

JOURNAL
OF
SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET
POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Vol. 5, No. 2 (2019)

Special Issue

**Remembering Diversity in
East-Central European Cityscapes**

JSPPS 5:2 (2019)

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Cover picture: © Eleonora Narvselius

Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society Vol. 5, No. 2 (2019)

Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag / *ibidem* Press

Erscheinungsweise: halbjährlich / Frequency: biannual

ISSN 2364-5334

Ordering Information:

PRINT: Subscription (two copies per year): € 58.00 / year (+ S&H: € 4.00 / year within Germany, € 7.00 / year international). The subscription can be canceled at any time.

Single copy or back issue: € 34.00 / copy (+ S&H: € 2.00 within Germany, € 3.50 international).

E-BOOK: Individual copy or back issue: € 19.99 / copy. Available via amazon.com or google.books.

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Introduction. Remembering Diversity in East-Central European Cityscapes¹

Eleonora Narvselius

Abstract: *The contributions to this special issue explore the multi-layered urban environments of East-Central European borderlands. They bring into focus the cityscapes of Wrocław, Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Chişinău, where the legacies of Nazism, Marxist-Leninism, and violent ethno-nationalism have been revisited in recent decades in search of profound moral reckoning and in response to the challenges posed by the (post)transitional period. While much has been written about the history of these cities, there is a dearth of knowledge about how their contemporary residents make sense of the cityscapes stripped of their historical populations, and how they deal with the history and memory of those populations. This introductory essay suggests a tentative approach to the analysis of engagements with the lost diversity in historical urban milieus full of post-war voids and ruptures. In particular, it tests the possibility of combining the theoretical propositions of Memory Studies with broader conceptualizations of borderlands, cosmopolitan sociality, and hybridity.*

Keywords: East-Central European cities, borderlands, cultural diversity, perished populations, hybridity, memories

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and Leibniz-Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Europa (GWZO) at University of Leipzig for their grants that permitted the advancement and conclusion of this article. Special thanks are directed toward Prof. John Czaplicka for his stimulating feedback and endorsement of this publishing project at its early stage.

Introduction²

Contributions to this special issue explore the urban environments of the East-Central European borderlands, bringing to the fore the material and symbolic landscapes of four historically interconnected cities. Wrocław, Lviv,³ Chernivtsi, and Chişinău were stripped of their historical populations in the twentieth century and continue to wrestle with the legacies of Nazism, Marxist-Leninism, and radical ethno-nationalism. These “peripheral cities in the middle of Europe”⁴ have by no means been “typical” sluggish provincial spots populated by people with uncertain identities and shifting loyalties; throughout history they were at the epicenter of pan-European and global political processes, trade, transcultural exchange, and the clashes of grand ideologies. Since the collapse of communist regimes, these cities have been keen to project an image of themselves as hubs of cultural diversity generating innovative spaces, inclusive identities, and multicultural common heritage (Murzyn 2008: 317). However, the actual state of affairs is more complicated; in fact, these urban landscapes provide plenty of examples of plural mono-ethnic heritage, while multi-ethnic hybridity and mutual engagement are less mainstream. A good deal of evidence indicates that although these cityscapes might function as effective channels for transmission of an array of outlooks, attitudes, and values, the surface impression of inclusive identities, tolerance, and peaceful sharing of the urban space may be misleading.

The most recent and memorable watershed addressed in each article is the collapse of the Soviet-dominated political

² This text continues the theoretical line of argument presented in Narvselius (forthcoming 2020).

³ Different house styles suggest different transcriptions for the soft sign (Ь) characteristic of the Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Bulgarian alphabets. In this issue, we have opted to use the spelling “Lviv” (except in Bo Larsson’s article, where we retain the soft sign (L’viv) for consistency with the transliteration of the names of other cities discussed in the article.)

⁴ I have borrowed this expression from the title of Bo Larsson’s book *Periferin i Europas mitt* (Larsson 2011).

system. While post-socialist transformations of urban landscapes and the quest for new urban identities have been addressed in a bulk of academic publications (see, for example, Czaplicka, Ruble, and Crabtree 2003; Huyssen 2003; Stanilov 2007; Czepczyński 2008; Young and Kaczmarek 2008; Bartetzky, Dmitrieva, and Kliems 2009; Czaplicka, Gelazis, and Ruble 2009; Darieva, Kaschuba, and Krebs 2011; Diener and Hagen 2013; Diener and Hagen 2015; Krase and Uherek 2017), much less is known about the ways in which contemporary urbanites make sense of cityscapes stripped of their historical population groups, and how they handle the history and memory of these populations.⁵ How, and more importantly, why do contemporary residents invoke historical diversity and make of it a closed or an open-ended resource? What has changed since the previous socialist/Soviet epoch? Above all, what do contemporary transformations of the cityscapes tinted by the presence of historical “others” say about the present-day societies?

In the words of Henri Lefebvre, “City is forged as an appropriated space” (Lefebvre 1991: 31); cityscapes constantly produce new “lived, conceived and perceived realms” of representation and action (*ibid.*: 40). The fractured spatial texture of contemporary borderline cities is particularly suitable for experiments with (re)appropriations of “foreign” spaces, (radical) re-drawings of borders between “otherness” and “outness,” and the (selective) recall of forgotten pasts. To facilitate analysis of these processes and without getting bogged down in their historiography, this introductory essay scrutinizes contemporary engagements with the lost diversity and appropriations of the East-Central European cityscapes. In particular, it makes the case for combining broader conceptualizations of borderlands, cosmopolitan sociality, and hybridity with theoretical propositions drawn from the field of Memory Studies.

⁵ Nevertheless, there exists a bulk of academic literature on Jewish spaces of Eastern Europe, especially in Poland; see, for example, Gruber (2002); Murzyn (2006); Bartov (2007); Hirsch and Spitzer (2010); Meng (2011); and Lehrer and Meng (2015).

Texture of Diversity in East-Central European Borderland Cities: Voids Filled and Voids Still Gaping

In the 2000s, an interesting trend emerged in Wrocław, Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Chişinău. All of a sudden, small anthropomorphic statues and other decorative objects hinting at human presence popped up in the streets and squares. Wrocław is presently famous for its bronze dwarves, whose number since the installation of the first Daddy Dwarf in 2001 has exceeded 100. What on first impression looks like an extravagant branding gimmick, is actually a reference to the Orange Alternative, an anti-communist underground movement that claimed the dwarf as its symbol in the 1980s. On the other side of Poland's eastern border, in Lviv, tourists take pictures of funny *batiaryky*. These bronze figurines popping up along tourist routes in the downtown area allude to the pre-war subculture of *batiary*, "lovable rogues" immortalized in the local folklore. In the landscape of the western Ukrainian city, *batiary* evoke the myth of Polish Lwów, exciting and perilous at one and the same time. In Chernivtsi, yet another western Ukrainian city with a complicated history, several objects that disrupt the conventional understanding of public monumental art can be seen in the downtown area. One of these is a bronze horse carriage alluding to the *fin de siècle*, metropolitan elegance, and European fashion. Another is the antique bicycle with a huge front wheel, as if casually left by its owner at a plaza with the evocative name "Turkish Well." These two installations arouse the mixed feelings of amusement and melancholy which usually accompany abandoned status objects that no longer have utility in present-day life. In the capital of Moldova, one may see another interesting "urban hieroglyph." An illuminated shield at the entrance to a hip restaurant is decorated with a portrait of a bearded middle-aged man. The inscription below reads "Karl Schmidt." Evidently, owners of the venue decided to put their business on the map by referring to a legendary mayor of Chişinău that was then part of the Russian empire. From time to time one also comes across non-monumental visual references to the pre-

war Jews. However, like the Jewish restaurant “Under the Golden Rose” in Lviv and figurines of “lucky Jews” on sale in Polish cities,⁶ they follow the same logic of pop-cultural presentation that elevates stereotypic features and uncomplicated narratives.

Despite obvious differences between these post-socialist cityscapes, a knowledgeable observer may detect their common ambience. Wrocław, Chernivtsi, Lviv, and Chişinău have traditionally been hubs of the historical borderland regions of Silesia, Bukovina, Galicia, and Bessarabia, proverbial for their motley populations and patchworks of languages and religions. In turn, this also implied that from being sites of seemingly harmonious co-existence and cultural exchange, they periodically became arenas for interethnic conflict and brutal violence. The contemporary urge to “re-populate” their urban nooks and crannies might be interpreted in more general terms as an effort aimed at the re-scaling, de-monumentalization, and individualization of the cityscapes that still bear traces of socialist/Soviet grand mythologies. At the same time, this is also a remarkable act of civic magic triggered by reactions to the EU and NATO enlargements, the settling of scores with “two totalitarianisms,” and fears linked to mass migration. This magical act highlights a perceived absence of human beings lost in the historical cataclysms and, consequently, emulates a presence of friendly, benevolent, and desirable “others.” One may continue this line of argument by evoking the apt metaphor of ghosts and spirits of memory suggested by Aleida Assmann (2011: 1–5). In places and times of existential and political insecurity people summon benevolent “spirits,” or positively colored presentations of bygone times, in an effort to withstand the scary “ghosts” of an unburied past. Under such circumstances, the cute figurines and images serve as public amulets conveying a comforting aura of innocence and wellbeing.

Meanwhile, symbolic “re-populations” of the urban space might also be propelled by a different logic. It seems that in cities

⁶ On “lucky Jew” figurines in Poland see Lehrer (2014).

profoundly shaped by legacies of expulsions, ethnic violence, and the Holocaust, there is a need to “camouflage the wounds of failed diversity” (Czaplicka, Ruble, and Crabtree 2003: 17) or, in Kenneth E. Foote’s terminology (2003), to “rectify” places of memory that for some people are still associated with disturbing experiences of injustice, loss, and crime. The latter treatment presupposes a partial and selective erasure of the traces of a disaster; in effect the place may become unarticulated and bereft of meaning, as “[n]o sense of honor or dishonor remains attached to the site; it is, so to speak, exonerated of involvement in the tragedy” (*ibid.*: 23). Resistance to rectification may come from different groups, including both representatives of the displaced urban communities, and local activists insisting on acknowledgement of the original sites of memory. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that rectification will morph into the next phases, i.e. “consecration” and “sanctification” of memorable sites and establishment of healing commemorative practices (*ibid.*: 7–10).

Oftentimes, to describe the fragmentary and multilayered quality of the cityscapes that withstood historical cataclysms and massive human loss, one uses the metaphor of palimpsest. Like any trope, however, it has its conceptual limitations (Huysen 2003: 7). The image of a palimpsest visualizes the possibility of retrieving some undamaged authentic layers exposed through breaches of the recent overwritings and re-dressings. Yet such retrieval is hardly possible in places where the whole demographic structure and economic organization were obliterated while material structures remained practically intact. Under such circumstances, it makes sense to talk about voids—symbolic, epistemological, emotional—which are palpable and which the present-day residents of these cities try to patch up. Voids are not merely omissions that still presuppose the ability of the living population to “decode” and partially retrieve the urban text. They are rather “the multiple of nothing” (Bowden and Duffy 2012: 46), brought about by the paucity of information available for the urban explorer, by her emotional detachment from the collective past, and by the complexity of the loss that resists coherent representation. Perceived voids in the texture of the

cityscapes produce disturbing voids of meaning which today's residents are tempted to fill in by inscribing them into "a bigger whole of being, a deity, a state, a nation, or the impersonal authority of the law" (Wydra 2015: 25). Such appropriation unavoidably disassembles the articulated "places of memory" associated with the "others" and substitutes them with "memories of place" projected by the present-day urbanites (Truc 2012).

The shapes and content of the urban milieus discussed in this special issue derive from combinations of cultural continuities and political ruptures, "representations of space" conceived by the elites, "representational spaces" of inhabitants and users (Lefebvre 1991: 3–50), present-day heritage industries, and individual efforts to make sense of the contentious past. Gaping voids that interlock collective memories with built environments and their symbolic re-mediations, are profoundly political. They disrupt the imagined consistency of the urban landscape, they provoke efforts of interpretation and, subsequently, trigger competition and conflict among social actors coming up with their own, more or less articulated versions of the past (Dwyer and Alderman 2008: 171). Paradoxically, instead of filling the gaps, the practice of ornamenting the public spaces with fairy-tale entities, legendary figures, and melancholic artefacts oftentimes makes urban voids even more obvious.

East-Central European Borderlands as a Cluster of Regional Distinctions, Banal Cosmopolitanism, and Urban Myths

The specificity and at the same time comparability of the selected cities stem not only from their modes of coping with the voids left by the legacies of large-scale violence, but from their position as frontiers of geopolitical expansion and stakes of great power rivalries. These characteristics can be aptly addressed with the help of the concept of borderlands. As particular types of spatial regimes, European borderlands have been formed by discourses focusing on their special anthropogeographic conditions,

cultural-historical distinctiveness, and political designs (Mishkova and Trencsenyi 2017: 8). Borderlands are commonly regarded as peripheries or margins of certain territorial entities, usually nation-states (Diener and Hagen 2010), whose particular conditions and local color are rooted in the past. However, the cultural fragmentation and *mélange* of borderlands are anything but local anomalies belonging to history. On the contrary, they have to be acknowledged as basic features of modern spatial orders “where identities and experiences are constantly being contested in specific sites or localized centers of power” (Lugo 1997: 53).

The concept of borderlands connotes problematic places where competition, appropriation, and violence have been the flipside of the co-existence of various ethnicities, religions, and other symbolic orders (Bartov and Weitz 2013). Hence, what is crucial to the understanding of borderlands is not only their material topography and location in political grand projects, but also specific modalities of power pertaining to appropriation, production, and contestation of diversity (Mishkova and Trencsenyi 2017: 2). In particular, borderlands often assume centrality in matters of symbolic politics due to daily entanglements with “otherness” and the rich texture of constraints and opportunities. This is especially true in post-1989 East-Central Europe where labeling some regions as “borderlands” became an effective tool for crafting certain normative visions of the post-communist development. These visions are not always based on historically correct estimations of borderland diversity, as they are primarily aimed at serving the neoliberal agenda of the peripheral elites who exploit local cultural capital in the hope of enhancing the competitiveness of their regions (Zarycki 2011: 90–97). Nevertheless, such whipping up of regional distinction is not a completely new phenomenon. As pockets of social and political instability and spaces of non-compliance with centrally imposed regulations, borderland regions have often been used for large-scale social experiments and political projects combining transformations of material

environments with fostering a new type of political subject (Bartov and Weitz, 2013; Amar 2015; Gross 1988).

Political projects of uniformization notwithstanding, in East-Central European borderlands, and especially in their urban milieus, certain facets of cultural diversity pertained throughout the calamities of the twentieth century. One such facet is a constant exposure to the scrutinizing gaze of the “other,” whether literally or metaphorically. This may happen through daily (and mostly unreflective) contact with material milieus, borrowed words, pieces of folklore, and family stories that hint at the presence of a “foreign” *spiritus loci* within a familiar cultural landscape. Another characteristic feature is a “banal” cosmopolitanism designating the borderland as “a prolonged time and a border space, in which people learn the ways of the world and of other people, ... [and] thus the place where a ... cosmopolitan subject is emerging” (Agier 2016: 9). This type of cosmopolitanism often emerges through public interactions linked to specific places, “from market squares to basement taverns to elegant clubs: places that had indeed often been built to enable... cosmopolitan sociality” (Humphrey 2012: 20). As such, the cosmopolitan sociality serves as a strategy making it possible to quickly stitch together the social fabrics torn by internal conflicts and rapid political transformations. It can efficiently conceal voids left by the drastic or gradual disappearance of whole segments of the urban populace by switching the focus to overarching symbols of central power, intellectual goods, and the latest fashions preoccupying local bohemians. It may be argued that the strategy of symbolic accretion described by Dwyer and Alderman goes hand-in-hand with “banal” urban cosmopolitanism. In a manner analogous to the geologic processes of sedimentation, uplift, and erosion, borderland cityscapes are susceptible to “over-writing, embellishment, and erasure... thought of in terms of what has been called symbolic accretion.” As a result, “different historical meanings are layered onto them, thus challenging the notion that these symbols have a final, established meaning” (Dwyer and Alderman 2008: 169–70).

Symbolic accretion, cosmopolitan sociality, and urban pockets of difference link to another significant feature that makes this set of cities comparable. Wrocław, Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Chişinău are places that have generated a plethora of stories and projected their own—often competing—“myths” referring to their borderline status and the unique quality of their urban life (see in particular the article by Czajkowski in this issue). For more than a century, the *Semper fidelis* myth of Polish Lwów clashed with the myth of the same city as the capital of “Ukrainian Piedmont,” but the present-day urban mythology elevates the “golden age” of the benevolent Habsburg empire and multicultural ambience of the city. In post-1991 Chernivtsi, the mythology of Ukrainian national liberation co-exists with the *Bukovina Mythos* originating from the Habsburg epoch and pinpointing a one-of-a-kind patchwork of languages and cultures as well as an ideal version of urban tolerance. Wrocław/Breslau has been glorified as a unique place of creativity, academic achievement, and enterprise, contested in the German and Polish imagery, but nowadays the focus has shifted to bridging the rifts with the help of a new EU mythology professing openness to the world and an end to national antagonisms. The Russian imperial myth of Chişinău as an urban patchwork with an oriental touch is nowadays eclipsed by national mythologies glorifying the great history of the Moldavian/Romanian people/s, but it is still viable in many contexts, not least artistic and literary ones. Urban mythologies expose complex transnational itineraries that connect Lviv with Wrocław, Chernivtsi with Chişinău, and Lviv with Chernivtsi in multiple ways. In turn, the issue of complex cross-border relations leads us to another conceptual pillar of this special issue, namely the problematic of transnational memories and memory cultures that both (trans)form and (re)mediate imagery of the historical diversity that is not here anymore, but still reverberates in multiple public and private contexts.

Recollecting Bygone Urban Diversity: Performative Memories, Postmemory, and Prosthetic Memory

Following a long tradition of viewing cityscapes as books and literary palimpsests, it has often been assumed that traces of the bygone diversity can be read “between the lines,” sometimes even as coherent subchapters, by philosophically-minded local flâneurs, scholars sensitized to cultural-historical details, and even by inquisitive tourists. Alternatively, cityscapes may be viewed as codes and signs (Huysen 2003) relating not only to texts and narratives, but also to practices, emotions, and attitudes. The question is, what exactly can be “decoded” in the urban spaces nowadays, under what circumstances, and by whom? Can urban newcomers and their descendants feel deeper attachment to the sites that used to be “emotional magnets” (Collins 2004: 80) for the previous populations? How are these parts of the cityscape actualized in our time, if at all? And how can one make sense of urban “voids”? Contemporary cityscapes are populated not so much by ghosts and spirits of the past, but by living people with their own ideas about belonging, origins, and community. Hence, when dealing with present-day borderland cityscapes, the analyst steps into a hybrid space of action, memory, hearsay, and imagination imbedded into—and constitutive for—the “material city” (see Boyer 1994; Crang and Travlou 2001; Srinivas 2001; Huyssen 2003; Crinson 2005; Legg 2007; Till 2005; Jordan 2006; Törnquist-Plewa 2016).

Throughout this special issue, the contributors have tried to make sense of the complex interplay between the mosaic-like built environments typical of Eastern European cities marked by “dismembered multiethnicity” (Follis 2012: 181), and the contemporary attitudes to the pre-war urban populations who created these milieus, but perished in the twentieth century. The authors have been primarily interested in how some clues available in present-day urban environments correlate with identity-forming knowledge about the past, often referred to as cultural or collective memories (Assmann J. 2010: 123; Kansteiner 2002: 179–97; Radstone and Hodgkin 2003). Following the

sociological current in Memory Studies (for example, Olick 2007: 114–115), it makes sense to abandon the idea of material milieus as something that “contains” or “preserves” cultural memories. After all, memories cannot emanate from the stones. Material environments are complex products of practices and ideologies, which actualize cultural memories of constantly changing urban populations in a myriad of ways (see Connerton 1989; Boyer 1994; Crang and Travlou 2001; Huyssen 2003; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004; Crinson 2005; Hebbert 2005; Jordan 2006; Foote and Azaryahu 2007; Legg 2007). Moreover, it cannot go unnoticed that for the current populations the legacies of urban pasts are a matter of active imagining and virtualization rather than a painstaking recollection of the past in its own right. As Andreas Huyssen explains, in urban contexts, “an urban imaginary in its temporal reach may well put different things in one place: memories of what there was before, imagined alternatives to what there is. The strong marks of present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past, erasures, losses, and heterotopias” (Huyssen 2003: 7).

Following the analytical framework suggested by the anthropologist Setha Low, urban memories may be approached as a necessary attribute of the social construction of the city space. Unlike the social production of space that comprises social, economic, ideological, and technological factors focusing on the physical creation of the material setting, the social construction of space is underpinned by daily exchanges, memories, and images which convey symbolic meanings (Low 1996: 862). Although urban memory links to concrete physical imprints of the city, nevertheless, much like other types of memory—personal, generational, political, and cultural—it tends to defy “the orthodoxy of correct interpretation” (Huyssen 2003: 19). Meanwhile, efforts to impose correct interpretations of the cityscape are a daily enterprise undertaken by multiple groups and individuals. If earlier it was Marxist-Leninist ideology that edited the East-Central European urban milieus by means of removing monuments, toponymics, and inscriptions and bulldozing religious edifices, nowadays one witnesses efforts to

cleanse the urban landscape of the vestiges of socialist histories by similar means, removing undesirable traces from the streets and city maps, as has recently been the case in Ukraine on the wave that followed the adoption of the so-called de-communization laws.

An obvious specificity of urban memory compared with other analytically distinguished memory types is its complex relation to space and materiality. Well-used, but also vividly criticized for being too static and nostalgic, the concept of *lieux de mémoire* is still a workable analytical approach allowing us to frame entanglements of urban space, historical materiality and cultural memory (Nora and Kritzman 1996–1998). Alternative, but also complementary analytical suggestions evoke metaphors of texts, arenas, and performances, and thus enable unpacking of the dynamic and improvisatory nature of urban memorial landscapes (Dwyer and Alderman 2008: 165–78). Remembrance is performative rather than simply reproductive, as when people come together to do the work of remembrance, the story they fashion is different from those that have come before (Tilmans, van Vree, and Winter 2010: 7). Hence, again, the past is constantly affirmed and transformed through discourses and practices evoking imagination and virtualization of the past understood as “construction of what might, ought, or could have existed but actually did not; and, one step further, the construction of what the visitors expect to have existed but actually could not have” (Ashworth 1991: 192).

The performative aspect of cultures of remembrance is underpinned by “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (Hirsch 2008: 107) practiced by memory actors. Varying grades and forms of such actualization of memories about the urban past make the mnemonic landscapes of the four chosen cities dissimilar. As the articles in the special issue demonstrate, while the “weight of the past,” exemplified by cultural links, architectural environment, and structuring of historical narratives, is largely comparable in Lviv, Wrocław, Chişinău, and Chernivtsi, the “choice of the past” (Mink and Neumayer 2013: 10)—charged with the interests, emotions, and imagination of the

contemporary rank-and-file urbanites, mnemonic activists, politicians, and cultural experts—is what makes the difference. Or, to use the already mentioned metaphor from Aleida Assmann, while these cities are haunted by similar ghosts of the past, they purposefully seek contact with different spirits of the past.

Almost seventy years after the events that stripped Wrocław, Lviv, Chişinău, and Chernivtsi of most of their pre-war populations, the progeny of newcomers—much like today’s descendants of pre-war urbanites that live mainly abroad—have no first-hand personal memory either of these dramatic events or of the way of life that preceded them. In this respect, these two important groups of memory actors—who currently commission monuments, renovate religious buildings, organize commemorative events, and make efforts to preserve memories about the cities they care about—are in the same situation. Both actively “choose” the past they strive to elucidate and reenact. Both experiment with imagination and virtualization of “their own” histories. Nevertheless, the sources of their creative work, second-hand knowledge, and emotional attachment to the past, are different. Typically, the offspring of the older population groups rely on family archives and personal stories of relatives, while the children of the newcomers extract their knowledge about the past primarily from much more fragmentary and impersonal sources that do not speak for themselves (e.g., the architectural environment, movies, literary works, interiors, and artifacts). The difference between these two types of memory work may be conceptualized in terms of the difference between postmemory (Hirsch 2008), the afterlife of “living” memory of witnesses shared across generations of “legitimate custodians,” and prosthetic memory, a past reconstructed from the position of emotional and aesthetical distance. Prosthetic memories are generated not within families, but rather through accessible public domains such as literature, film, museums, and theater (Landsberg 2004). As a product of various mediations, they tend to be visual-factual rather than sensual-emotional (O’Keeffe 2007: 5).

Combinations of both types of memory work are especially evident in connection with public commemorative initiatives and the symbolic marking of public urban spaces. Without denying that oftentimes “[g]uilt, resentment, denial, powerful political taboos, and the imperative of dealing with the national trauma all combined to block the formation of memory of vanished others” (Blacker 2013: 178), several contributions to this volume (in particular, the articles by Felcher, Larsson, and Otrishchenko) contend that the work of filling tangible and intangible “voids” of the post-war urban environments in Eastern Europe has not only frustrating limitations, but also enabling qualities. Although transnational commemorative co-operation around the legacy of the perished urban groups and partial Europeanization of commemorative discourses often look like a superficial “disturbance of homogeneity” (Furumark 2013) from above and outside, nevertheless one should not dismiss their impact on urbanites and their perception of cultural diversity. Equally, despite the fact that the efforts of the present-day inhabitants of the four cities to come to terms with difficult pasts may not always be unalloyed success stories, it would be inherently wrong to imply that the capacity to “read” and “feel” urban places of memory is something reserved only for the legitimate custodians of postmemory.

Engagements with Urban Diversity: Multicultural Heritage and Hybridity

Cultural diversity may be roughly defined as a field of representations organised along the axes of ethnic/non-ethnic difference of populations and material/immaterial diversity of their lived milieus. This conceptual grid embraces a huge variety of forms, events, performances, and discourses. As a mode of “being, doing and knowing” that helps to sustain group identities in times of rapid change and crisis (Fishman 1996: 65–66), ethnicity nevertheless still remains and will seemingly remain the most applicable lens for analysis of divisions emerging throughout history. To this one should add the present-day

constellations of languages, religions, and, increasingly, races in the wake of economic migration, transnationalization of higher education, expanding tourist industries, and military conflicts. However, in the course of history, ethnic rifts typical of borderlands have been incessantly amalgamated, blurred, articulated, or neutralized by non-ethnic diversity and by a strategy of “national indifference” (Zahra 2010). Consequently, activities of local professionals, politicians, rank-and-file urbanites, and diaspora communities, as well as the artistic imagery and activities of local NGOs suspending lines of ethnic and national divisions should be given closer consideration as loci of transformative impact.

Being quite an abstract and all-encompassing term, “cultural diversity,” similarly to “borderlands,” requires a constant re-interpretation and contextual adaptation. In particular, a distinction should be made between multiculturalism that connotes a certain ideological prescription, and cultural diversity, multiculturalism, and historical diversity as descriptive notions. The concept of multiculturalism “domesticated” by means of translation into local languages (Polish *wielokulturowość*, Ukrainian *bahatokul'turnist'*, Romanian *multiculturalism*) is one of the neologisms that emerged in the wake of post-socialist transformations of public discourses. Nevertheless, frequent references to the term are not always and not necessarily an indication of growing multicultural alignment. What is denoted is rather a situational pluralism linked to the liberalization of memory politics in East-Central Europe after 1989 (Narvselius 2012). This approach mostly dispenses with reflective critical interpretations and regards the multiple local pasts rather as a patchwork of internally homogenous presentations. In this context, the main corollary concept of multiculturalism becomes “multicultural heritage” (Polish *dziedzictwo wielokulturowe*, Ukrainian *bahatokul'turna spadshchyna*, Romanian *patrimoniului multicultural*), a term that in the post-socialist conditions mostly refers to tangible forms and material representations conveying the historical presence of various peoples and cultural groups. Multicultural heritage is often comfortably presented as an

argument for attracting foreign investors, as a ticket to the European community and a tourist attraction (Murzyn 2008). Simultaneously, it poses a challenge to presentations of the cities as organic parts of uninterrupted narratives of the ethno-national Polish, Ukrainian, and Moldovan distinction and, when politicized by subversive actors, it may have serious consequences for state sovereignty.

In the absence of a shared understanding of what constitutes cultural diversity, it is possible to argue that all cities are multicultural to some extent (Kłopot 2012: 133–34) or, on the contrary, that no city ticks all the boxes for different aspects of cultural diversity. In a way, the impression that some cities are more culturally diverse than others is conveyed by the *material* built environment. Naturally, in borderland cities like Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Wrocław where stylistically different sections of the historical architecture were placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, one may get an impression of a greater degree of cultural diversity. Nevertheless, on the basis of examination of *immaterial* (intangible, symbolic) aspects of daily life in the selected cities, it is not difficult to draw a conclusion that the pre-war diversity left quite shallow traces in the public discourses and memories of the present-day populations. Also, its transformative potential as a tool for fostering toleration of cultural differences and emancipation from xenophobic frameworks is quite limited. Although marking the symbolic presence of the perished urban groups with monuments, toponyms, and even theme restaurants has become common practice, a tendency towards the selective exclusion of popular and academic knowledge about historical diversity persists. In some cases, one wants to eschew association with “uncomfortable” and traumatic historical episodes (the Holocaust, collaborationism, expulsions, political repressions) that might imply the complicity of those who repopulated the cities, or, alternatively, skip mentioning the prominent role and achievements of other ethnic groups (in particular, Poles, Jews, Germans, Romanians, Austrians) in some contexts. Tackling urban cultural diversity in the four cities suffers from many limitations caused by concrete policies and political discourses,

and in many cases is also underpinned by inflexible daily patterns of sociability. To an extent, one may agree that “[m]ost European cities ‘were plurally encoded by socially pluralist societies and are now also decoded pluralistically’... Much of the iconography is not decoded at all, less because it is unintelligible than because of its irrelevance to contemporary plural societies” (Ashworth, Graham, and Tunbridge 2007: 48).

The “irrelevance” of material tokens of the perished populations in contemporary East-Central Europe is nevertheless relative. It has been a commonplace to envision the post-socialist transformations as “rapid and simultaneous” (Gelazis, Czaplicka, and Ruble 2009: 1) and to present them in terms of a gap, hiatus, or cleavage. Nevertheless, this image of a sudden, drastic, and unanticipated break is actually a big simplification. A certain continuity of background culture (popular imagery, limited but viable contacts abroad, daily practices of sociability, tastes, city folklore, family stories) combined with sporadic official references to “otherness” in the Soviet/socialist urban landscapes paved the way to the post-1989 “return to diversity” (Rothschild and Wingfield 2000). However, the flipside of this relative continuity is not that unproblematic. Although the rhetoric of the “return” was necessarily adjusted to new socio-political demands, concrete ways of dealing with legacies of the previous populations mostly were not underpinned by alternative approaches. Indeed, in some cases restoration works and commemorative practices even relapsed into the previous negligence, as in the case of the old Jewish cemetery in Wrocław (see the chapter by Golden and Cervinkova in this issue). Adapting Michel de Certeau’s arguments, such non-linear development may be interpreted as indicating the endurance of previous (Soviet, “real socialist”) tactics over novel strategies. In historical cities, the strategies of actors carving “readable spaces” in line with some disciplined visions have been constantly undermined by the tactics of those who elude the discipline of urban planning (de Certeau 1984: 35–36). Present-day inconsistencies between the centralized legislation, top-down politics of memory, expert restoration plans, and local policies, commercial interests, and personal

ambitions is a well-known phenomenon observable in post-communist Europe (Murzyn 2008). Aside from exposing problems of the post-1989 governance, it might also indicate the persistence of multiple local ways of being and exercising power in the East-Central European borderlands.

Alongside diversity, another interesting concept that lends itself to the conditions of East-Central European multi-layered urban milieus is hybridity (Rosaldo 1995; Werbner 1997; Young 2000). The existing academic literature usually reserves this term for addressing intersections of the local and the global (anthropology, international relations), for describing mutual transformation of the dominant and dominated populations (post-colonial studies, migration studies), or for labeling prescribed spaces of dialogue and negotiation (political science, studies of multiculturalism). Several chapters in this special issue (by Golden and Cervinkova, Felcher, Otrishchenko, and Voronovici) explore the emergence of spontaneous rather than cultivated spaces of negotiations and site-specific engagements with otherness, which in hindsight may be labeled as hybrid. Such spaces are often unstable and limited, and their practical outcomes are difficult to estimate. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that “the concept of hybridity does not denote any specifics of identity that can be represented” (Mizutani 2013: 38). It may be underpinned by equality, but also by inequality of status of the involved parts (e.g., the present-day majority versus memory activists, experts versus users of the built environment, residents versus representatives of diaspora, the EU institutions versus local authorities etc.) It may refer to emerging civic identities (Czaplicka, Ruble, and Crabtree 2003) and oil-and-vinegar ethno-cultural mixtures. It may be envisioned as a new emerging space charged with “dialogical re-inscription of various codes and discourses in a spatio-temporal zone of signification” (Kraidy 1999: 472), or as a liminal “culture’s in-between” (Bhabha 1996) spreading on both sides of a symbolic fault line without allegiance to any. In any case, “[h]ybridity as a subversion of political and cultural domination is but just one of many possible configurations” (Rewakowich 2018: 6).

Contributions to the special issue address these themes of diversity, voids, hybrid spaces, and transformations of urban memory in various ways. The study by architect Bo Larsson provides a comprehensive overview of the history of the four cities with a focus on material transformations and urban planning projects that came in the wake of major political and demographic disruptions. The author points out differences in local approaches to the material legacy of the vanished populations, and finds evidence of an uneven, but by and large positive appropriation of the material sites connoting the presence of pre-war “others.”

While Larsson’s article largely focuses on Lefebvrian “representations of space” embraced by urban professionals and other local elites, urban sociologist Natalia Otrishchenko’s article highlights “representational spaces” where “otherness” is encountered and domesticated on a daily basis. Drawing upon interviews with urbanites inhabiting pre-war buildings in Lviv, she demonstrates how memories about the perished urbanites reverberate in family stories. Attitudes to the previous dwellers and the ethnic groups they represent range in these stories from disinterest and denial to efforts to make sense of personal contacts with the “old Lvivians.” The latter approach helps to reduce urban “voids” and make the domestic space more comprehensible and emotionally engaging.

A contrasting case is presented in the study by anthropologists Juliet Golden and Hana Cervinkova on the neoliberal marginalization of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Wrocław. The present state of this urban landmark exemplifies one of the possible, but questionable ways of appropriation of the multiethnic heritage. As the historical legacy of the once prominent Jewish community has been managed primarily by pragmatic actors with no personal memories or postmemories of the pre-socialist period, the cemetery was gradually museumified and turn into a “cold” heritage site.

As an expert in heritage management, Anastasia Felcher takes up the issue of heritage making and efforts to re-interpret parts of Moldovan historical diversity by cultural professionals

and politicians. In Chişinău, as in many other post-Soviet cities, certain cultural components—most obviously, Russian and Jewish ones—cannot be unproblematically inscribed into the framework of a celebrated multicultural past. As a result, as the author observes, discourses and practices of multiethnic heritage preservation are often in discord, and the situation is further aggravated by “mutual non-engagement” of the ethnic communities and the local developers.

In a similar vein, the article by sociologist Paweł Czajkowski analyzes continuities and ruptures of meaning associated with famous urban landmarks during the socialist and post-socialist periods. His study demonstrates that in the specific historical circumstances of Wrocław, the fate of monuments reflects changes in social consciousness of the urbanites and, on a more fundamental level, correlates with dynamics of urban mythology entangling the local and the national, the universal and the specific, the distant and the proximate. Consequently, efforts to elevate the myth of ethnic pluralism result in paradoxes, tensions, and conflicts.

Historian Alexandr Voronovici focuses on a comparable dynamic that generates multivocal meanings and practices in relation to one especially significant urban memorial. His study brings to the fore the vicissitudes of multiple physical transformations and commemorative re-framings of the Soviet-built *Eternitate* complex in Chişinău. As the author observes, “the Soviet internationalist narrative of the Great Patriotic War was also a convenient shortcut to the message of multiethnicity.” This discursive opportunity became instrumentalized after Moldova’s independence by those political forces and memory actors who were keen on articulating their specific messages in reference to the World War II mythology of victims, martyrs, and heroes.

The special issue concludes with two studies that look at the problematics of handling diversity through a clear-cut sociological lens. The study by Barbara Pabjan suggests a theoretical generalization of cognitive strategies of collective memory. On the basis of a survey that measured attitudes to historical diversity among several groups of Wrocław’s residents,

she concludes that the post-war antagonism in respect to the German architectural legacy has been reproduced by means of specific cognitive patterns transferring Polish–German disputes from the sphere of action to the domain of cultural discourse. Pabjan also provides an account of correlations between the levels of knowledge, education, and status of the respondents and their preferred strategies for tackling the city’s multifaceted past. As her study demonstrates, the memory conflicts revolving around Wrocław’s past nowadays are mostly underpinned by opinions and beliefs about history rather than by authorized historical knowledge.

Nadiia Bureiko and Teodor Lucian Moga proceed from a different perspective and compare the identities of two territorial minorities and residents of the cross-border region of Bukovina: Ukrainians in Romania and Romanians in Ukraine. Their article argues that these two communities display multifaceted identities which correlate with the ethno-cultural diversity of the region and are pre-conditioned by its complex historical evolution. Although the study does not focus specifically on urban conditions, it makes clear that the most significant cities of the region, Chernivtsi and Suceava, exemplify the distinctive Bukovinian landscape of diversity formed by several political regimes and demographic shifts. The authors call for a closer scrutiny of the relationship between the minority populations and the state, since different policies and institutional configurations of the previous political regimes (e.g., the Habsburg empire) might have their afterlife in a relatively non-confrontational contemporary approach to diversity in the Bukovinian borderland.

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