

MEMORY AND OBLIVION IN THE CITYSCAPE

Commemorations in the Warsaw Districts of Muranów and Mirów

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The article discusses memory of the Jewish and the Holocaust past of Warsaw as it has been practiced in two districts of the city of Warsaw comprising the territory of the World War II ghetto. To contextualize the case studies described in the text, a discussion of the politics of the Polish memory of World War II in the context of the city of Warsaw has been provided, together with a brief discussion of research methods, which made use of the author's familiarity with the place as an inhabitant, a tourist guide and a visitor. The article describes the spatial context of commemorations, and presents interpretations for their perception and reception both by the inhabitants and the visitors.

Keywords: Warsaw, ghetto, commemorations, cityscape, Jewish memory

Introduction: A Martyrdom T-shirt

A Polish internet-based t-shirt shop¹ offers a t-shirt design with the reproduction of a well-known black-and-white photograph representing a razed to the ground cityscape of war ruins with a solitary church visible in the distance. The slogan on the t-shirt reads: "Muranów'44". What the photograph represents is a view of the ruins of the Western part of the pre-World War II Northern District of Warsaw, converted in 1940 into the Warsaw ghetto by the Nazi occupiers of the city, and consequently destroyed. Yet the neatly traced paths that cross the desert of destruction towards the church, as well as the rather orderly state of the ruins themselves, suggest that the photograph was taken after the rub-

bish-cleaning had already started and once the passageways had been marked out for the inhabitants of the ruined city. The photograph could not have been taken in 1944. What the slogan refers to is the date of the Warsaw Uprising (August 1–October 3, 1944), and Muranów, one of the quarters comprising the area that was known as the Northern District before World War II, and which gained a very characteristic architectonic setting after the war. The t-shirt establishes a clear connection between the locally recognizable district name (after World War II, "Northern District" was never used again), a historical photograph of the ruins and the date of the armed uprising, suggesting that the tragic war fate of contemporary Muranów was directly related

to the Warsaw Uprising. However, that was not the case: a substantial part of the territory of the Northern District had been destroyed prior to the 1944 uprising, having been a consequence of the annihilation of the Warsaw Ghetto undertaken by the Nazis in the spring of 1943. Thus, if any uprising is to be connected with the photograph of ruined Muranów reproduced on the t-shirt, it should be the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (April 19–mid-May 1943).²

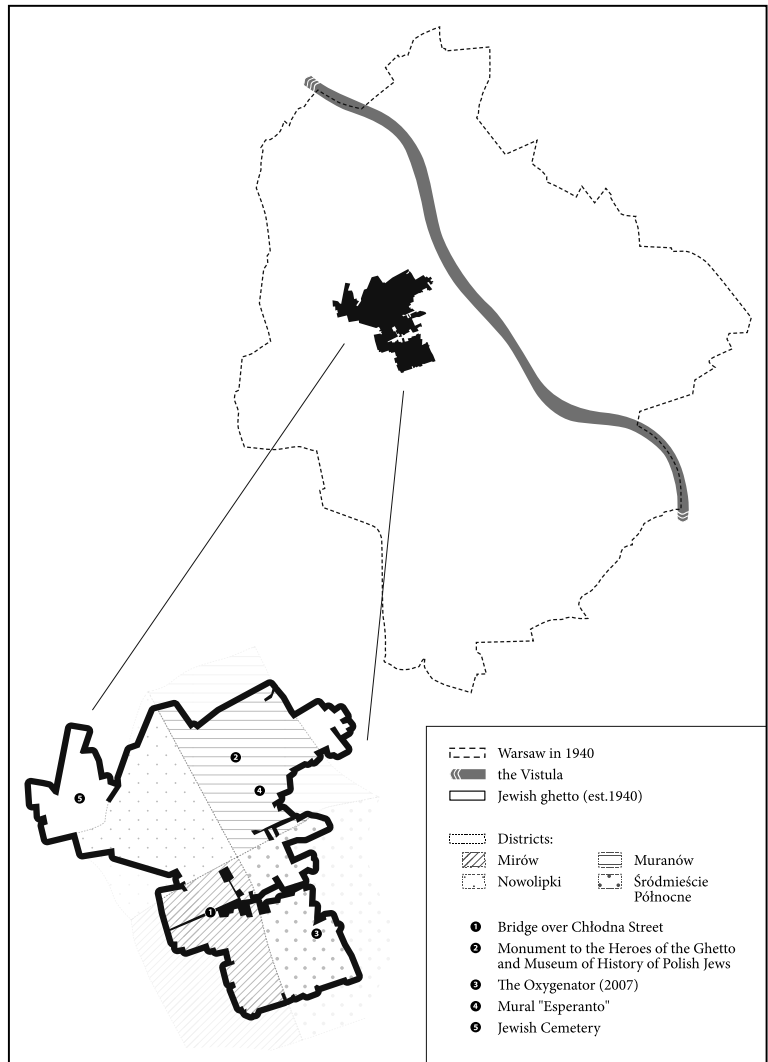
Apparently, the t-shirt producers know that they can count on the contemporary inhabitants of Muranów to subscribe to the heroic story of the Warsaw Uprising. Simultaneously, the t-shirt company knows that the people who could imagine themselves as the heirs of the Ghetto Uprising would hardly be interested in affirming their local identity by sporting a Muranów t-shirt. It is also conceivable that the only possible association of Warsaw ruins is inherently the Warsaw Uprising.³

The t-shirt as an item of popular culture points to an important tension in the politics of remembrance in Poland. This tension also finds its manifestation in Warsaw public space,⁴ namely in the need to accommodate two histories of martyrdom in the city's heritage instead of one, or, in the least, the need to acknowledge the existence of ambiguities in Polish claims

to innocent victimhood during World War II in the context of the Holocaust.

The pre-war Northern District area is a place where the practices of memory and oblivion have been taking place since the end of World War II. As different parts of the city claimed visibility in the reconstruction process, they became palimpsests of sorts, mobilizing diverse social actors on their behalf. In this context, the practices of memory and oblivion have always been informed by the politics of memory, which for the sake of this article will be

Ill. 1: Map of the World War II ghetto of Warsaw and contemporary districts. (Copyright: Bartosz Grześkowiak)



understood as the politics of the knowledge of the past. Assuming that memory is a way of constructing knowledge of the past (Samuel 2012: xxiii), it is possible to locate memory in the context of Michel Foucault's observations on the knowledge–power relationship (Foucault 1980, 1984). In this perspective, power relations are crucial in the processes of remembering and forgetting, as well as in the selection of content that is to form memory, on both the individual and the collective level (Hacking 1996; Shotter 1990). Following this approach, the politics of memory as it is manifested in the cityscape, is strongly related to the politics of identity since it legitimizes a community's claims to certain spaces (Kapralski 2001). Material interventions in the cityscape are embodiments of the collective memory of their builders and users, who accommodate the past as it is known to them – their state of memory. On the one hand, such interventions express the meanings constructed within the dominant discourse. On the other, because of their material qualities (scale, sensual appeal, different and often very symbolically charged ways in which users can establish contact with them), interventions in the cityscape evoke emotions and feelings that may obscure or change the meaning that their constructors initially had in mind.

In this article I will focus on the two districts, Muranów and Mirów, of the city of Warsaw comprising the territory of the World War II ghetto and discuss recent interventions in the cityscape, which stage the Jewish and the Holocaust past of Warsaw. I will try to describe their spatial context, as well as provide interpretation for their perception and reception both by the inhabitants and the visitors, always being aware that the inhabitant can become a visitor in her own home, and that inhabitants are never the exponents of a single politics of memory. As I am myself both an inhabitant and a visitor to the place, further in the text I will reflect on my own position as a researcher at and of her own home, as well as on my fieldwork methods. However, I will start by providing a discussion of the politics of the Polish memory of World War II in the context of the city of Warsaw, which I consider an indispensable intro-

duction to a tour of Muranów and Mirów focused on material commemorations. I will end with a short case study from outside of the former ghetto zone, as a comment by the city residents themselves.

Intertwined Uprisings: Polish World War II Memory in Warsaw

In an essay dedicated to the Polish politics of memory, sociologist Lech M. Nijakowski calls World War II and the occupation of Poland “the highest instance of Polish memory”. “The war [World War II] reality,” Nijakowski wrote in 2008, “is a point of reference, an archetype of mythical deluge of barbarism and of heroic victory. In a sense it is the point zero of European civilization, although not in the way it is for European Jews, for whom the Holocaust has become a durable part of their identity and vision of history, also in the religious sense” (Nijakowski 2008: 114). Heroic martyrdom is a constant topos of Polish national mythology and it is almost indiscriminately used in the construction of a mythologized Polish modern history, the memory of World War II included (Domańska 2000). An observer of Warsaw's post-1989 monument-related activities (including the destruction, construction and reconstruction of monuments) wrote about the “propensity for victimization and heroism” in the city's commemorative materializations (van Cant 2009: 113). As the Polish sociologist Annamaria Orla-Bukowska maintains, the assumptions underlying the construction of Polish memory after World War II, were that Poles (1) were the war's first official victims; (2) they were laid on the altar to be slaughtered and fought against two totalitarianisms; (3) they were the purest and noblest of heroes, the only nation on the continent which neither collaborated with (via open alliance, facilitated annexation, or unengaged neutrality) nor formally surrendered to the Third Reich; (4) Poland, though sacrificed to Soviet totalitarianism, had saved Europe from German fascism and contributed to peace on the continent (cf. Orla-Bukowska 2006: 179). However, until 1989 Polish World War II memory discourse in its official version could refer neither to the fight against “two totalitarianisms”, nor to the sacrifice to the Soviets.

Further, in the People's Republic of Poland the collective, glorious memory of martyrdom and heroism shared with Jews had not been a real option, even more so, as "communist ideology made the extermination of the Jews and the world that was destroyed with them a footnote to overall suffering in World War II" (Gruber 2002: 5).

Commemorating Heroes, Not Victims

In her article, Orla-Bukowska follows the transformations of Polish memory of World War II from the immediate post-war years to the first decade of the political and economic transition after 1989. As she rightly notices, official memory during the People's Republic of Poland focused on the German occupation since the Soviet occupation could not be perceived as such, Poland being a part of the communist bloc. The change of political system meant not only that the war had to be incorporated into national memory, but also that it served in the construction of a new Polish identity: one reoriented to the East instead of the West. But as the author makes clear in her article, a substantial part of Polish society did not follow the eastward change in identity and what ensued was a bifurcation of discourse, segregating official memory of World War II from unofficial accounts (Orla-Bukowska 2006: 178ff.). For obvious reasons, the question of Soviet aggression on Poland and its multiple consequences were totally silenced in public discourse, becoming in turn the main content of unofficial discourse. Although it had been fought against the Nazi occupiers of the city, the Warsaw Uprising was not a welcomed part of public memory in the People's Republic of Poland since it had been orchestrated by the underground Home Army. In the first decade after the war, the new Polish regime persecuted and executed many of the war-time members of the resistance loyal to the Polish government in London, while the command of the Polish Underground State (*Państwo Podziemne*) were tried in Moscow and executed or sent to gulags. The trauma of the uprising, which resulted in almost total destruction of the city and which was subsequently deprived of official commemoration, made it the main topic of private national memory

of World War II in Warsaw. However, as Orla-Bukowska extensively explains, that official memory was void of certain content did not mean that the same content was in turn alive in unofficial memory practices. The two streams of bifurcated discourse were intertwined in more complex and changing ways over the fifty years of the People's Republic.

The changes in Polish national memory of World War II, as described by Orla-Bukowska, can also be observed following the development of material commemorations in Warsaw and in the districts of Muranów and Mirów in particular. The first monument erected in post-war Warsaw (inaugurated in November 1945 in the eastern bank district of Praga) was dedicated to "Brotherhood in Arms" and celebrated the Red Army as the liberator of the Polish capital from Nazi occupation. The second monument, built amidst the ruins of the city in the area of the former ghetto, commemorated the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and was erected in 1946. Rather symbolic and discrete, it was designed by Polish architect Leon Marek Sużin. The second commemoration of the uprising, bigger and much more monumental with a sculpture by Nathan Rappaport dedicated "To the Heroes of the Ghetto", was located nearby and inaugurated in a solemn ceremony in 1948.

Interestingly, as different authors writing on the subject of Jewish memory in post-World War II Poland have pointed out (Kaprański 2001; Wójcik, Bilewicz & Lewicka 2010), while commemorations of Ghetto Heroes can be found in the form of monuments and street names in several places around Poland, commemorations of Ghetto Victims, let alone the pre-war Jewish community, are almost entirely absent. The exaltation of death as an important feature of Polish national mythology could provide a plausible interpretation here, as "the death of the Ghetto fighters fit well with the Polish historical paradigm of glorifying those who died in a hopeless fight" (Kaprański 2001: 47). But when the erection of the monument honouring the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw coincided with the lack of commemoration of the fighters of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, for many Polish observers it pointed to the ideological

preferences of the new city authorities. "I have nothing against the Jewish heroes. However, Warsaw has yet no monument to its insurgents, nor the children that fought in the uprising," wrote the esteemed Polish writer Maria Dąbrowska in her diary (quoted in Chomątowska 2012: 121). The official commemoration of the Ghetto Uprising of 1943 and the efforts to silence the memory of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 placed two uprisings fought in the same city against the same occupation forces in two separate spheres of Polish memory, forcing their myths into confrontation already at the beginning of Stalinist times. "Rapoport's [this spelling is in the original] creation stood alone in a vast field of rubble, easily read by Poles as a symbol of the new government's decision to honour the Jews, while consigning the Polish national struggle to the dustbin of history," wrote American historian Michael C. Steinlauf, in a book dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust in Poland (Steinlauf 1997: 49). "By the 1960s and 1970s," writes Orla-Bukowska, "the principle 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' steered the opposition. Growing progressively and more inclusive of and siding with anyone whom the socialist regime officially disclaimed, the opposition maintained surreptitious contacts with and wrote in favour of the West, of Germans and Germany, and of Jews" (Orla-Bukowska 2006: 189). Particularly when "Poles of Jewish ancestry", themselves progressively disenchanted with the communist state and Marxism-Leninism as a political ideology, became the victims of party purges and anti-Semitism and were ultimately forced to flee Poland in 1968. In the changing landscape of political alliances, the content of the bifurcated Polish memory of World War II was also shifting, and it was not surprising that Warsaw of the 1970s witnessed Jewish Culture Weeks celebrated under the auspices of liberal intellectuals from the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia. Of great importance for the presence of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Polish memory was the 1977 publication of Hanna Krall's *Sheltering the Flame*, a book based on interviews with Marek Edelman, a Holocaust survivor and a fighter in both uprisings in Warsaw.⁵ All this contributed to a change in the private, unofficial discourse of Polish World War II memory, making

the Jewish past and the Holocaust its part and parcel.

The sixteen months of the "first Solidarity" (from the protests in August 1980 to Martial Law in December 1981) were, according to Orla-Bukowska, crucial for Polish World War II memory, allowing its unofficial contents "from the Katyn Forest to the Kielce pogrom" to enter the public sphere. Among the key issues raised were the Soviet occupation and the Shoah. Nonetheless, while the former was an issue without serious international response,⁶ the latter surfaced in conjunction with a worldwide awakening of Holocaust remembrance. It is also important to note that while in the 1960s and 1970s access to unofficial memory of World War II highly depended on family history and social background, remaining closely related to the region and class origin of those who could be active in remembering, after the "first Solidarity" this was no longer the case. In the 1970s, the transmission of the contents of unofficial national memory became an issue for the opposition activists. Still, the first independent (meaning mostly underground) education initiatives, the "flying courses",⁷ the intelligentsia directed mostly to its own members. Even so, Poland of the 1980s witnessed an enormous proliferation of independent publications addressed to a very broad audience, propagating the content of unofficial memory.

Memory Bifurcated

The demographic situation in Warsaw after World War II was highly heterogeneous. At the end of the 1950s, when the population of the city reached a million, only a certain fraction of adults had been natives to the city. Two-thirds of the pre-war city population, including its Jewry, had perished;⁸ the rest was deported after the uprising. Immediately following the liberation of the western bank of Warsaw,⁹ which took place on January 17, 1945, the number of inhabitants of the city amounted to a mere 162,000.¹⁰ By December 1945 already 386,000 food coupons were distributed, and the number of residents was calculated as 467,000 (Drozdowski & Zahorski 1997: 482). Warsaw as a capital attracted immigrants from all over the Polish territory, people of different social standing and different motivations. The reconstruc-

tion of the city required a huge amount of labour but also intellectual work; new government administration structures, developing industry and education opportunities were obvious magnets for immigrants from smaller towns and rural areas. Territorial change, which provoked mass immigration between post-war Poland and the Soviet Union, as well as Poland and Germany, also brought about interior migrations within the national territory. Warsaw's demographic situation provoked substantial divergences in the private sphere of World War II memory among the city residents, whose diverse origins spanned across distant parts of the pre-World War II territories of the Republic of Poland. Their family experiences of the war could be completely disparate, depending both on the geographic place of their origin and their social and ethnic heritage. It was only the "first Solidarity" and its underground aftermath that brought about important change by assembling the diverse contents of private memories into a body of unofficial, "underground" memory that possessed an enormous subversive power. The first officially approved public commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising took place in 1983. This was the unveiling of the statue of the *Young Insurgent* by Polish sculptor Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, commemorating boy and girl scouts who fought in the uprising. The official monument to the Warsaw Uprising was erected in 1988.

The 1980s also witnessed a growing international interest in Holocaust commemorations, and Poland, in spite of its location behind the Iron Curtain also participated, on both official and unofficial levels. In her book on reinventing Jewish culture in Europe, Ruth Ellen Gruber observes: "For decades after World War II, memory of Jewish history and heritage was often marginalized, repressed, or forgotten, not only in countries where the flames of the Holocaust had burned most fiercely, but also in countries less directly touched by the effects of the Shoah. Jews, their culture, and their history were often viewed as something distinctly apart, off-limits; even the Holocaust was regarded as an internal 'Jewish thing', detached from the general flow of national history and national memory" (Gruber 2002: 5). This detachment, the sin of indifference,

already expressed during the war by Czesław Miłosz in his poem *Campo de' Fiori* and evoked in 1987 by literary scholar Jan Błoński in his essay published in the liberal Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*,¹¹ became the starting point for critical reflection on the Polish memory of the Holocaust and the role of Jews in Polish national history, while the reassessment of the value of European Jewish heritage was going on in Western Europe. In 1987, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a resolution recognizing "the very considerable and distinctive contribution that Jews and the tradition of Judaism have made to the historical development of Europe in the cultural and other fields" (quoted in Gruber 2002: 5). Another thing of importance for Warsaw memory of the World War II ghetto were trips to Poland organized by the Israeli Ministry of Education for high-school students which started in 1988 (Feldman 2008: 30). Numerous groups of Israeli youth waving white-and-blue flags, always accompanied by security guards, started appearing in Muranów and quickly becoming a presence that was difficult for the residents to ignore (cf. Wójcik, Bilewicz & Lewicka 2010). The same year, 1988, saw the inauguration of a monument built on the Umschlagplatz – or the platform from which trains were loaded for deportation – commemorating the victims of the ghetto.

The bifurcation of memory about which Orla-Bukowska writes, remained valid until the transition, when the process of filling in "the blank spaces" provided an opportunity for the unofficial and the official memories to meet on public grounds. Yet if the bifurcation between the private and the public national memory seemed to come to an end, what emerged was a plurality of World War II memory communities (Nijakowski 2008: 145–190). Not only has every ethnic minority gained rights to its own memory, but also Polish memories have turned out to be diverse according to region and its status during World War II. Still the Warsaw Uprising has gained an almost unparalleled position in the institutionalized national memory of World War II. Further, with the advent of the right-wing government in autumn 2005 that has challenged

the plurality of memory communities, memory of the Warsaw Uprising was made into a universally valid example of Polish heroic martyrdom and moral victory. Official, national commemorations were introduced and on the 60th anniversary of the uprising (2004), the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising was inaugurated, becoming since the most visited museum in Warsaw, recognized by virtually every inhabitant of the city.

Missing Neighbours

In 2000, Tomasz Gross' book *The Neighbors* was published, heating the public debate about the role that Poles had played during the Holocaust. Polish public opinion had to face the fact that for each tree in Yad Vashem planted by a Pole there was not only a lot of indifference, but also a substantial number of *szmalcowniki*¹² and people ready to kill their Jewish neighbours. It signified not only that being a Pole means to share martyrdom with somebody else, but to find oneself in the position of villain. It was not a question of moral dilemma whether you would have joined the uprising or not,¹³ but a question of responsibility for the murder of the defenceless. In 2001, while commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Jedwabne pogrom,¹⁴ the President of the Republic, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, officially asked for forgiveness. The 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising could not be celebrated in a museum just yet; however, in 2005 the Museum of the History of Polish Jews was officially established. Its location in Muranów, in front of Rappaport's monument to the Heroes of the Ghetto, was approved and for the 70th anniversary, the building of the museum was inaugurated. In the meantime, in 2010, Rafał Betlejewski, the same artist and copyrighter who had celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising with the action "Would I have joined?", organized the action "I miss you, Jew". This consisted of painting the slogan in places around Warsaw and its suburbs where Jewish communities used to live before World War II. The artist's choice for the background was mostly the walls of decrepit pre-war constructions. On several occasions, the word "Jew" quickly disappeared from the graffiti and on one occasion

the author was arrested by the police who claimed his action was anti-Semitic. The most immediate conclusion is that the word "Jew" itself by many Varsovians was read as anti-Semitic. A more distanced analysis rather points to the artist's motivation, which is more directly related to the memory of World War II. As he declared, he tried to express the feeling of nostalgia for a world that had disappeared. This nostalgic approach was introduced to Polish memory discourse in the late 1970s with the weeks of Jewish Culture organized by the more democratically oriented Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (Orla-Bukowska 2006: 190).

Polish memory of World War II has been undergoing substantial changes but as Nijakowski says, it still remains the highest instance of national memory, which means it can greatly influence the attitudes and motivations of contemporary Poles. Warsaw-related memory of World War II is part of Polish memory in general, but in considering the memory activism and regional identity formation after 1989, and especially after Poland's accession to the EU, it should rather be seen as one of several regional memory communities emerging in the last decades; peculiar in its own way, different from the others, it has its own memory activists, places, and struggles.

Constructing the City's Past by Walking: My Peripatetic Anthropology at Home

I am a Warsaw native. I spent the first twenty-five years of my life living in Muranów and Mirów, and some years after I had moved out, I started guiding foreign tourists on Warsaw tours, which included the former ghetto area.¹⁵ Doing an anthropological study of one's native city is undoubtedly doing an anthropological study of home, so it poses questions about the anthropologist's presence in the field and the strategies of her engagement with her own world, which cannot be taken for granted in anthropology. "On a phenomenological level, home is the familiar, only becoming 'uncharted territory' when a homecomer returns and finds the basis for the taken-for-granted changed, while fieldwork can be the location of others experienced by a stranger

in a non-familiar place. The existential dialectic between these two apparent opposites may be played out ... as familiar place interacts with non-familiar to produce stranger-at-home as well as home-with-stranger" (Weil 1987: 196). At home, as anthropologist Shalva Weil writes, anthropology "no longer becomes the field-site but an all-embracing intellectual discipline, which interacts with those who constitute the home, such as family members, co-residents, or friends" (ibid.), also childhood friends. Attempting an anthropological study of Muranów and Mirów, I cannot systematically and reflexively acquire cultural competence as an ethnographer would do in a foreign country, thus building up the cultural knowledge (Hastrup 1995: 57). My cultural knowledge is already there, with all my memories unavoidably shaped by memory of the community in which I grew up and the everyday practices I used to perform in the space of my city. Cultural knowledge was there before my anthropological reflexivity could have developed. In the 1970s and 1980s on my way to youth choir rehearsals, I used to pass by several similar sandstone plaques bearing a text that started: "This place has been sanctified by the blood of Poles fallen for the liberty of the Homeland." Erected by the city authorities at the sites of street executions carried out by the Nazis during World War II, especially during the Warsaw Uprising, the plaques noted the date of the execution and the number of its victims. I also used to pass by a black marble plaque marking the place where romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid used to live. In one of his verses, he addresses Warsaw saying that he would like to have a single cobblestone of the city's streets on which, "no blood, nor tears would shine". Walking the streets of my city, I was initiated into its martyrdom before I could understand what the word "martyrdom" really meant. On the other hand, I experienced the "memory hiatus", as living in Muranów and Mirów I had no access to any oral sources on the district's ghetto past. The sources I had, family memories and my friends' parents and grandparents, spoke of the history of the city reconstruction and the war outside of Warsaw in the villages of central and eastern Poland, or further east, in the territories occupied by the Soviets.

I was initiated into the vast areas of memory of my city and my national community only in 1980, as a secondary school student. Since then, I became an avid reader of publications available in the clandestine circulation, went for informal walks in the Old Town with Uprising veterans, and took part in or at least witnessed several commemorations belonging to the unofficial sphere of Polish memory (cf. Orla-Bukowska 2006).

In effect, this ethnography of the memory of World War II in Warsaw is unavoidably an ethnography of self, with all the consequences for the way an ethnographer organizes knowledge and puts it in writing (Strathern 1987). In her analysis of the practice of auto-anthropology, British anthropologist Marilyn Strathern points to the fact that compared to the practice of anthropology "out there" it entails a reversal in approach to anthropological writing in terms of the strategies of "authorship" and "writership", as defined by Roland Barthes in his essay "Authors and Writers" (Barthes 1982). According to Barthes, an authored text expresses the author's engagement with the world by the means of language, with the author being present in it and highly self-reflexive. The writer, meanwhile, is someone who pretends to be absent from the text and for whom language is just a transparent tool. Strathern, drawing on Paul Rabinow's application of Barthes' categories in his analysis of ethnographic productions, observes that while anthropologists act in their texts both as writers and authors, they do it for different audiences. Therefore, when anthropology is done "out there", and the objective is to represent "an exogenous other", then "for the home readership the ethnographer is author, being an authoritative source through which his/her readership have access to the other. Towards those being studied, the ethnographer is a writer, creating an explicit relationship between their ideas and his/her framings" (Strathern 1987: 25). When doing anthropology at home, the structure of distinctions differs, "[t]he ethnographer becomes *author* [emphasis in the original] in relation to those being studied. The proposition rests on there being continuity between their cultural constructs and his/hers" (ibid.: 26). This cultural continuity between my products and what the people I study pro-

duce by way of accounts of themselves is crucial for doing anthropology at home, as well as writing “home ethnographies”. Especially since establishing a neat border between the home and the field has been extremely difficult. On the one hand, the Polish scholars who write about Polish memory are my partners in an important debate that I also engage in, being a Polish scholar myself. On the other hand, these same people are my field informants, providing me with the expert information I need for understanding the past and present of my field area. At the same time, my own childhood memories are made into a source of information, as are the memories of those informants of mine with whom I walked through the districts of Muranów and Mirów. Can I be an author and a writer for the same audience? I would agree with Strathern that for the home society the accounts produced by an anthropologist “may be regarded as partial, obvious, repeating what is known, but also as idiosyncratic and trivial; he/she has merely authored another version” (ibid.). Yet I think that her statement that “as author an anthropologist may cast people’s experiences into a different light in an illuminating way: people will know more about themselves” applies not only to “my people”, but also to my fellow anthropologists, who after all share the memory of World War II and the Holocaust.

Walking Practices at Home and in the Field

“The ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below’, below the thresholds at which visibility begins,” writes Michel de Certeau in his famous essay on walking in the city (Certeau 1988: 93). Visibility in a city is a privilege of the theorist, “the voyeur god”: a city planner, an urbanist, a cartographer. In order to be at home *qua* anthropologist, I decided to organize my knowledge using the technique of walking. According to de Certeau, walking is an elementary form of the experience of the city and the practice that allows for making use of spaces that cannot be seen. Obviously, engagement with the city space by walking does not exclude the sense of sight but brings it back to the body, reconnects with other senses, and imparts a different rhythm to thinking; it is also an efficient way of exploring. I decided that my fieldwork would be based

on walking and focused on the practices of living the city memory by walking it. I had relatively easy access to some residents of Muranów and Mirów as they were my former neighbours, but I decided not to carry out formalized interviews and instead casually asked them about their walking routines. I took a childhood friend for a walk in the neighbourhood in which we used to live. I walked with visiting friends of different nationalities, some of them anthropologists, some of them not. I went back to the places I knew from childhood and adolescence, walking them for the sake of this study. I had a camera and took pictures. On several occasions I practiced what anthropologist Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch has called the “tourist gait”, and by which she understands “walking with heightened interest in one’s surroundings” (Österlund-Pötzsch 2010: 17).

In their text entitled “Fieldwork on Foot” and dedicated to walking as a fieldwork technique, Tim Ingold and Jo Lee (2006) rightly observe that anthropological fieldwork practices have been undertaken in several different modes. The differences among them result from distinct visions of anthropological fieldwork, widely discussed in the literature, and depend on the researchers’ position in relation to their field, the activities undertaken there and the purpose of those activities. However, although different modes of fieldwork tend to overlap in fieldwork practice, which usually uses various kinds of observation and participation techniques, it is only the change of perspective – from observing somebody’s experience to sharing it – that provides fieldwork with necessary grounding. Interestingly, according to Ingold and Lee, fieldwork done by walking allows for the particularly smooth combining of modes, as walkers “describe these three different types of perception or experience in ways that are not all in conflict with each other” (ibid.: 74). Ingold and Lee propose that walking itself can be taken as a practice of understanding, different from the understanding that derives from discourse analysis for which more traditional forms of ethnography are used. Potentially then, understanding through movement, not only through discourse is what is at stake, and the understanding that is shared and taking place in the world walked together. As perception in walk-

ing involves senses differently than the perception of a still observer located in a fixed point in space, the knowledge built in walking is necessarily different from the one built at rest. Ingold actually believes that movement is much more common a way of perceiving the environment than a fixed point of observation, and that “cognition should not be *set off* from locomotion” (Ingold 2004: 331).

Reflecting on my own walking routines and practices, I realized that it was necessary to move out of Muranów and Mirów in order to start walking in these districts, not as a merchant of lemons at Campo de' Fiori,¹⁶ prone to “the oblivion born before the flames have died,” but as a stranger able to focus on things beyond the safe and stable course of the everyday. I started practicing the tourist gait by becoming a tourist guide myself: a native explaining her world to foreigners. “Walking practices,” Österlund-Pötzsch writes, “are part and parcel of the complex process involved in producing tourist places” (ibid.: 16). In the case of Muranów and Mirów, I have taken part in that process. Walking with different people and talking about walking practices with the neighbours was an important part of my research.¹⁷ Walks and talks focused on childhood or youth memories from the 1950s, 60s and 70s, which were almost completely devoid of memories of the Jewish past, but from time to time the contemporary perspective surfaced with a comment like, “look, we didn't know that then...”. The experience of the oblivion “then” was in these moments punctuated by the memory possessed by “now”. It is of note that while the experience of living in Muranów in the 1950s, 60s and 70s included no memory or consciousness of the Jewish presence at all, in the early 2000s the inhabitants of Muranów were aware of the Jewish past of the place and identified it as important for the Jewish tradition.¹⁸ Memory of the Jewish past among the inhabitants and former inhabitants of Muranów can be defined as post-memory, founded not on the direct experience of the events that form its content but requiring an investment of creative imagination. Material interventions play an important part in building up this kind of memory, especially in an environment that bears virtual-

ly no traces of the past that the post-memory aims to evoke (Hirsch 1997; Wójcik, Bilewicz & Lewicka 2010: 198). Yet while Muranów's post-memory has been finding its material representations in the form of official commemorations, the still living memory of the district's inhabitants, attached to the urban substance itself is not commemorated. No events worthy of official commemoration can be remembered happening there in the 1950s, 60s or 70s, no people are reclaimed by their neighbours as worth remembering; even the commemoration of architect Bohdan Lachert (see below) was contested. The times and people of the People's Republic of Poland receive no support in official commemorations and are now falling into oblivion.

The Void: Memory Practices in Mirów and Muranów

Chłodna street

Chłodna is a street in Mirów, in the western part of the centre of Warsaw. There is an information board (part of the city information system) attached to the building at Chłodna 22, which says: “Chłodna street. Formerly a dirt road. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Chłodna led from the Mirowskie barracks to the village of Wola and for a certain time it used to be called Wolska. It got its official name Chłodna in 1770, in reference to the chilly winds that blow along the street from the west to the east.”¹⁹ Just a few metres from this information board there is a concrete plinth with some text and a solid brass plate attached to it. In the pavement along the curb, elongated cast-iron slabs form a line with inscriptions in Polish and English: “Ghetto wall, January-August 1942.” On the other side of the cobblestone street through the middle of which runs a pair of old tram rails, there is a similar line. Chłodna street, being an important east-west thoroughfare, could not have been enclosed inside the ghetto. It was the ghetto residents who had been excluded from the city life, not the street. So a wooden footbridge over Chłodna was constructed for the ghetto residents to commute between the southern, smaller part of the ghetto and its main sector in the north. There actually is a bridge over the street, just a couple of meters from



Ill. 2: Chłodna street: the Bridge Monument, the information pillar seen from the back, and the pavement with slabs marking the ghetto border. (Photo: Ewa Klekot)

the concrete plinth with information on the Warsaw Ghetto. Two metal pillars on this side of the street, two on the other, and between them parallel lines of silver cables. In the pillars there are two peepholes for those interested in seeing some old photographs, and a sound installation. The markings in the pavement were introduced in November 2008 on the initiative of Eleonora Bergman, a historian from the Jewish Historical Institute, who co-designed them with architect Tomasz Lec (Chomątowska 2012: 46), who also designed the footbridge-monument inaugurated in October 2011.

Following the old tram rails a hundred metres further, one finds yet another, different type of iron-cast markings in the pavement, this time forming a square with an inscription in Polish reading: "Bunker 1944." This commemoration was introduced in 2011, during the restoration works on Chłodna, but its design is weak and it looks rather pitiful compared to the per-

vasive presence of the ghetto wall slabs. It is not the only 1944-related commemoration here. Just opposite the bridge, near the building located at Chłodna 25 there is a semi-circular outline made with the same markings and letters, reading this time in German, "Nordwache 1944", and a black marble plate on the wall of the building itself. Commemorated here, according to the text on the tablet emplaced by an organization of uprising combatants in 1998, is the capturing of a crucial Nazi post by the insurgents.²⁰

The building at Chłodna 20, the second from the bridge, is a "survivor" although its richly decorated, eclectic facade had lost one storey during the war. It is here that Adam Czerniaków, the president of the Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat, had lived. However, there is no mention about it on the building itself and the relevant information is passed on to visitors directly by guides or can be read in guidebooks on Warsaw's Jewish heritage (Jagielski 2002: 38). In the

southern part of the ghetto, more buildings have survived than in the north. This is partially because the uprising did not take place there, as after the deportations of 1942 the Nazis reduced the ghetto to its northernmost part and also because immediately after World War II this part of the city was not included in the first reconstruction and redevelopment scheme. In consequence, half-ruined buildings with dark, musty courtyards, where falling bricks could kill an unsuspecting passer-by still remained in such a state up until the mid-1970s, providing shelter to a very different class of residents than the population of newly built Muranów, which was to become a place of formation of a new socialist society. The area around Chłodna and neighbouring streets to the west and south was composed of architectural war survivors and post-war makeshift constructions. It was inhabited by those who for various reasons were not willing or able to participate in the socialist struggle for a better future: small private entrepreneurs whose life was being made more and more difficult by the new system which forced them to always operate on the edge between the legal and the illegal, members of the lumpenproletariat and petty criminals. And although the first giant blocks of the new residential neighbourhood “Behind the Iron Gate” (*Za Żelazną Bramą*) appeared in the immediate vicinity in the 1960s, the area around Chłodna was still called “the wild west” (Nadolski 2008).²¹

In October 2012, the same Chłodna street witnessed yet another Jewish memory-related intervention in the cityscape. Between the building at Chłodna 22 and the one at Żelazna 74, in a slot barely a metre wide, a peculiar artistic object was inserted: the Keret house. A construction designed by Warsaw architect Jakub Szczęsny, it measures 92 cm in its narrowest point, and 152 in the widest. It is equipped with sanitary fittings and electricity. The Keret house was designed to become a solitary retreat for Israeli writer Etgar Keret, but other artists and writers can also apply for a residency, which is granted by a commission headed by Keret himself. The project is organized by the Polish Modern Art Foundation, an NGO sponsored by the city, the Ministry of Culture and private donors. The Keret house webpage

explicitly states that the project is an interpretation of Warsaw’s World War II past:

The present form of Warsaw is a result of the very painful history of the city and subsequent urban decisions. The city’s war and post-war experiences resulted in it being split and smashed by temporary and random building development. Despite the incoherence, Warsaw is an extraordinary city of creative chaos. Warsaw is full of unexpected solutions and mysterious places created by the former tissue of the city and the fact that it is not united with the contemporary, growing urban structure. This process produced literal cracks within the urban system, which function as non-productive void spaces.²²

So the Israeli writer’s residence is supposed to “fill in the crack in the city structure,” and its inhabitants will be “settling in void.” This programme resonates with the idea of a void in the city life left by the Holocaust, present in Warsaw memory of World War II. To be sure, the feeling of void and the sentiment of nostalgia are not only a Warsaw, nor Polish idiosyncrasy. Ruth Ellen Gruber explores them in her book as a pan-European phenomenon (Gruber 2002). Nevertheless, the Keret House does not fit in easily with her description of a “virtually Jewish world” recreated in the void left by the Holocaust. Quite the contrary, it converts the void left by World War II into the city’s living heritage. The question that remains open is to what extent the permanent inhabitants of Chłodna can participate and live this void as their heritage too. As for now, according to the architect, the Community of Residents at Chłodna 22²³ has been very friendly in facilitating access to all the installation systems. As one of the neighbours told me, an opportunity to sell the flat at good profit to Jews may also arise in consequence.

South Muranów

Muranów, a central part of the Northern District, also became a central part of the ghetto and was subsequently demolished in its entirety. According to Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, experts



Ill. 3: South Muranów. (Photo: Krzysztof Pijarski)

on Jewish Warsaw in the times of World War II, the Northern District of Warsaw was mainly populated by Jews for two main reasons: the nineteenth century policy of excluding Jewish residents from certain parts and streets in the city (*ulice egzymowane*, or exempted streets) and Jews' tendency to settle in the vicinity of co-religious people. Since the residential centre of Warsaw and the Old Town were *exempt*, Jews settled in their immediate surroundings to the west and north. In 1840, a Jewish quarter in the north-western part of the city already existed (Engelking & Leociak 2001: 28–29). In 1938, the Northern District equalled roughly one-fifth of the city and was populated predominantly by Jews, especially its central part, Muranów. In the territory monitored by the police precinct in Muranów (Komisariat IV) Jews made up 90.5% of the population (ibid.: 34).

In 1945, Muranów was virtually non-existent: buildings had been turned into heaps of rubble, lit-

erally razed to the ground by the Nazis after the liquidation of the ghetto. According to their plans, the German city of Warsaw on the western bank of the Vistula was to become home for about 130 000 German residents. The rest of its inhabitants, namely Poles, were to be resettled on the other side of the river, while places that had been previously inhabited by Jews were no longer to be part of the city. "In any case the place inhabited previously by five hundred thousand of the underhumans, completely unsuitable for Germans, should disappear," wrote Himmler in February 1943 (Chomątowska 2012: 96). In late June 1944, an SS officer responsible for the systematic demolition of the ghetto remnants informed his Berlin superiors that, "works in the Warsaw ghetto must be discontinued. Demolition has been finished on time but the levelling works could not be finished" (ibid.). The demolition squad was particularly efficient in the southern part of Muranów, which they converted into a real moonscape.

The reconstruction and redevelopment of Warsaw after World War II actually translated to a huge modernization project for the city, as well as a re-definition of its history according to the needs of the new regime. Warsaw was supposed to leave behind its dark past of bourgeois capitalism with its urban architecture of gilded eclectic palaces for the rich and dark tenement houses with narrow courtyards for the poor. Following popular opinion, the pre-war Northern District was par excellence an example of that dark past to be exorcised from the city by the advent of modern social housing, which developed on an unprecedented scale after the nationalization of private land property in the city by what became known as the "Warsaw Decree" in October 1945. Construction works in south Muranów started in 1949 and were announced as an important part of the six-year plan. An exemplary housing estate for the working class was going to be built on the ghetto ruins, with new houses located on the embankments made of rubble of the old ones. The bricks were going to be made using a special recycling technology, where material from the ruins would be ground to form new bricks. The author of this project was a Warsaw architect named Bohdan Lachert who was

famous for his progressive, modernist designs already before World War II. "As the subsequent strata of ancient Troy allowed archaeologists to study its history, the construction of the new housing estate for the working class in Muranów on hills made of rubble will testify to new life born on the ruins of old social relations, on the territory commemorating the unparalleled barbarity of Nazism and the heroism of the Ghetto insurgents," wrote Lachert in 1949, explaining the outline of his project to an audience of Polish professionals (quoted in Chomętowska 2012: 170). Lachert's original idea was to leave the buildings without any plastering in order to make the material, called "rubble-concrete" (*gruzobeton*), visible. The bare, "rubble-concrete" material presence of the ruins transformed into bricks was to be a reminder of the tragic past. After some years, the local residents started protesting against the ascetic functionalism of the estate-monument and since their voices resonated with the political shift in official aesthetics towards "socialist realism", they got the Muranów houses plastered and painted.

The whole area of the Northern District was re-designed. Not only were new housing estates constructed but new streets were created, some of them bearing old names, others named after heroes of the Ghetto Uprising. South Muranów was completed in 1956. The rest of the former ghetto was subsequently populated by typical communist blocks in simplified functionalist style, different from Lachert's estate. "Had I known that the Poles were going to build blocks all around, I would have designed the monument differently," Nathan Rappaport is supposed to have said (*ibid.*: 129). "There is a void in the ghetto place. It is built-up but bare, it is dead although life is buzzing and humming there. The place survived but has been hollowed out, deprived of content, of interior. [...] Its people perished in the Holocaust, but *what also perished was space*, the material substance of the place," writes Jacek Leociak, a Polish historian of the ghetto and a long-time resident of Muranów (Engelking & Leociak 2001: 766; my emphasis).

Yet Lachert's design succeeded where other designs realized in northern Muranów failed; he created an extremely friendly, egalitarian and safe, although

modest, living space out of the ghetto ruins. The architecture of south Muranów was based on Warsaw's pre-war experiences in the development of modern social housing estates. The whole area was divided into square blocks of buildings located on embankments, which were accessible by stairs from street level. Lachert and his team designed three types of housing construction. There was the long, four-storey *klatkowiec* (many staircase house), the similarly long and tall *galeriowiec* (gallery house) where single flats were accessed not from the staircase but from external balconies constructed along the walls (it made it possible to place more small units per building than in the *klatkowiec*), and finally the smaller, two-storey cubes known as the *punktowiec* (point house).²⁴ Combining these elements they designed individual blocks on the embankments with long and taller constructions along the streets and smaller "point houses" inside the spaces surrounded by "gallery houses" and "many staircase houses". Inside the spaces framed by taller buildings situated along the streets, there were green courtyards with sandboxes for children, places to hang the washing and ubiquitous hanging frames for beating out the dust from carpets, almost always occupied by playing kids. In the inner space of a block there was also normally a kindergarten, or a crèche. Schools were constructed and the "Muranów" Youth House of Culture was organized in the reconstructed Działyński Palace, offering a wide range of activities for children and young people. During the "Little Stabilization" period (1956–1968) and the "early Gierek time" (1970–75), south Muranów was a green and lively neighbourhood inhabited mostly by working class people with some admixture of intelligentsia. The spatial organization discouraged strangers from venturing into the inner space of blocks. Buildings located on embankments were covered with greenery and the stairs between two long buildings, or the vaulted gate opening in one of them, worked as natural filters for the human traffic on the streets.²⁵

Lachert succeeded in bringing new life to the place but not in building on its memory. Once the houses were plastered, south Muranów plunged into amnesia and even the children attending the primary

school named in honour of Ludwik Zamenhof were not told that he was a Jew.²⁶ In her book about Muranów, Cracow-born journalist Beata Chomańska (2012) gathers several portraits of former and current residents of the district, Jacek Leociak among them. His childhood memories from Muranów of the 1960s – like the memories of almost all the residents living there as children in the 1960s and 70s – were devoid of any references to the World War II ghetto, or the pre-war inhabitants of the Northern District. “The little hill, on which the house had been located was considered a natural lie of the land in this part of the city centre and at home he never heard the word ‘ghetto’” (ibid.: 412). It was only when as a student he was coming back home by bus from the theatre where he had watched “Conversations with the Butcher”,²⁷ that he suddenly realised that the names of streets the bus was passing by approaching his home were the same names he had just heard in the theatre. Nowadays, Leociak is an acclaimed historian of the ghetto.

Stacja Muranów, an NGO co-funded by Chomańska, initiated Muranów memory activism in the form of murals referring to the district’s history. The first, painted in 2011 by young artists Anna Koźbiel and Adam Walas, is located on Zamenhofa street and has been entitled “Esperanto”. The same artists painted a second mural dedicated to Bohdan Lachert, which was inaugurated in November 2012. Both works were orchestrated by Stacja and supported by the city government. Both had local media coverage during their inauguration ceremonies. In September 2013, the Lachert mural was hacked off by the city government’s Municipal Estate Management Company, the same source that had earlier sponsored the painting. Inquired by a journalist, the Company explained that the painting would be reconstructed after renovations of the wall itself (Dubrowska 2013). Then in April 2013, on the 70th anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising, a third mural was inaugurated by another NGO, called Klamra, depicting Marek Edelman.²⁸ In September 2013, Stacja with the same couple of artists produced its third mural, called “The Women of Muranów”. Both of Stacja’s existing murals are located in vault-

ed gates in long *klatkowiec* houses. The one depicting Edelman is located high on a building wall. Yellow daffodils were painted on the bottom part of the wall with Edelman’s portrait; it was during the inauguration that the participants could paint daffodils using templates, rollers and paint provided by the organizers. The daffodil, bearing certain resemblance to a yellow star, had been chosen as the symbol of the 70th anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising.²⁹ Apart from memory activists and an audience coming from other parts of the city, the mural inaugurations attracted local participants and when the community of residents at Zamenhofa wanted to renovate their building, they facilitated the artists’ reconstruction of the mural afterwards, paying for the whole process.

The Oxygenator

Próżna street is in the centre of Warsaw, just opposite the Palace of Culture and Science. Próżna is a street of “ghetto inselbergs”, what refers specifically to the buildings at Próżna 7, 9, 12 and 14. Barely a hundred meters of pre-war houses on both sides of the street make it into the only street of such historical density on the territory of the former Jewish Warsaw. It had been incorporated into the southernmost part of the ghetto but excluded from it already in 1941, which can explain its partial survival. The eastern part of Próżna was hardly damaged during the Warsaw Uprising. But according to Warsaw historian and heritage activist Janusz Sujecki, it does not exist on the map of modern Warsaw – not because of the war, but as a result of the post-war activities of the Bureau for the Reconstruction of the Capital, which was responsible for the demolition of several houses on Próżna³⁰ and the posterior negligence towards the four remaining pre-war buildings. These were declared historic monuments only in 1987 (Sujecki 1993). The western end of the street opens at Grzybowski square where the Jewish theatre is located today. The Nożyk synagogue – the only functioning synagogue in Warsaw – is just behind it on Twarda street. Today, this is the centre of Jewish community life in the city. Próżna and Grzybowski are where the main events of the yearly Festival of Jewish Culture,



Ill. 4: Oxygenator. (Photo: Rafał Manowski, courtesy Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw)

dubbed “Singer’s Warsaw”, have been taking place since its beginning in 2004. It was in the courtyard of Prózna 14 that Maurizio Cattlan’s sculpture “Him”, a kneeling Hitler, was placed during the artist’s exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Art in 2012.

In the presence of material substance, which “remembers”, the memory works more readily, at least for those who do not have their own remembrances of the past that they want to remember. Nonetheless, artist Joanna Rajkowska³¹ did not invite people to contemplate the Prózna vestiges when she built her “Oxygenator” in the middle of Grzybowski square in 2007. The intervention consisted of building a sort of Shangri-la just 300 metres from one of the main crossings in the centre of Warsaw, almost in the shadow of the Stalinist tower of the Palace of Culture. Before 2007, Grzybowski square was a rather neglected, empty space with some unimpressive-looking trees, a couple of benches used mainly by the local amateurs of cheap alcoholic beverages, and

always bearing the traces of a substantial population of pigeons. Rajkowska changed this into a green spot with a pond full of water lilies and fish, surrounded by little embankments covered with lush grass inviting passers-by to sit down. Special equipment was set up in the middle of the pond to enrich the air with oxygen.

Rajkowska’s intervention was preceded by excavations in the area of the future pond in which the artist also took part. She had chosen the place fully aware of its ghetto past and the objective of her “Oxygenator” was to make people wonder about the place in which they so unexpectedly found themselves, in the middle of the city centre. The installation’s purpose was also to inspire the local residents to quietly reflect on the place in which they are living. She wanted “to unblock the ritualized conflicts buried in Grzybowski square” (Pawełek 2010: 72). More specifically so, as her project had arisen as a kind of preventive action in a conflict situation.

With the “Oxygenator”, the artist and the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw were taking hold of a place where another monument had already been proposed: a monument to the Martyrdom of the Volhynia Massacre. This was supposed to be a giant sculpture representing a dead baby tied to a tree trunk with barbed wire, all cast in brass. Here, the fight for the city space as a place of commemoration was fought not only in the name of the “martyrdom contest”, but also in the name of the aesthetics of the cityscape and the least egalitarian of causes – the taste. Rajkowska’s project brought a truce, although not the peace.

To a certain extent, the Oxygenator reversed the architectural features of south Muranów as the artist had used the embankments to surround the pond, not to elevate it, but in both cases the objective was to produce an enclosed space for people to feel safe. The atmosphere at the pond (open July 20–November 20) was relaxed. As the installation’s security guard observed,

[I]n the evening there is more of a romantic mood... By day there is an atmosphere of curing, healing, when the elderly regulars that come here are sitting around. Some start their day by stopping at the *Oxygenator* or “the pond” in local slang. Someone comes at seven in the morning with their dog, attaches its leash to the bench and starts performing gymnastic exercises – a lady who is well over her seventies. Another comes around eight and brings me the newspaper. “Mr. Pawelek, I brought you *Metro*” – we talk briefly about the fish.... (ibid.: 12)

The Oxygenator proved to be very successful among the local residents, who live mostly in rather gloomy ten- or fifteen-storey blocks of flats constructed in the 1960s and 1970s. They wanted it to be reconstructed in 2008, after it had been dismantled in autumn 2007. A resident of Bagno street, Irena Zaborska, wrote (ibid.: 261):

The Oxygenator by Mrs. Rajkowska had something elusive but attractive, which made people

want to gather around it, stand for a while, sit by it, walk, and talk. After all, the Poles almost do not talk to each other – and here they started. They started to make appointments by it, to meet, to talk and to stay quiet – together. And we are very grateful to Mrs. Rajkowska for this. And no other project can replace it, especially if it divides instead of uniting.

In spite of their letters to the city authorities and an official petition signed by a thousand neighbours, the Oxygenator never materialized again. After the renovation of the square had been completed in late autumn 2010, the pond reappeared in the centre, but framed with granite blocks. Among them in the spring, greenery was planted and some places to sit were made; all in impeccable, formal-with-a-touch-of-fantasy style of the new business greenery in the city. Nothing was left of the casual, cosy and intimate atmosphere of the Oxygenator, which had made it a liked and desirable element of the neighbourhood. Today, Grzybowski square is clean, civilized and impersonal, rather a place to pass by comfortably undisturbed than to sit and contemplate its past, or delve into the conflicts buried there.

Conclusions

Almost seventy years after World War II, the buildings at Próźna street were still neglected and in an increasingly decrepit state. The webpage of an artistic project organized there between 2005 and 2010 reads:

Próźna is actually the only little street spared from the annihilation of the ghetto. Its current state of almost total ruin ... is in itself a heartbreaking monument of the destruction of a community of its inhabitants but also of the process of the annihilation of memory going on.

The text continues giving a very emotional interpretation of the street’s role:

The appearance of Próźna street makes it visually autonomous in relation to its environs, or the

current centre of Warsaw. In an aesthetically and historically provocative way it opposes the contemporary city. It is a dramatic clash of a dead and dying fragment of the city from the past and the living and the indifferent contemporary city. It is an image of both an ethical and aesthetic conflict in the centre of Warsaw. It is the result of German crimes in the wartime and the post-war indifference.³²

Until the late 1990s, the pre-war houses in Próżna were inhabited. From 2005 to 2010, the ground floors and courtyards of the “ghetto inselbergs” housed an international “Projekt Próżna”. Since 2012, they have been subject to renovation works, which are stripping the street of its look of “almost total ruin,” instead making it look “brand new renovated” and wealthy, with new developments attached to the restored houses.

After World War II, in several places of war destruction in Europe, conservators opted for a “permanent ruin” status for ruined architecture, the most famous cases being the Coventry Cathedral, Emperor Wilhelm’s Church in Berlin and the remnants of the massacred French village of Oradour-sur-Glane. The case of Warsaw was different. The city was going to be rebuilt and the enterprise included the reconstruction of the whole historic area of the city, such as the Old Town and the Royal Route, as well as the construction of a completely new urban landscape. Since its beginning, the reconstruction was the result of the interplay of various political agendas, as well as different conservation ideologies (Martyn 2001). In the territory of the former Northern District of Warsaw, no “permanent ruins” had been left and very few pre-war constructions that had survived were renovated. Meanwhile, the remaining ruins got reduced to a state of substance and space to be remodelled according to the new order of life. The ruins as a form and place did not survive, and with the new limits and order imposed, they were not able to transmit the memory of the past, as the experience of Muranów has clearly shown.

Raphael Samuel, a British historian and author of the book *Theatres of Memory* (first published in

1994), writes about the romantic “involuntary memory” of the suppressed.

The romantic “theatre of memory” was altogether more introspective, not scaling the heights but following the inner light [...]. Romanticism built on time’s ruins. Its idea of memory was premised on a sense of loss. It divorced memory-work from any claim to science, assigning it instead to the realm of the intuitive and the instinctual. It pictured the mind not as a watchtower but as a labyrinth, a subterranean place full of contrived corridors and hidden passages. Instead of anamnesis, the recollection that resulted from memory-training and conscious acts of will, imaginative weight fell on what Proust called “involuntary memory” – the sleeping traumas which spring to life in time of crisis. (Samuel 2012: xxii)

A war ruin, which maintains its form and is practiced as a place (in de Certeau’s sense) facilitates the romantic work of memory, becoming its theatre *par excellence*. The old Próżna street was described by the authors of the Próżna Project webpage as ruins bringing up the suppressed traumas of the past and inviting to mourn their loss, yet with the conservation works this possibility has also been lost.

For decades the Warsaw (and more generally Polish) policy of World War II commemoration focused on Polish heroism in order to re-establish conditions for national life in the new political situation. Mostly signs, symbols and monumental representations were employed, generally underestimating the commemorative potential of both ruins and relics as places of memory. In consequence, the ruins disappeared, leaving a void in the city’s structure on both material and symbolic levels. This void is where the memory struggles are fought and the martyrdom contest is taking place, harnessing Warsaw’s World War II memory to current political agendas. Different material interventions, along with those described, are conceived either to fill this void with memory, or to make a statement about it in order to remember, or to inhabit it, making no allowance for oblivion.



Ill. 5: Graffiti in Ochota district. (Photo: Ingeborga Janikowska-Lipszyc)

Coda: Graffiti in the Ochota District

On April 18, 2013, on the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the magnificent building of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened in Muranów, just opposite Nathan Rapaport's monument to the Heroes of the Ghetto. Many came to the opening wearing yellow paper daffodils, distributed by the museum as a symbol of remembrance. In a nearby courtyard on Nowolipki street, the mural representing Marek Edelman was inaugurated and completed by the audience painting yellow daffodils on its lower part. On the same day in the district of Ochota, on a wall fencing in a local high school, graffiti appeared. It said "1943 we remember," and was clearly marked with a sign of the fans of the biggest Warsaw football club, Legia: an "L" inscribed in a circle. Football fans in Poland, the Legia fans included, like in many places of the

contemporary world, have already given enough reason to be seen as nationalistic, racist, intolerant and violent. Perhaps the "L" in a circle under the date of 1943, instead of 1944, would be enough of a surprise to many, but for more effect, the graffiti was signed by the "thinking fans". That is the Warsaw football fans, who in 2013 still think of World War II and to whom it still matters to such an extent that they use its memory to make a distinction within their own fan community.

Notes

- 1 (<http://gridworks.cupsell.pl/produkty/72978-Muran-w-44-Black-Meska.html>), accessed on August 31, 2013.
- 2 Muranów razed to the ground with the ghastly silhouette of the St. Augustine church on Nowolipki street is a very persuasive picture and several photographic versions exist. One of them has also been published in

Norman Davies' authoritative history of the Warsaw Uprising (Polish edition, p. 737) with the caption "Desert of ruins". Apparently, also for such an outstanding historian of Poland as Professor Davies, the origin of ruins in Warsaw can only be associated with the Warsaw Uprising.

- 3 Which actually provoked the destruction of 55% of the city buildings, over 150,000 civilian deaths, 16,000 casualties among the Home Army soldiers and the expulsion of the remaining population, in majority deported to concentration camps elsewhere in Poland or forced labour camps in Germany (Drozdowski & Zahorski 1997: 469–470). The rest of the damages to the city had been wrought before the uprising, during the city defence in September 1939, during the liquidation of the ghetto in the spring of 1943 and after the uprising, during the city's liberation in January 1945. Destruction summed up to 72% of residential buildings and almost 90% of the buildings of public use (ibid.).
- 4 A recent book by Elżbieta Janicka, *Festung Warschau* (2011), is dedicated to exposing the places in the city space where Jewish history and suffering in the Holocaust have remained unrecorded and deprived of commemoration, or even appropriated by the Polish "commemoration system" of plates and monuments. My aim is different: I will focus on recent interventions in the cityscape, which in very distinct ways stage the Jewish and the Holocaust past of Warsaw.
- 5 Edelman himself, present at the inauguration of Rapaport's monument, since then never again participated in any official commemorations of the Ghetto Uprising until the end of the communist regime.
- 6 And remained so until the April 2010 plane crash in Smolensk, when the death of the Polish president and over a hundred high rank state officials on their way to celebrate the anniversary of the Katyn massacre brought the world's attention to the question of the Soviet occupation of Poland and its consequences.
- 7 "Flying courses" (pol. *kursy latające*) is the name given to underground Polish education practiced under occupation. It had its beginnings in the nineteenth century "flying university" in the territories under Russian rule after the secondary and higher education in Polish was suppressed. It focused mostly on passing on the knowledge of the Polish language, history and literature. The tradition was revived under the Nazi occupation with the suppression of the Polish education system and the same name was again given to the independent education activities in the People's Republic of Poland. "Flying" referred to the way of operating: the classes took place in different locations, mostly in private houses, always changing place ("flying") to avoid discovery by the police.
- 8 The 1939 population of the city amounted to 1,289,500, of whom 375,000 were Jews (Drozdowski & Zahorski 1997: 359, 390).
- 9 The city is located on two banks of the Vistula, but the core of the city is on its western bank. The Warsaw Uprising was fought only on the western bank of the river. The eastern bank was conquered by the Red Army and the People's Polish Army already in mid-September 1944 and therefore did not share the consequences of the failed uprising.
- 10 Of which 140,000 lived on the eastern bank, and 22,000 on the outskirts of the western bank. The core of the city was destroyed and depopulated (Drozdowski & Zahorski 1997: 476).
- 11 *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 2, 1987.
- 12 *Szmalcownik* – slang for a person blackmailing Jews in hiding, or blackmailing Poles helping Jews, for economic profit.
- 13 During the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, Warsaw artist Rafał Betlejewski organized a billboard action "Would I have joined?".
- 14 A village in Poland where on July 10, 1941, a group of about 300 Jewish victims were locked in a barn, which was then set on fire by some of their Polish neighbours in the presence of Nazi gendarmes. More on the case can be found in J.T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2001).
- 15 The materials gathered while guiding tours in Warsaw and in the Warsaw Royal Castle (including my field-notes and interviews with other guides) have been used in my other publications, together with material collected during a workshop for anthropology students researching the audiences of two Polish national heritage places, namely the royal castles in Warsaw and Cracow.
- 16 From the poem by Czesław Miłosz with the same title. The quoted verse was translated by Louis Irribarne and David Brooks in *Collected Poems* (New York: Eco Press 1973, pp. 33–35).
- 17 Some of the residents I talked to have been living there since the 1950s, and are now in their 70s and 80s; another group were people born in the 1960s and 70s, who spent their childhood in Muranów and to whom I had access via my own childhood acquaintances and their siblings.
- 18 See Wójcik, Bilewicz & Lewicka (2010) for a brief comparison with other districts of Warsaw.
- 19 In Polish *chłodna* means 'chilly'.
- 20 The replica of this semi-circular concrete bunker, which was attached to the wall of the building can be seen in the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising.
- 21 In front of Czerniakow's former house stands a big wooden cross in the middle of the street, facing the footbridge monument. In the early 1980s, among the

residents of the westernmost of the giant blocks “Behind the Iron Gate”, the one at Chłodna 15, a young Catholic priest used to live. His name was Jerzy Popiełuszko and he did not work in the nearby parish church but in another district, in the church of St. Stanisław Kostka. His passionate sermons on moral and patriotic matters gained him a huge crowd of followers and after the “first Solidarity” era had come to an end with the Martial Law, he became so disturbing for the communist security apparatus that in 1984 they decided to kidnap and kill him. His funeral became an enormous patriotic manifestation and already by the early 1990s in the wild lawn in the middle of Chłodna a commemorative cross was erected with the priest-martyr’s portrait attached to it. Some time later a big boulder with an inscription appeared in front of the cross and the green was renamed after father Popiełuszko. Nowadays the wild green has disappeared, giving way to a neatly ordered space of stone and regularly planted trees, but the cross and the commemorative stone with the inscription have stayed in the same place in the middle of Chłodna street.

- 22 (<http://kerethouse.com/filter/Architektura#Keret-House>), accessed on September 10, 2013.
- 23 After 1989, the building on Chłodna was converted into registered property and the flats mostly sold to the residents as in the case of many state-owned residential properties. Thus, the building legally became a “community of residents” (pol. *Wspólnota mieszkaniowa*).
- 24 The flats ranged from 20 to 40 square metres, rarely reaching 50.
- 25 In the 1990s and early 2000s, when Warsaw witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of gated communities, in south Muranów there was no need, nor way to build any, as the inner courtyards had been designed as “naturally gated” with no faces or actual gates.
- 26 This is my own recollection.
- 27 Pol. “Rozmowy z katem”, a play based on a book of the same title by Kazimierz Moczarski, a former soldier of the Polish underground Home Army, who in 1949 found himself sharing a cell in the Mokotów Prison in Warsaw with Jürgen Stroop, the SS officer responsible for the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. Moczarski, awaiting the death penalty, had long conversations with Stroop on his war past. Eventually, Stroop was hanged in 1952 and Moczarski released in 1956 during the political Thaw. He wrote down his prison conversations with Stroop immediately after the release but they were not published until 1972–74 in the monthly *Odra*.
- 28 Unfortunately, in autumn 2014, the mural disappeared during the renovation of the building (Kulesza 2014).
- 29 A beautiful symbol. The only thing is that in Warsaw, Jews were not forced to wear yellow stars of David, but white sleeve bands with a blue star.

30 The conservation doctrine followed during the post-war reconstruction of historic Warsaw recommended rebuilding only historic buildings constructed no later than the mid-nineteenth century, because of both political reasons and the prevailing aesthetic ideology. “Extensive demolition of left-bank central Warsaw’s burnt-out and in numerous cases structurally sound pre-war housing stock was carried out under the auspices of BOS (Bureau for Reconstruction of the Capital, the main conservation body established for the purpose of reconstruction of Warsaw’s historic monuments)” (Martyn 2001: 203).

- 31 Creator of a fiberglass palm tree constructed in 2002 at the crossing of Aleje Jerozolimskie and Nowy Świat, entitled “Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue”, one of the most interesting contemporary interventions in the Warsaw cityscape. The palm makes an intelligent and imaginative commemoration of the Jewish population of Warsaw by addressing multiple associations. The historic one is that “New Jerusalem” was the name of a Jewish settlement west of Warsaw, the royal city, that existed 1774–76 when the law on *non tolerandis Judaeis* had been still binding so Jewish merchants could neither settle nor trade in Warsaw. Some time later the road leading to this settlement (destroyed in 1776 by the city authorities under the pressure of Warsaw merchants) became one of the most important streets in the city and until today is called Jerusalem Avenue (Engelking & Leociak 2001: 25–26).

32 (<http://www.projektprozna.pl/>).

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