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Abstract

The article discusses the issues of art and memory after the Holocaust in the artistic works of Tomasz Pietrasiewicz: a theatre director and a culture animator. The focus is on the following two questions. The first one is about the context in which his "theatre of memory" is functioning, that is also about the cultural factors shaping the memory of people living in the realities of Lublin at the turn of the 20th/21st c. The second one pertains to the art and the artist's condition: what language and means of expression does he use, and why does he do it at all, why has he decided to take responsibility for the city's tragic history? The text consists of six parts. The first part describes the origin of the Theatre, the second one explains the notion of "islands of time" as an interpretation tool, the third part presents urban semiotics of Władysław Panas, the fourth one provides a description of an "utopian" project: "Lublin. 43 thousands", conceived here as a universal machine of memory, the fifth one concerns the mysteries and installations, understood as archaeology of memory, and the sixth part discusses the artist's responsibility.

Key words

Holocaust, Lublin, art, Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre, utopia.

Resumen

Este artículo trata el tema del arte y la memoria posteriores al Holocausto, en las obras artísticas de Tomasz Pietrasiewicz: un director de teatro y animador cultural. Se centra en dos ejes. El primero es el contexto en el que funciona su "teatro de memoria", y gira alrededor de los factores culturales que dan forma a la memoria de las personas habitantes de Lublin a comienzos del siglo XXI y finales del siglo XX. El segundo eje está relacionado con el arte y la condición del artista: el lenguaje y los medios de expresión que usa, el porqué de sus acciones; ¿por qué decidió responsabilizarse por la trágica historia de la ciudad? El texto tiene seis partes: la primera describe el origen del teatro; la segunda explica la noción "islas de tiempo" como herramienta de interpretación; la tercera parte presenta las semióticas urbanas de Władysław Panas, la cuarta muestra una descripción del proyecto "utópico": *"Lublin. 43 thousands",* que se entiende como una maquinaria universal de memoria. La quinta parte tiene que ver con los misterios e instalaciones, entendidos como la arqueología de la memoria, y la sexta parte trata la responsabilidad del artista.

Palabras clave

Holocausto, Lublín, arte, Centro Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre, utopia.

Resumo

Este artigo toma por tema a arte e a memoria após o Holocausto, nas obras de arte de Tomasz Pietrasiewicz: um diretor de teatro e animador cultural. Centra-se em duas questões. A primeira é o contexto no qual funciona seu "teatro de memória", levando em conta os fatores que dão forma à memoria das pessoas morando em Lublin na volta do século XX para o século XXI. A segunda questão está relacionada com a arte a a condição do artista: a linguagem e os meios de expressão que utiliza, o motivo das suas ações, por que ele decidiu responsabilizar-se pela trágica história da cidade? O texto tem seis partes: a primeira tem a ver com a origem do teatro, a segunda explica a noção de "ilhas de tempo" como ferramenta de interpretação, a terceira mostra as semióticas urbanas de Władysław Panas, a quarta descreve o projeto "utópico": "Lublin. 43 thousands", entendido como uma maquinaria universal de memória. A quinta parte é sobre os mistérios e as instalações, entendidos como a arqueologia da memória; e a sexta parte é sobre a responsabilidade do artista.

Palavras-chave

Holocausto, Lublin, arte, Centro Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre, utopia.

Analecta **Política**

Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, a theatre director and a culture animator, the head of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre, lives and works in Lublin, a city on which a Nazi German concentration camp Majdanek has left its mark: almost all its Jewish inhabitants perished during the World War II. The artist decides to assume, as it were, moral responsibility for this and undertakes a task of reviving the memory of Shoah, fended off by Lublin citizens for various reasons which only emblematically could be defined as historical, political or social. After almost thirty years – counting from the date the Theatre was established – the time has come to create a synthesis of his memory-related work. We talk here about a multifaceted phenomenon which transforms the personal and collective perception of seemingly forever frozen realities of both the past time and urban spaces – their semantic topography. This phenomenon, and precisely a process, is unfinished, opened to further stages, planned *for eternity*. Thus, any intellectual comprehension of it can only be an attempt, an approximation or a conceptual touch, with the hope for reconciliation or communication with it, for repetition and going again through the things witnessed oneself, as the author (of this paper) says. With a conviction that its significance reaches far beyond Lublin's experiences and confirms a rule that only the things which are unique and individually experienced are universal and truly human.

Let us notice that the focus here is not on so-called postmemory. Pietrasiewicz's artistic work does not have its sources in trauma and mourning of the second generation, children and grandchildren of the survivors. The artist and his friends do not aim at commemorating the fate of their relatives and do not address their artistic statement at descendants of victims, at least not primarily at them. So, the question is on how to formulate this statement, what language to use in order to duly commemorate. And what should commemoration mean in this context? If we tried to reconstruct today the way of thinking of Lublin artists, surely dynamic and changing throughout the past decades, we would notice that these questions made them aware of the need to provide contemporary people with such knowledge and sensitivity which they would be able to assimilate and combine with the categories that shape their own world. The artists had to accept the fact, well-known in the social sciences, that any memory is always to a certain degree "collective memory" – it is always co-determined by the social categories influencing the selection and communication of memory, even if these categories pertain only to an individual person and his or her internal self-communication (Ankersmit, 2001). They must have conclude that what remains in memory from the past is only what "the society in each era can reconstruct within its contemporary frame of reference" (quoted from Halbwachs after Assmann, 1995, p. 130). Hence, what should reconstruction of the past look like in order to preserve its results in memory of

people living in the realities of Lublin at the turn of the 20th/21st and not associated with this past either by succession of generations or family relationships, or on the basis of cultural identity? What should be their "frame of reference" and which mental constructs should it encompass to bind these people with the past, through memory-based, cognitive but also responsible relationships?

A formal note: a description and interpretation of the installations and public mysteries created for twenty years (1997–2017) within the "theatre of memory", as called by Pietrasiewicz, must obviously be selective and limited in a brief article. This relates both to the illustrative material analysed and to the enormous literature on theory of memory and Holocaust-related art (Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2010; Stone, 2015).

Freedom – the genesis of the Theatre

The NN Theatre was established in 1990, originally as a theatre, and then gradually transformed into a cultural institution run by the local government, and the centre of artistic and cultural activities in the Lublin Old Town, in the Grodzka Gate. The leaders of the Theatre came from the student culture of the 1970s and 1980s –probably the most fruitful decades in the whole history of student movements (if we adopt such a category) in Poland. At that time, students were sort of privileged by the Communist government, which resulted from calculations of these authorities– the calculations ultimately detrimental to the regime, as was luckily proven by history.

On the one hand, young ambitious culture creators had some opportunities, even though limited, to travel abroad to the West, so they made use of invitations to performances and festivals received from there. They aroused great interest behind the Iron Curtain – the inviters were attracted by their exoticism and were curious to know the opinions of young people born and raised in an enslaved world. On the other hand, these young people were not so much allured by the attractions of the consumer society, but by the air of freedom. They were the intellectual elite in their homeland, so they did not go primarily to earn their living, but to search for values. While being abroad, they met and tried to make contact e.g. with the authors banned by the Communist government, they avidly read their books and secretly smuggled these books to Poland, putting themselves at risk of severe penalties. These were such authors as (to mention just those most probably known also to non-Polish readers): Czesław Miłosz, Witold

Gombrowicz, Bohumil Hrabal, Vaclav Havel or Joseph Brodsky. Moreover, young artists read Dostoyevsky and listened to songs of the bards: Vladimir Vysotsky, Bulat Okudzhava or Leonard Cohen. Freedom, as an idea rooted in high culture with strong emancipation impulses, shaped their imagination and perception framework through which they viewed the world. It provided them with an alternative life in the so-called real socialism. The Western forms of the alternative culture at that time –sexual revolution, feminism, ecology, rejection of the mass culture and so on– had strong political connotations in the Eastern European version, as these ideas were associated with participation in the democratic opposition –but also social implications– since they resulted in intergenerational conflicts between nonconformism of young people and conformism of the older generation –parents who frequently were somehow settled and reconciled to the existing government system.

This context, fundamental to the identity of young students-artists, loses its significance together with the downfall of Communism, even though emancipation discourse remains alive. To set free from the heritage of Communism – this is the guiding principle of the creators of the student theatre after 1989. In Lublin, this principle leads them to the need to revise views on history of the city where before World War II almost one-third of the inhabitants were Jewish. This used to be their home for five centuries. Almost all of them (among 120 000 citizens of Lublin there were near 43 000 Jews) perished during the Holocaust, mostly in Majdanek, one of the largest concentration camps, situated within the borders of Lublin, and in a German death camp in Bełżec near Lublin. Since the end of 1941 Germans systematically implemented the plan of extermination of Jews, completed with liquidation of the ghetto on 9 November 1942. Germans razed to the ground the whole Jewish district of Lublin and the socialist state removed what was left, by building in this area a square for the purposes of a parking lot, as well as communication arteries of the city.

Islands of Time

If cultural memory is supposed to consist in reconstruction of past events within the contemporary frame of reference, first we should find out what this framework is for the creators and the audience of the NN Theatre. It seems that this is a relevant question about the intentions of the creators –the people of the Theatre– and what they plan to achieve in their work with memory. A synthetic look at their accomplishments allows us to claim that their goal is to shape such

expectations and attitudes among the audience as to arouse in them a sense/a need to remember –to assimilate the distant as the close ones, to make them familiar. The goal is to awaken a sense/a need for community with them among those who are exempt from the necessity of mourning after the Shoah. The only fact which connects them with the dead is that they live in the same place and walk the same streets as them. This is not enough for them to be able/be compelled to remember– it is necessary to release for them the energy contained in the texts, theatre performances, photographs and oral stories. Jan Assmann, a theorist of history, calls all these media "figures of memory" and says that if they appear in everyday communication they create in it the "islands of time" which, as he explains, are supposed to be:

> islands of a completely different temporality suspended from time. In cultural memory, such islands of time expand into memory spaces of "retrospective contemplativeness" [retrospective Besonnenheit]. This expression stems from Aby Warburg. He ascribed a type of "mnemonic energy" to the objectivation of culture, pointing not only to works of high art, but also to posters, postage stamps, costumes, customs, etc. In cultural formation, a collective experience crystallizes, whose meaning, when touched upon, may suddenly become accessible again across millennia (Assmann, 1995, p. 129).

Thus, the problem is to draw "mnemonic energy" from the "islands of time" which bear traces of fateful events from the past. These islands have to emerge from the ocean of oblivion in the ever-changing contemporary world, began shaping the collective experience of its inhabitants and thus to become a "frame of reference" for them. The semantics of the notion of an island comprises two moments: repetitiveness and wholeness. Travellers who land on this island settle there, either "for ever" or, just like tourists, for some time, with the intention of seeing or recreating all these things which they know/remember from the mainland, where there is continuous succession of generations and social experiences. On an island it is necessary to recreate the whole familiar and remembered form of the world from the beginning.

Panas and New Semiosis of Lublin

For Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, these "islands of time" are texts, photographs, audio recordings and rituals, which he uses for the purpose of making the addressees aware of the evil from the past. Their message is centred mostly around elements

or images of mythical and religious imagination which has inherent ambitions to comprehensively explain the human and the divine world. In the Polish cultural realities, folk religiosity formed on the basis of the Catholic faith predominates. The artist broadens the existing social imaginaries with the fields which emerge especially from the texts written in the 1990s by Władysław Panas (1947-2005) – a semiotician and a culture theorist.

Since the beginnings of the NN Theatre, Pietrasiewicz cooperates with Panas. They complement each other in their joint work on the semiotic redefinition of Lublin. Step by step, they replace the former poor semantics of the city with semiosis – gradually increasing permeation and relocation of various signs and texts, generating new unstable meanings emerged in the course of lively negotiations and references to various codes and cultural contexts. Thus, they both focus on work on the new collective memory of Lublin, while being aware that it is a construct. The association of the notion of memory with the concept of work enables them to disclose its dynamic character and to juxtapose it against the compulsion of recalling, unwitting repetition of past images in our minds. Hence, their aim is to actively create the energizing "figures of memory" and to introduce them into the public sphere where they would become the aforementioned "islands of time" on which it would be possible to bring back the past again with "retrospective contemplativeness" whose aim is to save and protect the past. This is a different intention than to put the past in museums. Pietrasiewicz (2017) writes:

> After the destruction of the Jewish Town in Lublin its murdered inhabitants quickly became the "expatriates" of our memory. The histories of their lives and deaths, abandoned by everyone, have been "homeless" for decades until we started to gather the "orphaned and forsaken" stories. By saving them, we have opened an "Orphanage" for them in the Gate (p. 72).

As a result, the building of the Gate turns into the "Ark of Memory" with a permanent exhibition "Lublin. Memory of the Place" constructed as the interior of an archive full of photographs, documents and recorded memories. In the rooms there are metal bookshelves with thousands of ring binders, and about a dozen of computers where it is possible to view the databases with iconography, oral history and texts. The display includes also archival photographs with accompanying sounds of the pre-war Jewish town resonating around the building and, in other rooms, an exhibition-installation "Memory of the Holocaust" commemorating the destruction of the Jewish district. Moreover, the Centre organizes numerous educational events (e.g. meetings of Polish and Jewish young people, lesson plans

and programmes of workshops for Polish-Jewish groups etc.), issues publications and compiles documentation – collects oral stories and archival material about people who rescued Jews during the war at risk of their own lives, among them also those honoured with medals of the "Righteous Among the Nations".

The conceptual background for many of these initiatives and for the whole project of Lublin theatre of memory can be found in Władysław Panas' essays, where he treats the city as a palimpsest, methodically scrapes off the layers of its semantic surfaces to find beneath them the messages/texts encompassed by collective unawareness. With symbolic figures, images and stories, reconstructed by him, the semiotician restarts, as it were, the energetic field of attracting memory on an island of time which the mystical and multicultural Lublin becomes in his writings. He describes his work on Lublin's storehouses of memory as "promotion of 'metaphysical tourism', that is such tourism which" –as he further explains– "has time, does not hurry, has infinitely much time and infinite patience" (Panas, 2008, p. 170). In his essays, Panas develops patiently and with *retrospective contemplativeness* e.g. a story of Lublin Hasidim from the turn of the 18th/19th c, living near the Grodzka Gate –previously known only to a narrow group of historians. For a wide educated audience in Lublin and Poland in general, this topic is almost completely unknown– a fragment of history parallel to the history of the Polish culture. However, the paradox lies in the fact that mostly owing to this fragment the global audience knows –or has a chance to know– Lublin and its vicinity. This is particularly due to Martin Buber's works (1991; 1999). Gershom Scholem (1941) –the author of a canonical work on Jewish mysticism– similarly as Buber has in mind Lublin and its most important tzaddik, Jacob Isaac Horowitz (1745-1815) called the Seer of Lublin, when he writes about an extraordinary phenomenon, that is this small geographical area and an astonishingly short period (1750-1800) during which so many saintly individuals appeared there. They were supposed to have religious creative powers with which they stormed the values which were dead and frozen in tradition. The same figures interpreted by Panas talk with archetypes, that is pre-images which, moved from the domain of religious discourse into the urban space, provide it with universal meanings and make Lublin a magical and mystical city. Thus, the mnemonic energy of its semantic layer has its source in mystical religiosity, not only Jewish, but also Christian.

For instance, the place of the Hasidic centre of the world –Axis Mundi– where the Seer of Lublin lived and where he directly communicated with God, nowadays is a square – a huge elliptical urban parking lot, built after the war on the ruins of the Jewish town, together with the adjacent 10 tenement houses. Panas decodes the symbolism of this place as an open eye looking up to the sky, and 10 buildings as a

symbol of Sefirot number, cabbalistic divine attributes through which God creates the world. The most important of these buildings –a landmark– should be the Seer's house whose location is identified by the semiotician-detective on the basis of a low relief on the tzaddik's matzevah, miraculously preserved in the old Jewish cemetery among havoc wrought there by the Nazis. The author of the famous essay *The Eye of the Tzaddik* searches for a place which does not exist, but which gives meaning to the emptiness left after it. This is just a logical contradiction, valid in the Euclidean space and not in the symbolical space. Panas (2015) writes:

> The city maps and the matzevah verify and interpret each other. Their qualities complement and transcend each other. A simple city map, a topographic sketch, a very prosaic thing, begins to attain a symbolic meaning. And completely poetic, surreal and symbolic matzevah acquires the value of a precise plan. There is a discipline - geo-poetics (p. 85).

The *unreal reality* of the *matzevah* described here can be explained by pointing to equivocation – a potentially ambiguous phrase whose sense can be figured out in the domain of classical metaphysics – let us say in Plato's concept of participation according to which the apparent material world becomes real, that is comprehensible and rational, solely due to the fact that it participates in the only real world of ideas. However, the ontological status of the same *unreal reality* gains meaning also in the perspective of depth psychology and its category of the collective unconscious. The latter, as defined by Carl Gustav Jung (1971), is supposed to be inherited by us since the oldest times in the form of memory images, or –from the anatomical point of view– in the brain structure. The limits of our imagination are thought to be delineated solely by the inborn possibilities of ideas and not the ideas themselves which can be revealed to us only in a specific experience, in the form of a pre-image, a figure of a daemon, a human being, or a process. We were born with, so to speak, drawers in our heads which, whenever there are proper circumstances, are filled in with sensual matter of impressions. Pre-images return in history only where creative imagination can operate freely. Thus, we deal here with such a situation, place and time. Panas' argumentation seems to be the following: the intensity of Lublin's creative climate, noticed by Buber and Scholem and confirmed then by the presented geo-poetic research, provides sufficient evidence that this place is visited by archetypical figures which energize imagination and memory by their very nature. Such intellectual scaffolding, included by Panas in his discourse, creates subtle intertextual games: literary, philosophical and theological. Coupled with Panas' great literary style, they let him open the eyes of his readers to the city where in every corner there are amazing stories, founding legends and sacred motifs emerging or rather

depositing as on an island of time. It is assumed here that "people cannot just settle anywhere, because there is some unoccupied space. They need to have deeper motivation" (Panas, 2008, p. 169).

Panas (2008) revives the mnemonic energy of ordinary places, seduces the reader, and gives the her/him a sense of participation in a historical procession of figures who can "notice something important under these shabby clothes and seemingly unattractive, poor appearance" (p. 170). The actors of this procession are both a 13th Century Polish duke and a 19th Century Jewish mystic, or 20th Century Polish avant-garde poet. The first one is Leszek II the Black who, according to a legend, had a dream about Archangel Michael giving him military instructions on how to defeat invaders in a battle and who, as a token of gratitude for victory, founded a temple dedicated to this saint (today there is an empty square in this place). The second one is the Seer, sometimes also called the rebbe from Lublin or Lubliner. The third one is Józef Czechowicz (1903-1939) who was killed during an air raid of the city at the beginning of the war and whose life and works, associated with prewar Lublin, are the subject of in-depth theoretical and literary studies and press articles of Panas, as well as documentary works of Pietrasiewicz. Moreover, the poems of Czechowicz serve as symbolic material for a number of actions focused on the poetic mapping of the city, which have been organized for years (formerly also with participation of Panas) by the Grodzka Gate Centre: these are e.g. walks along the route described in Czechowicz's *Poem About Lublin* (Czechowicz), or reading this poem aloud in public to commemorate successive anniversaries of the poet's birth or death. However, Panas (2008) himself and his contemporaries, readers of metaphysical signs, tourists visiting empty places in the city, also join this peculiar procession of figures which are historical and mythical at the same time. Physical emptiness left after the Catholic temple, and even bigger one left in the place of the Jewish town, is full of metaphysical meanings:

> All these vanished in the material sense, but we know that if something disappears in the physical sense, it does not vanish completely, but remains in some other way. Carl Gustav Jung talked about archetypes, images of events, people and situations which are revealed to some other people in their dreams, in imagination. I guess we also observe it in memory and in art (p. 165).

Thus, memory has an archetypical and circular structure. Its secret is contained in the returning images. It is referred to in "the circles" under the title of one of the books by Tomasz Pietrasiewicz. This structure is intriguing both for the contemporaries and for the ancients. Plato's idea of reflection as an impression (*typos*) of a seal ring in wax refers to much earlier mythological representations

according to which *anamnesis* is a gift of Mnemosyne, mother of Muses. The ability to remember what we think, see or hear was supposed to consist in putting a wax tablet under our thoughts or observations, so that they could be impressed on it just like seal imprints. "And whatever is imprinted we remember and know as long as its image lasts", says Socrates in *Theaetetu*s (Plato 1921, p. 191). Hence, human cognition of the world means here its recognition, it goes round in a circle and consists in finding something which was looked for. The same function is fulfilled by the figure of a drawer-archetype, mentioned before a bit offhand. However, in our social imagination, the picture of an impression and a circular structure of thinking is connected not only with intellectual activity (speculatively selected by philosophers), but also with religious and moral deeds. In the Judeo-Christian culture it is inevitably associated with the tablets received by Moses from Yahweh: the commandments once engraved on them we find impressed on our inner life which is sometimes called soul or conscience. In each of our acts, we move from what is to what should be according to these laws, and the other way around. An image of reflection as an impression has remained for centuries an image of memory.

Utopia - Universal Machine of Memory

Another archetypical incarnation, a transmitter of the extraordinary, magical energy of the place –of Lublin– in the abovementioned historical procession seems to be naturally Pietrasiewicz. He enters the public spaces, uses and deconstructs the simplest patterns of behaviour we are guided by in them, which sometimes do not have anything in common with the language of the Shoah, as the practice of sending letters to non-existing addresses of the prewar Jewish town: "Obviously" –as he writes– "the letters could not find their addressees – they came back officially annotated: 'addressee unknown' or 'non-existent address'. Through such action we wanted to 'touch' emptiness left after the Jewish town" (Pietrasiewicz, 2008, p. 20). Remembrance of someone who does not exist is generated and revived by the returning (the motif of a circle again) letters. The point is to experience emptiness, lack, nothingness, something which cannot be comprehended by reason, but it somehow still exists in everyday life. Unavoidable antinomies –logical contradictions– all the time accompany the work on memory described here. These are logical and not existential contradictions. However, only the existential dimension matters: individual experience –or perhaps rather impression, sensation, consisting in very unspecified touching the emptiness– becomes possible only when we manage to look at everyday life in a different

way than we usually perceive it, to tear off the masks of present familiarity and at the same time not to absorb the addressees with the sophisticated work on representations of the world (not to succumb to the temptation of aestheticization), not to inflict violence on them and not to accuse them (not to yield to the temptation of moralizing).

The goal is a source of sense, a kind of big narration, even though concealed and secret, which cannot be represented, neither experienced. Its inaccessibility can only be touched. This is another antinomy representing the paradox of human existence which every day borders the metaphysical, in a sense of – quoting Emmanuel Lévinas (2000)– *intriguing,* attracting to infinity, enabling to understand traces, fragments and snapshots, on the basis of which it is never possible to recreate the complete meaning, and which can never be reduced to it. Therefore, the metaphysical intrigues and hence energizes, gives back and at the same time facilitates the repetitive, circular and thus ritual character of human existence which, contrary to what may seem, cannot be totally closed within the (empirical) world and reveals the irremovable traces of transcendence present in it. In cultural storehouses of memory, Pietrasiewicz finds the readings or rather touches of these traces, he notices them e.g. in the stories, reconstructed by Panas, about redeeming the world and sending the Messiah, to which Jewish mystics tried to "force" God. These are utopian stories which do not have to follow the rules of logic, a kind of exercise for religious and social imagination. Owing to its mnemonic and emancipation energy, utopia becomes for the artist a legitimate method to restore memory and to create islands of time on which traces of past events can be deposited freely. It also forms the basis of the project "Lublin. 43 thousands" (2015) in which the NN Theatre starts to create a story about saving each inhabitant of the Jewish town from oblivion (this is the number of people of Jewish origin recorded in the population census in 1939). As Pietrasiewicz (2017) comments:

> Those who organised the Holocaust wanted every trace of memory concerning their victims to be irreversibly erased. It was not enough for them to sentence Jews to death when instead they could be pushed into chasms of oblivion. The mere hint of the Jews' existence here was to be extinguished and every document bearing proof of it – destroyed (p. 103).

This absolute idea of wiping away the existence of thousands of people, this dark utopia at the heart of evil itself, is challenged by our very different utopia, which is similarly absolute. We strive to protect the memory of each and every inhabitant of the former Jewish town. We want to find the names of these people and reconstruct

their fates in as much detail as possible. It is our absolute act of resistance to the truly horrifying idea of utopia created by the perpetrators of the Holocaust (p. 106).

Among the memories collected about the inhabitants of the Jewish town there are also those which have a character of snapshots, vague traces, or rather genuine traces which the contemporary humanities explored and pondered over in search for a manner of existence and articulation of a difference, that is something un-identical, un-usual, un-repeatable. Traces –non-signs which do not have control over the reality in a sense that they do not name or determine anything in it, instead they reveal only those things which are different and precede these which can be named, which do not draw their meanings from being disclosed and presented. This is the case of a letter from a person called Daniel sent from Lublin on 29 March 1942: "M. Z. with M. and all the children with N. were caught and sent no one knows where" (Pietrasiewicz, 2017, p. 108). Each of the people mentioned– "M. Z.", "M." and "N." –has their file in the aforementioned "exhibition-archive" in the Grodzka Gate– a file under these initials or, as the file of Daniel, author of the letter, under his first name. Nothing more –only this or as much as this. None of the initials determine or explain anything, preclude any additional circumstances, explanations or clarifications– but rather arouse a desire for them, increase anxiety and raise objection to the incomprehensible and the unsaid. There is a binding rule here contained in the metaphor of an island of time: on the basis of one trace of human existence discovered on an island we must –rebelling and struggling against the impossible and the absent– try and recreate the whole life and the entire world which has disappeared together with this person.

The traces discussed here incite a revolt. They compel us to ask about the *truth* of reconstruction of the past, to which extent we get to know it and to which extent we invent it and combine it with external narratives. Anyway, such doubts arise in the case of representing any historical event which is unique and unrepeatable by definition. There is yet another doubt connected with the question what a modal verb "must" (we must try) means when used in this context, is it in relation to remembrance? An attempt at answering these questions will be undertaken in the final part of this article. At this point let us make a brief observation which confirms the antinomicity of the *utopian* vision of the Shoah, presented here. Both artists and scientists are greatly perplexed by the uniqueness of this event: if they managed to explain it in detail / present it with adequate language consisting of signs, so to speak, full and vivid, embodying the past reality, this would mean that they have learned truth about it –the truth which would crown the process of cognition and, along with it, would end any discussion. Therefore, learning the truth about a historical event, which completes the discussion on it, foretells

its oblivion. The fact that the project "Lublin. 43 thousands" is unfeasible due to its utopian character makes it a universal machine of memory. Rituality and repeatability which are necessary for operation and functioning of this machine correspond to the internal logic of human memory itself. However, such an assumption entails consent to the fact that we will never have direct access to the source, to the original– the historical truth. Taking responsibility for this truth and deciding in his conscience to testify to it, Pietrasiewicz is not discouraged by this fact at all. On the contrary, it rather gives him further impetus –a kind of an internal imperative– to try and liberate himself from dominant opinions concerning this truth. In this way, he reveals conventionality of these opinions, shows their dependence on various groups and institutions producing knowledge which inevitably uses ideology, that is the media, scientific centres, museums, churches, political parties, archives.

Mysteries as Archaeology of Memory

In search of its own language, the art of Holocaust currently begins to consciously penetrate this kind of social opinions or imaginaries, among which an important place is held by those from the area of folk religiosity. They also seem to have the largest mnemonic energy. Theorists of historiography confirm that the discussion on memory "circulates within popular discourses saturated with religiosity" (Klein, 2000, p. 145), to which it encompasses, similarly as scientific discourses on the Shoah, the notions of the originally religious meaning, such as e.g. witnessing, testimony, ritual, piety. Mystery has the same provenance. This is a cultural invariant, a ritual of stopping the time when a mystery was fulfilled, a way to become familiar with the unknown and the incomprehensible and bring it back to the present. A mystery is performed every time within the framework of specific communication patterns and codes. In the Polish conditions, this is usually the Mystery of the Passion, performed traditionally in the form of the Stations of the Cross, encompassing fourteen stations recreating the events from the last moments of Christ's life.

Pietrasiewicz keenly makes use of this cultural rite. He additionally combines it with the archetypical motifs of impression and trace, as e.g. in the case of a mystery "A Day of Five Prayers" which took place on 07.11.2000 in the Majdanek concentration camp. All its participants walked there along the way through the camp, delineated by five places – stations, where clergymen of five faiths (Catholic, Muslim, Orthodox, Protestant and Jewish) prayed in turn.

In this artistic and religious performance each person individually testified to history, gave testimony to the truth of the past tangibly and palpably, through the medium in the form of plates made of fired and non-fired clay mixed with soil from the Majdanek camp. The former prisoners of the camp held the plates of fired clay with their prisoner numbers imprinted on the surface. Other plates with imprinted numbers of prisoners, randomly selected, were scattered on the ground in the place of prayer. In the description of the event we read:

> Passing by, the participants of the Mystery picked up the plates and took them. Symbolically, they were taking the Memory of this place – Majdanek. Each person who took a plate with a number could acquire more information about the person carrying this particular number in the archives of the Majdanek Museum. It was a symbolic gesture of returning the stolen names and identity to the prisoners of the camp (Pietrasiewicz, 2008, p. 66).

There were also plates of non-fired clay available, prepared for the participants who, before entering the camp, were able to record their participation in the event through impressing their fingerprints on the plates.

The Mystery of Light and Darkness, which was organized for the first time on 16 March 2006, commemorates successive anniversaries of the liquidation of the Lublin ghetto (16 March 1942). It takes place within the city aiming to use its everyday areas and to uncover the unusual senses hidden underneath. The Mystery begins in the evening hours in the Grodzka Gate where hundreds of names of the pre-war inhabitants of the Jewish district are read out. Next, in the area of the non-existing Jewish town, lights are turned off. As we read:

> On the other side of the Gate, in the Old Town, the lights are still on, and everyday life continues. For nearly an hour, the Grodzka Gate becomes a passage between Light and Darkness. In this darkness there is only one lamp shining. This is the unique lamp saved from the Jewish town, the "Lamp of Memory" (Pietrasiewicz, 2008, p. 40).

The impression or trace as an image of memory appears also in a mystery "The Poem of the Place" (12 October 2002) whose action is centred around the Grodzka Gate. Pietrasiewicz uses here a staging concept which can be described as *archaeology of memory* –he testifies to the past through a gesture of disturbing, undermining the familiar, seemingly obvious and ever existing shapes of the present time. In order to achieve this goal, he digs out the memory of the former city hidden today under the concrete shell covering it: sewer manholes become

islands of time with traces of the lost inhabitants of this place. The lights are turned off on the side of the former Jewish town and participants of the mystery walk through the Gate from the usual everyday life going on in the Old town into the darkness. On their way (the motif of a way again), lights become visible, coming out of the open manholes passed by them– the channels imprinted on the ground joining the dead with the living –out of which voices can also be heard: stories told by Lublin citizens about the Jewish district and its Shoah: "The light and voices coming from the depth of the open manholes"– writes Pietrasiewicz (2008)

> created a kind of a huge artistic installation revealing the hidden and usually invisible meanings of the emptiness near the Grodzka Gate. The only props of the stage design used during the Mystery were floodlights and loudspeakers put into the open manholes (p. 49).

A mystery's rite and the motif of a way connected with it appear also in the latest installation by Pietrasiewicz, entitled "Mis/Remembrance of the Place", built in 2017 on a plot sized 44m x 10m in Lublin at the site of a former railway loading ramp. About 28 000 Jews were deported from there to the death camp in Bełżec by the German occupation authorities in the period from 17 March to 14 April 1942. The author describes his work in the following way:

> A lot of time has passed since the slaughterhouse was closed and the land is slowly falling into disrepair. On visiting, one can observe the process of natural degradation which has affected the site (the crumbling wall, the cracked concrete surface of the plot and the wild, garden-like growth of shrubs, trees and plants). The very area which should serve most as a memorial site has, in fact, become a representation of oblivion. The process of decay embracing memory itself is in fact the main idea behind the "Mis/Remembrance of the Place" art installation. A metal container in the shape of a freight car has been placed in the memorial site area and can be entered from Zimna Street through an opening created in the outer wall. Holes in the shapes of Hebrew letters are punctured in the walls of the container – on both of its sides, and through these the whole area of the plot can be seen. The last letter of the Hebrew alphabet is cut into the ceiling of the container, allowing for a view of the open sky. It is at this desolate and degraded spot that "The Last Route" ends (Pietrasiewicz, 2017, p. 278).

The container is made of rusty metal –"the visible corrosion is meant to emphasize the process of destruction and the fading of memory" (2017, p. 278) taking place here. This *last route* to Umschlagplatz has been commemorated with the Memory Trail– the way walked by Jews led to the loading ramp from the

synagogue laying at the foot of the Lublin Castle. The synagogue, used by the Germans as the place where victims were detained before deportation to the death camp, was demolished by the Germans after the liquidation of the ghetto. Nearby, a Jewish printing house, the oldest in Lublin, had been functioning for several hundreds of years. It was there where The Book of Zohar, the most important work of the Jewish mysticism, was printed in 1623. The Lublin edition of this book is its only full publication, apart from the Italian one. As Pietrasiewicz (2017) writes:

> The printed word was of great significance to the Jewish people - in fact, they are known as the nation of "The Book". For this reason the path the Jews were forced to take as they marched toward death is now lined with the scattered letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The dispersed alphabet symbolises the disintegrating world. The letters are not arranged in the form of a text anymore. The shape of the letters used in the project corresponds to the typeface used for the preparation of The Book of Zohar published in Lublin. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet introduced into the urban space of the city are "mute"; they are "silent". There is barely anyone in present-day Lublin who might find them legible. And this fact puts strong emphasis on the absence of a people who used to live and thrive in our city, making use of such lettering every day (p. 272).

The last route is marked with 21 concrete slabs with texts and metal bands on which letters of the Hebrew alphabet are engraved. In the information published on the website of the NN Theatre we read:

> The letters are not placed in the alphabetical order but randomly, as if someone scattered types from a type case around the city. It symbolizes destruction of the foundation of the Jewish culture – the printed word, and at the same time the end of life of the pre-war Jewish society in Lublin (Website of the Grodzka Gate).

The Nation of the Book and the city as a book are the cultural narrative frameworks which intertwine which each other and together build the symbolical tissue of the memorial installation described. These frameworks have been pragmatically used to help local community get orientated in the close environment and remember it, recognize (today) the things which used to be (yesterday). However, the "islands of time", representations of the lost world –a book, alphabet letters, prisoner numbers– thrown here into the public space, do not have any power over it because they are only the traces already discussed here. The traces of a difference which do not belong to the horizon of the manifested being, which do not make sense by themselves. They do not make sense because they lack power to recreate the past world, if we understand this as dusting off its "real" impression from the darkness of

oblivion. Thus, their mnemonic energy is created in the tension field of a desire for a sense and rebelling against a lack of its manifestation in thoughts of addressees/audience/participants of an event. Hence, we have imperceptibly entered here the domain of metaphysics and the field of operation of an energizing, mnemonic intrigue emanated by transcendence, something which barely leaves traces and cannot be itemised, objectified and embodied.

Therefore, this cannot be an experience of an individual privileged in his access to the truth of facts, reflective, self-confident, and conceited. It is rather an experience of –let us use one of the possibly adequate metaphors– the archaeologist of memory, who tries to piece together fragments and traces of the past every time without any success. The archaeologist of memory is deeply aware that he is not and will never be a historian.

The traces are guided by chance, they are fragile and unstable, just like a handful of types scattered in the wind. The problem is how to give the energetic power to each of them and how to place them in the field of attracting any other remaining traces which could be joined together in a larger area of meaning – the bigger place of memory. This mechanism results from the very nature of our reference to the past – every time we bring back again the fragments and snapshots of past events with expectations of meaning which stem from our constantly changing attitude to these events.

Therefore, we construct the past again each time, depending on various conditions of its current understanding by us. However, since we do it as weak individuals –insecure and humble in the face of the unknown– what can justify our carefree attitude to the tragic fate of the unknown people? Especially, if it is connected with artistic ambitions and free playing with fictitious stories, irrespective of whether these stories are more or less fragmentary, credible or probable. After all, each of them is an island which is entered with a complete plan: remembrance of one individual, based on even a slightest trace of his or her life, embraces the whole life and the entire world of this person.

Artist's Responsibility

The answer to this fundamental doubt overlaps with the domain of morality. Pietrasiewicz assumes that our memory capabilities are a part of our identity and have the same character as an artist/human/citizen's ability to take upon

oneself one, indivisible and unsophisticated responsibility. Therefore, he asks about such forms of presenting the Holocaust which would introduce it to the level of participation in the collective memory, about responsibility for the past and about being faithful to it. Responsibility and faithfulness are not the capabilities we are born with – they are a goal set to us. We need to develop these values, similarly as conscience. And what does this development consist in? The answer is that a follower of these values wants (wishes) to view him-or herself as responsible (tautology is inevitable here), or in other words: introduces into his or her identity –to self-perception– specific quality of life which encompasses the range of "good" and "bad", "responsible" and "irresponsible". The author of the *Circles of Memory* rhetorically asks: "However, is it possible to live in Lublin and not to be interested in the culture and history of the population once constituting one third of all citizens? After all, the history of Jews living in Lublin is an integral part of the city's history" (Pietrasiewicz, 2008, p. 5).

This is the reason why insufficiency and imperfection of all means of expression which Pietrasiewicz has at his disposal, in relation to the critical events from the past, do not discourage him at all, on the contrary: make him a witness himself. Taking responsibility for these events, he feels "summoned" by them not to calculate, weigh and analyse them in terms of their credibility, probability or strength of expression. The source of demand for truth about the silent victims has its origin in a completely different place than in their representations. It is in the human conscience, in a wish to testify and take responsibility, the wish comes earlier than any representation. All depends on readiness for being responsible and giving testimony. This is the stance taken by Pietrasiewicz.

As a creator of an alternative theatre, he has never had any problems with the opposition: autonomy vs. commitment. In his plays, both those earlier from the 1990s, based on the prose of Melville (*Moby Dick*) or Hrabal (*Too Loud a Solitude),* and the later ones from the beginning of the 21st c (*Hasidic Triptych*), he has never claimed that the forms inherited from the arts of naturalism and realism are completely exhausted. Anyway, as we can see, he chooses the most metaphysical among them.

In his Holocaust art, Pietrasiewicz easily combines real documents – photographs and memoirs – with stage productions, visual arts and installations. He knows the latter ones very well from his theatre experiences – they are supposed to help him fill the gap between performance forms and unspoken demands for limit events, manifested in traces, fragments and snapshots, dispersed and spreading to places of memory. These are the demands, reaching beyond time, for

identification with the victims. The poetics of language of mysteries is based on two rules: iconicity and repetitiveness. Both have their source in the constitution of memory itself which is by nature both iconic and technical at the same time (hence the idea of mnemotechnics). This is the reason why the discussed mysteries are based on simple images of light and darkness, but along with them rhetorical figures, such as enumeration or repetition, are also used in their visual and linguistic forms. The artistic concept is clear and logical here: presentation of something which cannot be presented requires a method which is mysterious itself. There is double coding here: the mystery of trauma is superimposed with the mystery of memory contained in the elusive form of *seeing through* – flickering of streaks of light and shadow simulating increase and decrease in the level of mnemonic energy emanating from available *islands of time* – and in the logic of repetition, moving in circles. This double coding and the process of decoding a message is the work of imagination which precedes cognition. Poetics is an art of imagination, just like testimony is an art of conscience.

The ritual repetition of the same gestures, using the basic forms of representation: enumerating names (of the prewar inhabitants of the Jewish district), repeating short, schematic accounts of the survivors and the righteous, using the same clay plates with impressed numbers of Majdanek prisoners or fingerprints of the mystery's participants, sending the same letters to the ghetto (the actions: "Letters to the Ghetto", "Letters to Henio"), repeating the same children's song (exhibition: "Primer – Children in Majdanek Camp") (Hudzik, 2011) – this method is associated with a technique well-known in almost all religions, which is meant to help control the mind of a person coming into contact with the absolute, to clear the soul of bodily tarnishing. In relation to the Shoah – the tarnishing due to being alive which none of the living deserves, just like none of the murdered deserved death.

Conclusions

Pietrasiewicz summons himself to be a witness of history he did not live through. However, the very wish to be responsible for this history – to be responsible for the Shoah – proves that his attempts at bringing back its remembrance are not and cannot be a hopeless enterprise. They are not hopeless if we humbly accept that the logic of facts and the logic of fiction intermingle with each other. If we admit that artistic activities, just like political or religious practices, influence the "real" world, expanding the sphere of what is publicly visible. Their core is

transcendence concealed in the mists of the past, in the mystery of oblivion and non-existence, in what comes to daylight and becomes an *island of time* beyond time which emanates mnemonic energy. This energy is emanated and spread to us by art which intrigues through undermining or reconfiguration of the relations between words and things, our ways of speaking and existing. Art in which "mute" and "silent" alphabet letters talk the loudest, in which emptiness becomes the height of existence, in which images of memory's death bring it back to life, in which history of an individual can be encountered in any place and time, in which the most mundane things become the most intriguing, extraordinary and elusive, in which the things dispersed, random and fragmentary stand in defence of necessity and entirety.

Therefore, the opposition of artistic reality versus the real world, or autonomic art versus committed art is basically false here. Intrigue is an element of drama and, by definition, drama cannot be uncommitted. The artist who summons himself to be a witness of the past abandons the temple of art – that is modern institutions and buildings created for it – and stands on the public stage himself, in the space of a city or a concentration camp, wherever human life and death moved in their macabre circles. The artist decides to meet the Other. At his own will, he chooses the unknown, takes the risk, and exposes himself to failure as a human and as an artist.

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