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A Sense of Place.
Narratives of Memory and
Identity as Told Through
Image and Voice

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Abstract

Drawing upon participatory artistic practices and using the capacity of documentary photography and moving image both to construct and unsettle official discourses, I advance through my practice a collective exploration of memory and identity as embedded in designated places, and in turn make visible the memories of place. I am looking particularly at the identity of place in the post-Soviet context to explore notions of belonging, identity and migration.

The research is structured around two case studies, which provide an in-depth analysis of two different methodological approaches to the study of a place, each situated in specified locations. The first case study, *Out of Place*, examines the phenomenon of national identity as found within Baltic Russian emigrants now living in the UK. Focusing on a network of Russian-speaking emigrants from Latvia, I establish an audio-visual archive of the objects and memorabilia brought with the emigrants as they move from Latvia to the UK. Ten participants were invited to contribute to the project by telling a story about the object of their own selection. The case study aims to look at how the identity with a place can be constructed through people's experience, and how place manifests itself through the objects and artefacts.

The second case study, *The Landscapes of Nizny Novgorod* produced in collaboration with sociologist Olga Chernyavskaya, emerged out of the question of how identity of/with place can be constructed through representation of landscape. The case study is aimed at exploring the identity of Nizhny Novgorod (Russia), through tracing the distinctive features of its eight districts. Eight walks were organised, each one dedicated to a particular district. These walks were organised as field studies, though they carried elements of the Situationists' *dérives,* they were designed to document the city and gather 'the field data', but also create a situation where new and unintended encounters could take place.

The contribution this MPhil seeks to make is situated in both methodological and artistic fields, in a reconsideration of the underlying principles and artistic practices in representing and constructing the identity of/with a place. The use of oral history as a method in the *Out of Place* case study allowed me to create an identity of a place based on plurality and multiplicity. In the *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* the identity of a place was constructed through the means of photography, by giving voice to those parts of the city that are usually considered to be too banal or not interesting enough to be photographed.

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During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature:
Date:

Introduction

It is hard to imagine something more crucial to our sense of identity than place. Whenever we think of ourselves we find we are already attached to some sort of a place. As soon as we become self-aware, we are also conscious of the place that surrounds us. It seems that place — and here I am referring to place in the sense of the Greek topos *(τόπος)*[1], which is both space and place, is inseparable from our thinking, and by the very act of thinking we situate ourselves in place. Following the Heideggerian philosophical tradition we can say that 'our being in the world is the same as our 'being there/here' [2] and our encounter in the world is always situated.

Amin Maalouf, a Lebanese-born French writer, opens his book '*Identity. Violence and the Need to Belong*' with a recollection of experience that I believe is quite common to many immigrants. Since he left Lebanon in 1976 to live in France, Maalouf was often asked whether he felt 'more French' or 'more Lebanese'. Maalouf always answered 'both' not out of a sense of balance, but because 'any other answer would be a lie'.[3] He explains that what makes him himself rather than anyone else is the very fact that he was poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions.

Place plays a key role within identity. After all, as Peter Claws put it, 'identity is a reflexive relation, a relation of myself to myself', but it is also quite often a 'mediated relation: I relate to myself through interactions with the others and with the world'.[4]

The everyday experience of being an immigrant consists of answering a deceptively simple question — 'where are you from?'. As a Baltic Russian immigrant living in London, I have experienced this quite often, and the question always somewhat confuses me. The place you answer is very likely to be connected to your identity. How broadly/narrowly do I define myself?

Much of the problematic of this thesis comes from my personal experience of being a migrant. Migration is often defined in terms of movement, crossing borders, going from one place to another. Although our identities are inseparably

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[1]My understanding of topos is based on the writings of Aristotle as discussed in Merab Mamardashvili's 'Lectures on Ancient Greece Philosophy'. See Merab Mamardashvili. *Lekcii po antichnoy filosofii* [Lectures on Ancient Greece Philosophy], (Moscow: 2002), [in Russian].

[2] Jeff Malpas. *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place. Explorations in the Topology of Being.* (The MIT Press: 2012), p.2.

[3] Amin Maalouf. *Identity. Violence and the Need to Belong*, transl. by Barbara Bray (Arcade Publishing: 2000).

[4] Peter Claws. Identity: Cultural, Transcultural and Multicultural, in *Multiculturalism. A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Theo Goldberg (John Willis & Sons: 2009), p. 371.

connected with place, the physical movement on its own is not a sufficient ground for a 'migrant-hood condition'.

After all, 'we all are migrants', as Gregory Feldman remarked.[5] What he meant was not that the history of humankind involved lots of movement, but that the migrant-hood condition derives from 'a lack of possibilities to constitute (and re-constitute) places. In other words, in today's world people experience (although to different degrees) common conditions proverbially understood as that of migrant: rootless, uncertain, atomized and disempowered[6].

Despite the fact that physical movement quite often constitutes an essential part of being a migrant, it is possible to be a migrant without migration. This is certainly my case: being an ethnic Russian born in the Soviet Republic of Latvia, I witnessed the border moving eastwards under my feet when Latvia gained its independence in 1991. Along with many freedoms to enjoy, it brought to me a loss of my citizen status. Latvia already had been independent with a membership in the League of Nations (1920-1939) so the leadership chose not to declare independence for their first time, but to 'restore' it.

This critical distinction was an opportunity for leadership to control citizenship policy and to give power (and votes) to certain groups of people while ignoring others. Latvia restored pre-Soviet laws, giving nationality to anyone who had held it before 1940 and to their descendants, leaving behind about 700,000 of people (26% of population in 1991; mostly ethnic Russians), who came to Latvia from other Soviet Republics to rebuild the country after World War II, and *their* descendants. Unfortunately, my parents and myself were among that number. I received my Latvian passport and a right to vote only in 2006, through a naturalisation process, which included passing exams on Latvian language and history.

The point I am trying to make is not about historical or political (in)justice. My personal story highlights the fact that, in the modern world, it is not necessary to travel somewhere to become a migrant. When living in Latvia I definitely felt myself to be a migrant; in 2011, when I came to the UK, I felt my migrant experience (with its positive and negative sides) had multiplied.

The motivation behind this research derives from the desire to explore our relationships with place, and different ways in which, we can identify ourselves with places. Edward Relph, a human geographer, suggests that our connections with places can be both positive and negative (in his own terms, from 'existential insideness' to 'existential outsideness').[7] This is why both places that appear in my

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[5] Gregory Feldman. *We all are migrants,* (Stanford University Press: 2015).

[6] Ibid, p.4.

[7] Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness,* (Pion Limited: 1976), p. 58.

research are located in what can be called the post-Communist world, and both, as will be shown later, are marked by the sense of loss and displacement that shape the identities of those who lived in the Soviet Bloc.

This research contributes to the discussions around place, memory and identity by looking at how artistic practices such as photography, moving image and oral history can be a factor in the construction of identity of / with a place. Taking this question further, how can we, as artists, understand and express what it means 'to be in a certain place', 'to belong to a place' or 'to come from a certain place'? How can we describe something that stands and appeals to the very fact of our existence?

I approach these questions by observing (through photography and conversations) the relations between memory and identity as embedded in specific geographic places and by using a case study as a research strategy. Drawing upon the participatory practices used both in the fields of fine art and communication design, I am particularly looking at the relationships between memory and identity in the post-Soviet context, exploring notions of belonging, identity and migration, in relation to recent (1991-2016) political and historical developments.

Place as a concept

We can speak of place in a myriad of ways — we can articulate it in terms of our own existence, in terms of globalisation, in terms of the development of the cities, in terms of politics or in relation to nature and culture. Indeed, as British geographer Doreen Massey has argued, place has come to have a totemic resonance in the contemporary world.[8]

Much of the discussion set in this research comes down to our relationships with places, and the very positioning of the place in this context appeals to the phenomenological approach to understanding place. The concept of place described here is informed mostly by the works of Canadian geographer Edward Relph and by the works of British geographer Doreen Massey. [9]

In '*Place and Placelessness'* (1976) Relph writes that place determines our existence, because 'to be human is to have and to know your place'.[10] He tries to understand place through the idea of identity, stressing not the importance of the 'identity of a place', but the 'identity with a place', which is experienced by a person or a group of people.

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[8] Doreen Massey. *For Space* (Sage: 2005), p.5.

[9] Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness,* (Pion Limited: 1976); Doreen Massey. 'A Global Sense of Place' <http://www.unc.edu/courses/2006spring/geog/021/001/massey.pdf> [accessed 29th of May 2015], p.5.

[10] Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness,* (Pion Limited: 1976), p.19.

The modality of that identity might differ — from existential insideness ('to be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with place')[11] to existential outsideness (a self-conscious and reflective un-involvement, an alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of unreality of the world, and of not belonging).

In contrast to this 'real' identity of a place, Relph develops a notion of mass identity, which arises not from individual or group experiences, but is 'assigned by 'opinion-makers' and provided ready-made for the people, disseminated through the mass-media and especially advertising'. 'Mass media', writes Relph, 'conveniently provide simplified and selective identities for places beyond the realm of immediate experience of the audience, and hence tend to fabricate a pseudo-world of pseudo places. And someone exposed to these synthetic identities and stereotypes will almost inevitably be inclined to experience actual places in terms of them'[12].

If Relph writes about a place as a 'multifaceted phenomenon of experience',[13] then Doris Massey looks at the place as the sum of different social processes. What distinguishes her position from that of Relph's is that to Massey, a place has no single identity, but rather a number of identities that are being performed on a daily basis. Partly criticising Relph's position, partly complementing it, she writes how the search after the real meanings of place are interpreted as coming from a desire for fixed, secure and unproblematic identity (especially in the times of space-time compression). Massey criticises this trend, for according to her, it leads to the reactionary notion of place, which can lead to such things as reactionary nationalism or introverted obsessions with heritage.[14] When criticising this reactionary notion of place, Massey points out that,

> National governments and cultural elites are often keen to root a sense of national identity in a historical story where it had come from and where it is going – a creation myth. Elaborate traditions are invented to bolster these stories. Museums display these histories. Often these histories are very selective and exclude the experiences of more recent arrivals[15].

Massey refers to a place in the sense of Greek 'topos', refusing the destination between place (as meaningful, lived, and everyday) and space (as outside, abstract, meaningless). Although Massey in her writings uses the word 'space', where this thesis uses the word 'place', there is no controversy in the conceptualisation, as both refer to the Greek meaning of the '*topos*'.

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[11] Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness*, (Pion Limited: 1976), p.19.

[12] Ibid, p. 59.

[13] Ibid, p.29.

[14] Doreen Massey. *A Global Sense of Place*, <http://www.unc.edu/courses/2006spring/geog/021/001/massey.pdf>, [accessed 29th of May 2015], p.5.

[15] Ibid, p.5.

Her definition of place/space is built upon three propositions. The first one sees place/space as product of interrelations, predicated upon the existence of plurality. The second proposition understands it as the sphere of 'coexisting heterogeneity', with different trajectories coexisting with each other. Multiplicity and space are co-constitutive of each other. Massey's third proposition is that space is always under construction, and could be understood as a 'simultaneity of stories so far'.[16]

Towards Politics of Place

It appears that place can operate as 'the sphere of everyday', as 'geographical source of meanings', but it also can be conceptualised as 'a place to retreat', as 'a protective pulling-up of bridges and a building of walls against the new invasions'.[17]

Nowadays, when the world is witnessing one of the largest migrations of people, the political role of place is becoming increasingly important and Doreen Massey's words, originally published in 2005, seem to be even more pertinent and topical. The migration crisis in Europe and, more recently, the discussion about migration in Britain, has been highlighted further by the results of the referendum on leaving the European Union. The question of politics of place has reached a new level of emotional discussion.

The relationships between politics of place, memory, identity and migration are actively discussed across a range of disciplines in art, design and visual communication. Artists all over the world are engaged with themes of place, identity and belonging. For example, British artist Emma Smith dedicates her work '*School for Tourists*' (2015, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland) to the relationship between place and identity, specifically looking at the conditions of being local and being a visitor. And, more broadly, Belgian filmmaker Laurent van Lancker in his documentaries through oral history collects migrants' stories about their journeys, illuminating social and religious aspects of different cultures. Dutch artist Renzo Marten addresses poverty and the spatial inequality of people living in the Congo, by teaching them how to make a profit from what he sees is their greatest asset — their poverty. Themes of journey, belonging and displacement were also reflected in major publications on art and design including (but not limited to) '*Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*'[18], and '*Here, There, Elsewhere: Dialogues on Location and Mobility*'.[19]

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[16] Doreen Massey. *For Space,* (Sage: 2005), p.8.

[17] Doreen Massey. *For Space,* (Sage: 2005), p.5.

[18] *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (FUTURES: New Perspectives for Cultural Analysis), ed. by Robertson et all, (Routledge: 1994).

[19] *Here, There, Elsewhere: Dialogues on Location and Mobility*, ed. by David Blamey, (Open Editions: 2002).

Mapping Memory in the Post-Communist Europe

The questions of identity and place are inseparably linked with memory and nostalgia. It is the memories of place that brings in those who are displaced a phenomenon of nostalgia. As a term nostalgia (from Greek 'nostos' meaning 'homecoming', 'return home', and algia meaning 'pain') was coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688, who described it as 'a sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one's native land'.[20] However, nostalgia is not just a longing for a home, it is a longing for a phantom homeland, frozen in one's memory. As Svetlana Boym puts it:

> Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of enchanted world with clear borders and values, it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, the edenic unity of time and space before entry to the history.[21]

The themes of nostalgia and memory became very topical in the contemporary art in recent decades and have been a subject to a numerous exhibitions. For example, in 1985, the New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York) held an exhibition '*The Art of Memory: The Loss of History*' which dealt with the question of the commodification and reification of memory in the form of mass media images. The artists included Judith Barry, Adrian Piper, Louise Lawler, Martha Rosler and Rene Santos. Another exhibition '*Places with a Past*' was organised in Charleston in 1991 with participating artists such as Ann Hamilton, Christian Boltansky, Chris Burden, Cindy Sherman, Alva Rogers, and David Hammons. The exhibition explored different ways in which artists can engage with repressed and marginalised histories in order to recover them.

Dieter Roelstraete, a curator, calls this recent artistic interest to the past a 'historiographic turn' in art, that can be described as a 'methodological complex that includes the historical account, the archive, the document, the act of excavating and unearthing, the memorial, the art of reconstruction and reenactment, the testimony'[22]. Artists, engaged in the historiographical mode are preoccupied 'not only in storytelling, but more specifically in history-telling'[23.]

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[20] Paolo Magagnoli. *Documents of Utopia. The Politics of Experimental Documentary*, (Wallflower Press: 2015), p. 2.

[21] Svetlana Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia,* (Basic Books: 2010), p.8.

[22] Dieter Roelstraete. *The Way of the Shovel: On the Archeological Imaginary in Art*, e-flux, no.4 (2009), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/04/68582/the-way-of-the-shovel-on-the-archeological-imaginary-in-art/>, [accessed 1/02/2017].

[23] Ibid.

While Roelstraete links the existing 'nostalgic' art trend to the crisis of the history, other theorists would argue that it is the crisis of memory not history that brings up nostalgic and preoccupied with memories artistic works. The intellectuals both on the political left and right (see for example a collection of essays by Pierre Nora '*Lieux des Memoire*'[24] and Frederic Jameson's work '*Postmodernism, or the The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalism*'[25]) were seeing nostalgia as a result of end-of-memory postmodern condition.

In the ex-USSR republics and post-communist Eastern and Central Europe the 'historiographical' turn in art has become even more prominent. While there are vast differences (both cultural and historical) between different former USSR republics and as well as between other countries, there are certain processes that are common in the entire region, with the traumatic relationship with past among them. Victor Misiano, one of the most recognised curators in post-Soviet space in 2007 curated an exhibition '*Progressive Nostalgia*' in the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea (Italy). The exhibitions explored the feeling of detachment and loss of identity as one of the characteristics of a Post-Communist condition.

The exhibition turned out to be very successful and travelled to Athens, Tallinn and Helsinki. The artists, including Anatoly Osmolovsky, David Ter-Oganjan and Olga Chernysheva, looked at the fate of the post-Soviet space and, through their work, reflected upon such themes as independence and national identity, the trauma of transition, the communist past, and most remarkably, upon memory and amnesia following the collapse of the USSR.

Another exhibition dedicated specifically to this region (and also with an interest in memory and identity) was organised in 2011 by the New Museum (New York). The exhibition was called *Ostalgia*, from the German word 'ostalgie' — a term which emerged from two German words *'ost'* (east) and *'nostalgie'* in order to describe a sense of longing and nostalgia for the era before 1989. The word also links time and place, and as the curator of the exhibition Massimiliano Gioni explains, it is 'reminding us that nostalgia is not just homesickness, but the need to travel through time, or shape time to fit our yearnings'[26].

In the catalogue's opening essay, Massimiliano Gioni speaks about the loss that marked the identities of those who lived in the former Soviet Bloc. He also mentions that the collapse of the Soviet Union was brought about to return to

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[24] Pierre Nora. *Rethinking France: Histories and Memories v. 4: Les Lieux De Memoire*, transl. by David P. Jordan, (University of Chicago Press: 2010).

[25] Frederic Jameson. *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalism*, (Duke University Press: 1992).

[26] Massimiliano Gioni. Ostalgia, in *Ostalgia. Exhibition catalogue*, (New Museum: 2011), p. 23.

history – by the recovery of the past – by a process of rediscovering national origins and identities, but also, above all, by exposing the manipulations and historical falsifications perpetrated by those regimes. This time was marked by Milan Kundera's slogan: 'The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'. In twenty years, the situation had changed dramatically. As Massimilliano Gioni observes:

> Both East and West seem driven by the desire to return to post-historical dimension, to a present continuous of comfort and grandeur, a new fiction in which the only space conceded to the past is a sort of mediocre, theme-park reconstruction. Even in Berlin – the city where the Soviet Bloc began to crumble in the most obvious fashion – all traces of a temporal mode other than eternal present of shopping are systematically vanishing: the past is removed to create a time without friction or disjunction, without shifts, rifts, or troubling presences.[27]

These Berlin transformations were remarkably featured in the work of two artists, Tacita Dean and Marcel Odenbach. Dean's series of photo etchings *Palast* (shown both in *Ostalgia* and in *Project Europa* exhibitions) record the final days of the Palace of the Republic, the giant parliament building of the GDR, 'slated for demolition to make room for the reconstruction of a fake Proustian castle'.

Artist Marcel Odenbach in his film '*No one is where they intended to go*' (exhibited in *Project Europa*) also focuses on Berlin's past, featuring the literal demise of the Berlin wall. Recording a sweeping rise of national sentiment, Odenbach captures the euphoric spirit of mass gatherings, marches and candlelit vigils. Through collage he brings together found footage, newly filmed work, music and sound and disrupts the collective image of a new Germany, warning about the resurgence of a dangerous nationalism.

This research continues the discussion about the triangle of place, memory and identity by looking particularly at the post-Soviet space. It is structured around two case studies each situated in a specific location. The first case study (*Out of Place*) examines the phenomena of national identity as found within Baltic Russian migrants now living in the UK. The second case study (*Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod*) is set in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, and looks how the identity of place can be constructed through the representaion of the landscape.

There are several reasons why I have chosen these particular locations. First of all, I was interested how the idea of nation-place as a concept that combines the abstraction of space with a deeply-felt emotion place, would realise itself in practice[28]. Russian philosopher Alexander Piatigorsky describes this specific idea of nation as a place as being a particular feature of the Russian Empire that the Soviet

[27] Gioni, p. 24.

[28] Tim Cresswell. *Place: An Introduction,* (Wiley-Blackwell: 2004), p. 177.

regime not only inherited but also carried to the point of paradox. Piatigorsky defines this feature as 'the absolute prevalence of the idea of the place above the idea of the ethnos'. In Russian 'imperial self-consciousness', he claims, ethnos is derivative from the place, as the State can easily be reduced to the territory it occupies. He writes:

> From here emerges a marvelous ancient tradition of calling traitors and betrayers everyone who simply tried to escape from Russia. One can search for the metaphors of this phenomenon forever. The betrayal of the fatherland is a betrayal of the place, love for the fatherland is love for the place. Interestingly, the protagonists of many Soviet songs, find themselves in a foreign land missing not the people, but its particular landscape). [29] Out of here also comes an almost mythological concept of the Soviet borders as a magical boundary that fence this territory. And it is the territory, not the people, which is considered sacred.

Secondly, I was interested in the notion of ambiguous, problematic identity, or even, in Relph's words, in 'existential outsideness',[30] and the area provided an excellent ground for research.

I was also interested in the contrast between 'identity with a place' as experienced by individual or by a group of people and the 'mass-identity of a place' assigned by opinion-makers. Locating my case studies in the post-Soviet space allowed me to draw upon the tradition of counter-memories.

Svtelana Boym in her comprehensive study of nostalgia '*The Future of Nostalgia*' points that while there were lot of differences between the USSR and Eastern and Central Europe, there was a one common feature of the intellectual life there (particularly speaking about the period from 1960s to 1980s). She argues that a development of 'counter-memory'[31] laid a foundation of resistance to the Communist regime and as a prototype of a public sphere. Describing the processes of formation of the counter-memory, Svetlana Boym writes:

> Countermemory was for the most part an oral memory transmitted between close friends and family members and spread to the wider society through unofficial networks. The alternate visions of the past, present and future was rarely discussed explicitly; rather it was communicated through half words, jokes and doublespeak[32].

Later, when working with the group of Baltic Russian emigrants and employing oral history to construct identity with a place based upon plurality of voices, I

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[29] Alexander Piatigorsky. *Latviya pereferiya chego?* Rigas Laiks. October (2002), [translated from Russian original].

[30] Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness,* (Pion Limited: 1976).

[31] Svetlana Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia,* (Basic Books: 2010), p. 61.

[32] Ibid.

Figure 1. Natalja Vikulina (2016) . Still from the *Out of Place* film.

have found that traditions of countermemories are still existing in the community, and can be used as a powerful tool for unsettling the official discourse of national identity.

Participatory Practices in the Formation of Memory and Identity

Recent decades were marked by the 'social turn' both in the field of communication design and in the field of fine art. Communication design has been reinventing itself, shifting the focus from commercial objectives to the creation of social change. Being situated in the new globalised and multi-national society, communication design needed to face the challenges of communicating to diverse groups of people. This resulted not only in bringing the focus to social issues such as for one example, migration, but also, as Teal Triggs suggests, has aligned with the exploration of innovative methods, that will enable social change to happen.[33] Quite often those methods would correspond with democratic approaches that would address the experiences, needs and problems of the audiences.

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[33] Teal Triggs. Collaborative Learning: The Social in Social Design, in *Developing Citizen Designers*, ed. by Elizabeth Resnick, (Bloomsbury Academic: 2016).

Practices of participatory design first introduced in Scandinavia in the 1970s, have now become one of the trend strategies in design. Toni Robertson and Jesper Simonsen, the editors of 'Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design' suggest that participatory design arose from the various political and civil rights movements, when people in many Western societies demanded an increased say in decision making, and were prepared to participate 'in the collective action around shared interests and values'.[34]

Some designers and design researchers responded to the request by introducing the concept of participatory design with the principle of 'genuine participation'[35] at its core. The users' role has changed dramatically — from being merely informants to being 'legitimate and acknowledged participants in the design process'.[36] Toni Robertson and Jesper Simonsen note that there were both pragmatic and political reasons for this principle. The pragmatic rationale stressed the need for mutual learning of users and developers about possible solutions of the studied problem[37].

Derek Yates and Jessie Price, authors of *Communication Design: Insights From the Creative Industries* (2015), give another pragmatic rationale for including participation in the design process. They suggest that in the new 'networked' world the audience is much more active, as social networking media provides endless opportunities for the audience to register their opinions. This means that the backlash 'to an ill-thought-out creative decision can be instant and overwhelming'[38]. In this regard, participation can become a strategy to engage with the audiences proactively, continually developing design solutions with them.[39]

As for the political dimension of participation, it comes from a desire to ensure that the voices of different communities are heard in the decision-making process. As Toni Robertson and Jesper Simonsen explain:

> The motivation [in participatory design] was and remains democratic and emancipatory: participation in participatory design happens, and needs to happen, because those who are to be affected by the changes

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[34] Toni Robertson and Jesper Simonsen. Introduction in '*Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design,* ed. by Robertson and Simonsen, (Routledge:2013), p.2.

[35] Toni Robertson and Jesper Simonsen define 'genuine participation' as fundamental transcendence of the users' role from being merely informants to being legitimate and acknowledged participants in the design process.

[36] Ibid, p.5.

[37] *Here, There, Elsewhere: Dialogues on Location and Mobility*, ed. by David Blamey (Open Editions: 2002), p.6.

[38] Derek Yates and Jessie Price. *Communication Design. Insights From the Creative Industries,* (Bloomsbury: 2015), p. 73.

[39] Ibid.

resulting from implementing information and communication technologies should, as a basic human right, have the opportunity to influence the design of those technologies and the practices that involve their use.[40]

Fine art practice has been undergoing a similar process. Artists started to talk about their work in terms of 'relational aesthetics' – a concept, developed by Nicolas Bourriaud in his eponymous work, where he defined relational aesthetics as 'a set of artistic practices, based on human relations and their social context'.[41] A new generation of artists were proposing artworks as 'moments of sociability' and 'objects producing sociability'. The artworks acted as 'relational devices', making new encounters and provoking new discourses.[42] Their artworks no longer lived in a space to walk through, but in a certain period of time that has to be experienced. In Nicolas Bourriaud's word they became 'states of encounter'.[43]

Nicolas Bourriaud's '*Relational Aesthetic*s', published in 1998 and translated into English two years later, gave impetus to a number of post-studio artistic practices, with 'participatory art' among them. Claire Bishop, the author of a major historical and theoretical work on this subject of participatory art entitled '*Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*', suggests those practices to be different from 'relational' art, as the 'participatory' artists seem to be more interested in the 'creative rewards of participation as a politicised working process' and less in the 'relational aesthetics' as such[44]. The artists on the participatory side saw themselves less as 'individual producers of discrete objects' and more as 'collaborators and producers of situations'. The public, previously consisting of viewers was now formed by participants. The artwork ceased to be 'a finite, portable, commodifiable product' and turned into 'an ongoing project', 'an array of social events'.[45]

In the early 90s, participatory artists often operated outside museums/galleries. They were situated on the periphery of the art-world, and as Claire Bishop notes, had relatively weak commercial profiles. Within a decade, the situation changed dramatically. Today, participation has become one of the key thematic trends in contemporary art. Many artists (see for example works of Francis Alÿs and Thomas Hirschhorn) who treat social collaboration as an extension of their creative or conceptual frameworks have become well-established and commercially successful. The existent division into the artwork being positioned in the museum

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[40] Toni Robertson and Jesper Simonsen. Introduction in '*Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design,* ed. by Robertson and Simonsen, (Routledge: 2013), p.6.

[41] Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational aesthetics,* transl. by Copeland M., Pleasance, S. and Wood F., (Les presses du reel: 2002), p. 14.

[42] Ibid, p.30-33.

[43] Ibid, p.30-33.

[44] Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and Politics of Spectatorship,* (Verso: 2012), p.2.

[45] Ibid.

Susan Hiller   Christian Boltanski
The Prisoners of War
Bettina Furnée

Sophie Calle

Graeme Miller

Emma Smith   Sameer Farouque and
Playback   Mirjam Linschooten
                         Museum of Found Objects

Out of
Place   Keith Piper
                         A Future Museum of the Present

24-hours noticing
RMIT University

                         Laurent van Lancker
Landscapes of   Disorient
Nizhny Novgorod

                Assaf Shoshan
Lynn Silverman,   Waiting territories
Horizonts

                  Anselm Kiefer
                  Occupations
Tacita Dean   Francis Alÿs

Figure 2. Practice review diagram.
The diagram shows a number of artistic practices reviewed in this thesis in relation to my
research. Two circles show two case studies accordingly. The proximity of a name of an artist towards
the centre of a circle represents the relativeness of an artistic practice to this research.

or outside it also seems to be less defining than in the 90s. And even those artists
who are not directly participatory, may reference community and collectivity.[46]

Research Positioning

My artistic practice also shares some common ground with the artists working
in the new fields of relational and participatory art, whilst not being directly
participatory. There are a number of reasons that allow me to claim this relation.
Like the above-mentioned artists, my practice also addresses social issues. However,
the correspondence is not so much in the context but in the processes and methods
of artistic production. In my research, I am looking for artistic methods that would
allow the construction of an identity of place based on plurality and multiplicity
and that would absorb different, often contested memories and voices.

My research was set to explore relationships between memory and identity as
embedded in specific places and to look how artistic practices can be a factor
in constructing of identity of/with a place. My interest in the concept of place
was informed by my wish to demonstrate the subjective and conditional nature
of a place identity. The research question required specific methods to answer.
I was particularly looking for methods that would correspond with pluralistic

[46] Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and Politics of Spectatorship,* (Verso: 2012), p.12.
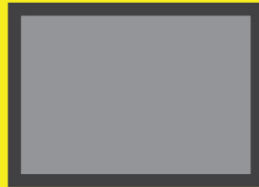
Figure 3. Natalja Vikulina (2016). From *Landscape of Nizhny Novgorod* series.

approaches and would allow to unsettle official discourses of identity of a place and to construct the identity of a place 'from below'[47]. Oral history (used as a method in my first case study) and walks (used in my second case study) were chosen specifically for that reason.

The research is structured around two case studies, which provide an in-depth analysis of two different methodological approaches to the study of a place, each situated in specified locations. In my first case study, (*Out of Place*) I explore how place is narrated through memories of participants. In the second case study (*The Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod*), place is represented through the photography of urban landscapes. This has resulted in a series of images *Landscape of Nizhniy Novgorod*, where I use my lens as a visual communicator to document this contemporary landscape.[48]

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[47] To draw analogy with 'history from below', as described by E. P. Thompson.
Edward Palmer Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class*, (Victor Gollancz: 1963).

[48] Submitted as part of the thesis for examination.

Out of Place case study is set as an archive of the stories about the objects brought by immigrants moving from Latvia to the UK. Their objects and their stories provided the basis for the *Out of Place* website (outofplace.rca.ac.uk), which was established both for the documentation and representation of the project[49]. The case study was set to explore how the identity of a place could be constructed through people's experiences. It was also focused on the sense of belonging / not belonging, and on the experience of being an immigrant.

The second case study (*Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod*) emerged out of the question of how the identity of / with place could be constructed through representation of the landscape. It came as a result of my residency in the Volga Branch of the *National Centre for Contemporary Art* (further in the text − NCCA) in Nizhny Novgorod. A series of research residencies were established to develop new, contemporary knowledge about the city. The brief presented by the curators of the residence coincided with Massey's critique of the inward-looking, reactionary notion of place.

In both of my case studies I am looking at the contrast between 'identity with a place',[50] as experienced by an individual or by a group of people and 'the mass identity of a place', assigned by 'opinion-makers', and I use my practice to challenge the latter. Using documentary photography and oral history recordings (informed by Alessandro Portelli and Paul Thomson), I am constructing an alternative identity of a place, derived from a polyphony of voices and images.

I also use my practice as an image maker to critique the assigned 'inward-looking reactionary identity of place' as described by Doreen Massey (2005) and to find a way whereby the visual representation of identity of place could reflect its multi-faceted nature. I am also exploring the 'existential outsideness',[51] experienced in the feeling of alienation and detachment from place.

Both of my case studies share a social form of artistic production as a key element. The set of methods used in the case studies were different, however they share the same structure. Each of them included, as a first stage, a building of an archive of images (the *Out of Place* case study includes also the audio recordings of the stories) and its later interpretation (in prints for the *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* case study or in the installations and video films for the *Out of Place* case study).

As a practice-based researcher, I regard my work to be a sort of a living organism, where theory and written work influence the practice and vice versa. This research uses an ontological design paradigm which emphasises what it means to be in the world. To borrow from Laurene Vaughan and Yoko Akama's own words, the ontological design paradigm looks at us, 'designing this world, which in turn acts

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[49] (See the Appendix2).

[50] Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness,* (Pion Limited: 1976), p. 58.

[51] Ibid.

back and designs us' and understands as 'a process that results in us being designed by our designing'[52]. This suggests that the context of the research is always in motion. It also means that reflexivity or, in Donald A. Schon's terms, 'reflection on and in practice'[53] form a significant part of my research process. The research operates in four stages of a continuous cycle, moving from theory to action, from action to observation, and then to reflection[54]. Some traces of this process will be exposed in the following chapter.

The focus of the research, with its emphasis on people's experiences, appeals to the phenomenological approach, which is often characterised as a study of people's points of view about certain phenomena[55]. In this case, I am looking at how people experience places and how the knowledge of their experiences can be used in artistic practice and thus contribute to the construction of identity of/with a place. On a theoretical level the discussion around place has been framed by the works of human geographers such as Doreen Massey and Edward Relph (discussed above); as a practitioner I have been drawing upon a wide range of artistic practices including, but not limited to the works of artists Susan Hiller, Emma Smith, Keith Piper, Laurent van Lancker, Sameer Farouque and Mirjam Linschousteen. The artworks discussed in the study primarily informed my choice of research methods, but not necessarily my decision to focus on the subject matters.

I also address my research questions by using methods often associated with narrative research — such as oral history (informed by the works of Alessandro Portelli)[56], and using case study as a research strategy. The decision to use those particular methods came naturally from the positioning of research. The methods associated with narrative research have developed from a particular epistemological position: namely, that lived experiences form a valid basis for building knowledge about the world. As Crouch and Pearce argue, 'a narrative approach provides us not only with ways to think about and understand experiences, it also provides a way to write a research text that addresses both personal and social issues and enables new stories to be told in the form of a research text. The researcher draws on the original stories to create a text that itself takes the form of a narrative'[57].

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[52] Laurene Vaughan and Yoko Akama, Y. 24 hours noticing: Designing our encounters with place in: *De-Signing Design: Cartographies of Theory and Practice*, ed. by Grierson, E., Edquist H. and Frichot,H., (Lexington Books: 2015).

[53] Donald A. Schon. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, (Basic Books: 1984).

[54] Here I am referring to experiential learning cycle as described in 'Doing Research in Design' by Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce [Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce. *Doing Research in Design,* (Berg Publishers: 2012)].

[55] Gjoko Muratovski. *Research for Designers. A Guide to Methods and Practice*, (Sage: 2016), p. 79.

[56] The detailed discussion of oral history as a method can be found in the second chapter of the thesis.

[57] Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce. *Doing Research in Design,* (Berg Publishers:2012), p. 105.

A case study approach is also chosen as a research strategy to allow more flexible research design. Colin Robson suggests that flexibility is one of the greatest strengths of the case study, as a research strategy case study 'is defined solely in terms of concentration on the specific case, in its context'[58]. My understanding of case studies was informed by the works of Robert E. Stake, Colin Robson and Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce.[59] Colin Robson defines a case study as 'a research strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence'.[60] For the design of research and for the implementation of a method, it is crucial to understand what constitutes the case that is studied. Robert Stake, in "The art of case study research", defines a case as 'a specific, unique and bounded system' that could be bound by time, place, events or even pre-existing concept or theory.[61]

Outline of the thesis

The thesis consists of the *Introduction*, three chapters and conclusions. In this *Introduction* I have set out the context of the research and briefly outlined methods of the research. Here, I looked at the framework in which the thesis operates, giving attention to the definition of the key concepts used in the research (e.g. identity and place). This presumably would help readers to familiarise with context of the research. The following chapters unfold the argument of the thesis and consider some of the themes, already touched in the *Introduction* in more detail. Chapter One, *Research Background*, describes the journey undertaken and reflects on the trajectory in which the research has developed. Chapter Two (*Out of Place*) and Three (*Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod*) provide an overview of the two case studies and give a more detailed overview of the methods employed in each case study. In conclusion I summarise my findings and give some indication for future development of research in this area.

I have dispensed with a separate literature or practice review chapter in order to use the discussion around theory and artistic practices as integral to the argument and research throughout writing. The discussion thus far has focused

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[58] Colin Robson. *Real World Research*, (Wiley-Blackwell: 2011), p. 149.

[59] Robert E. Stake. *The Art of Case Study Research*, (Sage:1995); Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce. *Doing Research in Design* (Berg Publishers:2012); Colin Robson. *Real World Research*, (Wiley-Blackwell: 2011).

[60] Colin Robson. *Real World Research*, (Wiley-Blackwell: 2011), p. 177.

[61] Robert E. Stake. *The Art of Case Study Research*, (Sage: 1995), p. 5.

on setting a broader context for the key themes (such as participation, relational aesthetics and migration). Whilst it is not the purpose of this thesis to delve into great depth on each of these broader topics, their contemporaneity has informed my thinking and has influenced my practice as a visual communicator.

Chapter 1.
Research Background

Palimpsest: From Artefact to Metaphor and Back Again

Initially, my research began with exploring the city as a palimpsest; as a text that is constantly writing and rewriting itself with the objective of revealing new meanings. I wanted to use the metaphor of palimpsest as a tool of deconstruction that would allow the unpacking of new unexpected meanings by revealing the past through the present.

Palimpsests are usually defined as a piece of parchment written upon twice, with the original writing being erased to make place for other writing. However, the most interesting and important part of what constitutes palimpsest is not there. The reason why palimpsest became such a curious artefact lies not in the fact that the parchment or paper was overwritten, but in the fact that though the first text was erased, it slowly reappeared through the centuries as the iron remaining in the ink reacted with the oxygen.

This capacity of palimpsest to slowly reveal what was hidden before made it a good metaphor to speak about memory and identity. The first to introduce the metaphorical use of palimpsest to English public was Thomas de Quincey,[62] who employed palimpsest to speak about the processes of our mind. He also used this term to speak about the Christian idea of resurrection, linking it with reappearance of the erased text. What fascinated him most is the deeper phenomenon of the resurrection itself, and the possibility of resurrection for 'what had so long slept in the dust'.[63]

Later, the metaphor of palimpsest was developed in the works of Sigmund Freud (particularly in the essay '*A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad*'), where he employed it to speak about the processes of memory. Palimpsests were also employed in the works of structuralists such as Julia Kristeva and Gerard Gennette to speak about idea of intertextuality.[64]

At that stage, my research proposed to use a metaphor of palimpsest to observe and analyse the urban practice of remembering and forgetting. This resulted in a series of photographs *City as a Palimpsest*, where I looked at city as a political text,

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[62] De Quincey was not the first to use palimpsest as a metaphor, but as Sarah Dillon put it, he was the first to 'inaugurate' palimpsest, to introduce it to the English public and to acquaint readers with subsequent metaphorical use. See Sarah Dillon. *Palimpsest, Literature, Criticism, Theory,* (Continuum: 2007), p. 1.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Sarah Dillon. *Palimpsest, Literature, Criticism, Theory,* (Continuum: 2007).

Figure 4. Natalja Vikulina (2014). From *City as a Palimpsest* series.

or rather, in Lefebvre's terms, in a city as a 'product of human practice', or as a 'material expression of the social relationships in place'.[65]

In the meantime, I was looking at how these issues were addressed in the field of photography and visual communication, where my practice is firmly situated. One of the projects that influenced the development of my research was a multiplatform project titled '*Unfixed*' developed in 2010 at the *Centre of Contemporary Art in Dordrecht*, Netherlands. The project explored the topics of cultural identity and history, but also looked at the strategies of artistic research, photography theory and contemporary practices 'around making, using, studying and writing about photographs'.[66] The five stage project included an exhibition, artist residency, workshop, symposium and, as a concluding stage, a publication.

One of the works that particularly drew my attention was Keith Piper's '*A Future Museum of the Present*'. The Museum, using apparent absurdity of parody and

[65] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Blackwell Publishing: 1991).

[66] *Unfixed : Photography and Postcolonial Perspectives in Contemporary Art,* ed. by Sara Blokland and Asmara Pelupessy, (Jap Sam books Heijningen and Unfixed projects: 2012), p7.

masquerade, presented a critique of the assumed authority of the socially dominant classes. In this case, the project attempted 'to interrogate and problematise the assumptions of Authority embodied within the act of forming the Museum or Archival collection[67]'.

The central motif arose in response to the cultural moment that the Netherlands was experiencing at that time — the success of the Dutch football team (and its passage through the qualifying stages of the 2010 World Cup) that resulted in the fact that much of Holland's urban space was 'swathed in the orange colour'[68]. In response to this, British artist, Keith Piper started to collect an array of orange 'objects'. In his statement he declared that 'usurping by the outsider artist of the power to declare objects 'museum worthy' and to classify their significance as markers of an imagined Dutch present, could in itself be seen as a subversive reversal of the old ethnographic model'[69]. In parallel to these acts of collecting orange objects came a series of photographic portraits of members of the arts and general community wearing, or in some way interacting with, an orange object, which was either theirs, or had been chosen by them from the museum 'collection'.

The works of Keith Piper gave me the impetus to explore other approaches to photography. From the archaeological approach used in my earlier works (see for example *City as a Palimpsest* series), I shifted to participatory and subversive approaches to photography. The latter can be traced back to the practice of *détournements*. Originally invented by the members of Letterist and Situationists International as a technique of the subversive appropriation of existing images to undermine existing meaning[70], the concept influenced a lot of contemporary artists and designers (see for example some of the Adbusters campaigns or the work of Victor Burgin from the 1970s where he subversively uses the language of advertisement). Although in my work (and, in the work of Keith Piper) it is not the image that is appropriated but rather the official discourse of national ideology (that comes with all its paraphernalia — flags, anthems, passports etc.), the chosen approach continues an artistic tradition set by Situationists.

Objects define us

The theoretical study of the participatory artistic practice created an impulse to rethink my own artistic strategies. My next body of work explored notions of memory and identity, taking as a point of departure the capacity of objects to collect information about cultures and societies. The ability of the object

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[67] *Unfixed: Photography and Postcolonial Perspectives in Contemporary Art,* ed. by Sara Blokland and Asmara Pelupessy, (Jap Sam books Heijningen and Unfixed projects: 2012), p. 63.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and Politics of Spectatorship,* (Verso: 2012), p. 84.

Figure 5. Keith Piper (2010) *A Future Museum of the Present*.

to transmit stories of their owners has been known for a very long time. The apparently simple formula 'objects define us' opens numerous paths for artists, ethnographers and anthropologists. [71]

A brief look at the shelves of the curiosity cabinets in museums such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford provides insights into numerous ethnographic studies conducted in the past. As Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce ironically observe: 'objects displayed in the museums across colonial centres have been studied for what they convey about the cultures and societies from which anthropologists have collected (some might say stolen) them'[72]. Whilst the research into the cultural practices of remote and unfamiliar communities in different corners of the globe is no longer topical in these circumstances of a contemporary post-colonial world, the principle of connection between a culture and its designed object is still valuable to explore as a focus of inquiry.

As Nicholas Saunders suggests, an anthropological focus sees objects as possessing important and variable social dimensions beyond, as well as including, their original design purpose. Objects embody an individual's experiences and attitudes as well as cultural choices in the technology of production. They occupy a dynamic point of interplay between animate and inanimate worlds, inviting us to look beyond the physical world and consider the constantly changing relationships between objects and people[73].

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[71] Antony Hudek. Introduction. Detour of the objects, in *The Object* (Documents of Contemporary Art), ed. by Antony Hudek. (Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press: 2014).

[72] Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce. *Doing Research in Design,* (Berg Publishers:v2012), p. 84.

[73] Nicholas Saunders. Memory and Conflict, in *The Material Culture Reader*, ed. by Victor Buchli, (Berg Publishers: 2002).

Figure 6. Sameer Farouque and Mirjam Linschooten (2013).
The Museum Of Found Objects. Cairo. Interpretation.

The object is quite often seen as a deposit of memories and stories. This essential quality of the object to narrate a story was widely used in art. One can cite the works of Christian Boltanski, who was exploring this ability of objects throughout his artistic career. Or, the works of Susan Hiller, who was convinced that any conscious configuration of objects tells at least two stories — the one of the narrator and the one of the listener. Her installation for the Freud Museum in London was constructed from carefully curated objects placed in the archival boxes. Talking about her object collection, Hiller described it as made out of rubbish, out of ruins and discards. To her the objects within each box were the starting points; the framing of the object; the finding of the right words (or text, image, diagram) was a way of contextualising the objects, not to limit their meaning but to open them out to create symbolic links[74].

An artwork containing everyday objects, situated in the archival environment, acts as a reference and critique of the ethnographic studies of the early 20th century.

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[74] Susan Hiller. Working through Objects, in *The Archive*, ed. Charles Merewether, (Whitechapel Gallery: 2006), p. 43.

Image redacted

Figure 7. Susan Hiller (1991). From *The Freud Museum*.

This is certainly the case for the already mentioned work of Keith Piper, '*The Museum of the Future*', which used a strategy of 'parody to usurp the power to declare objects museum worthy'. A similar approach was developed in a project by Sameer Farouque and Mirjam Linschooten titled '*The Museum of Found Objects*' (2013). The project consisted of the making of four 'museums', organised in four cities respectively — Cairo, Johnston, Toronto and Istanbul. The building of a museum lasted around five weeks, during which artists accumulated everyday objects from the city districts and then made a series of photographs featuring those objects. As the artists say in one of the interviews, the concept of the 'museum' was to use the capacity of the everyday objects to embody major facets of a society (such as economy, modes of production, cultural/personal use) to 'reach deep into the hidden undercurrent of a place'.[75] The outcome of the project was twofold — it was both a creation of a portrait of a city through different lens, and a critique of the museum.

Red-White-Red Still Lifes

In 2015, I created a project that consisted of installations made from everyday objects found in the houses of participants. My intention was to engage participants and potential audience in dialogue about the idea of nationality and place. What

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[75] Lara Angol. *Six Questions About the Museum of the Found Objects*, <http://www.museumoffoundobjects. com/filter/knowledge%20=%20knowledge/interview>, [accessed 3 September,2016].

does it really mean to be Latvian/English/Russian and so on? I selected four participants of Baltic Russian origin (two living in London, and two living in Riga) with whom I could work together collaboratively on the production of the four installations.

The objects were arranged so as to make evident a reference to the Latvian flag. When we look at them, our mind might indulge in speculations and conclusions. We might think of a person to whom they belong, or about the place they come from. The objects are so culturally coded that they would not say much to those who are not familiar with the region's cultural background. Those who are aware of their cultural background will, of course, question their 'nationality' and find it implausible. Some of the displayed objects simply don't have anything in common with the idea of Latvian nationality other than being the right flag colour and situated in the right place. Others may have a connection with the identity, though this connection could be argued as false (or disgraced at least) if interpreted from the official viewpoint.

The French historian Ernest Renan famously said that nations are based as much on what the people jointly forget, as what they remember[76]. By taking this point of view, will we be able to tell if these neglected artefacts can still work as a part of a national identity? Is the belonging to one's national or cultural identity a destiny or a choice? Does it take more than colour (or ethnic origin) to proclaim one's nationality?

It may appear at first glance that this project was about the difficulty of finding authentic objects that fit into the idea of national identity but in fact, the project is much more than that. It continues to engage in the ongoing debate (e.g. Boris Groys, Agata Pyzhik, Massimiliano Gioni) that explores themes of memory, history and lost national identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The installations were photographed and later exhibited in their archival boxes. When situated within an archival box, the photographed objects look similar to the objects found on the shelves of history museums. In a way they are small museums themselves - the museums of a neglected national identity.

The red-white-red still lives were exhibited during '*Why Would I Lie?*' the Royal College of Art's Research Biennial held in April 2015). The exhibition was used as a testing ground to see how an audience perceived the still lives, but also to establish a broader network of potential interviewees. I received feedback through informal conversations and through the review of exhibition, published on a website

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[76] Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, (1882), in Renan, Ernest 'What is a Nation?', in Ernest Renan, Qu'estce qu'une nation?, transl. by E. Rundell, (Presses-Pocket:1992)..

Figure 8. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *Box 1.* An installation view from *Why Would I Lie* exhibition.

dedicated to contemporary art, with the focus on Baltic, Scandinavian, and Russian art[77].

The feedback received from the participants showed several important points that were useful for the future development of the project. The majority of respondents were very interested in the objects featured in the installation. Some of them tried to establish connection between the objects, when others recalled similar objects in their houses. During conversations with the audience I noticed that the object immediately evoked stories and memories. This capacity of objects to prompt memories and thoughts has been used in my further work (see the first case study *Out of Place)*.

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[77] Kirill Kobrin. *Chemodany chestnosty [The Suitcases of Honesty]*, Art Territory ,
< http://www.arterritory.com/ru/teksti/statji/4620-chemodani_chestnosti>, [accessed 25.09.2016],
[in Russian] .

The review of the exhibition titled '*The Suitcases of Honesty*' was written by historian, art critic and curator Kirill Kobrin.[78] I used the published material as an insight into how an installation was perceived. The fact that Kirill Kobrin himself is a migrant (in 2000 Kobrin immigrated from Russia to the Czech Republic, since 2013 he lived and worked in London) made the text even more valuable for the evaluation and analysis purposes.

The first part of the text was dedicated to the analysis of the concept of the exhibition, while in the second part of the text, Kobrin reviewed several artworks, with red-white-red installations among them.[79] In his reflection on the installation, Kirill Kobrin draws two analogies. The first analogy compares the installation with a collection of short stories '*Suitcases*', written by Sergey Dovlatov. Sergey Dovlatov, was a Russian journalist and writer, who emigrated to the USA in 1979. The idea of this collection of stories is that the author takes with him in the journey a suitcase stuffed with different things. After arriving in the new country all the things in the suitcase became unnecessary, as all the objects from Soviet life looked quite odd in their new environment.

Kirill Kobrin argues that although formally those two projects are similar — both suitcases (the one described by Dovlatov and the one exhibited on the biennial) are the suitcases of emigrants, the similarity is only apparent. Dovlatov's stories are not about migration, there is no new America in his stories, his stories are about someone who isn't even thinking of integrating into the new environment. To Kobrin, true migrants are different:

> Migrants are falling into the gap between the two worlds, clutching to the weird and accidental things. And the only way they can survive in this gap is by constructing themselves anew. That does not mean to absolutely ingratiate oneself with the customs of the new land, nor does it mean to ignore those customs by putting on a diving-dress and breathing only air specially imported from the fatherland. Their new identity is made up of the components of those two realities plus everything else that one could find appropriate. In that sense, despite all the concurrent trauma, migrants can be a freer and happier persons than many others. This happiness derives only when a migrant tries to escape both the slavery of memory and the slavery of circumstances. [80]

The second parallel that Kirill Kobrin makes, is the film '*The Tulse Luper Suitcase*s' by Peter Greenaway. The main character of the film, Tulse Luper, is travelling across

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[78] Kobrin was also a co-curator of the residence in Nizhny Novgorod. See case study Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorord for a detailed description.

[79] Kirill Kobrin. *Chemodany chestnosty [The Suitcases of Honesty*], Art Territory
< http://www.arterritory.com/ru/teksti/statji/4620-chemodani_chestnosti>, [accessed 25.09.2016], [in Russian].

[80] Ibid

time and space (mostly acrsoss 20th century). According to Kobrin, Luper acts as a metaphor of the 20th century, when Europe experienced one of the largest ever movements of people dispossessed by wars. As a result the biography of a person turns into the collection of objects that replenishes with each stop. However, for Kobrin, the *Out of Place* project is different from the 92 suitcases of Tulse Luper.

For him, the *Out of Place* project reminds us that today everything is turned into culture – sex, politics, crime and even the senseless wreckage of the big ideologies. And there is nothing behind those cultural values, they are being totally invented or reconstructed as a collage from the old belongings that had lost theirs meaning.

The feedback received from the exhibition contributed to the development of my research. Conversations with participants helped me to reveal the capacity of objects to prompt memories and thoughts. This capacity became central for the methodology presented in the my first case study *Out of Place*.

Building the Archive

When I was creating the colour-coded photographs, I was fascinated by how much history is embedded in certain objects. This naturally led me to the next step of my research, namely, setting up an *Out of Place* case study (see Chapter Two for a detailed description).

The audio recordings of these stories along with photographs of the objects formed the O*ut of Place* archive. The content of the archive is accessible in two languages (English and Russian) through the website, that was established for both the documentation and representation of the project.

Oral history, along with photography, were chosen as the main methods for the case study. The subjects of memory and identity have been in the discourse of oral histories for a long time. Situating my research in the field of oral history allowed me to continue this tradition, but also to create a tension between the audio and photographic archive as the means of documenting memories.

I presented the '*Out of the Place*' project during '*Interactions with the Real*' PhD Conference organised by Royal Holloway, University of London and during *Mapping Memories* Conference organised by German Federal Agency for Civic Education in Tbilisi, Georgia. Both events provided a space for creative dialogue between practitioners and academic researchers by foregrounding practice as a means of creative exploration and academic enquiry. The project was presented as interactive installation with objects, photography work and audio/video recordings *(Interactions with the Real* Conference) and during seminars in the *Mapping Memories* Conference.

Later, as an interpretation of the case study, I created a 16-min documentary film based on the six recorded stories. The movie was designed to showcase the project both in the gallery space (as an integrated part of the installation) and as a stand-alone piece. The film was shown in Riga in September 2016 as a part of *2Annas International Film Festival.*

Similarly to the O*ut of Place* case study, my second case study *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* also emerged from my previous work. In this case study I was drawing upon the ideas and methods already presented in the *City as a Palimpsest* series. However, this time my work was informed by the writings of Doreen Massey (from the theoretical perspective) and by artistic practices of Situanionists International.

The case study was set in Nizhny Novgorod (Russia) and was aimed to explore the identity of a city through tracing the distinctive features of its eight districts. It has emerged as a result of the residency, organised by th*e National Centre for Contemporary Art (NCCA)*, Volga branch. The task of the residencies, as formulated in the NCCA brief, was to return the city dwellers interest in their place, but not through officious and pompous events without any connection with 'the real world' and thus without leaving any trace in the collective consciousness. They were looking for a different type of knowledge about the city, that might derive from the understanding of the city as a complex being, which exists as a dialogue between different social, cultural or historical elements.

The project *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* was developed in collaboration with Russian sociologist Olga Chernyavskaya. It was aimed at exploring the identity of Nizhny Novgorod through visual representation. In order to do this, we organized eight walks, each one dedicated to a particular district of the city. These walks were organised as field studies, though they carried elements of the situationists' dérives. That is to say, the walks were designed to document the city and gather 'the field data', but also create a situation where new and unintended encounters could take place.

Chapter 2.
Out of Place. Case Study One

This chapter gives an overview of my first case study *Out of Place*. The case study looks how at place (in this case Latvia, the country of origin of the participants of the case study) is narrated through memories of the participants. It is as an archive of the stories about the objects brought by migrants moving from Latvia to the UK. The objects are used as prompts in order to help trigger participants' memories and thoughts about the country from which the objects originated. The case study was built on the capacity of the object to transmit cultural information about the societies from which they originated. *Out of Place* seeks to construct an identity of place through engagement with multiple subjective recollections while unstabling the nature of this identity by the very same means. It was crucial for me that there would be no single 'authoritive voice', but the identity of place would emerge from the plurality of different voices.

The case study grew out of my earlier body of work. In 2015, I made a series of installations that consisted of everyday objects found in the houses of participants (who were living in London and Riga). The objects were arranged so as to resemble the red-white-red flag. The installations were photographed and later exhibited in the archival boxes so as to resemble the objects found on the shelves of history museums. In a way they were small museums themselves – the museums of neglected national identity.

While arranging the installations, I was fascinated by the narrative capacity of the object. The everyday objects were full of the stories, but they were also so culturally coded that sometimes it would be very difficult for somebody outside the culture to interpret them. The *Out of Place* case study was established to unpack those stories.

I was interested in how place acts as a container of memories and how these influence our identities. The most convenient way seemed to look at my native country Latvia, especially since it provided excellent background for the research.

A large body of research [81] concurs that the Latvian-Russian identity (or 'Baltic Russian' identity) differs from the identity of Russians living in Russia. The most interesting fact shown in the surveys is that Baltic Russians tend to identify themselves with a place, which can be a particular locality – a country (Latvia), a city, a district or even a street. They do not identify themselves with either Russian or Latvian ethnicity, seeing themselves rather as something different. In terms of

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[81] The background information given in this chapter is based on the study *The Post-Enlargement Migration Experience in the Baltic Labor Markets* conducted by Mihails Hazans and Kaia Philips in 2011, and *Identity of Ethnical Russians as it Appears in Lithuania and Latvi*a conducted by Lithuanian sociologists Matulionis and Frejute-Rakausene. I am also referring to a number of essays and the journalist texts published in Latvia in recent years.

income, education, and cultural background the group is very diverse, however, recent sociological surveys show that they are generally more alienated from the state and its constitutional order than ethnic Latvians.[82.] This attachment to place as a source of identity together with the physical detachment and the feeling of being lost became the reason for choosing this particular group as a focus group for my research.

I was particularly interested in working with russophone[83] emigrants from Latvia aged from 27-47. The reason for that lies in the fact that this is a generation of people who were born in the USSR, and who witnessed the collapse of the empire, which again could be a reason for 'hybrid' 'problematic' or 'ambiguous' identities. I heard quite often (from both inside the community and outside it) that this generation is 'lost', 'detached' and 'rootless'. Gregory Feldman in his book 'We are all migrants' [84] takes ethnic Russians living in Latvia and Estonia as an example of 'migrants without migration'.[85.] Taking Feldman's concept further, I was interested in exploring how people that could be described as 'twice migrants' relate themselves to their place of origin and to their new place.

The choice of oral history as a method was central to this case study. The project drew upon this capacity of oral history to embrace different 'truths' and give voices to different groups of people. Because of its 'participatory' nature, the method of oral history seemed to be (and, as later findings show, proved to be) an ideal tool for constructing the identity of a place 'from below'.

Towards Participation in Oral History

If we look at the main characteristics of oral history as a discipline, we could mention that it has a lot in common with practices of participatory design. It shares both political and practical rationales of participation design (as discussed in pages 16-18). For example, Alessandro Portelli, an author of numereous books on oral history, noted that oral history is always 'the result of relationships, of a shared project in which both interviewer and interviewee are involved together.'[86] Thus, artworks using oral history as a creative material would necessarily have the participatory element embedded in them, as interviewees are not simply the source of information, but the co-authors and collaborators of the project. Another

[82] Ivars Iabs. *Critical but not serious. Latvian Russophones in the Shadow of Ukraine,* <https://ivarsijabs. wordpress.com/2015/05/02/critical-but-not-serious-latvian-russophones-in-the-shadow-of-ukraine>, [accessed 20th of May, 2014].

[83] Russian-speaking population of the country.

[84] Gregory Feldman. *We all are migrants,* (Stanford University Press: 2015).

[85] See Introduction for a detailed decryption of 'migrants without migration' and a review of Latvian non-citizens.

[86] Allessandro Portelli. What Makes Oral History Different, in *The Oral History Reader*, eds Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. (London&New York:1998), p.46.

characteristic of oral history that connects it to the participation practices in design is mutual learning. British sociologist and oral historian Paul Thomson in '*The Voice of the Past*' noted that the reconstruction of history through the methods of oral history becomes a much more collaborative process in which non-professionals play a critical role; historians come to the interviewee to learn, to sit at the feet of others[87].

Oral history shares also the political rationales of participation. In the essay, '*Popular memory. Theory, Politics, Method,*' Richard Johnson and Graham Dawson point out that the social production of memory is a process by which everyone participates, though unequally. It is more often for the past to be produced through official discourses of 'public theatre', whereas private memory, recorded in intimate cultural forms: letters, diaries, photograph albums and everyday conversations, quite often remains silenced.[88] Thus, as a method, oral history creates an opportunity to engage with the history of places on a micro-level, and so allows different voices to be heard. It allows us to challenge bigger historical and official narratives.

Recently, with the rise in relational aesthetics as a mode of creative production, oral history has become a method not only for historians but also for artists. Linda Sandino, in the introduction to '*Oral History in Visual Arts*', observes that relational aesthetics is something that distinguishes a visual artist using oral history as a creative material in their practice.[89] Indeed, if we take a brief look at the artistic practices engaged with oral history, we would notice that they are closely engaged in relational aesthetics, of even more to add, in social, collaborative and site-specific practices.

For example, Bettina Furnée collects the memories from the community living in Bawdsey (Suffolk, Eastern England) and installs the pieces of texts (some of them strung as letter-beads across the window spaces, some — directly stenciled on the concrete walls) in an old wartime observation post. Alexandra Handal uses oral history to collect the stories of Palestinian refugees, and to 'disrupt the dominant Zionist narrative'[90]. Michael Mcmillan creates artworks based on oral history interviews with first-generation Caribbean migrants. Maxine Beuret combines oral history with photography to explore different cultural environments in the context of a time passing. Her project '*Semper Eadem (Always the Same)*' conducted in partnership with East Midlands Oral History Archive depicts fifteen public places

[87] Paul Thomson. The Voice of the Past, (Oxford University Press: 1978), p.12.

[88] Popular Memory Group. Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method. in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (Routledge:1998) .

[89] Matthew Partington, Linda Sandino (eds). *Oral History in Visual Arts*. (Bloomsbury Academic: 2013).

[90] Alexandra Handal. Chronicle from the field, in *Oral History in Visual Arts,* ed. by Matthew Partington and Linda Sandino (Bloomsbury Academic: 2013), p. 45.

in Leicester (pubs, libraries, shops etc) that have not visually changed for at least 25 years.

We can also mention Graeme Miller, who broadcasts oral history recordings of the testimonies of those who lived and worked in the buildings demolished for the M11 link road. The voices were broadcast from the transmitters mounted to a lamppost on a route alongside of the road and can be tuned into by walkers equipped with receivers and maps available from the local libraries. 'The transmitters are solid-state and are expected to last for decades, so the changing landscape will play a role in the future of the exhibition', explains. Miller. Talking about his work he states, 'that these are memories that you can't write in stone anyway, they are almost deliberately sabotaged not to be a version of the truth, but they can arouse a lot of curiosity …'[91]

Emma Smith collects stories from residents living in the neighbourhood of Church Street, London, and creates a play based on the scripts from those interviews. Players select scripts to read together by the set of rules. They can direct their own performance creating a new play each time the game is played. In this way the work acts as model of a micro-society, where 'the coherence of the play is dependent on the dynamics of the group, the number and familiarity of players and the languages spoken'.[92]

What unites all these different artistic practices are not just the use of oral history as a method, but also an interest in exploring places, communities and identities embodied in those communities. Oral history, among other methods associated with narrative research, has developed from a particular epistemological position, namely that lived experiences form a valid basis for building knowledge about the world[93]. Also, as I already mentioned above, the oral history projects are necessarily participative: they act as shared projects between interviewer and interviewee.[94]

My understanding of oral history as a method is based on the works of Italian oral historian Alessandro Portelli and on the writings of the members of the Popular Memory Group[95]. In the essay '*What makes Oral History different*', Portelli suggests a number of characteristics that distinguish oral history as a method from other

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[91] Graeme Miller and Toby Butler. Linked: A Landmark in Sound, A Public Work of Art, in *The Oral History Reader,* ed. by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. (Routledge:1998), p.426.

[92] as described in the artist's portfolio founded at
<http://www.emma-smith.com/site/work/playback-2/> , [accessed 7th of September, 2016].

[93] Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce. *Doing Research in Design,* (Berg Publishers: 2012) , p. 105.

[94] Alessandro Portelli. What Makes Oral History Different, in *The Oral History Reader,* ed. by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. (Routledge:1998), p.46.

[95] The group was working in the Centre for Contemporary Studies in Birmingham in the early 1980s.

historical methods[96]. The first characteristic derives from the very nature of the method — its orality. The fact that oral history operates via the spoken word both implies restrictions on the method and opens a number of possibilities for it.

For example, the interviewees' accents, the ways they speak, the tonality and the volume or range of their voice, and the velocity of their speech carry a lot of social and cultural connotations which are not reproducible in writing.[97]

Another distinctive feature of oral history that Portelli points out is that oral history as a method is linked to the tradition of folk narrative, where no strict distinction between the 'factual' and the 'artistic' exists. There are no dedicated oral genres to transmit historical information, and, as a result, historical, poetic and legendary narratives often become inextricably mixed up. Oral history is necessarily subjective: it tells us less about facts and events and more about the meanings of the events for the people who experienced them. That means that, in the oral history sources, the boundary between what concerns the individual and what concerns the group may become more elusive than in established historical written genres, so that personal 'truth may coincide with shared imagination'[98].

From this understanding of the method main requirements of the interviewing techniques derive — giving priority to the free flowing narrative of the informants[99], establishing intimacy, listening and asking open-ended questions[100]. The collaborative approach was crucial for the way I set out and conducted interviews. I intentionally refrained from asking directly in the interview how the respondents related to their objects, instead relying on the conversation to allow this to be revealed as their story evolved.

However, there are some significant differences that distinguish this project from others. Unlike oral history projects conducted by historians, *Out of Place* case study is firmly positioned in the field of visual art/ communication design. The recordings I collected are used as a raw material for assembling collective identity of a place.

This approach also had an impact on the way I interviewed my participants. Unlike many historians who are recording 'life stories' my interviews were more subjective in their orientation. The process of formation of collective identity was highly dependent on several factors: 1) the choice of an object; 2) the plot of a story about the object (the 'what' of a story); 3) the way a story about the object is told (the

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[96] Allessandro Portelli. What Makes Oral History Different, in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. byRobert Perks and Alistair Thomson. (Routledge: 1998), p.46.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid, p.35.

[99] Ibid, p. 39.

[100] Studs Terkel, Tony Parker. Interviewing an Interviewer, in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. (Routledge: 1998), p. 124.

'how' of a story). To ensure participants remained fully engaged in all the factors of the process, I kept my voice (and questions) to minimum. In that way my role in this project was more of a 'collector of stories' rather than that of an interviewer.

In the essay '*Oral History as a Genre*', Alessandro Portelli notes that oral history can be described by its open-endness, as in theory (and in practice) oral history can be about anything. However, according to Portelli, at the core of oral history lies 'the combination of the prevalence of the narrative form on one hand and the search for a connection between biography and history, between individual experience and the transformations of the society on other'; as a genre, oral history depends to a large extent on the shifting balance between the personal and the social.[101] The stories I collected during the O*ut of Place* project are personal stories, however they provide an in-depth insight into the condition of migrant-hood by showing an attitude (sometimes traumatic, sometimes nostalgic) of the participants into the condition of migrant-hood.

The existing publications of the projects conducted by oral historians show a variety of scopes and approaches. Alessando Portelli proposes four major defining parameters in the publication of oral history: 1) the scope of the narrative; 2) the representation and continuation of the dialogic experience and oral performance; 3) the intended audience; 4) intended effect on the reader. I will use the proposed characteristics to give some insights on the processes and methods of this case study.

My case study was focused on Baltic Russian migrants living in the UK. Using social networks, I selected ten respondents, who gave their consent to participate in the interview. The interviews were conducted at the homes of participants (nine of them live in London, with one living in Nottingham). The range of the years resident in the UK was very broad going from one year to twenty-five.

The collaborative approach was crucial for the way I set up and conducted the interviews — I regarded respondents as co-authors of this project. This resulted in the way I structured and conducted interviews. First of all, the choice of the object was entirely up to the interviewee. The only requirement that I stipulated was that the object should have been brought from Latvia. Already at this point, respondents actively participated in the creative process by selecting an object from their belongings (some of the participants had at home a variety of objects to choose from, while others had just a few), and by deciding what the story was about and how it would unfold. The timings of the interview depended on the number of objects/stories a respondent wanted to contribute. As the interviews were subject-oriented, on average, it would take from 5 to 10 minutes for a participant to tell a

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[101] Alessandro Portelli. Oral History as a Genre, in *Narrative and Genre* ed. by Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (Routledge:1998), p.23.

story about one object.

Unlike oral history projects conducted by historians, *Out of Place* case study is positioned in the field of visual art/communication design. Whilst respecting the recordings, I wished to create a bricolage portrait of collective memory and identity that would emerge from the plurality of recorded voices and images. It is also important to highlight that the project consisted not only of audio recordings of the participants' stories, but also from my photographic work. The initial idea was to connect oral history recordings with photographs of the object, so the viewer could compare the two narratives — the oral, told by voice, and the visual, told by photograph. Those two components provided the basis for an accompanying O*ut of Place* website (outofplace.rca.ac.uk), which was established both for the documentation and representation of the project.

Analysis and Evaluation

The collected stories encompassed a great variety of objects. When I was setting up this case study, one of my concerns was that as a result, I might get a number of repetitive stories about the same objects. The aim of the case study was to create an identity based on the plurality of voices, but what if there was just one distinguished voice that could be heard? However, my fears were unfounded and although there was a small overlapping in the choice of objects, overall the participants responded to the brief in very different ways.

First of all, as I said, there was a great variety of objects. There were books, magazines, a catalogue of the film festival dated 1998, mittens, clocks, bracelets, medicine (this is where an unexpected overlap happened, as two of the interviewees chose medicine as their objects), personal documents, toys, there was a dancing porcelain pair, a bike, a shawl, a cactus, a clay whistle, a portrait of Lenin and many other curious things.

However, what fascinated me was not only a variety of objects, but also a variety of ways in which respondents related to the objects. After interviews were transcribed, I interpreted them using elements of thematic analysis [102] in order to identify common themes and attitudes in participants' stories. This allowed me to identify such categories as 'personal memory and nostalgic objects' (see for example the stories '*Lenin the Stitched*', '*Veronica*', '*A Bracelet*', '*A Shawl*' in the appendix), ancestors' belongings ('*The Grandfather's clock*'), nostalgic objects ('*Mittens*') and objects of the protest (*'A China Dancing Couple*', '*The Castle of Light*', '*Nothing Special*'). [103]

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[102] as described in *Interviews in Qualitative research* by Nigel Kings and Christine Horrocks, (Sage: 2010), p. 150,

[103] See transcription of stories in Appendix 1, p.86-106

There were also a number of objects that people had taken with themselves for practical reasons (*'The bike'*, *'The Box of Medicines'*, *'A Bottle of Medicine'*). These stories might seem somewhat 'flat' however, in spite of their apparent banality they give some in-depth view of the migrant-hood condition and show how insecure people are when they find themselves in a new place. 'We simply don't trust local doctors' – says one of the respondents. Another story *(The Bike)* gives us an example of financial insecurity, when a man, to save some money on the daily commute, brings his old bike from Latvia.

There was also another group of objects that symbolised for the participants the traumatic experience of migrant-hood, the 'existential outsideness', the feeling of being rejected and of non-belonging. The attitude towards those objects was critical, although quite often this critical attitude was mixed with irony. One of the interesting findings that emerged during the analysis of the stories was that quite often, the objects chosen to criticise the government or politics in the former fatherland of the participants were the images that would normally be associated with the official discourse of national identity. The official symbols of Latvian cultural identity such as a porcelain dancing pair in the national costume or an illustration of *The Castle of Light* from the novel '*Fire and Night'* (*'The Castle of Light'* story) were appropriated to unsettle the official discourses and to speak against corruption and discrimination.

The conversations I recorded do not necessarily contain the history of the objects. Quite often people would realise that I shared a common understanding and cultural knowledge about the object they were talking about; rather than retelling the story I already knew, they frequently spoke metaphorically about their native country. For example, one of the participants chose as her object a painting of Lenin that was hanging in her house (see "*Lenin the Stitched'* story). It was a standard portrait of Lenin; one could find a lot of those paintings in the official buildings during the Soviet era. However, this painting had one particular feature that would distinguish it from other similar portraits: right at the top of the portrait, going across the whole canvas was laid the cross-stitched national pattern. We both knew the story of this picture. The painting was made by Alexander Sergeant, a key figure in Latvian non-conformist art, who used the existing painting of Lenin and added cross-stitching on the top of it. One could say that Sergeant used Lenin in the same way as Andy Warhol used a can of Campbell soup.

During Soviet times, Alexander Sergeant was an editor of the 'samizdat' magazine, which featured the works of Moscow conceptualists with artists like Dmitry Prigov and Lev Rubenstein among them. Samizdat was a way of publishing and reproducing censored publications and a large number of those magazines are also now located in the house of the interviewee. The painting along with the samizdat magazines were bought by the participant to support the artist and now Vladimir Ilyich Lenin looks down on the passers-by from the second-floor window in the house located just by Alexandra Park in North-west London.

The portrait tells a marvellous story, however, the participant, knowing that I was aware of it, chose to tell another one about another portrait of Lenin, the one she knew from her childhood. The object (Lenin-the-Stitched portrait) was used as a reference, as a starting point of departure to recollect her childhood memories. Her story is an ironic recollection of one incident that happened in her nursery when one of the kids decided to steal the portrait of Lenin from a book, tore it out and hid it in his boot. Unfortunately, the teacher discovered the book with the torn page and reprimanded him in front of his class and parents.

The way the participant told a story about her object highlights the subjectivity of oral history as a method and stresses the elusiveness of the boundary between what concerns the individual and what concerns the society, on which Alessandro Portelli was pointing out.[104] Of course, she did not want to hide the 'real' story of Lenin's portrait. It is rather that her own personal memories was as real and important as the history of the object itself. On other occasions, respondents used the objects to

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[104]Alessandro Portelli. Oral History as a Genre, in *Narrative and Genre* ed. by Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (Routledge:1998), p.23.

reflect on current political and economical situations (see, for example, the stories '*The Castle of Light', 'China Dancing Pair', 'Nothing Special'*).

What distinguishes the recorded conversations I had with the participants is the way how the stories were told with a mixture of irony and nostalgia. The manner in which my participants spoke also invited interpretation – a reading in between the lines – suggesting a critique of the local government, hinted at rather than stated. This might be explained by the tradition of communicating through counter-memories, that historically comes from the Soviet times (see the discussion of counter-memory on p. 19), when alternative views on past and present were discussed through half-words and doublespeach. The importance, though of the participants telling their own stories is not to be underestimated in terms of the ways in which we may begin to reveal a clearer picture of what it means to be a russophone migrant.

Filming *Out of Place*

Later, for the interpretation of the case study, I selected six stories to form the basis for the film. Similarly to 'red-white-red' still lifes I had made earlier, the aim of the film was twofold. Adding another visual, cinematographic aspect to the audio recordings allowed me to highlight two places presented in the study —the place of origin and the place of memory. The first, the place of origin, was not visually present; it was narrated by voice and manifested itself only through memories evoked by the objects. The second, the place of residence, formed the present location, where the objects are currently displayed. Working with moving image allowed me to construct a detailed portrait of the second place by filming the environments of the respondents' houses.

Another aim of the film was to reconsider some of the existent practices in documentary photography and filmmaking. In the eyes many documentary photography and film act as a signifiers of the truth. The idea of documentary being a transparent reflection of the world had arisen already in 1939 by the art critic Elizabeth McCausland who compared the 'the truth of the documentary photography with the truth of a financial page or unemployment report'.[105] This idea of documentary as a voice of truth became a reason for the later criticism of a genre in the middle of twentieth century.

However, this was not the only reason for critisim. Martha Rosler accused documentary photography of reducing poverty and famine to something like a natural disaster, which could not be overcome. 'Documentary', writes Rosler, 'is a little like horror movies, putting a face on fear and transforming threat into

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[105] Elizabeth McCausland. Documentary Photography, in *Documentary*, ed. by Jullian Stallabrass, (Whitechappel Gallery and MIT Press: 2013), p. 27.

fantasy, into imagery. One can handle imagery by leaving it (it is them, not us)'.[106] This echoes another sharp statement made by Susan Sontag saying that most phototographs do not keep an emotional charge and thus corrupt the conscience.[107] Although Rosler was speaking about the documentary photography, the same can be applied to the documentary fillmaking.

Another common argument against documentary as a genre has been to do with what it excludes from its view. Today the reality and the truth are staged by the media, and documentary photography and footage play a crucial role in this process. On the one hand, we have representations of wars that are staged so as to show off the power of the state[108], on the other, we can observe how certain subjects are being deliberately excluded from the view. A striking example of that is found in the work of Alfredo Jaar who observed the lack of material about Africa in Life magazine from 1936 until 1996: the rare occasions of published texts about Africa were mostly reduced to featuring animals.

Additionally, documentary was widely used as a tool of visual anthropology and as such it was widely criticised within postcolonial discourse for constructing the cultural or racial Other, as essentially and fundamentally different, as fixed within difference. Numerous studies of the ethnographic photography of colonial time pointed on a 'colonial gaze' projected onto other cultures. Ethnographic photography treats its models almost like rare species to be put in an album; it tries to catalogue and classify the colonised.[109] The power of the supposed objectivity of the documentary supported the hierarchies of the power and existing ideology.

But nevertheless, on the basis of that criticism, documentary photography and filmmaking began to re-invent itself. The juxtaposition of the 'authenticity' of the documentary and experimentation in artistic moving image has been questioned in many works. In recent decades, artists have been widely using moving image and photography to explore documentary themes, often experimenting with structure, form and content of films or images. One such example is the work of Ahlam Shibli, a Palestinian photographer, who explores notions of homeland and belonging particularly in relation to Israel and Palestine. Another example is the work of Laurent van Lancker, who uses different sensorial, narrative and collaborative strategies to create his documentaries. His film '*Disorient*' (2011) uses

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[106] Martha Rosler. In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography), in *Documentary,* ed. by Jullian Stallabrass, (Whitechappel Gallery and MIT Press: 2013), p. 124.

[107] Susan Sontag. *On Photography,* in Documentary, ed. by Jullian Stallabrass, (Whitechappel Gallery and MIT Press: 2013), p. 118

[108] As it was brilliantly described in a number of Jean Baudrillard's essays

[109] See for example: Sarah Pink. *Doing Visual Ethnography*. (Sage Publications: 2001) or *Unfixed Projects*, ed. Sara Blookland and Asmara Pelupessy (Jap Sam Books: 2011)
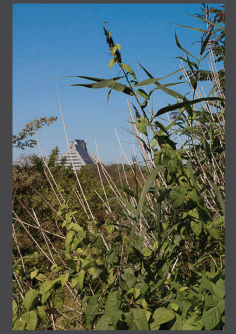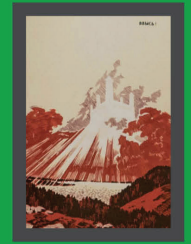
Figure 10. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *The Castle of Light*. From *Out of Place* series.
In *The Castle of Light* (see the story on the p. 75 in the appendix of the thesis) the participant uses an illustration from a book featuring the imaginary Castle of Light to speak about the 'real' Castle of Light, the eponymous recently constructed building of the National Library. This print is featuring the two castles – the one in the book, and the library itself.

a synchronicity of image and sound to create a polyphony of voices forming one narrative. The Otolith Group collective (founded in 2002 by Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar) questions the documentary by using found material and treating filmmaking as an integrated post-studio practice.

Visual ethnography presented a concept of a participatory and collaborative photography that implies a more equal relationship between a photographer and a model. Sarah Pink describes several case studies when Guinean women did not want to be photographed in their usual dresses in their everyday life, but preferred staged photographs in European dress and with their best jewellery on. 'I could not take the 'documentary' images of everyday life that I had anticipated', admits Pink,

Figure 11. *Out of Place* project. An Installation view from the PhD conference *'Interactions with the Real'*, Royal Holloway (2015).

'but I learned how local women wanted to represent themselves'.[110]

Renzo Marten's project proposes that local Congo people take advantage of the greatest resources they have — their poverty — to document themselves and make a profit out of this activity. Another project, *Slum TV*, was set up with the goal of documenting the lives and stories of people in Mathare slums, Nairobi, which are home to 500,000 people. *Slum.TV* achieved this by placing the tool of self-representation in the hands of the slum dwellers.

Outcomes

I wanted the *Out of Place* film to be positioned in the field of experimental documentary, and to work both as a stand-alone screen-based piece and for the gallery space, to be integrated into the installation. The stories of participants were cross-cut to create a non-linear narrative that will draw attention to the multiplicity of truth rather than creating one 'authority' voice. I intentionally decided to keep the original sound of participant's speech and not to over-dub it with the English

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[110] Sarah Pink. *Doing Visual Ethnography*, (Sage Publications: 2001)).

translation as the way the particpant spoke, the intonation of their voices were highly important for this project.

The location shootings were made when I already had a number of stories recorded. I wanted the film to reflect the equivocal nature of the project, with a narrative formed by a choir of voices. In order to do that, I first selected stories that would have different attitudes to the past (critical, ironical, nostalgic, emotional etc). Later the stories were cross-cut to place stress on the idea of the collective sense of identity. For the same reasons, I decided to feature in the film just the objects and the environment of the participants' habitat, and to conceal their faces. The invisibility of participants has both artistic and political reasons. On the one hand, the concealment of the faces evokes the fact that quite often, the voices of this community are silenced; on the other, their invisibility draws more attention to the way they speak — the intonation, emotion and musicality of spoken word.

In November 2016, the *Out of Place* case study was exhibited as an audio-visual installation during the PhD conference '*Interactions with the real*' organised by Royal Holloway. The installation included the photography work, audio recordings and the objects themselves. Almost at the same time, The Foundry (Vauxhall's social justice and human rights centre) together with Beaconsfield gallery delivered a project with a similar approach. The project called *The Migrant Experience* was organised together with telecommunications company Lebara. The Lebara employees (many of whom are migrants themselves) researched over 700 individual migrant stories from across the world. Some of these stories were Lebara employees' own experiences and others were sourced by interviewing people who lived in their local community. The exhibition in the Beaconsfield gallery featured objects that emigrants brought, along with the transcription of their stories. Other images produced by employees of Lebara were people holding single words.

While *The Migrant Experience* had some common ground with the O*ut of Place* project, there were some significant differences as well. The O*ut of Place* project was based on the spoken word, and most of the challenges of the project came out of the necessity to translate the spoken word into other languages. The narratives were formed not just by the plot,) but also (and sometimes even more) by how they stories were told. The intonation and musicality of the spoken word had enormous significance in this project.

In 2016 I have presented *Out of Place* film in Latvia during *2Annas Short Film Festival* and in London during *Communicating the Intangible* RCA School of Communication Research in Progress Show. Both events allowed me to communicate my research to a broader public, and to see how general audience perceives my work.

Conclusions

The *Out of Place* case study looked at how an identity of place manifests itself through objects and people's stories, and how oral history recordings and photography can be used as tools in the construction of the identity of/with a place. The case study revealed a variety of ways in which migrants think of their place of origin, their new location, and about themselves as such. The oral history as a method allowed to enable counter and private memories to enter into the cultural sphere to disrupt ground narratives and common uninformed perceptions. The case study provided a new methodological approach towards a study of a place by constructing an identity of a place through the narrated experiences of participants. A use of objects as prompts proved to be an effective tool to trigger conversations and memories.

The second case study (*Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod*) was set to test a different methodological approach. It was established to research how the identity of place could be constructed through the means of photographical (and video) representation but in the meantime maintaining a participatory element within it. I was particularly interested in how memory and identity are embedded in an urban landscape. In a way, the second case study was a return to my initial idea of describing the city as a palimpsest; as a text that constantly re-writes itself. However, this time my approach was informed by critical theory and human geography. In particular, I was drawing on the notion of place as a combination of different social practices, and as a product of our relations as described by Doreen Massey[111]. In that sense, geography is understood as a geography of power in the way that the distribution of social relations mirrors the power relations within our society[112].

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[111] Doreen Massey on Space. Social Science Bites. (Feb, 2013),
<http://www.socialsciencespace.com/2013/02/podcastdoreen-massey-on-space/>,
[accessed 12th of May 2015]

[112] Ibid.

Figure 12. Natalja Vikulina. (2015) From *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* series.

Chapter 3
Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod. Case Study Two.

Describing place through lenses

Edward Relph argues that for most purposes it appears that 'the image of a place is its identity and that to understand something of the social structure of images is an essential prerequisite for understanding identity'[113]. For him an image is 'a mental picture that is the product of experiences, attitudes, memories, and immediate sensations' that is used '…to interpret information and to guide'[114]. The following chapter gives an overview of my second case study, *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod*, where I explore the role of photographical representation (in the form of landscape photography) in the construction identity of a place.

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[113] Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness*, (Pion Limited: 1976), p.58.

[114] Ibid, p. 58.

There are several reasons why a photographic image works so successfully in establishing an identity of place. One of the reasons, as Liz Wells suggests, lies in the fact that photography contributes to characterising sites as particular types of places within the order of things. She writes,

> The photographic image, in its precision and detail, operates topographically and metaphorically. The image itself evokes mood, a sense of what it might be to actually experience this place. The viewer of the image responds in terms of a nexus of aesthetic judgement, emotional recognition, identification empirical appreciation. Unlike the relatively unbounded experience of looking, photography defines and frames, suggesting particular ways of seeing.[115]

Another reason, and this is especially the case for the documentary photography, lies in the 'authenticity effect', that is sometimes believed to be embedded in photography. It is quite common to hear that photography is objective (by coincidence, this is the word used to describe lenses in French, Russian and English), authentic and thus trustworthy. However, the authenticity of a photograph can really be questioned. As John Berger observes, if the photograph isn't tricked in one way or another it is authentic like a trace of an event. However, this event was isolated from all other events that came before it and which go after it. It has been seized from that ongoing experience which is the true authenticity. Photographs are both authentic and not authentic, whether the authentic side of photographs can be used authentically or not depends on how you use them.[116]

The supposition that documentary has an authority of truth because of not being manipulative is false — photography by its nature is manipulative. As a creative act, photography consists of numerous decision-making acts (choosing the subject matter, angle, lighting, exposure etc.), each of which could be described as discriminative or manipulative. All these details contribute to different interpretations. Ideology is embedded even in the single viewing position that most cameras use, and that contributes so much to 'the Cartesian ego-centrality'[117] of the photograph. We also can change the reading of a photo by placing it in a certain sequence or in a certain context — a technique that was widely used by many contemporary photographers.

Photography has a long history of contribution to the formation of national identity. Jens Jäger, taking mid-19th century Germany and Britain as an example, gives a historical study of how landscapes images contributed to the formation of

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[115] Liz Wells. *Land Matters. Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*,(I.B. Tauris: 2012), p. 56.

[116] John Berger. Interviewed in *The Authentic Image,* Screen Education, #53/3, Autumn/Winter, 1979/1980.

[117] Liz Wells. *Land Matters. Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity,* (I.B. Tauris: 2012), p. 40.

national identity.[118] Looking at the reception of landscape photographs, Jäger traces when and how the new medium was incorporated into the construction of national identity. He notes, that the ability of the photograph to represent required among other things (such as the existence of national movement and a receptive public) an intellectual framework in which landscape photographs could be read. According to Jäger, this intellectual framework consisted of three elements. The first one is the 'authenticity effect of the photograph, that already has been discussed above — it allowed viewers to interpret landscapes as 'true' representations of nature. The second element required the photographed landscape to be embraced as a national symbol. That means that there should be 'a strong connection between certain landscapes on one hand, and the national virtue on the other'[119]. Third element required prevailing aesthetic conventions 'to frame the viewing of landscapes and steer the interpretation of landscape photographs'[120].

Liz Wells, in her book '*Land Matters. Landscape photography, Culture and Identity*',[121] shows a more recent example of how photography was used to construct an identity of a place by discussing the publication '*National landscape*', produced by the Finnish Ministry of the Environment (1993). The publication includes photographs (and other visual materials from 27 locations), all of which testify variously to regional tradition and heritage. There are countless examples where photography has been used to create the official discourse of the identity of a place, and the example Liz Wells gives is one of many. However, says Wells, photography can easily contribute to unsettling aspects of cultural identity through offering evidence which does not 'fit' — such as pictures of airports or factories.

The representation of land as landscape has a long history in establishing the notion of national identity. However, the same ability can be used to unsettle and disrupt official discourses. One of the iconic examples is Anselm Keifer's series of self-portraits in boots and breeches making the Nazi salute on different European sites. The photographs called '*The Heroic Symbols*' were a documentation of the artist's performance '*Occupations*' (1969). The sequence of eighteen black and white photographs – some with ironic captions such as: '*Anselm Kiefer. Between the summer and autumn of 1969, I occupied Switzerland, France and Italy. A few photos*' – obviously acted as a parody.

Another example where photography and the representation of landscape were used to unsettle the ideological narrative can be found in the project '*Territories of Waiting*' by Assaf Shoshan, a Paris-based artist of Israeli origin. The photography book with eponymous name, published to accompany the project, starts with

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[118] Jens Jäger. Picturing Nations: Landscape Photography and National Identity in Britain and Germany in the Mid-Nineteenth Century , in *Picturing Place*, ed. by Joan M Schwartz and James R. Ryan., (I.B.Tauris: 2003).

[119] Ibid, p. 119.

[120] Ibid, p. 119.

[121] Liz Wells. *Land Matters. Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*, (I.B. Tauris: 2012).
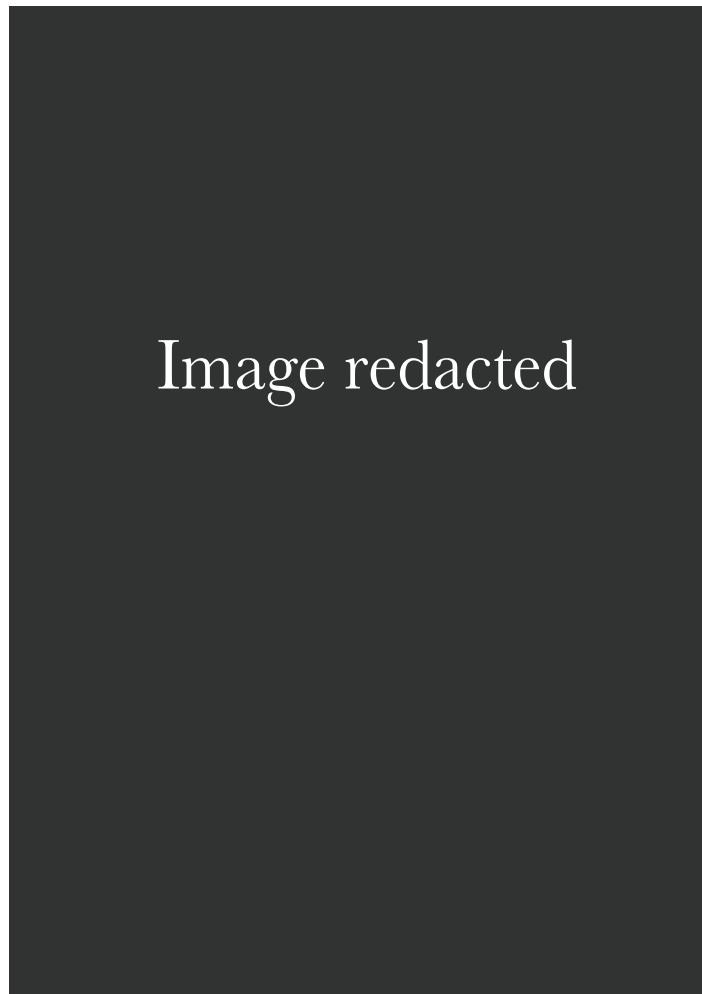
Figure 13. Anselm Keifer (1969). *Occupations.*

landscapes marked by interventions of military forces.[122] The opening image depicts a fortress in Gesher, built during the British Mandate in Palestine. The idyllic pastoral landscape, set in green fields and with mountains in the background, contrasts with the concrete walls and black eye sockets of the empty window frames of the fortress. The following photographs in the book unsettle the idyllic opening image. As we progress through the book, the marks of war on the landscape are more and more obvious.

Gil Pasternak in the essay '*Ground narratives*' observes that the sites depicted in Shoshan's project, 'are related to the grand ideological and historical narrative created by Israeli State about its establishment'.[123] The images produced by Shoshan unsettle this narrative and raise 'questions about Israel's policies and attitudes towards its non-Jewish habitants'.[124] The underpinning concern is even

[122] Assaf Shoshan. *Territoires de l'attente,* (Diaphane éditions: 2013).

[123] Gil Pasternak, Récits d'un territoire/Ground Narratives, in Shoshan, Assaf, *Territoires de l'attente* (Diaphane éditions: 2013), p 71.

[124] Ibid, p. 72.

more enhanced by three family portraits of Sundanese asylum seekers, presented as a subseries in the '*Territories of Waiting*'. Assaf Shoshan uses the same strategy — the first photograph in the subseries creates an idyllic postcard-like image similar to the one presented at the very beginning of the book. The first image is made 'in compliance with the convention and visual vocabulary of family photography' (all adults wear smiles, the family is holding hands) and, as Gil Pasternak points out, depicting Sudanese asylum seekers this way, 'evokes an idealised vision of social stability'.[125] However, the apparent harmony of the first image is disrupted by the second and third image.[126]

Research question

If my first case study was set to explore how the identity of a place can be constructed through the narrated experiences of the participants, then in my second case study (*The Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod)* I wanted to test a different methodological approach. The case study was established to look at how an identity of a place can be constructed through the means of photographic and video representation.

The case study emerged as a result of my residency in the Volga Branch of the National Centre for Contemporary Art (*NCCA*). The residency seemed to be a good opportunity to test ideas as the brief presented by the curators of the residency coincided with Massey's notion of place. In a '*A Global Sense of Place*', Massey noted that it is not uncommon for the search after the real meanings of place, locality, and the unearthing of heritages to be interpreted in part as a desire for fixity and for security of identity in the midst of all movement and change. To her, this idea of place is necessarily reactionary and can lead to such things as reactionary nationalism or introverted obsessions with heritage[127]. This is precisely the same problem described by curators of the residency in *NCCA*. The problem, as suggested by the curators, lay in the lack of a particular kind of knowledge about the city: a self-reflective knowledge, that would derive from the understanding of the city as a complex being, which exists as a dialogue between different social,

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[125] Ibid, p. 74.

[126] Gil Pasternak employs the analysis of the language of family photography to show how Shoshan disrupts this 'idealised vision'. On the second picture (*Asylum seekers II*) the couple sit side by side, each holding a child. Siama (the female figure) wears a smile and 'seems to be prepared for photographic moment', however Taaban's (the male figure) gaze turns not to the camera, but to Siama as if to question his position. The third image seems to be even more removed from the 'idealised vision' of the first photograph: there is just one adult alongside the children, the family is incomplete; nobody is smiling.

[127] Doreen Massey. *A Global Sense of Place*,
<http://www.unc.edu/courses/2006spring/geog/021/001/massey.pdf>,
[accessed 29th of May 2015], p.5.

Figure 14. Natalja Vikulina (2016). An installation view featuring '*Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod*' case study during *Communicating the Intangible* Exhibition, RCA).

cultural or historical elements. While there are many institutions that are involved in a process of production and reproduction of knowledge about the city, there is a number of reasons why the knowledge they produce can be problematic; one is that they look at the city retrospectively, perceiving it as something static, as something frozen in the past and ignore its contemporary state of being, its dynamic.

Based on this view, history is understood as something that has already happened and culture is intended to reproduce the discourses of the 19th and 20th centuries. Such an attitude towards the city discourages city dwellers from having a real interest towards the place they live. If the past is a museum or a monument, then between a city and city dwellers a wall arises, even if this wall is made of glass.

The residency was located in Nizhny Novgorod, the fifth largest city in Russia situated 400 km east of Moscow. The very location of the residency offered a lot of possibilities for the case study. During much of the Soviet era, the city was closed to anyone not residing in it in order to safeguard the security of Soviet military research and production facilities. Anyone who didn't have a residency permit needed to apply for special permission to enter. Despite the decline of military production since Soviet times, Nizhny Novgorod is still a major industrial city with some military factories still functioning, and the atmosphere of the 'closed city' is still there.

Remarkably, Nizhny Novgorod was a hometown and a place of residency for two of the founders of Russian photography school — Andrey Karelin (1837-1906) and Maksim Dmitriev (1858-1948). Both photographers contributed a lot to the development of photography as a medium, but also thoroughly documented the city. Much of the views of Nizhny Novgorod of that period are known by their photographs. However, after that period most of the areas of Nizhny Novgorod (except the central one) have not been documented. The residency offered also a possibility to fill that gap and document the everyday life of the city, drawing upon the tradition set by Dmitriev and Karelin.

Landscape as a Picture and Landscape Being Pictured

The aim of my second case study (*Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod*) was to explore how place manifests itself through the landscape, and to look at how photography contributes to establishing the identity of place.

W.J.T. Mitchell observes in '*Landscape and power*' that landscape is best used as a verb, but not a noun.[128] 'To landscape' is to impose a certain order. We can also say, bearing in mind Doreen Massey's notion of 'geography of power'[129] that 'to landscape' is to impose power relations, and the representations of landscape would necessarily mirror the power relations within our society.

The landscape came into the history of painting mostly as a cultivated land, and this position immediately defined the viewer's relation to nature. Nature was perceived mostly as an object. The viewers were situated out of the landscape. They were at least observers, but sometimes also owners of the object. Perhaps that is why the landscapes were commissioned to be painted by landowners not only as a decoration of the sitting room, not only to emphasise the social position and the prosperity of the owner, but also as proof of the ownership of the land. In the European painting tradition, landscapes were not just beautiful pictures with stunning views but, to a certain extent, political manifestos.[130]

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[128] W.J.T. Mitchell. *Landscape and Power,* (University of Chicago Press: 2002).

[129] Doreen Massey. On Space. Social Science Bites. Feb, 2013
<http://www.socialsciencespace.com/2013/02/podcastdoreen,-massey-on-space/>,
[accessed 12th of May 2015].

[130] It is interesting that if we trace the etymological meaning of the word 'landscape' we fill find that it has connotations not of nature, but rather of ownership, identity and society.
If we break the compound word 'landscape', which came into English from the Dutch language, we will get the two parts: the word 'land' and the suffix '-scap' or '-schap'. The '-scap' corresponds to the English suffix '-ship', denoting, among other meanings, the state or condition of being something. Some researchers (see for example Kari Jormakka's article on architectural landscapes) point out that following the etymological trail further, we get to the older stem 'skep' which leads us to the German verb 'schaffen' and to the Swedish verb 'skapa', both meaning to create. As for the word 'land', etymologically it too has some interesting connotations. Kari Yormakka claims that it comes from an old English 'land' or 'lond', signifying 'a definite portion of the ground', 'the home region of a person or people' or 'territory marked by boundaries'. All these etymological roots could indicate that, in the beginning, the word 'landscape' might have political and economical connotations.

Figure 15. Natalja Vikulina. (2015) From *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* series.

In this project, landscape is addressed both in terms of the painting tradition, and as a social construct changing and defining itself all the time. I mean 'addressed' not in terms of following the tradition, but rather, in appropriating its forms and discourses for critical reflection, As an artist, I appear to be confined by these two polar ends of the landscape.

It was in the beginning of the 20th century when cities started to be described as landscapes, and today the 'city landscape', as a combination of words, is not questioned. Ultimately, what is the city if not a cultivated land? Walter Benjamin, describing the figure of the 'flâneur', a city slacker and a researcher under one hat, says that the city 'opens up for him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room'.[131]

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[131] Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project,* transl. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Harvard University Press: 1999), p.888

Despite having a camera, I am partly a 'flâneuse'[132] as well, spending hours strolling in the city. And it is exactly by taking the position of the 'flâneuse' that I am able to combine two different poles of the landscape. When photographing a city, I also photograph an invisible image of myself on the other side of a camera, and the traces of the presence of a man are also my traces. Long walks turn myself from the observer into the participant.

Methods, Methodology and Processes.

The project *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* was developed in collaboration with Olga Chernyavskaya, a sociologist from National Research University Higher School of Economics. Her previous research on the inclusion of the city dwellers of Nizhny Novgorod provided background for this project. One of the key elements of the case study, in terms of methods and methodology, was the use of walking as a method. During the residency, we organised eight walks, each dedicated to a particular district. The walks were designed by Olga Chernyavskaya so as to catch not only the central and most representative (from the public viewpoint) locations, but also residential and industrial areas, as well as shopping and recreational areas. This provided an opportunity to give voice to those parts of the city that are usually considered to be too banal or not interesting enough to be photographed. The documentation of the walks included the building of an archive of more than a 1000 images, as well as video footage.

The use of walking as an artistic medium is by no means new. As David Evans, an author of comprehensive guide book on the art of walking, mentions, walks were already widely used by artists at the beginning of the 20th century, when 'traversing a city street on foot was treated by every major avant-garde group as a form of creative activity'[133]. For a certain period, performative activities such as walks, were forgotten but then rediscovered again in the second half of the twentieth century in the light of the philosophy of Situationism and Psychogeography.

Artists engaged in walks include Marina Abramovich and Ulay, Francis Alÿs, Richard Long, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Rut Blees Luxemburg to name a few. Moreover, the series of walks (or in Simon King's words, 'walkatives'[134]) aimed at exploring London have been organised regularly within The Royal College of Art by Simon King and Jaspar Joseph-Lester. The walks were used as a trigger for thinking, researching and making[135]. We can also mention a project called

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[132] See Lauren Elkin book '*Flaneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*' for a historical review of 'flâneuses'. [Lauren Elkin. *Flaneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London,* (Chatto & Windus: 2016)].

[133] David Evans. *The Art of Walking: A Field Guide*, (Black Dog Publishing: 2013), p.13.

[134] A neologism coined by Simon King to suggest the idea of walking and talking, but other definitions exist.

[135] The concept of the walkative as described in Walkative blog [https://walkative.wordpress.com/].

'*24 hours noticing*', conducted by a group of communication researchers from RMIT University, with the aim of designing encounters in space and to heighten awareness of space and locale.[136]

Walking as a method was chosen for two reasons. First of all, while walking, we experience our environment differently. Walking takes both time and space; our pace is slower; our experience of the environment is more reflective. As Liz Wells notes, walking becomes an act or process, not merely a means of reaching an end[137]. Another reason why walking is important in this project lies in the fact that it is necessarily interactive: we place ourselves in the situations that allow new encounters to take place.

We used the walks to observe the city and to reflect on it. It was important that we did our walks as a group of researchers coming from different disciplines. In that way, we were bringing together different perspectives and different backgrounds, while sharing methods, observations and reflections. The project was designed so that while sharing the field work, we still could bring the outcomes back to the discourses of our respective practices.

Walking as a drifting technique and a method

As a method walks also bear some elements of participatory and relational art, as many artists engaged in walks (see for example works of Marina Abramovich and Ulay, Francis Alÿs, Richard Long, Lawrence Abu Hamdan) are also quite often engaged (directly or not) in participatory creative activities. As a creative method walking goes back to the concept of the Situationists' *'dérive'*. This concept was originally put forward by a writer and a filmmaker Guy Debord, who introduced it as a 'drifting technique' of 'rapid passage through varied ambiances'. The process often involves a 'playful-constructive behavior' linked to the conditions of urban society.[138] In a dérive, as described by Guy Debord, 'one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there'[139]. This technique of drifting was widely employed by the artists associated with a collective of Situationists International (whose leader and active member was Guy Debord) as a research tool in 'psychogeography', a study of the effects of a given (usually urban) environment on the emotions of the individuals. Claire Bishop suggests that dérives

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[136] Vaughan, L.,Akama, Y. 24 hours noticing: Designing our encounters with place in Elizabeth Grierson, Harriet Edquist and Helene Frichot (ed.) *De-Signing Design: Cartographies of Theory and Practice*, (Lexington Books: 2015), p. 85.

[137] Liz Wells. *Land Matters. Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (I.B. Tauris: 2012), p. 284.

[138] Guy Debord. *Theory of the Derivé*, transl. by Ken Knabb, Situationist International Online. (1956) <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html> , [accessed 28.08.2016].

[139] Ibid.

were one of the main forms[140] of open-ended participatory art in Paris in 1960s. They acted as forms of data gathering for Situationists ' unitary urbanism', an attempt to move beyond and disrupt what they saw as 'a disciplining, homogenising and ultimately dehumanising effect of modernists forms of urban high-rise living'[141].

The walks, we conducted as a part of a residency in Nizhny Novgorod, followed the tradition of the situationists *'dérives'* in several ways. They were designed as field trips to study the area and to observe the emotional and behavioral impact of urban space upon an individual. Designed to include often unrepresented places in the city (such as industrial, suburban and residential areas), the walks also (similarly to *dérives*) allowed the new encounters to take place. Describing a technique of a *dérive,* Guy Debord noted that it is a 'possible rendezvous' that brings a psychogeographer 'to a place he may or may not know', and it might well be that 'the same spot has been specified for a 'possible rendezvous' for someone else whose identity he has no way of knowing', and therefore it is highly encouraged for everyone on a *dérive* to start up conversations with various passersby[142].

The fact that the city was documented through walking, was very important for the research. First of all, it allowed us to experience the environment at more slower pace — thus, allowed time for reflection and noticing. Secondly, walking allowed us to interact with city and city dwellers. One of the interesting findings that came as a result of this method were observations on how city dwellers react on camera. A man with a camera in districts remote from the centre is a sort of abnormal phenomenon. Anywhere apart from the city centre the camera marks its owners as strangers, specifically as strangers who insist on their otherness. Their appearance creates a situation that allows the breaking of everyday patterns.

Quite often, the reaction to a camera was negative, with people fearing that the photographs (even photographs of the city environment) could cause them harm. Sometimes people did not understand the reasons why their surroundings were being photographed ('Why are you shooting this? This is not interesting'). There was also a reaction to a camera as a tool of control, as something that could impose power, but also enforce social change (Please can you make a picture of this? This needs to be reported! We can't go on and live like this!)

The results of the residency were presented during the seminar '*Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod: social, cultural and historical'* held in the National Centre for Contemporary

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[140] Claire Bishops's review of the open-ended participatory art existing in Paris in the 1960s suggests three main forms, existing in Paris in the 1960s : Situationists derives, GRAV (Groupe Recherche d'Art Visuale) situations and the happenings of Jean-Jacques Lebel.

[141] Claire Bishop. *Artificial hells. Participatory Art and Politics of Spectatorship,* (Verso: 2012), pp. 77-79.

[142] Guy Debord. *Theory of the Derive,* transl. by Ken Knabb. Situationist International Online, (1956) <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html> , [accessed 28.08.2016].

Figure 16. Natalja Vikulina. (2015) From *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* series.

Art, Nizhny Novgorod. The case study was presented together with the collaborator sociologist Olga Chernyavskaya, and covered processes, methods and results followed by a discussion with the audience. The seminar gave a lot of information about how the project was perceived. The discussion showed that the majority of the audience did not identify themselves with the districts they are living it, but rather with the central part of a city. The project gained a lot of interest from the audience as an attempt to give voice to unrepresented districts of the city, but also raised questions about how these districts are developed in the future.

Analysis and Interpretation

One of the particular challenges of this case study was the analysis and the interpretation of my photographic images. I intended to examine the representation of urban landscape in order to reveal new patterns and meanings. However, I was also aware that there is no such thing as a 'neutral' view in photography, and even if I tried to be as objective as possible, my views and habits would necessarily be embedded in the work I produce. As Liz Wells observes, representation is an ideological act, but so is looking, since our engagement with

what we perceive is subject to cultural currencies and preconceptions[143]. Thus, the analysis of images included not only the visual records of the city landscape but a reflection on myself making those records as well.

Perhaps, when speaking about ideology embedded in a photographic image, it would be useful to recall a notion of 'resource' widely used in social semiotics. Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama define resources as rules that help us to interpret images. Those rules could differ from laws and mandatory prescriptions to common practices, from the influence of role models to common habits[144].

One of the examples of such 'resources' is 'point of view'. By depicting places, people and things from above or below, we create a meaning potential. Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama note that although it is not possible to say what different points of view will mean exactly, it is possible to describe the kinds of meaning that could be created, such as for example symbolic power relations (looking down on something will give you a symbolic power, looking up at something will impose symbolic power over you; looking frontally will give an impression of involvement, etc). Of course, things like 'power', 'detachment' or 'involvement' are not the meanings of the angles, but rather 'fields of possible meanings', 'meanings potential'.[145] These fields of meanings were widely used in my interpretation of the collected images.

During the period of residency I created more than one thousand images of different city districts as well as six hours of video recordings of the walks conducted. This substantial set of data required a system of analysis. The situation was even more complicated when taking into account the fact that, although we shared a lot of common ground with Olga Chernyavskaya (including the research question for this case study), we operated in different systems of research, with her being positioned in the field of sociology, and myself in the field of art and design.

As a result, we decided to make two different systems of logging the images. One system (developed for Chernyavskaya) had categories by districts of the city. However, for myself, I arranged photographs thematically in different sets such as '*The Art of Walking and Geographical Gaze*', '*The Borderland*', '*The Ruins of Empire*', '*In and Out*' and others. I used critical theory about the representation of the landscape to analyse and reflect on my photography. Taking as a starting point those collections of images, I tried to deconstruct them, highlighting particular types of semiotic resources embedded in them.

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[143] Liz Wells. *Land Matters. Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity,* (I.B. Tauris: 2012), p. 56.

[144] Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama. *Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach in Handbook of Visual Analysis*, ed. Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt (Sage: 2001), p. 135.

[145] Ibid.

This resulted in a series of photo-collages or 'constructed landscapes', where I combined several photographs united by one particular semiotic resource. The series reflected upon such themes as power distribution in the city, isolation, an emotional influence of the urban environment upon an individual. The series constituted from the photographs taken in unrepresented areas of the city, and the whole 'sense of place' contrasted with the official identity of Nizhny Novgorod, represented mostly by the 'historical' part of the city.

The video documentation of the walks was used in a collaborative project '*Psychogeography: a parallel experience*'. The idea of the project was to combine works of video artists, musicians and writers framed within the theme of psychogeography. Specifically for this project, I developed a video work based on the 'go pro' footage from Nizhny Novgorod *dérives.* The film was made in a juxtaposition of the three visual components: video footage (in terms of a moving image), photography (in terms of a still image), and the afterimage (in terms of an image that continues to appear in one's vision after the exposure of the original image).

Our vision is built in such a way that our attention captures moving image first. That is why, in my film, the frame for moving image is mostly given in a smaller size than for the still image. This was designed so as to make viewer go for the moving image first, but then return to the attentive examining of the still. Thus, the still and moving image enter into dialogue with each other, their voices, telling the same story of the city, overlay each other and create a polyphonic description of a place. The project was shown as a live performance at *NCCA*, Nizhny Novgorod on the 15th April, 2016. The performance had a big resonance with more screening to be performed in autumn 2016 in Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod.

Conclusions

The case study '*Landscapes of Nizny Novgorod*' is an examination of the ability of photographic representation to manipulate and thus to transform any preexisting sense of place. In this case study I was looking how the identity of place (specifically Nizhniy Novgorod, Russia) could be constructed through the means of photography and moving image. I was also reflecting on walking as artistic practice and a method of research. Walks, organised and designed by Olga Chernyavskaya, a sociologist from the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Nizhny Novgord) played a central role in this case study. Each walk included not only popular and well known locations, but also residential and industrial areas, as well as shopping and recreational areas. This provided an opportunity to unsettle the official discourse of the representation of the city and to give voice to those parts of the city that are usually considered to be too banal or not interesting enough to be photographed.

Image redacted

Figure 17. Screening of the *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* in the *NCCA*, Nizhny Novgorod, April 2016.

During the period of residency more than a thousand images of Nizhny Novgorod have been created. Drawing upon the notion of resources widely used in social semiotics, the case study provides an example of how photographic images could be analysed and interpreted.

The system of walks developed by Olga Chernyavskaya ensured that the city would be documented systematically, giving a fair attention to every district and different areas within those districts. The conducted research had shown that there is no one identity nor for the city, nor for a district, but rather that identities are re-performed on a daily basis, which proved Massey's theory of place.[146]

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[146] Doreen Massey. *For Space,* (Sage: 2005), p.8.

Conclusions
Afterwords. Looking into the Future

Today, when we witness what is probably the largest ever migration of people, dispossessed by wars and economic instability; when people are moving around the globe at a greater rate and intensity; when the idea of a united Europe starts to crumble in the most peculiar fashion, it is very important for artists and designers to explore creatively the ideas of self, home, belonging, memory and identity.

The contribution this MPhil seeks to make is situated in both methodological and artistic fields, in terms of reconsidering the underlying principles and artistic practices of representation and construction of the identity of/with a place. The definition of place is taken from the works of Doreen Massey, (as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter Three), who looks at place as 'a product of interrelations' predicated upon the existence of plurality. To Massey, space (and place) is not a flat surface across which we walk, but 'a pincushion of a million stories', which allow 'for a multiplicity of trajectories' to take place, speaking literally and metaphorically. [147]

What is important is that this kind of spatial thinking can shake up the manner in which certain political arguments are formulated. Particularly, as Massey points out, this new spatial thinking can warn of 'claims to authenticity based on the notion of unchanging identity' and contribute to 'relational understanding of the world, and of a politics, which responds to that'[148].

However, new spatial thinking requires the exploration of new artistic and design methods that will correspond to democratic approaches that address the problems around place, memory and identity. This research seeks to give an insight into the methods that will address this new spatial thinking.

This practice-based research set out to look at how artistic practices such as photography, moving image and oral history can be a factor in the construction of identity of/with a place. I approach these questions through two case studies focused in different locations and using two different approaches. The first case study (*Out of Place*) looked at how the identity of/with a place could be constructed through people's experiences, while the second case study (*Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod*) observed how an identity of place can be represented through means of landscape photography. Both case studies were focused on a social enquiry of the constructing about 'identity from below'[149].

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[147] Doreen Massey. *For Space* (Sage: 2005), p.9.

[148] Ibid.

[149] See an explanation on the pp. 23-24.

The contribution this thesis seeks to make is situated in both methodological and artistic fields. Through my practice I have employed methods, that advance knowledge about the ways in which place, memory an identity exist in symbiosis. This allowed me to create an identity of a place based on plurality and multiplicity, by enabling counter-narratives to enter cultural sphere and disrupt existing official discourses of identity of place.

Thus, in my first case study O*ut of Place* the identity of place is constructed through the recorded memories of the participants. In the second study, *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* the existing identity of place has been transformed through photographical representaion, which in this case took a form of a 'constructed' landscapes. The system of walks, developed by sociologist Olga Chernyavskaya, allowed to create an identity of a city by including previously unrepresented parts of a city.

Although both case studies in this thesis have been set up to work in a specific place and with a specific group of people, the methods can be easily replicated to work with another community or with another place. The next steps beyond this MPhil involve developing and expanding both of the case studies. The *Out of Place* case study can be developed further by expanding the group of participants to include not only Baltic Russian participants but also ethnic Latvians. This will allow a comparison of attitudes towards place within two given groups. This time I plan to narrow the location from a whole city of Nizhny Novgorod to a small back street. The street, surrounded by industrial areas and having only ten buildings on it, bears the name of William Shakespeare. Using Shakespeare's verses as prompts, I would like to collect people's life stories and present them in a film format. The film would embark on a poetic reflection on a city as a model of a society. As for the *Landscapes of Nizhny Novgorod* case study, I plan to combine the existing approach with the one I tested in the *Out of Place* case study.

The undertaken research had an immense impact on me as a researcher and a practioner. It has expanded my understanding of various disciplines that my research has touched upon (such as human geography and oral history) and how they overlap with my home discipline of visual communication. My practice has also undergone several shifts. From the archaeological approach I used in the beginning of my journey (see for example the *City as Palimpses*t series) I turned to a more participative approach. Overall it gave me confidence to explore the innovative methods within and outside my own field of practice.

My intent is that this study will have merit for other artists and designers interested in exploring themes of place, memory and identity, and for social designers interested in methods of working with different ethnic communities. At the same time, through the exhibition of my works, it is anticipated that there is some relevance for a general audience, particularly migrants, who like myself, have sometimes struggled to come to terms with their own cultural identity in a new place.

Appendix 1:
Examples of Participants' Objects and Words

In this section, I provide selected examples of the stories collected for the *Out of Place* case study. For this project, I interviewed ten respondents of Baltic Russian origin (nine living in London and one based in Nottingham). Respondents were asked to provide a story about an object they took with them from their native country. Overall, participants of the project provided about 30 stories about different objects. Each story represents a particular type of voice (ironical, nostalgic, critical) and the identity of a place is constructed through this plurality of voices.

Figure 18. Natalja Vikulina (2016). *Lenin the Stitched.* Still from *Out of Place* film.

Lenin The Stitched

Age: 39
Years leaving in the UK: 7
Occupation in Latvia: software developer
Occupation in the UK: software developer
Lives in: Hornsey, London

Like every Soviet child, I attended a nursery school. In the school we had a 'quiet hour' – an hour after lunch when every child had to go for a nap. This nap after lunch whetted awful thoughts, because everybody hated it. My bed was located near a bookshelf, which had a standard collection of the books for the school – one war book, one scout book, one book about Lenin and one book from classical children's literature, such as Chukovsky or Marshak. When preparing myself for a nap, I usually opened one of these books so I would have at least two pages of the text to sneak at during this quiet hour. Quite often this was a book about Lenin as it had more text and fewer pictures inside. That is why some moments from Lenin's biography I knew pretty well. Once, an awful incident occurred in this school, an incident that has stuck in my mind ever since. After the quiet hour our teacher

gathered all of us and said that there was a person that put shame on all our group. The teacher increased the tension for a while and then finally said who that evil person was — a boy named Sasha. When Sasha had heard in the assembly about Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and his crucial role in the revolution he decided to tear out the portrait of Lenin from the book and hide it in his boot. The teacher found the book with its torn out page, and then discovered the boot with the portrait and gave Sasha a severe scolding, both in front of the class and later in front of his parents. And I was sitting and thinking how lucky Sasha would be if he managed to steal this portrait of Lenin. Then he would have a large coloured portrait of Lenin at home, something similar to this cross stitched one. This was an interesting combination of a childish and misplaced love for the leader together with a rather standard portrait. And even today when I am looking at the portrait, I still feel pity for Sasha.

Figure 19. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *The Catle of Light*. From *Out of Place* series.

The Castle of Light

In old times, The Castle of Light was part of a legend about Lāčplēsis, but now the Castle of Light – it is the library, of course. It happened so, that the library was built when I was no longer living, so I did not observe how it was constructed, but just heard the quarrels about its construction, and then after a while I saw the building itself.

I am very fond of libraries myself, and the more libraries we have – the better. Well, we could even have just one, but large. But with the Castle of Light it didn't come out very well and smooth. Have you looked at it from the side? It looks like a ski slope for kids. It is very good for rolling down. Especially if you have a snowboard. And you roll down from the roof and go straight into the middle of the road. And then, the roof can also cave in. So you are sitting and reading something by Rainis, and then right on top of you a guy with a snowboard falls down. That would be silly, right? I think, this project is not safe, especially for the city centre.

Figure 20. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *A China Dancing Pair.* From Out of Place series.

A China Dancing Pair

When I am looking at those China figures, I imagine that this girl is not just simply a girl, but she is something like Vaira Vike-Freiberga. I think they are very similar, as Freiberga liked to dress in folk costume and go for a dance. Yes, this girl definitely looks like Freiberga to me. And I think that those associations that I have will never arise in the head of my son. There is a huge gap between the world of my childhood and the world of his childhood. The art-object 'Lenin The Stitched' could possibly unite us, but there is no chance that this porcelain figure of a dancing couple can do the same, because the girl, who is now being led by a boy for a dance, led me out of the country. And now each time my son visits Latvia, he feels very nervous, because as he told me, he doesn't know 'Latin' very well.

The Arsenal Film Festival

It happened so that the movie festival Arsenal appeared when I became interested in such events. I remember that during third (or fourth) Arsenal I got a job at a boarding school. I had to wake up really early so by six I would be at work and wake children up. Therefore I left home at half four or five. And in summer, when Arsenal took place it was quite sunny, so you don't feel like that you're walking in the night, it was completely absent. On the contrary, there was the feeling of sunrise, wonderful weather, and empty streets. We experienced awful financial difficulties and attending the movie festival was difficult. And when you found a good movie you had to decide whether to go to that one, or may be it was worth going to some other good movie. Tickets were expensive, money couldn't be found anywhere, and so in the morning at half four I go to work, and go past the cabinet of ministers. The cabinet of ministers is a puzzling building, where these ministers roam, and they probably have their own life there, and they don't come to work so early. So I go and see that on the stairs there are ten Lati. And ten Lati, for those times – it was a lot of money. At the time for this money you could not only go to one, nor two movies, for this money you could sit in the hall for the whole day. And so it happened that thanks to one forgetful minister I could sit the whole day in a cinema.

At Arsenal there was always a really controversial evening movie, it started really late, at about twelve, its content was never predictable. Generally, a movie that had received good reviews, was not played at midnight. It was usually played slightly earlier. At twelve they put on movies that caused mixed reviews. And I remember that we came, having bought some alcohol and two jars of marinated gherkins, and sat literally on the front seats of the House of the Congresses because few would come to watch movies at twelve. And since my work day started at half four, I would often watch that movie in my sleep. But sometimes I watched them properly. And so we sat comfortably with gherkins, vodka or wine, and we had the feeling of our own private movie theatre. The movie was weird, for example a Korean silent movie, or Iranian movie about strange objects in strange surroundings. Sometimes without even a translation, or with a translation that didn't make it any easier to understand, and I think, that sometimes the translator himself didn't understand and it was in fact his fault. And yet, these sessions left me with reminisences of human warmth and taste of pickled cucumbers.

Figure 21. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *Rigas Laiks Magazine*. From *Out of Place* series.

Rigas Laiks Magazine

From the very beginning, the magazine Rīgas Laiks was published in Latvian, and from the very beginning it was one of the most favourite magazines, which you would read from cover to cover. You might agree with one thing, dislike another, but overall you really enjoyed reading it. Later they introduced the Russian version. And then, while reading it, you really got this feeling as if you were among your friends in Latvia, where you know everyone, and there is a certain locality that could exist only there. That is why you get more pleasure reading the magazine when you are in Riga. But even here, in London, this magazine is a breath of the fatherland.

It is interesting how your attitude changes towards your ex-life in Riga and to the things in that locality, and particularly to the Latvian language. Even the name of Rigas Laiks is in Latvian. You feel much more tenderness towards the Latvian language when you are away from home. When I read the Russian version of the magazine, I see how Latvian words slip in.

Figure 22. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *A Shawl.* From *Out of Place* series.

A Shawl

Age: 42
Years leaving in the UK: 10
Occupation in Latvia: n/a
Occupation in the UK: artist
Lives in: Putney, London

This shawl was given to me by my mother, when I became old enough and began to live independently. It was part of a dowry, which she collected and most of which ended up being useless. She said that this is a Pavlosky shawl. It is one of the a few things from her presents that I really liked. For me, it symbolises my Russian roots– it reminds about something rustic or wealthy business families, about Russian everyday life of our grandparents. Something very traditional and yet — very beautiful. Oddly, most of the things that our parents wanted to give us ended up being completely useless. All those table sets, sets of bed linen, money, kept for deposits, we could take only upon the age of maturity and which by that time turned into a negligible sum. But there are things that don't get old, which let us feel a connection between generations, and remind us of our ancestors. Maybe this is so, because this is such a beautiful thing, a real work of art.

Lophophora williamsii

These cacti are almost my friends. They have been with me for many years. They were given to me by a friend of mine, with whom in our youth we shared a love of psychedelics, especially of the psychedelics of natural origin. He said it was Lophophora williamsii, a hallucinogenic cactus, although I'm still not sure whether this is so. I liked to grow them: they are low-maintenance plants and it is easy to take them along if you are travelling. That is why they moved from Riga to London, and have been with me for many years, moving from one apartment to another.

They gradually grew bigger, got children (in some ways like me) and they keep growing further. With every year I got attached to them more and more. The original plan was to grow them to a decent size, and then to eat them, gaining some interesting experiences. But the time goes by, and with each year I feel more sorry for them. Besides, I'm not quite sure that this is the right type of plant and that I will get the desired effect. Now I just like the way they look, and the fact that they are always with me. It is difficult to have a pet in London, but you always can have a plant. That is why I think of them more as of friends, then anything else.

Figure 24h. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *A Bracelet*. From *Out of Place* series.

A Bracelet

This wooden bracelet was given to me by a friend nearly twenty years ago. We went to an ethnographic museum, and there was a fair of traditional crafts. I am not a big fan of jewellery and normally don't wear it, but I liked this bracelet because it is made from wood. It has a very light feeling – may be this is due to a warmness of the tree; its naturalness. For me it symbolises my connection to Latvia, to its nature, that I enjoy in Latvia the most. It reminds me of the days that we spent with my friend in forests or at the seaside, and of all the things I am lacking here in London. I don't wear the bracelet often, but sometimes it is nice simply to hold it in your arms and remember about the times that passed. It reminds me my youth.

Figure 25. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *An Hourglass.* From *Out of Place* series.

An Hourglass

This hourglass was given to me by my partner's mother. Her son was my first serious and mutual love. We had been living together for seven years. We happened to break up, although we preserved friendly relationships afterwards. He was a very important person to me, but his life took a bad turn and after a few years he tragically died. But I still have a good relationship with his mother and this present is from her.

When I experienced a hard time in my life, and I was all alone in London working, trying to finish college and taking care of my baby, my former partner's mother came to help me. My son was not her grandson, but she spent a couple of months in London looking after him.

This clock is one of my favourite presents. It isn't particularly useful, it simply stands on a shelf, but you can still measure time with it.

During hard moments I used to find comfort while playing with this clock. I was amused by the fact that it only takes one movement to flip it and potential energy becomes kinetic. At that time those clocks symbolised that I could still change something in this world, even though this would be a small thing. This thought comforted me and gave me new strength.

Now, when the hardship is behind me, the clock symbolises simply the flow of time. Time flows, most things change, but memories about our close ones remain with us.

Figure 26`. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *Veronica CD*. From *Out of Place* series.

Veronica CD

Age: 27
Years leaving in the UK: 4
Occupation in Latvia: n/a
Occupation in the UK: tax consultant
Lives in: Maida Vale

This CD has been with me in many countries. Originally it was brought from Latvia by my ex-boyfriend. I wanted to learn Latvian, so I asked him to bring me some good music to make it more engaging. So he brought me this CD, which is made by probably one of the most popular Latvian band. At that moment the band was not well known in Russia, and it was not known in Europe as well. That's how I got to know Prāta Vētra. After that we have moved to Cyprus, and I took this CD with me, then it moved to Bristol, to Edinburgh, then again to Cyprus, and then back to England, this time to London.

I associate this CD not that much with the learning of Latvian language, but with two of its songs. One is called 'Lidmašīnas', which means airplanes. I fly quite often now, and often, when my flight is delayed, I always remember that line 'Kur ir mana Lidmašīna?', where is my airplane.

And the second song is called Veronika, and that is also the name of the album, and by coincidence my name is also Veronika. So, I sometimes vainly think that this song is also about me. More so because there is a line there — something is not right, and that girl now lives in London

Figure 27. Natalja Vikulina (2015). A Draft Paper. From *Out of Place* project.

A Draft Paper

Age: 53
Years leaving in the UK: 26
Occupation in Latvia: musician
Occupation in the UK: musician
Lives in: Nottingham

I needed to avoid the Soviet army. And the only way to avoid it was being sick. So it was common practice to go to a psychiatrist and be declared mentally ill. So I went with my mum, and she took me to a psychiatrist, somewhere in Vecriga. Quite a lot of people I knew went through that doctor, called doctor Bezborodova. She talked to me for five-ten minutes, asking me different questions about my views, about what I do… I turned up in a very hippy style clothes, and she looked at me, and straightaway I could see that she thinks I am ill. She asked me few questions and then asked me to step out of the room and just talked to my mum. And that was literally two minutes. And then I was called back again. And…well… basically she sent me to the mental hospital with a piece of paper on which she made some notes.
And then I asked my mum, what did she tell you? And she said, well I told her, I don't think my son is ill. And she said no, you don't understand, he is very, very ill. It just starts there. It will get worse. He definitely needs to go for a treatment.

So I turned up in a mental hospital, and a doctor looked what the other doctor wrote about me. One was that I am vegetarian. And he said, why

are you vegetarian? And I said, because I don't agree with killing animals. And he said, well, that's understandable. And I was thinking, oh that is not working…. he is actually an intelligent man… —What about reading different philosophers? —Well, I just I find it interesting… —Well, that's quite normal. —What about clothes that you wear? I said, I just wear what I like. He said, well, that's fine. And then he said, what about serving in the Soviet army? And I said, I can't do that, because I am a pacifist. And he said in that case you have to spend some time in this hospital. And I said, ok, thank you.

And so I ended up in a mental hospital. Luckily, he didn't keep me after this, so I was there only for the inspection for two weeks, and for making a diagnosis, and after that, normally I would spend another four months, but I promised him that I gonna go there every week and talk about things and get new prescriptions and everything, and I did, so he said 'I'll let you go home after that'.

In the hospital itself I was very lucky, because as soon as I got the uniform that they wear in a mental hospital, I saw a person I knew — it was my friend's step dad, he was working there, and they had a space in a room for a war veterans, there was one bed free there. So he put me in that room, and I was very lucky, there were only eight people in the room. So it was kind of more cosy than the rest of the hospital, where they had barn beds, and some people slept in the corridor itself.

It was a very depressing time there, obviously, there were a lot of ill people, and some of them would spend all their lives there. And it was literally a corridor and some rooms, a bit like a hostel, and they would never be let out. So I was very lucky in that sense.

And after I was diagnosed with psychopathia, I didn't have to go to the army any more.

Whilst being in hospital, I was the only one on that floor, who was never given any medicine. I really appreciate what that doctor did for me… And after that, he prescribed me something, but I didn't really consume any of that. I would came one week saying, yes, that's working ok, or no that is not working, so he would gave me something else. Just to keep a game going.

There, in that mental hospital, we would have one room with people being treated with insulin. It was believed that schizophrenia can be cured by insulin shock, There were about 4 people who were tied to bed, given an injection of the insulin, and then straight away given an injection of sugar and given the cup of syrup to drink, so the syrup would keep them alive after shock. They looked like zombies, really just wailing in the corridor, their faces without any expression. And I think it was about 30 days' treatment for them. Quite depressing things.

Figure 28. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *A Bike.* From *Out of Place* series.

A Bike

Age: 47
Years leaving in the UK: 3
Occupation in Latvia: teacher
Occupation in the UK: teacher
Lives in: East Finchley, London

It was the first time that I realised that you can bargain in Latvian shops. It was a crisis and I had a limited budget for the new bike. I went to the local bike shop, just on the corner of the street where I lived. I didn't intend to bargain at all, but I liked one of the bikes that was on display. I said to the man who was selling the bikes that I liked this one, but the price was too high for me. I don't remember how much it was, let's say 270 euros. Then the seller asked me how much I was willing to pay. Well, I said, I have just 200 euros. Ok, take it, he answered. Commuting in London is very expensive, so I thought why not bring the bike here? So during one of my visits, I dismantled the bike so I could take it on a plane, then, when I was back in London, I assembled it together, and here it is!

Figure 29. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *A Clay Whistle*. From *Out of Place* series.

A Clay Whistle

Age: 47
Years leaving in the UK: 6
Occupation in Latvia: not in employment
Occupation in the UK: part-time teacher
Lives in: Deptford, London

Here it is, the ceramic whistle, from my friend an artist from Riga. It was my old friend and a dear person, therefore the whistle is also very dear to me as memory of this friend, but also as a memory of Latvia. Latvia is a country of artists. It is a country of artists probably because of the beautiful nature, forests, sea, lakes and fields. Unbelievable beauty. If a man was born and raised in Latvia he absorbs all the beauty and simply cannot not become an artist. Also for me these whistles are a whole epoch.

As young hippies we went to a hippie festival "Kazukas". It is a spring fair, festival of beginning of the spring, coming of the spring different kinds of artists performed on the streets, sold their baubles and other stuff made from dry flowers.

It is a festival of an incredible beauty. We were attracted to ceramic whistles – they come in all different shapes. Those whistles are both a piece of art and a musical instrument. Since we were also street musicians and played recorders, we had a lot of interest in how one can 'capture' sound. We really liked those whistles and wanted to learn how to make them ourselves. Well, dreams come true and one day we somehow got accepted into Latvian society of Jewish culture, where we did ceramics, and by request our tutor introduced us to a woman, a specialist in whistles, who taught us how to make them. All magic turned out to be really simple. I did some for myself, but Lyda became a master, and devoted most of her life to it. She isn't with us anymore, but her creations are still with us. She was a capturer of souls, she breathed in sounds into her every creation.

Figure 30. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *Nothing Special.* From *Out of Place* project

Nothing Special

Age: 37
Years leaving in the UK: 7
Occupation in Latvia: photographer
Occupation in the UK: student
Lives in: Merton, London

I don't have much of valuable things from Riga. I saw this notebook when I was in Riga for a visit. I think it was three or four years ago. I bought it because it says Nothing Special! It is an everlasting genius sentence. This phrase is always with me, since it was said.

There is a Bloomberg interview with Slakteris, who was at that moment a minister of finance. And a correspondent is asking him, what happened in Latvia [the interview was taken during the risks of 2007 — N.V], how did you find yourselves in this situation? And Slakteris says— Nothing special.

Of course the notebook is just a joke, but there is something symbolic in it. There is no value in the notebook, but the phrase is for all circumstances. Whatever happens, you can always say — nothing special!

Figure 31. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *A bottle of medecine.* From *Out of Place* project.

A Box with Medicine

Age: 28
Years leaving in the UK: 8
Occupation in Latvia: n/a
Occupation in the UK: photographer/social media manager
Lives in: Bethnal Green

I come from a medical family, both of my parents were doctors, and actually four
of my grandparents were doctors, and seven out of eight gran-grandparents were
doctors. So I grew surrounded by doctors, but also whenever there was anything
that would hurt, I never had to worry about myself, I would just go: 'mum, there
is pain here', and my mum would sort of produce her magical box with all sorts
of medicines that would magically cure me, and that's one thing that probably…
I need to grew up and address. In that sense I really stayed a child. My mum still
supplies me with all the medicines, and whenever somebody is travelling, she
always sends a package of medicines that she knows is good or she thinks you
should have at home. To be honest, I don't even open it, and when I feel ill, I still
call back home… And I go: Mum, it hurts here, and mum goes ok, there is this
bag with its day on it, you open it, and there is this package… And whenever she
visits, we go to the box and together we make notes, so I actually know what it is.

I kind of feel ashamed — as a grown up person I should be able to take care of myself without her help, and be more proactive, and know what I am taking, but in that aspect I still stayed an absolute child, and all my medicine …if anything happens, and they will have to open the box, they will not know what to give me, because it is all in Latvian, they would just not have any clue what's inside… So yes, without my mum, I still wouldn't be able to cure myself.

Figure 32. Natalja Vikulina (2015). *Faringo Spray*. From *Out of Place* series.

A Bottle of Medicine

Age: 38
Years leaving in the UK: 7
Occupation in Latvia: Financial analyst
Occupation in the UK: Financial analyst
Lives in: Hornsey

Why do I have this at home? It is very simple, I think many of us have integrated here, but the one thing that is difficult to take as it is — it's the local health system, with its motto all: let's hope it will pass by itself. I think that maybe one of the reasons is that we simply do not trust local doctors… I don't know why this is so —may be it is a question of our mentality or may be indeed the national health system is better in Latvia. I don't really know, it is difficult to say.

Appendix 2.
Website Screenshots

Out of Place website (outofplace.rca.ac.uk) was set and designed specifically for documentation and representation of the *Out of Place* case study. The content of the website is accessible in two languages (English and Russian). Below is some examples of website design.
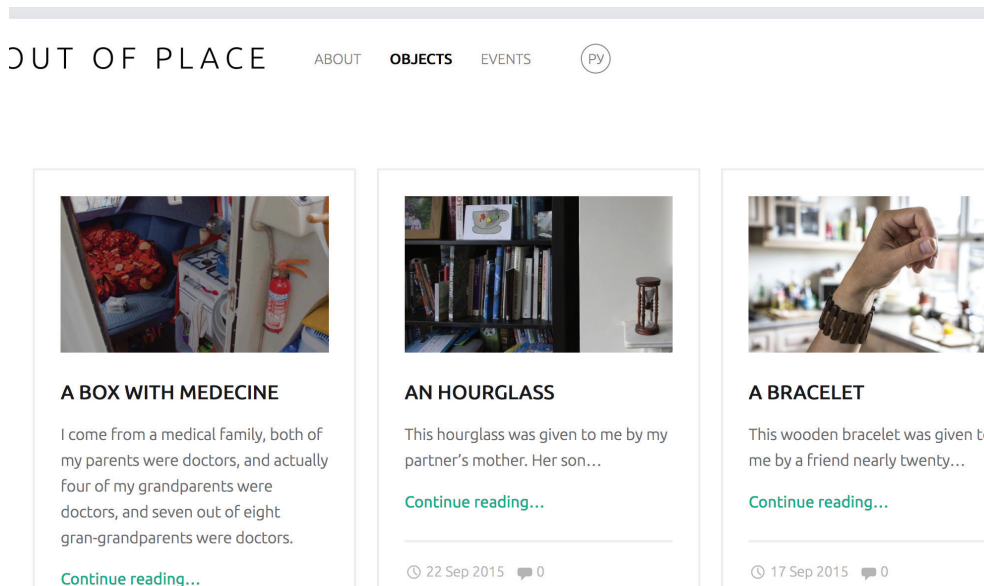

Figure 34. Natalja Vikulina (2015). A screenshot from *Out of Place* website.
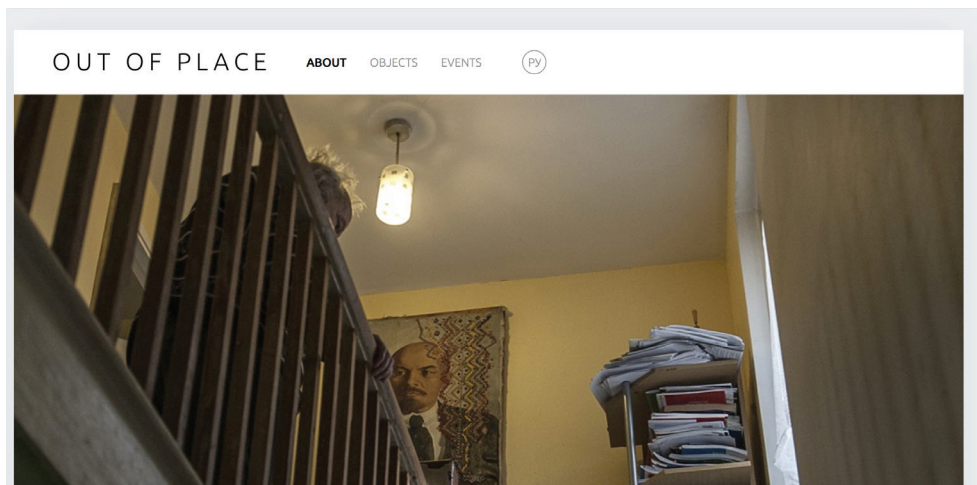

Figure 35. Natalja Vikulina (2015). A screenshot from *Out of Place* website.

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