. I sense it is a privilege to be here.

Maps or guidebooks cannot guarantee successful navigation. Central Europe's cities change so rapidly that only direct everyday experience can keep pace. I'm reminded of the film *Warsaw* [3], where a driver arriving in the city in winter cannot find anything where it was. He returns at various points in the film, asking about street names that no longer exist and can't be recalled.

When I arrive in Warsaw, I can immediately imagine that the city provides the perfect spaces for forgetting. In the 1990s, light green skyscrapers emerged from the blocks of the 1960s that took the place of the historical districts that were razed to the ground during the war. These towers became part of the exclusive utopian space created in the great business districts of Western and Far Eastern cities. They carry with them the promise of an optimistic atmosphere, free of problems, doubts and memories, a rare thing in Central Europe. However, this vertical indulgence is offset by the everyday poverty dominating the streets, and by the raw lack of architectural illusion that spreads as far as the eye can see.

6.

Central Europe's common architectural space exits thanks to the interchangeable elements of the neoclassicist eclectic style of the Monarchy, and the way these harmonize with one another. In the culture of duplicates, which linked together otherwise competing cities with common interdependencies and points of reference, each city provides a small-scale copy, mark or synecdoche of the other. The Europe Courtyard in Bratislava is only a parody of this phenomenon, but at one time whole cities bore the title of "Little Vienna" or competed in designating themselves the "Paris of the East."

If a city is text, then the Central European city is hypertext. Street names and even parts of cities have no choice but to bear the names of other parts of the region – think of the Krakovo district of Ljubljana or the Praga district of Warsaw. It is the Central European mix of languages, words, signs and melodies which crystallizes in urban space, with the theatres scattered over

the territory of the Monarchy in the style of the Fellner and Hellmer workshop, or the startling buildings of Jože Plečnik. Perhaps it's the notion of "radical eclecticism", which the architect László Rajk used to try to put into words Budapest's architectural traditions and sources of inspiration, refers to these temporal and spatial wanderings of symbols.[4] An alternative city guide describes Warsaw as an "eclectic cocktail".[5]

This degree of mutually incestuous cross-referencing creates a sensation of homelessness. Often provoking symptoms of claustrophobia in the art and literature of the region, this homelessness was later ruptured by the completely delegitimized architecture of post-war modernism. The Central European ideology of regime change has been unable to find an architectural partner for itself, with the "socialist city" giving way to urban marketing, which increasingly institutionalizes nostalgic attachment to the peaceful, supposedly multicultural era of the turn of the twentieth century.

The selective memory of Central European cities is not well disposed to the architectural modernism associated with totalitarian regimes, nor to the patterns of contemporary thinking that traces its origins to modernism. Architectural initiatives to connect the environment to opportunities for independent and community innovation seem to slumber between the same parentheses of collective amnesia as certain 20th century social achievements. The rediscovery of modernism is only taking place within particular professional enclosures and in urban communities that have no other choice in the way they determine their heritage: Berlin and Warsaw. This picture is only made more complicated by the return of socialist housing estates to the agenda, largely thanks to state plans to renovate them.

7.

What, then, is the common heritage of Central European cities? The buoyant serenity of the *fin de siècle*, which comforts those adverse to the present with fragile promises of continuity? Or the opposite: A continuous transience, in whose endless swirl the temporary status of the post-socialist city can find its natural place. A place from which even Vienna, freed from the awkward proximity of the Iron Curtain, is not excluded?

And what is the meaning of the present for these cities? The sharpening of disagreements, in which the localizability of internal differences makes national conflicts all the more conspicuous in an urban context? Or rediscovered diversity in which the deafening calls of birds in Krakow's Planty gardens, the echoes of the bells of Gdansk, the thunder of hooves of Vienna's horse-drawn carriages, the swish of Berlin's S-Bahn dashing past, the growl of the Vltava dams in Prague, the jingle of the trams in Buda and the strains of a Belgrade brass band all merge into the noise fragments of a single city?

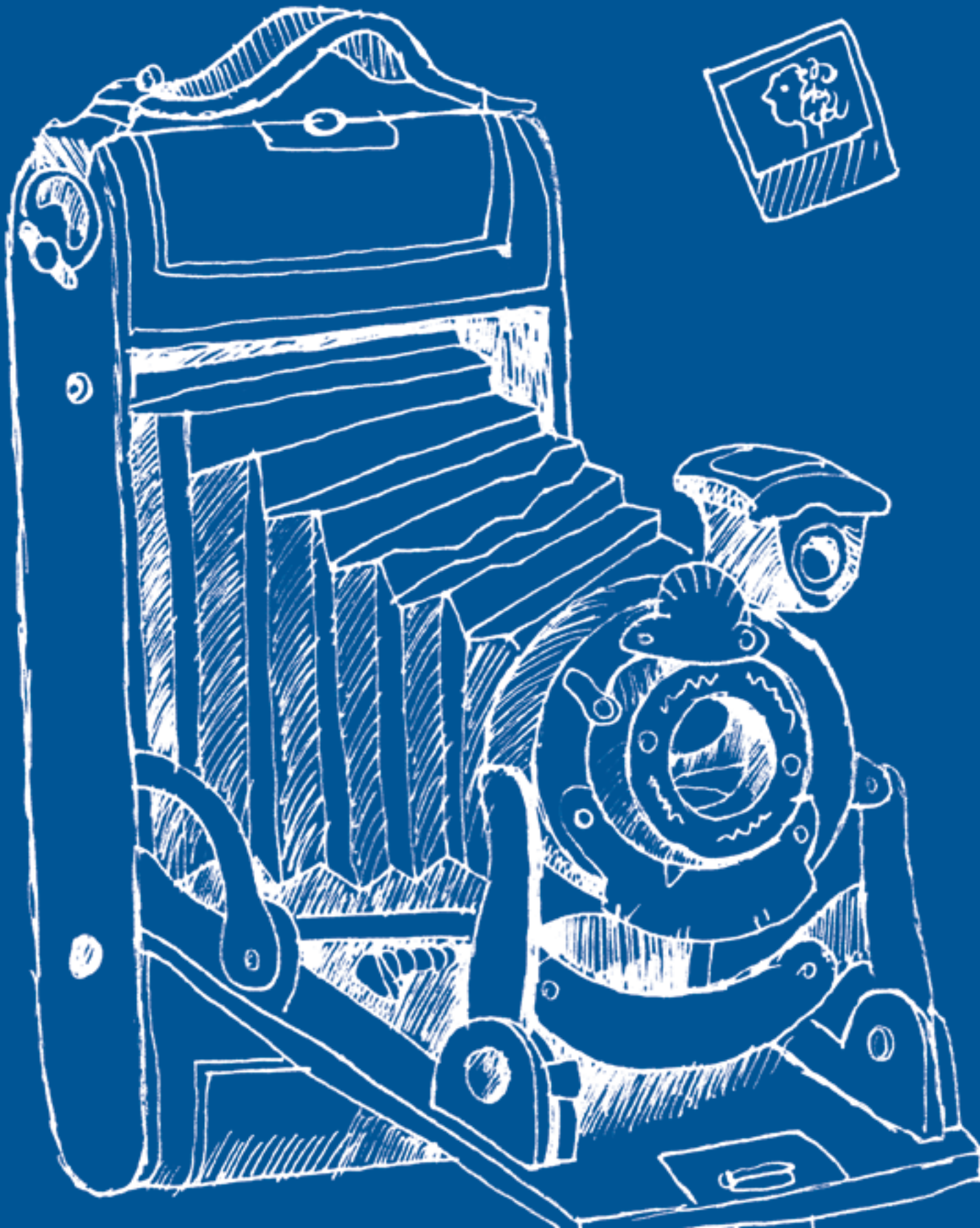
I'd like to believe that Budapest is again closely connected to the other cities of the region, not just by economic strategies, agreements and highways, but also by wandering people, objects and histories. Perhaps it will simply be the new multidirectional mobility, strengthened by open borders, a human and friendly low-rise look, and the rediscovery of hospitality, which will help the cities of Central Europe to become each other's suburbs and neighboring districts. ◂

(Kraków, July 2007)

Levente **Polyák**

(1979) lives in Budapest and is a freelance researcher and author. Studied architecture, art theory and sociology in Budapest and Paris. Participant in diverse urban research programmes, and member of international urban information networks. Organiser of workshops, conferences and exhibitions on contemporary urban phenomena.
His essay was first published in Hungarian in no 68 of *Magyar Lettre Internationale.*

1 Boris Grésillon: Berlin, métropole culturelle. Berlin, 2002. p. 278.
2 On Europe's Edge. BBC Documentary Archives, 7 June 2007.
3 Dariusz Gajewski: Warsaw (2003)
4 Rajk László: Radikális eklektika. Jelenkor, 2000.
5 Notes from Warsaw. Bęc Zmiana, 2007



VISUALS

Filip Springer

In Search of Peace

The city is a place for living. It was supposed to make life easier. The residents of the first Neolithic cities grew tired of wandering and wanted to rest. They expended a great deal of effort learning how to grow plants and breed animals, only to be able to stay in one place without needing to move. They wanted to feel at home. Ur, Jericho, Byblos – the first Neolithic cities are monuments to this immense desire to settle down.

Despite appearances, not much has changes since then. Cities have grown to enormous proportions, but there is still one aim of development – to put down roots. Settling down means finding peace.

In searching for serenity, we used to (and we still) loop ourselves into dead ends.

I used to live in a huge block of flats in one of estates in Poznań, and I came to wonder: Is this what we wanted? In our search for a "home", was the destination we were chasing really a building of monstrous proportions, lacking any human scale, in which we're reduced to nothingness?

Attempting to understand this, I started taking photos and studying modernist architects. And I came to the conclusion that, at least on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, we hadn't learned the lessons of the past. Is this what Le Corbusier wanted? In the end, I found places that brought my hope back: the Słowacki Estate in Lublin and Przyczółek Grochowski in Warsaw, which are the enormous experiments of a man larger than life – Oskar Hansen. These estates were the laboratories of the Open Form – a concept that was meant to change Polish cities forever. In 1972, Hansen created the Permanent Linear System, a utopian vision of the city – a total estate spanning from the Baltic Sea to the Polish mountains. Asked in 2005 if that vision was not too brave, he said: "I know that many of my projects will never be realized during my lifetime, but on the other hand I know that they will eventually be realized". He wanted to create flexible space, which users would be able to adapt according to their needs. The three pillars of Open Form are communication, flexibility and sharing.

I take photos of his estates and wait for the day when we understand the ideas out of which they came. When looking for the perfect place to live, we often choose spaces that are excellent for everything besides living. What are these sloppy, chaotic estates of detached houses that fill the suburbs of our Polish (and not only Polish) cities? Uncontrollable suburbanization is an American export that poses great risks for our urban spaces, with the capacity to turn our dreams of a "little house in the suburbs" into a nightmare. While taking photos of Warsaw, I keep wondering whether people who settled down here really wanted what they finally got. Closed ghettos of pastel houses, stripped of any function except those for living. You can live here, but you can't in fact live here. You must have a car to do the shopping or to take the children to school. If you don't have a car – you're lost. There aren't even sidewalks here. Did we really dream about this?

The city is an enormous estate. We came here to make our lives easier, we settled down in search of peace. I watch, and I take photos. I listen to this space and I keep asking myself, did we really find what we were looking for?

Filip **Springer**

(1982) – Graduate of Ethnology and Archeology from the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań. He has worked for the last 5 years as a journalist and press photographer, cooperating with local and national newspapers and magazines


RAGE AGE

János Bődey
Budapest

At present, the term "Budapest" yields 112 million search results in Google, 23 million of which are images that almost exclusively focus on the city's bridges and other landmarks. Common city dwellers, busy bringing life to such structures, are missing. There are no images of female shoemakers or public transport personnel. And there are definitely no images of people relaxing, enjoying the idle pace of sunshine on calm and peaceful Sundays.

As urban people, our everyday lives are defined by the dichotomy of loneliness and belonging. We often exit our communities via public transport, and we observe the behavior, the conversations of our fellow citizens in a state of pleasant solitude. We try to imagine swapping places and even souls with complete strangers.

With her profession on the verge of disappearance, how does a day in the life of an elderly female shoemaker look? What is her daily routine? Where and does she have breakfast and what does she eat? How does she take her coffee? Which market does she prefer? What kinds of people employ her and what do they talk about with her?

When does the underground train operator of the Budapest Transport Company start the first morning train? Has anyone jumped onto the tracks while they were driving? What is it like for a woman to drive an underground train? While she's at work, who takes care of her children? How does she spend the compulsory leisure time during working hours? How many years has the underground train repairman spent working for the Budapest Transport Company with the same 20-30 years old tools? What kind of insults does a ticket controller have to endure each day?

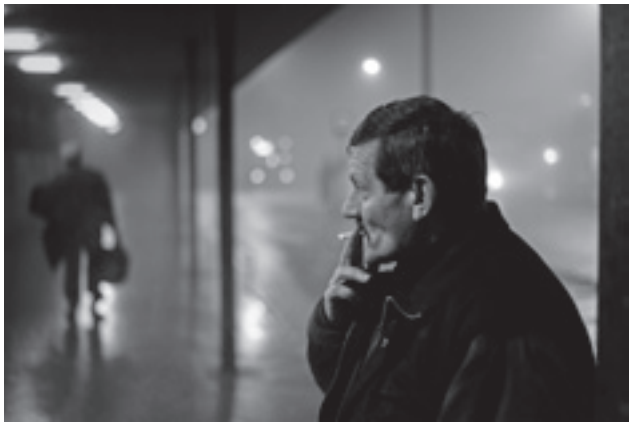
For a few moments, however, we can glimpse of the mood of a Gloomy Sunday

in the pose of a man tumbling forward in his seat, or in the vacant gaze of someone else. We can be the man enjoying the first sunshine of spring in underpants on the banks of the Danube, a shadow at a tram stop, or a boy speaking on his cell phone at the foot of a bridge.

The camera is a perfect tool for travelling, for – even if only temporarily – taking on the guise of others.

János **Bődey**

(1977) Since 2007 he has been a student at the Kontakt Photographic Courses and has participated in several photography workshops. Since 2009 he has been working for the online newspaper hvg.hu as a freelance photographer.



Laura Wittek
Petržalka

I've been in Bratislava since 1992, and I currently live in an urban district called Petržalka. For me, Petržalka represents a kind of commuterville, in which I've been forced to live by circumstances. At first, the district struck me as cold and impersonal, but with time I've come to recognize its genius loci. Despite its artistic form, the project "In Petržalka" tries to capture this reality.

Petržalka is a splendid place, a microcosm of many colors. At present, it's the most heavily populated urban district of Bratislava, containing the largest assortment of high-rise apartment buildings in Central Europe. The earliest historical evidence of the district dates to 1225. However, the area officially became part of Bratislava only in 1946. In the late 60s, an international competition to create a new urban sector of Bratislava was announced – Petržalka. Jozef Chovanec and Stanislav Talas along with additional team members were responsible for the final architectural plan. Their original project was eventually modified, and Petržalka subsequently became a glaring testament to the failings of massive housing structures in Central Europe that failed to provide civic amenities. "In Petržalka" is a reflection of everyday life, an artistically stylized photographic representation of different corners and places that appeal to me. My shots usually capture moments of time with hidden stories behind them. I let myself follow my vision and feelings that often disclose the beauty and richness of the present moment. I use my camera like a visual book, embracing the beauty of the surroundings that we only enjoy peripherally in everyday life. My focus is on the attractions of the melancholic and disconsolate shades of civilization. Despite the criticism, Petržalka

▶

is where I live and is now my home. The elusive soul of the city is what my photography is always chasing.

Bratislava will always have special ties to my heart. Not necessarily because I was born here, but because of my wonderful childhood that is full of loving memories of my dad, who also spent his life in this great city. I'm grateful to enjoy each of the fading memories of the city, especially about those places that don't exist anymore. Some of them belong to me, some of them to my father, and others to my friends. But most of all, I would like to share these stories through my pictures and let them talk to you.

Laura **Wittek**

(1977) In 2007 graduated from the photography School at the University of Opava. She has participated in several exhibitions in Slovakian galleries and museums


OÁZA BUFET
OÁZA BUFET
OÁZA BUFET

Markéta Béndova
City

I was born and have spent my entire life in the city. It is my home, my backdrop. With nearly infinite possibilities, I'm using the city to improve myself – studying, spending time with friends, finding inspiration for design, and seeking out fulfillment.

Sometimes the city turns into a labyrinth. The energy of everybody is mixing together and I find it difficult to concentrate. Anyway, I never felt comfortable with strangers. I always try to find out who's who. I'm always fighting against the fear of evil. After all, you never know if the Minotaur is lurking around the next corner! Who will he be, and will you recognize him? And what will you do – run away?

In better moods, the labyrinth around me turns into a waxworks. The city is suddenly lively and oddly amusing.

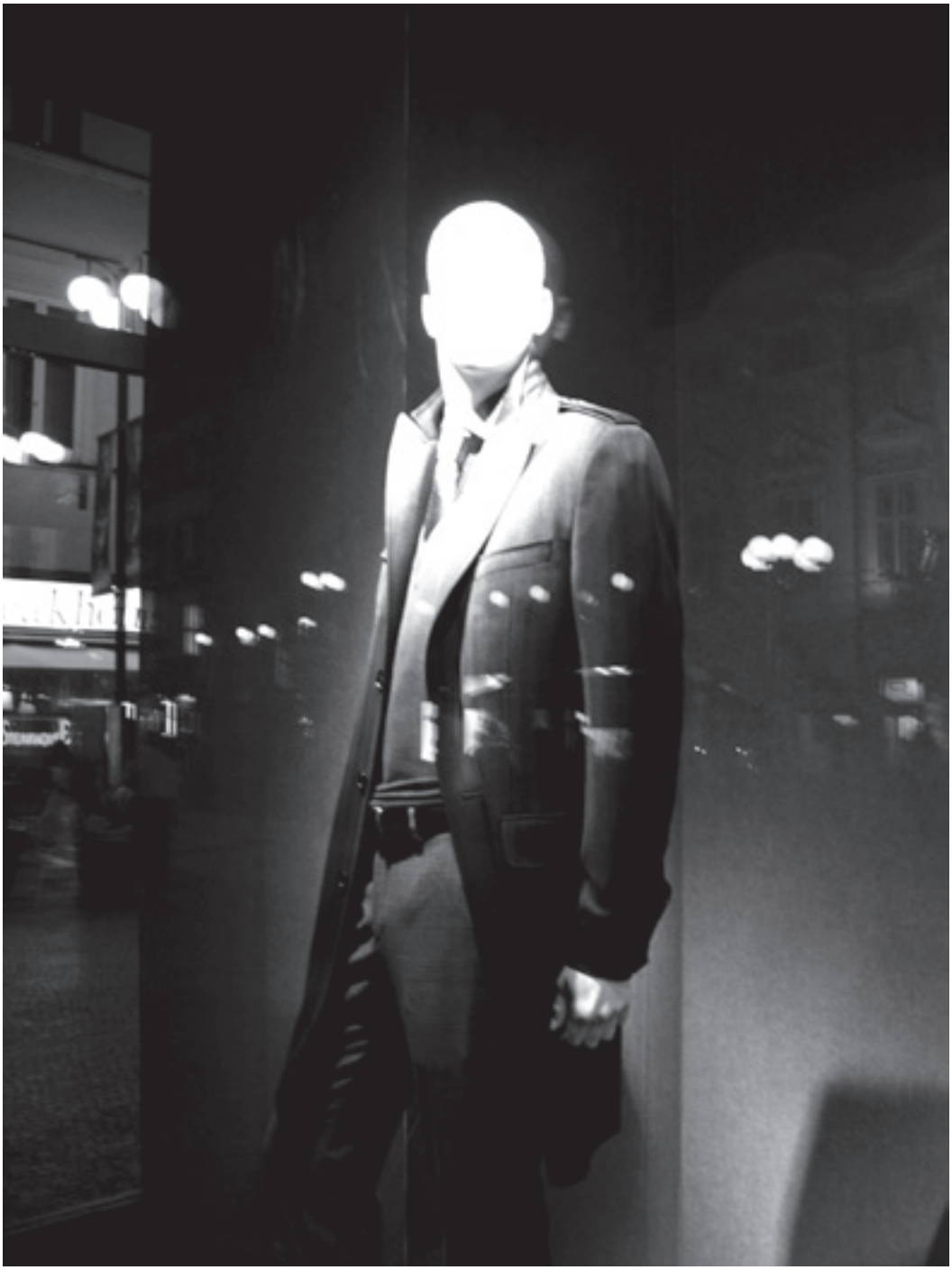
I feel as if I were in the circus, a part of it. I draw inspiration from local folklore, the culture, history and diversity of perception. I feel love and joy in everything that surrounds me. I am in love with a geek. People who terrified me in the labyrinth suddenly become real human beings, like me, whom I can love, believe in and admire.

This labyrinth/waxworks is a reflection of my inner world. I learn to perceive what is around me as my inner world. In conversations with the city, I see what is going on inside. Sometimes the city shows me bad images, but sometimes they're beautiful. I accept both of them.

Markéta **Béndova**

(1978)– student of photography at the University of Opava. She participated in various international visual arts exhibitions.


OPEN



Res Publica Nowa quarterly
www.publica.pl

Three generations of writers, intellectuals and journalists have joined us since 1979 to form a vibrant intellectual society. For more than 30 years Res Publica has had its our focus on culture, politics and society, influencing media, academia and political institutions. We believe in civil liberties with a stress on republican values and practices in public life. We are independent of any political parties in Poland or abroad.

Several distinguished international authors have published or have been republished in our journal volumes and books, regardless of their ideological inclinations. Among them are Isaah Berlin, Hannah Arendt, Michael Oakeshott, Pierre Manent, Leszek Kołakowski, Aldonus Huxley, Bohumil Hrabal, Alasdair MacIntyre, Slavoj Zizek, Timothy Snyder, Ivan Krastev, Irving Kristol and many others.

Since 2007 a third generation of Res Publicans has taken over, starting new programs besides print media. These include:

> **Internet website** with original translations of hot debates and issues worldwide (in cooperation with Eurozine - European network of cultural journals and Free Speech Partnership Program);
> **City DNA** – Res Publica focus on city's communities and planning;
> **Central European Dictionary of Political Concepts** – seminars, debates and book project focusing on Central Europe;
> **public debates** at Universities and culture institutions;
> **book publishing** and many other.

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Fundacja Res Publica im. Henryka Krzeczkowskiego
ul. Gałczyńskiego 5, 00-362 Warszawa
tel. +48 22 826 05 66, fax. +48 22 343 08 33
redakcja@res.publica.pl, www.res.publica.pl

City DNA is a project inspired by the European Capital of Culture program implemented by the European Community since 1985. The project focuses on three main themes the Res Publica Nowa tries to address and document i.e. a culture, a republic and a city.

By organizing a series of public debates that are held in cities trying to reframe their cultural policies and following them creative workshops with local audiences, the Res Publica Nowa creates a platform for multi-voice dialogue on the issues relating to common space - the City.
Culture becomes a pretext to involve citizens, regardless of their background (NGO, public administration, artists, academia, business etc.), in a political process of transforming one's city through culture. We open possibilities of discussion on the topics that are essential for further change within a city. Further innovative techniques precede and follow the process.
Besides organizing these "urban" debates and workshops, we also run a scientific research in the field of citizens' participation in creating cultural policy, publish a section on City DNA (in paper and online edition of the magazine) and animate internet forums devoted to culture and specific cities and run a webpage on city culture in Poland.
Following the great success in 2009, we are planning further actions related to this program, like city rankings, international projects, TV and multimedia production.

Goal: To facilitate change in the field of cultural policy in cities through a series of public debates, creative workshops, networking, academic research and publications.

Sponsors and dates so far: City of Warsaw (2009 and 2011), City of Szczecin (200), City of Gdańsk (2009), City of Toruń (2009), City of Łódź (2009), City of Lublin (2009), Fund for Civic Initiatives - FIO (2009), Polish National Centre for Culture (2010), Polish Institute in Kiev - Ukrainian edition (2011), Stefan Batory Foundation (2011)

Free Speech Partnership

The Free Speech Partnership program focuses on stimulating the cooperation with cultural journals in the former Eastern Bloc countries, based on intellectual exchange and experience sharing. Through reprinting texts, organizing meeting, debates and conferences, we want to improve the quality of the European discussion about the countries behind Schengen eastern border and establish a network of intellectual communities that can discuss their opinions and contribute to better quality of the European public life.

Our aim is also to increase the awareness of the European societies about the issues crucial to communities from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Latvia, Russia, and Ukraine and others. We identify partner magazines and groups from these countries so as to jointly choose the most interesting issues for national, regional and European debates. Our partner and cooperating groups do not necessarily need to have a pro-Western profile. However, what is important is that they aim at or represent young people or intellectual communities.
The subjects of articles we translate and put together touch upon important questions related to culture, society and political ideas. We juxtapose the text from the above-mentioned countries with articles on similar problems published in socio-cultural magazines from European and Euro-Atlantic community. In our opinion only such kind of activity and cooperation of cultural communities can give European integration a sound basis for development. The network of cultural journals Eurozine is a partner in this project.

Goal: To create a network of cultural journals from Eastern Europe, identify shared fields of concern and re-publish related articles in Poland in countries of the program and through Eurozine in the rest of Europe.

Sponsors and dates so far: US Embassy in Ukraine (2009), RITA fund from the Polish-American Freedom Foundation (2010), Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2010), Adam Mickiewicz Institute - Polish Presidency in the EU (2011)

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Central European Dictionary of Political Concepts

Introductory note
Paweł Marczewski, Wojciech Przybylski

There are plenty of books that put in order concepts, ideas and theories of modern politics and political science. Those that achieve broadest circulation and go through more than one edition are usually written from an Anglo-Saxon perspective, which is mirrored both by selection and content of entries. They usually describe the division between Left and Right by stressing its economical dimension and omitting its historical underpinnings, thus limiting their explanatory scope to contemporary Western democracies and leaving Central European perspective outside the picture.

There are also many books have tried to capture and explain Central European history and particular aspects of its modern politics to the Western reader. What they fail to achieve, however, is to articulate the difference between Central European and Western experiences, while at the same time trying to find commonalties and meeting points within the framework of common political language.

Central European Dictionary of Political Concepts has a purpose to analyze terms and notions that are universal for modern politics - such as a welfare state, totalitarianism, Left and Right, "the West" and "the East" – from the perspective of Central Europe. Authors of entries will take into consideration local histories, but they will never lose sight of parallels between the particular experience of the region and the universal dimension of modern politics.

As a result, the book will engage Western readers in a dialogue and stimulate a discussion between countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Instead of proposing a monolithic, common view on politics based on regional experience, and opposed to Anglo-Saxon perspective, it will provoke a wide-ranging discussion involving many dissenting voices and opinions.

Goal: To initiate public discussion in Europe on the political dilemmas concerning Central Europe through a series of seminars, workshops, public debates, articles and - most importantly - through a publication of Central European Dictionary of Political Concepts – several volumes of critical dictionary of political concepts in paper and online.

Sponsors and dates so far: International Visegrad Fund (2010), Polish Institute in Budapest (2009-2010), Polish Institute in Prague (2010), Hungarian Cultural Institute in Bratislava (2010), Villa Decius Association (2010)

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ul. Gałczyńskiego 5
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tel. +48 22 826 05 66
fax. +48 22 343 08 33
redakcja@res.publica.pl
www.res.publica.pl

Spolek přátel vydávání časopisu HOST
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602 00 Brno
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fax: 545 212 747
redakce@hostbrno.cz
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