MEDIATING POLES: MEDIA ART AND CRITICAL EXPERIMENTS OF THE POLISH SITE, 2004-2009

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

September 2012

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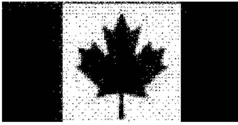

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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-92800-4

Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-92800-4

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a case study of the Polish media artist in the context of post-socialist and European re-imaginations of the Polish site during the years 2004-2009. Though it has been suggested that we have entered a post-national era defined by hyper-mobility and global interconnectivity, it is argued here that there is an ongoing need to think critically about locality, specifically through the concept of the site to ground negotiations of identity, political solidarity, and citizenship. The site is not only defined geographically but exists as the result and embodiment of particular historical, socio-political, and economic conditions. With this as a backdrop, I suggest that critical artistic practices function as experiments in the continued re-imagination and reclamation of the Polish site, and argue that media art is an important tool in processes of self-enfranchisement. I frame these practices through a theoretical exploration of media art and media theory, and through a Polish archaeology of experimentation that includes the Constructivists of the 1920s-1930s, the Workshop of the Film Form in the 1970s, the public performances of the 1980s, and the neo-expressionism of the 1990s. I then turn to the work of nine contemporary artists (Rafał Jakubowicz, Aleksandra Polisiewicz, Hubert Czerepok, Grzegorz Rogała, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Aleksandra Wasilkowska, Dominik Lejman, Izabella Gustowska, and Piotr Wyrzykowski) as examples of critical and experimental media art practice, and suggest that their work can be interpreted as a negotiation of one of three aspects—or ecologies—of the Polish site: the past, democracy, and mediation. I propose that such artistic practices intervene in these ecologies by enabling the pluralization of history and memory, the emergence of public spaces of appearance and communication, and the demystification of the processes of mediation of life and self. I propose therefore that critical media art practices can be understood as site-specific experiments within the ecologies of site and act as provocations or challenges to current political and economic ideologies and hegemonies. In this way they provide a particular opportunity for re-becoming political, critical, and engaged with the broader issues that define and shape the Polish site of this particular period.

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INTRODUCTION/

"...across a country
of low trees
low words
there crawls

there wends
a snail

on its back
it carries its home

dark

uncertain"

—Zbigniew Herbert, "Mr Cogito's Heraldic Meditations" (1990/2007, p. 434)

"Globalization...is nothing more than a fiction."
—Piotr Piotrowski (2009b, p. 439)

Before 1989, East-Central Europe (ECE)[i] was regularly neglected and absent from the Western art world, which "did not reveal any serious interest in the art of its close neighbors" (Piotrowski, 2003, para. 9). With few exceptions, East-Central Europe was missing from Western exhibitions and studies of art history to such an extent that, during the Cold War for example, the "West lived in the belief that no true values could emerge behind the Iron Curtain" (Rottenberg, 2011, p. 8). This situation was radically problematized and re-defined after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, when suddenly

there was "a boom in museum exhibitions that survey[ed] the wreckage of socialism and its industrial remains" (Scribner, 2003, p. 3). The "paradigmatic" exhibition of the time was *Europa, Europa* (1994) (Kazalarska, n.d., p. 3). Curated by Ryszard Stanisławski and Christoph Brockhaus at the Kunst-und Aussteslungshalle in Bonn, this ambitious exhibition was one of the first in the West to provide an overview of modern and contemporary art from the former Eastern Europe (including Russia). It revealed however a still prevalent colonial attitude that was trying to understand "how to integrate the region's art practice into the universal art canon, or, more precisely, into Western art history" (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 12)[ii]. Other retrospectives on the East by the West during this decade included *Der Riss im Raum* at Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin (1994); *Beyond Belief* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (1995); *Aspekte/ Positionen: 50 Jahre Kunst aus Mitteleuropa, 1949-1999* at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna (1999); and *After the Wall* at Moderna Museet in Stockholm (1999), for example (Piotrowski, 2003)[iii]. A turning point in the conversation occurred in the 2000s as countries from the former Eastern Europe, including Poland, joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, thereby ringing in "a new chapter in the history of the continent" (Hegyi, 2004, p. 7)[iv]. This first wave of European enlargement "was accompanied by an unprecedented number of projects and campaigns" aimed at "presenting the art and culture of the ten new European Union members to the old ones" in what was a "huge wave of exhibitions on the so-called 'New Europe'" (Kazalarska, n.d., p. 10). The focus was now on 'Europeanization', on a newfound cosmopolitanism

and contemporaneity, and on establishing "post-colonialist curatorial narratives" (Kazalarska, n.d., p. 5). Some of these exhibits framed as explorations of the region included *Passage Europe: Realities, References* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Étienne Métropole in France (2004), and *Living Art - On the Edge of Europe* at the Kröller-Müller Museum in the Netherlands (2006), among many others.[v] Joining the EU also meant that, for East-Central European artists, there were now more opportunities to exhibit abroad, to participate in international residencies, and to make deeper inroads into the global art world and its art market. But this situation was also misleading and paradoxical. On the one hand, despite a certain status, popularity, or caché as artists from this region, many worked to shed this constricting identity and label. The attempt to 'blend in' and join in a global *mélange* reflected a trend in the politics of identity, which had "diversified into new concerns that are often characterized by a sense of cosmopolitan solidarity" (Fowkes & Fowkes, 2010, para. 2). In other words, the upsurge in interest in the art from the former Eastern Europe/East-Central Europe, combined with the desire by artists from this region to join global flows and exchanges, were part of the growing allure of post-national ideologies and economies. However, these well-intentioned cultural exchanges essentially continued to showcase artists from this region separately, reaffirming a continued 'otherness' that required or merited a cordoning off or demarcation into their own shows, their own retrospectives and events, even their own galleries (such as Calvert 22 in London founded in 2009)[vi]. There was a pronounced tendency towards a fetichization, on capitalizing on the trendiness or 'exoticism' of post-

socialist East-Central Europe, rather than on a meaningful exploration of the histories, traditions, or cultures of this region. In response, some East-Central European artists and curators started re-writing and re-claiming their own narratives in an attempt at emancipation and/or self-enfranchisement, and curated exhibitions, projects, and initiatives to rethink the art from this region through their own lens. These include exhibitions such as *Body and the East* (1998) and *Interrupted Histories* (2006) at Modern Galerija in Ljubliana (1998), the first Prague Biennale thematized as *Peripheries Become the Center* (2003), or *East Art Museum* (organized by the Slovenian artist collective IRWIN) at the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum in Hagen (2005) (Kazalarska, n.d.). The persistence and popularity of these kinds of broad exhibitions in all of Europe (for example, recently, *Gender Check* at MUMOK in Vienna in 2009 and Zachęta in Warsaw in 2010), attests to the ongoing questioning of difference and otherness, of whether there is a "distinctive character" in art from the region of ECE (Groys, 2010, p.18). This is the setting or this dissertation. It is an exploration of difference, one that affirms it as productive, if not essential, in allowing the countries of this region to enact a self-enfranchisement and site-specificity that ultimately render political citizenship possible. This paradoxical situation between maintaining and shedding difference forms an inquiry into how, in this context, we can understand what it means to be a Polish artist.

The Polish transition since 1989 into a capitalist, democratic, and neo-liberal society marked its entrance into a world characterized by transnationalism and global flows (Appadurai, 1996), while the ongoing transformations post-2004 highlight the

fragile recalibration and fraught identity of independent Poland. Indeed, while "Poles actually have reason to celebrate" in terms of how "they have navigated the treacherous transition from communism" and as "the only country in Europe to have avoided a recession during the financial crisis, they are feeling insecure, pessimistic and uncertain about the future, and they have turned on one another" (Slackman, 2010). As such, the focus of this study on the years 2004-2009 affords a complex environment in which negotiations of identity, democracy, and site-specificity underlie the tensions of a society in flux. While 'Europeanization' and, more broadly, liquidity and global capitalism, offer their own unique and undisputed networked and cosmopolitan utopias, they also create a risky space and proposition for East-Central Europe, which is at a critical juncture between localized particularity and grounded historicity and "the serene firmament of universality" which the West represents (Močnik, 2006). Critic Viktor Misiano has explained this struggle by suggesting that,

> [t]he more you approach the Global, the more you discover that in fact its structure is local. It is composed of closed groups in which you rediscover the very same narrowness of spirit, dogmatism, personal rivalries, and intrigues. And the fact you belong to the Local—in Moscow or Ljubliana—will protect you, will allow you to maintain your distance and your independence (as cited in Blazevic, 2004, p. 26).

This situation affords artists with a unique responsibility. They are not only emblematic of change in the new Poland, but indeed function as actors in these ongoing negotiations of site that characterize the transformations of post-socialism and Europeanization. As has been frequently noted, including by important Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski

(2009b) art "does not appear as an autonomous field but a practice enmeshed in politics" (p. 9). As such, art must be understood as inextricable from its local context—a context that is defined through the specific markers—or ecologies—of a locality, including those of history, politics, geography, and culture. Together these produce 'the site,' a notion that comprises the complexity of the locality as constituted through a layering of specific ecologies. The locality is therefore not simply a geographic space, but one that is the product of a number of contextual factors that render it specific. The idea of the site-specific art work is therefore pushed and examined as more than existing in a physical location, as some suggest, but rather as bearing the layered markers of the site (more on the idea of the site in Chapter 1). Importantly, by being the product of a site, artistic engagement also contains the potential of politics and becomes a means through which to negotiate the site. In other words, understanding art through the lens of the site reaffirms the value of artistic practice and engagement in the processes of political reimagination.

Preeminent contemporary public artist Joanna Rajkowska one said in an interview that she "[d]reams of a country that is post-national or trans-national, in which however everyone is responsible for its shape and publicly responsible for its well-being" (as cited in Żmijewski, 2010). The question is how this responsibility and this public emerge in such a context. What does it mean, and how is it possible, to belong to a political solidarity at a time of cosmopolitan and post-national ideologies? I am guided through these questions by radical political theorist Chantal Mouffe who qualifies this situation by focusing on how we "understand citizenship when our goal is a radical and plural

democracy" (2005, p. 60). Her ideas on agonism are repeatedly taken up by contemporary Polish artists, critics, and scholars, rendering these ideals an important way to understand how artists function, or aspire to function, in the creation of democratic spaces and processes. Mouffe (2005) points to a specific situation that accurately captures the challenges of Polish self-enfranchisement by noting that

> [o]ur choice is not only one between an aggregate of individuals without common public concern and a premodern community organized around a single substantive idea of the common good. To envisage the modern democratic political community outside of this dichotomy is the crucial challenge" (p. 65).

Part of her project is to define that democratic space between a complete absence of political solidarity and that of hegemonic uniformity where differences are impossible; in the Polish case this could be understood as that space between socialism and post-nationalism. How indeed to maintain a sense of political solidarity simultaneous to the formation of an agonistic democracy? The proposition here is not one of ethnic nationalisms or the xenophobia they create, but rather an attempt to understand how to maintain political engagement in a world no longer defined by national allegiances. In the context of the Polish site, it is an argument for the continued necessity of politically strong solidarities which are separate but not disengaged from the rest of Europe or the world—i.e., that are able to resist the neo-liberal agenda of disengaged, uprooted, and de-territorialized publics. To do this the grounded site is critical as the space of political action.

In her concept of action, Hannah Arendt refers to the idea that "human beings are creatures who *act* in the sense of starting things and setting off trains of events" (Canovan, 1998, p. xvi). Action, that fundamental activity of the human condition that is inextricably bound and produced from the plurality of individuals is, Arendt (1958/1998) argues, the "political activity par excellence" (p. 9). Though Arendt's idea of action is inseparable from speech (indeed she explicitly states that "speechless action would no longer be action" – p. 178), it is nevertheless insightful and provocative to consider critical artistic practice as a kind of communication and action, especially as conceived through the idea of the beginning, whereby an aspect of the human condition is the political ability to start something new, to forge a beginning. To see the world differently, to propose that it can be different, is a beginning. This opportunity of new beginnings is, in many ways, a reflection of the Polish situation as it has been undergoing a continuous process of reinvention at least since 1989. Judy Radul's (2002) connection of action as a beginning and experimentation is central to the discussion of this dissertation. The critical art works discussed here all examples of trying to see things differently, to propose something new, to chart a course for a different kind of imagination and action. They challenge and insert provocations into different ecologies of the Polish site often by problematizing its current 'uprooting' within European and global networks. Experiments in ecology, it will be argued, are therefore a type of action, a way of thinking about art as a source of beginnings.

The first chapter delves more deeply into the historical and political condition of the Polish site, juxtaposed with an overview of corresponding attitudes towards the visual arts. I argue that though the space of the nation-state has been deemed increasingly irrelevant, the site-specificity and locality contained within a Polish territory has continuing effects on the way in which art is produced, received, and understood. Sketching out the history of Poland as nation, border, and identity, with a particular focus on the recent history of 1945-1989, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the immediate consequences and challenges of its inclusion into the European Union. Rather than perceive this new phase as the culmination of Polish history in which it has finally formed a union with the West, the proposition here is that one of the biggest challenges for Poland in the first five years after accession into the EU was to redefine itself as a site that could at once be integrated and distinct within European and global networks. This discussion serves as a response to the ideals of cosmopolitanism and post-nationalism which, it is argued, do not fully reflect the sustained way in which localities and sites continue to be politically, culturally, and socially significant. Within this fluctuating context, I introduce the Polish visual artist and her position within the social and political climate of Polish history. I consider the historically undervalued perception of the visual arts in Poland, and especially how this positioned visual artists during the socialist period and beyond. The shifting situation of the artist provides a window into the changing political dynamics of Polish society, and helps explain why contemporary artists are now particularly needed to present critical perspectives of the status quo and to help in the

process of creating a democratic, plural, and public site in the face of European and global pressures.

This attention to site is then turned onto media art itself as I trace Polish (i.e., existing in the Polish site) media art practices within a specific media archaeology that turns to experimental practices within Polish art. In the second chapter I suggest that critical media art practices can be understood as experiments within the ecologies of site that act as provocations or challenges to current political and economic ideologies and hegemonies and ultimately serve as an important artistic method for enacting new beginnings. First I turn to some key moments in art experimentation in Poland to trace a trajectory that deepens our understanding of media art as a potentially experimental practice, one that is best understood as at once defined through specific powerful formal features, the behaviors, experiences, and processes it enables, but also, crucially, as existing in and responding to particular situated environments. Though pointing out the influence of the avant-garde on new media art practices is not new, for example, the photomontage, collage, readymade, political action and performance of Dadaism have all been noted as strategies reemployed by new media artists (Tribe & Jana, 2006), as art historian Boris Groys (2010) has noted, "[c]ontemporary Eastern European and Russian artists work in a tradition of their own avant-gardes of the first half of the twentieth century" (p. 22). So here I begin this Polish archaeology in the early twentieth century and the germination of the Constructivists in the 1920s and 1930s. In particular I focus on Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro and the theory of Unism of their a.r. group.

Jumping ahead, I look to the 1970s and the neo-avant-garde as practiced in the Workshop of the Film Form and their analytic experiments with new technological media. From there I consider the rejection of the conceptual experiment and point to the performance-based activities of the 1980s, the neo-expressionism of the 1990s, and the boom in new media in the 1990s and 2000s. By no means a comprehensive survey of experimental art or experimental traditions in Polish art, this overview aims to contextualize the argument for the ongoing relevance and critical need for undertaking the ideologies of experimentation through the lens of site-specificity, and for the potential of media art to act in the experimental tradition.

The second component of this chapter is a theoretical investigation into 'media art'. Though Lev Manovich (2001) argued that media art (multimedia, time-based or process-oriented, work) is an agent of modernization and global interconnectivity, this dissertation proposes that it must also be understood as culminating from particular site-specific ecologies, aesthetics, and media archaeologies, so that it is not simply perceived as a homogenous and homogenizing form. As such, the ECE experience becomes not only essential for understanding the global contemporary cultural and political condition (Scribner, 2003), but also for expanding media art scholarship. If a material indicates a particular way of being in the world, what possibilities does the digital form offer for local adaptations and appropriations? In other words, can Polish artistic histories, practices, and conditions be translated or embedded into digital materials, and how are

these in turn a reflection or response to the 'new' Poland and the contemporary iterations of its identity and society?

The exploration of media forms is not a claim that other kinds of art or ways to use media are less significant, powerful, or important. Rather, the question is as much about how media art is defined, as it is a quest to understand a particular type of artistic intervention which has not only gained popularity but, arguably, resonates with this time of constant technological and media stimulation and immersion, such that

> ...there may be specific strategic and conceptual advantages to using emerging media in a metacritical way. In other words, if used cleverly, technological media may offer precisely the tools needed to reflect on the profound ways in which that very technology is deeply embedded in modes of knowledge production, perception, and interaction, and is thus inextricable from corresponding epistemological and ontological transformations (Shanken, 2011, para. 9).

Put differently, media art 'speaks' the language of everyday modern experience in a way that perhaps resonates and is more appealing to those who would normally shy away from engaging with "Art". Moreover, turning to media art as an instigator of beginnings and actions betrays a hopeful belief in its potential and qualities to explore certain kinds of relations between an audience and site. It also illustrates the types of interventions, infiltrations, interactions, and stimulations that artistic practice makes possible, enabling media to be used subversively, politically, and critically. These relations are at the crux of this dissertation such that media art here is not only an aesthetic or media practice (though it is that as well), but also a potentially political tool uniquely positioned to

propose critical perspectives regarding the changes affecting the Polish site during a pivotal and historic time.

Three Ecologies of Site

This dissertation argues that critical media artists create experiments that subvert particular ecologies of site that promote a re-grounding of political commitments and action. In writing about the post-socialist Poland of the 1990s, Anna Lubecka (2000) described the three areas of change that defined transition at that time as: a burgeoning urban culture, the technicization of self and everyday life, and an emergent civic culture. Here I expand upon these ideas to suggest that the negotiations of site taking place in the mid-late 2000s are manifested through, among others, a continued reevaluation of the ecologies of the past, of democratization, and of mediation. My case studies of nine artists (Rafał Jakubowicz, Aleksandra Polisiewicz, Hubert Czerepok, Grzegorz Rogała, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Aleksandra Wasilkowska, Dominik Lejman, Izabella Gustowska, and Piotr Wyrzykowski) and twelve projects are thus centered on media art projects that are engaged with the pluralization of the histories and memories of site (Chapter 3), the creation of publicity through public spaces of appearance and communication (Chapter 4), and the exposition of the narratives of the media environment (Chapter 5), as crucial factors in understanding the relationship to and experience of rootedness. The interventions within these ecologies provide a way to renovate the Polish site, whereby

the artist functions as mediator, storyteller, and actor whose role it is to provide an alternate imagining of the site, to look inwards now that all eyes are looking out.

Chapter 3 turns to the ecology of the past in the constitution of the Polish site. While history and memory are in a way tired themes for Polish society, the artists in these case studies use a variety of media to break up the monolithic History of national identity and create in its stead new kinds of stories from which to gain different (for example, unofficial) perspectives. By experimenting with alternatives to official and institutionalized history-making, artistic practices like the ones discussed in this chapter open the door to the pluralization of the past, giving voice, making visible, and circulating buried, dismissed, hidden, or forgotten narratives, thereby creating, at least for a moment, an open and potentially public space. Through these examples I suggest there are two ways of pluralizing the past. The first is work concerned with the history and memory of specific places—focusing on cities—and the way the circulation of alternative narratives contributes to the rewriting of official or dominant versions of (national) history through the sharing of individual memories and stories, and through the excavation of local, urban histories. The second is work concerned with the individual as a central actor in the democratization of official history, and incorporates or explores the plurality of personal memories. Both of these types of works are working for the circulation of communicative memories, whether of places, events, or individuals, to provide alternatives to cultural memory. The dissemination of these marginalized stories thus becomes a crucial component of the process of site-specific reclamation. The artists

and projects used as case studies are Jakubowicz (*Es Beginnt in Breslau, Swimming Pool),* Polisiewicz (*Wartopia),* Rogała (*Shadow),* and Czerepok (*Strange Tourists, Haunebau).*

In Chapter 4 I turn to the political question of publicity in the formation of agonistic spaces of plural democracy by considering the strategies available to artists to challenge the hegemonic appropriation, encroachment, and depoliticization of the urban 'public' space. I focus on the city as a site of the local and transnational, a particular place which reflects the crossing of trajectories, histories, and networks in a way which gives its space a sense of becoming, interaction, and openness that speaks to the plural and simultaneous nature of a globalized society. Specifically, this chapter examines how media art interventions contribute to the production of a democracy by functioning as a site of visibility and publicity, contemplation and self-reflection, encounter and confrontation, communication and appearance. Sketching out some key moments in the history of modern public art, this chapter then considers the place of public art in Poland before proposing a rethinking of public space. Using Mouffe's requirements of radical democracy—plurality, inclusivity, and agonism—I suggest that a democratic public space is one defined as functioning as a space of appearance and communication. Put differently, this is an argument for and about public space and the proposition that media art can create moments of publicity and encounter in a manner that produces an art-as-publicity. The case studies here are Wodiczko (*Warsaw Projection, 2005),* Lejman (*It is enough to go for a walk),* and Wasilkowska (*Fluctuating Microclimat*).

Chapter 5 examines media ecologies through projects that provide reflections on the technological mediation and mediatization of self and site. This exploration of the media environment considers how identity, experience, and imagination are processed through and by media technologies. The mediated everyday, despite being charged with uprooting human experience from locality, has also produced new ways of existing in and understanding the world that emerge and are inextricable from presence, whereby the body assumes the function of enframing or interfacing with media. By turning to alternate stories of mediation there is a beginning towards side-specific understandings of how the aesthetic spaces of media art are also political spaces of reconstruction which produce new forms of thinking, being and creating (in) the world (Dinkla 2002; Cubitt, 2002). Gustowska (*Art of Hard Choice*; *She-Ona: Media Story*) and Wyrzykowski (*Only Those Who Planned It Will Survive*) are used as case studies to examine these ideas.

Methodological Opportunities and Challenges

The post-socialist crisis of Eastern Europe has been examined through political, social, and economic lenses, but aesthetic responses have received little attention (IRWIN, 2006). Indeed, the Eastern European experience is still "a blind spot for contemporary cultural studies" (Groys, 2008, p. 149) and "subject to much scholarly amnesia and silence" (Condee, 2008, p. 235), especially in terms of interdisciplinary approaches (Zaborowska, Forrester, & Gapova, 2004). My questions originate from an attempt to understand how digital cultures and practices can be analyzed as products of site-specific

ecologies and archaeologies, and in understanding the affordances of particular media technologies when used for artistic practice (rather than, for instance, for mass communication). In other words, this is as a project rooted in the site and framed through media and communication studies, but supported by an interdisciplinary framework. It is not a project of art history for example, or aesthetics, which would require a different kind of discussion surrounding the merits of privileging digital forms, a broader contextualization within the institutions, histories, and rhetoric of art, and a more elaborate reference to the theoretical work at the intersection of politics and aesthetics, for example. Certain notions of art history would require a methodology that "creates a particular kind of objectivity dependent on something called 'historical distance,' a particular way of describing and locating an otherness fundamental to any art-historical inquiry" (Iversen & Melville, 2010, p. 10). This interdisciplinary study is however neither interested in objective evaluations of the art object as style, nor has enough distance to claim a historical perspective, nor is interested in debating the ontology of art. It is instead a project immersed in the social, cultural, and political problems and concerns of the present, and in situating artistic practices within these contexts, as affecting and acting upon the individual and the social imagination. It is moreover a project arguing for the vitality and opportunity of including visual art in media and communication studies. While Edward Shanken accurately suggested that "the study of technology as a hermeneutic method must be incorporated as a part of the art historian's standard methodological toolkit" (2007, p. 56), here it is the converse that is explored, or how the

inclusion of artistic practices serves as an important method for the media theorist. In other words, this dissertation argues for the merits of studying and understanding media—its forms, behaviors, processes, affordances, histories, and archaeologies—through artistic practice.

As elsewhere, media art in Poland has become varied and broad, especially as artists increasingly work across media, moving fluidly between 'old' and 'new' forms, constantly challenging attempts to categorize, define, or even legitimize 'media art'. In general the artists interviewed during my research expressed a reluctance or ambivalence towards thinking of themselves as 'media artists'[vii]. The artists included here cross generations and styles, and are not meant to define a particular trend or movement. They are not necessarily the most technologically cutting-edge, nor do they form a collection of the 'biggest' names in Polish contemporary (media) art, 'stars' of the 'global art world'. The most famous internationally is Wodiczko who is included because of his explicit commitment to the issues at stake here. Indeed, many important artists who would have been relevant to at least part of this discussion are not featured such as Paweł Althamer, Mirosław Bałka, Anna Baumgart, Zofia Kulik, Zbigniew Libera, Artur Żmijewski, Joanna Warsza, or Rajkowska. This is for a number of reasons. I was drawn to artists that were somewhat less known, or entirely unknown, to an international audience. I also considered the extent of an artist's engagement with media technologies, and whether they offered the best or most compelling examples of interventions into the ecologies used to structure this particular exploration of the Polish site. What the works selected do

share is that they are formally and conceptually interesting, they engage with the forms of media, and they display a critical perspective toward the site. Together they hopefully provide an eclectic mix of expected and surprising choices.

The selection of artists and the delineation of the three ecologies happened hand-in-hand. While some aspects of this terrain were obvious from the start—it would be impossible to skirt the 'problem' of history, for example—the other ecologies chosen to frame the site were constantly reevaluated and questioned. In trying to find the best and most appropriate ways of addressing the concerns and focus of this dissertation to think about the political potential of media art, I narrowed the other areas of focus as the practice of democracy and the experience of mediated reality. These three categories provide a solid way of containing the negotiations of contemporary Polish society, but a different project could very well have used different categories and points of entry.

Lastly, a personal disclaimer. As I was born only one year after my family left Poland, in many ways this was a project that emerged from personal questions, from a desire or attempt at some kind of return. I had a yearning to somehow 'plug in' to Poland, and I chose to do so through its artistic community. Slowly I made inroads, discovering what seemed like a secret world that was so distant and yet so familiar. I made my way through Polish materials, including books, magazines, and websites. There were new materials to read daily, the conversation changed quickly, and I was confronted by my slow reading and the laborious process of translation[viii]. My research also included a fieldwork trip to Poland in May-June 2010 for a six-week period that centered on

conducting interviews[ix], collecting original materials, and accessing local resources such as the WRO Media Art Archive. Before leaving Canada I scheduled to meet some artists, curators, and scholars, and planned my itinerary accordingly, including stops in the cities of Warsaw, Łódź, Wrocław, Poznań, Gdańsk, and Sopot. Along the way I was given numerous helpful tips and suggestions, which resulted in further interviews, adding up to nearly fifteen overall. Though not all of this collected material is referenced here (and conversely, not all artists included in the case studies could be interviewed), all provided essential building blocks in the formative stages of this project. Unsurprisingly, fieldwork was in itself a disorienting and overwhelming experience, for a variety of reason: I soon felt not only like an outsider, but even like an imposter, one who could never quite 'get it' or be part of 'it'. Am I, or am I not, part of this culture, this place? Again, the question of language reared its head. When Rajkowska says she longs for "Polish with an accent" (as cited in Żmijewski, 2010), she challenges the homogeneous quality of Polish identity and aspires to some more cosmopolitan version of 'Polishness'. But, for me and for now, this accent, or at least stunted vocabulary, remained an internalized mark of the outsider. While I had selfishly hoped to interview my subjects in English (and indeed some interviews did take place in English), it quickly became clear that this was counterproductive, if not foolish. Interviews in Polish added a layer of difficultly in terms of the interview itself and in the subsequent transcription and translation, but they also turned into an important aspect of the research experience. However un-savvy and simplistic my use of Polish was in these moments, it was indeed an opportunity that I

could let the interviewees speak in their language, and that I could read the critics and scholars in the original. It was a better way to understand the complicated situation of the Polish site—prior to translation, transformation, and mediation—and that is, I reminded myself, why I had embarked on this journey.

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[i] Since "[t]he notion of Eastern Europe is a legacy of the Cold War" (Groys, 2010, p. 18), one that is "losing political relevance as the original geopolitical designation of the Eastern Bloc has faded into history" and entry of some ex-Soviet republics into the EU has "emptied the old term Eastern Europe of its contested political relevance" (Fowkes and Fowkes, 2010, para. 11), East-Central Europe (ECE) has become a useful designation that locates this area in a geographic sense rather than through the marginalizing connotations of 'Eastern Europe'. However, it is important to remember that the division between East and West has a much longer history than that of the Eastern Bloc and that the socialist period was not the first time in history that the Poles, for example, had been looking to the West from a distance, and that Poland was separated psychologically and temporally, if not always physically, by a wall. Moreover, regionalism continues to divide Europe between East and West, and though a heterogeneous region with varied ethnic, and linguistic differences, Eastern Europe is a site that developed its own regional subjectivity and identity "based on a shared history, shared time-space of Eastern Europe, shared experience of oppressive regimes, as well as totalitarian and authoritarian political systems" (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 434). In this dissertation I refer to Eastern Europe as the space defined by the geopolitics of the Cold War, to East-Central Europe as that space is geographically conceived of now, to the 'East' as a loose term that refers to this area of Europe, and to the 'West' as defined by the North Atlantic region and, in this case, Western Europe most particularly.

[ii] Indeed, Western histories of modern art often make no allusions to Poland, its artists, or movements. East-Central Europe (not including Russia) is represented minimally, with some standard exceptions such as the Hungarian artist Lászl6 Moholy-Nagy.

[iii] The cities here indicate where the exhibitions started, but they subsequently travelled to a variety of locations and museums.

[iv] Poland joined the EU along with nine other nation-states: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007.

[v] For a more complete list and analysis of the curatorial narratives at play during this time, see for example Kazalarska, Svetla (n.d.).

[vi] This is not of course the case all of the time, and indeed some artists are able to push through this 'ethnicization' to become placeless 'stars' of the art world and/or have solo shows (Mirosław Balka or Monika Sosnowska, for example). It would be worth investigating with what frequency artists from ECE currently participate in international group shows not devoted to some exploration of the region.

[vii] Many are also begrudging of the label of the "Polish artist." But this rejection in itself reveals an aspect of the negotiation of site, such that the personal positioning of the artist within local as well as international art networks is one that is multiplied or reflected across all facets of Polish society.

[viii] All translations in the text are my own when not otherwise noted.

[ix] This research project underwent an Ethics Review by York University and was approved on November 24, 2009. Please refer to Appendices A and B.

CHAPTER 1/
The Country on the Moon; Or, Artists Reclaim the Polish Site

> "Today, the pressures of the present outweigh the burden of the past to such an extent that contemporary art is moving beyond the 'transition' into unchartered territory."
>
> —Maja Fowkes and Reuben Fowkes (2009, para. 1)

> "Eastern European cultures must learn to stand by their own strength."
>
> —Czesław Miłosz (1953/1990, p. 46)

In the wild landscape of the Polish city, wolves roam the streets freely. Or at least that is the metaphor Jakub Jasiukiewicz (1983—) chose in his project *Canis Lupus Polonus (The Polish Wolf)* (2008-2010). *Canis Lupis* (Latin for grey wolf) plays on the idea of Poland as an untamed wilderness with nary a sign of civilization, unresponsive to the 'progress' and 'civility' of 'the West'. According to the artist, it refers to "the stereotypical way of thinking about East-Central Europe as a deep and wild province" (Jasiukiewicz, n.d.). It has been exhibited numerous times, including at the WRO Mediations Biennale in Wrocław in 2010. The project consisted of an interactive installation drawing on the strategies and technologies of surveillance whereby four cameras were installed to monitor a sidewalk and film the movement of passers-by. The viewer was located in a gallery with windows overlooking this sidewalk. Three screens mounted onto the window displayed the scene under surveillance so that the viewer could at once see the real action

and the images on the screens. These screens displayed the sidewalks from the different perspectives being monitored, the image looking like something from an analog CCTV system, complete with grey scale, noise, and other imperfections (Jasiukiewicz, n.d.). But instead of seeing people, Jasiukiewicz manipulated the image so that each human form was transformed into a 3D avatar of a wolf. What the viewer saw then was a CCTV-like monitoring system with wolves walking and crossing this city space. The project plays upon some historical stereotypes of "Poles…as conspirators, revolutionaries, anarchists, and even barbarians, inhabiting 'swamps, woods and marches on which wolves and bears swarm in packs and endanger the roads'" (as cited in Castle and Taras, 2002, p.17). In producing a project about stereotypes of 'Polishness' and about surveillance, Jasiukiewicz in many ways reflects the sensibilities of his generation. A member of the 'New Poland' he exemplifies a tongue-and-cheek rapport with Polish history and politics and a newfound confidence and unaffectedness with being a 'Polish' artist (personal communication, May 22, 2010). Though perhaps not intended by the artist, there are also other connotations associated by the image of the wolf. The wolf is extinct in "almost all of Europe" except for the "largest concentrations…in the former Soviet Union" (Busch, 2007, p. 22) so that the wildness associated with a wolf's territory is still located in East-Central Europe. But while the wolf has been a symbol of "avarice, viciousness, and guile" (Busch, 2007, p. 99) it is also prominent in certain foundational myths (from Rome to Lithuania), an omen of victory or luck. Jakubowicz's wolf may be wild, but perhaps he is also the keeper of the land. Moreover, the wolf's small pack existence offers an interesting way of conceiving of a people, as the tension between individualism and

collectivity emerges in the formation of society. *Canis Lupus* creates a surrealist visual that takes literally the derogatory stereotype of Poland as wild by drawing on the negative association with wolves. The counterpoint however is the symbolism of the wolf as a protector of territory through the vigilance of the pack. In this sense, *Canis Lupus* alludes to the process of establishing a new set of expectations about Polish society and its place within a global network and questions whether "the term 'East-Central Europe' is still eligible in the discussion about the contemporary world" (Jasiukiewicz, n.d.). Indeed, *Canis Lupus'* political strength comes from creating a satirical situation that illustrates how critical artistic practices play an important role in social and political re-imagination.

The Polish site provides a complex case to understand the local dimensions and reverberations of global cultural and political change, and offers an insightful study of the multifaceted tensions that continue to divide Europe into East and West. Analyses of contemporary Poland are plugged into discourses of modernization and difference that are still ironing out the persistent divisions between the 'old' and 'new' capitalist democracies in Europe. While Poland has been a member of the European Union since 2004, it is unclear whether it is in fact treated as equally European, cosmopolitan, or a peer in global cultural participation and exchanges, especially as belonging to the EU has become the current measure of 'Europeanness' (Berezin, 2003). Slovenian scholar and activist Rastko Močnik (2006) has warned that the East is in fact too easily letting go of its localized particularity and grounded historicity for the sake of global connectivity, cosmopolitanism, assimilation, and entry into the "the serene firmament of universality"

that the West represents (p. 344). But while Polish society is therefore continuously working to define and claim its space within European and global networks and imaginaries, it must resist losing itself and the sense of identity it associates with a historical site, for the sake of, or in the name of, inclusion. Indeed, the situation in Poland is currently one where "[t]here are two visions of Poland struggling to co-exist" (as cited in Slackman, 2010), in which there is a negotiation between a desire to belong to Europe and the West, while working to not do so at the expense of its own identity and history (Marciniak, 2009).

Alongside this discussion of the Polish site is the parallel exposition of the shifting role of the visual artist as a critical actor in the negotiation of the 'new' Poland. Artistic practice represents a special opportunity for thinking about the complexities of global citizenship and local resistance, self-enfranchisement, and democratization. Critic and curator Zdenka Badinovać (2009) has even ventured that ECE artists are especially capable of offering alternatives to homogenizing forms of globalization provided they incorporate their experiences into their work rather than omitting them for fear of distancing a Western audience. In other words, the artist is particularly needed to present critical perspectives on the everyday politics of site and, conversely, in the Polish case this criticality also works to re-politicize artistic practice. If Marshall McLuhan was correct in his suggestion that artists were a culture's early warning system (1964), then artistic practices can provide an unparalleled window into the transitions of Polish society. What follows is an argument that renewed criticality in art offers a way of re-affirming the site-specificity essential for Polish self-enfranchisement.

On site

After the Cold War the world lost its trust in the modernist ideals of the nation, having just witnessed and lived through the divisions and wars to which it can lead. Soon, all nationalism was equated with ethno-nationalism, leaving behind the notions of the nation as "common project, mediated by public discourse and the collective formation of culture, [rather] than simply an inheritance" (Calhoun, 2002, p. 152), and the public forgot that "national struggles in much of the world were among the few viable forms of resistance to capitalist globalization" (Calhoun, 2007, p. 11; Smith, 1995; Berezin, 2003). In short, the public wanted to forget about nationalism, especially its dark side—xenophobia, hatred, and violence perpetrated in the name of one's nation.

Historically, there have been two lines of thought on the origin of nationalism. The first primordial or essentialist argument is one based on ancient or natural ethnic divisions, and an ethnicity that is "given and immutable" (Calhoun, 2007, p. 61) and which engenders an emotional response, bond, and loyalty (Smith, 1995). It is the nation as cultural or ethnic (Meinecke in Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox & Grancea, 2006), as a community of attachment (Berezin, 2003). The second origin of nationalism, especially in the West, favors the formulation which locates the nation and nationalism as firmly unrelated to ethnic claims, and where state formation precedes the formation of nations and nationalism. This is the state or civic nation (Meinecke in Brubaker et al., 2006), a community of affinity in which the constructed nature of nationalism is emphasized. Here, nationalism is absolutely connected to notions of modernity and the rise of the nation-state. Sociologist Craig Calhoun (2002; 2007) suggests however that despite the

arguments between these so-called traditional and modern views of nationalism, the clear-cut separation is not necessarily productive. Rather, he proposes that nations and nationalism are formed through active and shared social, political, and cultural participation and must be understood above all as a political solidarity, one that transcends cultural differences, and is essential for the practice of democracy. In this way, the nation can be understood not an absolute, self-obvious, predetermined, and defined category, but as an institution, a discursive practice, or an imaginary (Anderson, 1991; Smith, 1995; Calhoun, 2007) that functions "as classificatory scheme, as cognitive frame" (Brubaker et al., 2006, p.16). For Brubaker (1996) understanding nationalism, nationhood and nationness must be done through the "practical uses of the category 'nation', the ways it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, to organize discourse and political action" (p. 7). While Brubaker et al. (2006) are not interested in the nation as a real or substantive entity (but rather as a "practical" category), for Calhoun (2007) nationalism, which is also best defined as a discursive formation, is a working towards claims of political autonomy and self-determination, where a nation is a people of a country that are internally unified "with common interests and the capacity to act" (p. 48).

Some have suggested a 'decline' or 'crisis' of the nation-state (Berezin, 2003, p. 3), while others have been more definitive in their proclamations that the era of the nation-state is over and/or that we have entered a post-national age characterized by the dissolution of the nation as a primary organizational structure in global relations (Harvey, 1989; Appadurai, 1996; Habermas, 2001; Bauman, 2004). According to these claims,

individuals are no longer primarily bound by their citizenship, but rather by their participation within various deterritorialized networks. The idea that people are now more attached to ephemeral types of identities has gained popularity, especially with the kinds of social networking capacities provided by digital information systems. These placeless and mobile structures have in some cases been perceived to be even more politically effective and coherent than those based on the nation-state since they are often formed with an explicit unifying goal or interest, and act as a means of organization in a world that is desynchronized from historical community and place (Urry, 2007).

Calls for post-national citizenship (Habermas, 2001) or cosmopolitan solidarity (Soysal, 1995) have therefore offered illuminating ways of thinking about the new formations that emerged with the rise of increased networking, movement, and exchange. But despite the insistence that these new kinds of patterns of attachment to a-historical and placeless communities, networks, or assemblages have superseded the seemingly obsolete category of the nation, it has remained questionable whether the sense of belonging one associates to a physical place and the political power that emerges from civic identities has become redundant. Indeed, post-nationalism has been criticized as not fitting well with actual and experienced political realities (Eder & Giesen, 2001; Berezin, 2003), and some scholars continue to argue for the ongoing—even urgent—need to think critically about the nation-state to elucidate negotiations of identity and culture in regions with alternative histories of democratization, modernization, and global integration, such as ECE, as one of the few viable forms of resistance to globalization (Calhoun, 2007). After all, everyday experience remains lived at a local level, one still understood as a

place existing in space and time, and the allegiance to different kinds of "memory-less" and "context-less" networks has so far failed to assuage the feelings of rootless-ness, isolation, and alienation which have become characteristic and symptomatic of our electrified world (Meyrowitz, 1986; Smith, 1995; Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). So while post-nationalism offers important new ways of conceptualizing human culture and collectivity, it often fails to acknowledge the persistence and resilience of national loyalties, and local formations continue to remain relevant by offering ways of thinking about and organizing the collective identities and political solidarities essential for democratic practice. As radical political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2000/2009) has put forward,

> ...deprived of the possibility of identifying with valuable conceptions of citizenship, many people are increasingly searching for other forms of collective identification, which can often put into jeopardy the civic bond that should unite a democratic political association (p. 96)

Post-nationalism can be accused of existing "at the expense of political membership" (Berezin, 2003, p. 25), which raises the question of how post-nationalism or cosmopolitanism can "achieve a sufficient solidarity to be truly motivating for its members" (Calhoun, 2002, p. 157). On the other hand, political citizenship does not have to exist at the expense of cosmopolitanism or fluid identities. As Mouffe (1993/2005) has pointed out, citizenship is an "articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent...while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiance and for the respect of individual liberty" (p. 70).

Nation-states therefore continue to be active participants in shaping, formalizing, and institutionalizing globalizing systems and processes, as well as identities. In this way the local continues to be constitutive of, and interdependent in, global processes, whether cultural, economic, or political. As Saskia Sassen (2007) has described, the global "simultaneously transcends the exclusive framing of national states, yet partly inhabits, and gets constituted inside, the national" (p.1). Put simply, the nation-state as a political entity continues to play a vital role in the mediation between 'the local and the global'. While the duality of the local-global paradigm has arguably become insufficient in capturing the messiness of current global relations, exchanges, and spheres of influence, and problematically defines these two formations as categorically opposed rather than mutually constituted, the concept of the nation itself also needs to adapt and respond to changing patterns of identity and movement. In other words there is an ongoing need to think of how these micro and macro formations continually shape the 'localization of the global' at the same time as there is a 'globalization of the local'. For the sake of democratic practice, there must be different kinds of national imaginaries that leave room for locality in a cosmopolitan and globalized world. Without ignoring the importance of new kinds of placeless communities then, they must be understood not as replacements, but as complements or additions, to grounded kinds of networks, identities, and solidarities. Locality remains an intrinsic component of a 'post-national' cosmopolitanism and of organizing and identifying despite the rise of unrooted communities.

One way of understanding the complexity of locality, this dissertation argues, is by using the dynamic, fluid, and layered notion of the site, which can weave together the narratives of global integration and local transformations into the experience of the everyday. The rooted site still provides the potential for resistance of the national state, but is more attuned to the ideals and realities of transnationalism; the site serve as a mediator, but is also constituted through the intertwined and mutually reliant relations between localized and globalized structures.

Geographically speaking, the site can include a variety of places like the city or something vaster, such as the space that exists within the boundaries of a nation-state, or the area that defines a region. In the words of art historian Miwon Kwon (2004) the site is composed through social, economic, and political processes (p. 3) as well as defined by a particular historical condition (p. 29). The idea of the site does not define locality through absolutes, but rather as a layered context that can have multiple allegiances, fluid boundaries, and allows for national, global, and local structures to coexist in the everyday. But the site is more than a geographically located area. It is an environment, an ecology that is defined through the relations and interconnections that exist between all of its elements, and that understands the human as one part of larger ecosystems. Ecology, Matthew Fuller (2005) has said, is a word that "is one of the most expressive language currently has to indicate the massive and dynamic interrelation of processes and objects, beings and things, patterns and matter" (p. 2). Neil Postman (1970), a pioneer in ecological ways of understanding media, offered that "ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people" whereby the "environment

is…a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving" (p. 161). Ecology does not then refer here to an idea of Nature, but rather it is a proposition to adopt an ecological way of understanding the complexity of social, cultural, and political interconnections that define the site.

Through this ecological lens, the Polish site can be understood as constituted through a plurality of fluid contexts—or (sub)ecologies—such that the 'Polishness' of the site can be attributed to a particular confluence of histories, geography, politics, culture, etc. The ecologies explored in detail here—the past, democracy, and mediation—are therefore presented as central to the structure, organization, and imagination of the Polish site. Using this approach, it becomes clear that simply referring to a cultural work as 'Polish' because it is located in the geographic space of the Polish nation-state is inadequate, but that it would also be inaccurate to deny that it exists in a site partially defined by its 'Polishness'. Therefore, while it has been suggested that we have entered a post-national era defined by hyper-mobility and global interconnectivity, this dissertation argues for the ongoing need to think critically about the site to ground negotiations of identity and culture in regions with alternative histories of democratization, modernization and global integration such as East-Central Europe. The question that arises is how individuals can maintain social and political solidarity, learn to participate and share in publicity, and develop an agonistic democratic culture while traversing the fluid ecologies that comprise their particular site.

It is important to clarify here the idea of site-specificity as it has been typically been applied to art. Kwon (2004) notes for example that site-specific art too often gets

conflated with installation art (p. 4, note 3) and that "contemporary art discourse still lacks a substantive account of the historical and theoretical 'grounds' of site specificity," (p. 2). In her book on this topic, which filled an important void in this area, she adds that

> ...the framework within which we might discuss the artistic merit and/or political efficacy of the various formulations of site specificity, old and new, remains inconclusive. Most importantly, what remain unrecognized, and thus unanalyzed, are the way in which the very term 'site-specificity' has itself become a site of struggle, where competing positions concerning the nature of the site, as well as the 'proper' relationship of art and artists to it, are being contested (p. 2).

Site-specificity is not used here in the sense that an intervention is taking place in a particular place, such as an installation in a public square, for example (though those kinds of works are included, many of the works discussed here took place in galleries, and in different cities within Poland as well as internationally), but rather that the works emerge from the ecologies of the site, from a site-specific context. Like Kwon, this dissertation proposes a different idea of site-specificity, one that thinks beyond the location of the work and beyond the idea that "[t]o move the site-specific work is to *re-place* it, to make it *something else*"[i] (Kaye, 2000, p. 2). Put differently, site-specific works are here considered not as those *in* a place, but rather as *of* a site.

The Polish Site: A Chronology

Background

The concept of 'Eastern Europe' is commonly associated and defined through the geopolitics of the Cold War, but the division of Europe between East and West has a longer history. During the Enlightenment, Western Europe "invented Eastern Europe as

its complementary other half' and "imagined, discovered, claimed and set [it] apart" (Wolff, 1994, p. 4). This segregation produced a chasm so vast that in the late eighteenth century the trip from Prussia to Poland was described as being "moved back ten centuries,"[ii] while in the nineteenth century the voyage from Paris to Warsaw was considered one of "interplanetary displacement" (Wolff, 1994, p. 251). The West treated Poland as Europe's other, as "a country on the moon" and the "orangutan of Europe"[iii] (Wolff, 1994). From this position of periphery, Poland was treated like a backwater ("La Pologne—c'est nul part!"[iv]), a wasteland between the German end of 'civilized' Europe, and the 'exoticism' of Russia, a borderland or buffer between East and West (Delanty, 1995, p. 55). Towards the end of the nineteenth century the difference was defined by Poland's 'distance' from the Western European present (Mignolo, 1999), and its backwardness was conceived as a lag measured in centuries (Wolff, 1994). As a result of this spatial and temporal 'othering', Eastern Europe became the first model of underdevelopment for Western Europe and was thought to have a different degree of humanity (i.e., as primitive or barbaric). In other words, for Western Europe there was no coevalness and no contemporaneity possible with its Eastern neighbor (Mignolo, 1999). Even until recently the West has had limited interest in the myths and symbols of Eastern Europe, which bore little meaning and were largely construed as "local, unfamiliar, and suspect" (Smith, 1995, p. 138) so that there remain fundamental incongruities in values between the regions (Crowley, 2003).

Some scholars have indicated that some differences between the regions persist due to divergent organization of space and time such that, for example, temporalities of

East and West are rooted in space differently (Buck-Morss, 2006; Condee, 2008; Marciniak, 2009). For Močnik (2006) Eastern Europe is a timed space, counter to the timeless non-space of the West, one that is bound and defined by its historicity, having the "ambiguous privilege of those doomed to remain local, particular, peripheral" (p. 344). Time and history define the East, whereas in the West, which exists without the burden of having to justify and qualify its locality, space is detached from its historicity and the particularity of its experience. Doreen Massey (2005) more optimistically suggests a reconciliation, whereby though these might be "spatial times" in which the world is imagined as integrated and instantaneous, this does not mean or imply that the distinct historicity which renders localities particular must necessarily be muted or disappear, but rather that there can finally be "multiplicities of the spatial" (p. 83) and a "coexistence of very distinct senses of time" which are not defined by lag, backwardness, or primitivism (Smith, Enwezor & Condee, 2008, p. xv). Though it is a situation in continuous flux, it is important to situate the contemporary relationship between East and West as one historically rooted in a discourse of inequality, otherness, and difference.

One political consequence of this marginalized position is that European states have long treated Poland as a weak state there for the taking. One significant example is the Third Partition of 1795[v] when Poland was divided between the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia, and Habsburg Austria, and thus was wiped off the map for over a century (123 years, to be exact). It was not until after World War I and the Versailles Treaty of 1918 when the multinational empires of East-Central Europe were reorganized primarily along ethnic national lines that Poland regained a state of its own. But the

conflicts and battles for its territory continued, and lead to another large reorganization of its borders at the end of the World War II[vi] (though it is worthy to note that small adjustments to its territory continue to be made even into the 2000s). As a result of this ongoing territorial instability, Poles have historically spent a tremendous amount of effort in constructing the myths of the nation and of nationalism as autonomous to an attachment to soil or land. The state became only ancillary to the conceptualization of a Polish nationhood, and this is a condition reflected in the national anthem's opening line, "Jeszcze Polska nie zgineła, póki my żyjemy" [Poland has not yet perished, as long as we still live]. Historically then, the physicality of a Polish territory has been separate from the belonging people felt to Polish communities. Rather, national consciousness and collective identity were predicated on a common language, history, church, and ideas of race (Davis, 2005), spurring a romanticization of nationalism that became a central element of Polish history and culture from the nineteenth century onwards. In the long term, this cultural understanding of Polish nationhood has hindered the development of a society defined by citizenship or political potential and "prevented the development of a state-oriented, state-framed, 'civic' or 'territorial' understanding of nationhood" (Brubaker et al., 2006, p. 85). As such, the formation of a public civil society was put in jeopardy when the rhetoric of cultural nationhood became worn and no clear alternative conceptualization of solidarity and collectivity formed within the nation-state.

Socialism (1952-1989)

Alongside this tumultuous history as a backdrop, a period that is particularly germane for understanding contemporary Poland is the 'recent past', which commonly refers to the period of socialism that followed the instability of the interwar years and the suspended period of World War II. The era of the Polish People's Republic or PRL[vii] is widely considered and accepted as a traumatic experience in Polish history and one that has left long-standing scars in its society. The Iron Curtain marked a forty-year-odd period in which Poland, among others, lived as a communist[viii] satellite of the Soviet Union. Though the PRL was part of the Soviet Bloc established by the USSR, the degree of Soviet control over Polish affairs varied; mostly, the Polish government was in charge of the everyday running of the country. This was a period defined as one of "hilarious paradoxes and surreal nightmares, which the Polish people perceive from today's perspective with a sense of absurd irony and the grotesque" (Szczerski, 2009, p. 85). It was a time of rationing and shortages, never-ending lines, insularity and boredom, too much time and not enough space[ix]. Eastern Europeans spent these years in a languid state, experiencing the world through the isolationism of the Soviet Bloc, longing for what was beyond its frontiers, for the fast-paced Western world with its possibilities of movement, growth, and betterment, for a different material existence as well as, perhaps less consciously, for a different experience of space and time (Buck-Morss, 2006; Condee, 2008).

After the crisis of modernity in the East in 1953-1956—corresponding with the post-Stalinistic period—socialist governments shared many of the same goals as their

Western counterparts: industrialization, modernization, and technocratic progress, to building a 'new world for a new [wo]man' (Crowley, 2003; Condee, 2008). Though East-Central European modernity played itself out differently than in the West, they are in fact two sides of the same coin, two trajectories of industrial modernity. East and West for example shared many of the same cultural phenomena: "early cinema, urban architecture, mass leaders, media manipulation, the mass-utopian myth of industrial 'modernization' itself" (Buck-Morss, 2000, p. 235). However, despite these similar underpinnings, the implementation of modern values was carried out very differently and the developed modernity in the East lacked many of the markers of its Western counterpart: a sovereign nation-state, liberal democracy, or capitalism (Condee, 2008). While socialist regimes extolled progress, life for the worker in the East 'lagged in modernity', such that compared to her Western neighbor she was deprived of many of the same improvements in standards of living.

The Soviet Bloc was not however a homogenous territory. There were numerous differences between the states that were part of this formation, making ECE a heterogeneous region then, as now. Even though the ideology imposed on this vast territory was at its roots the same, each nation-state's ideological state apparatuses operated differently, leading to vast social, political, and cultural differences amongst the segments of the Soviet Bloc (Castle and Taras, 2002; Piotrowski, 2009a). Nonetheless, one of the goals of a communist ideology and of the Soviet Union (in theory and propaganda, if not in practice) was the creation of unified pan-global society of workers: the universal proletariat (Smith, 1990). In this respect, East and West had similar

ambitions to implement and expand their versions of modernity globally and to make universalist claims to world citizenship. Where communism proclaimed for the "workers of the world to unite," capitalist ideologies based this unity on a "worldwide network of markets and profits" (Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge & Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 581). The collapse of the Iron Curtain in Europe in 1989 marked the failure of socialist modernity and its vision, ideals and utopias, which made room for the expansion of Western values and discourse. The challenge was set for East-Central Europe to decide what kind of future it wanted, how it would achieve it, and what it was willing to lose in exchange for impending 'westernization'.

Culture and the arts were subsidized during the socialist period. Despite censorship, control, and surveillance, artists, writers, filmmakers, and members of the intelligentsia were able to reflect upon the nature of their predicament by taking advantage of lax moments of regulation, creatively outmaneuvering the government by avoiding explicit political references, and moving civil society into the private sphere (Matynia, 2001). The visual arts especially were endowed with a freedom unavailable to more controlled, scrutinized, and feared forms such as writing. This is in part the result of a historical situation in which the estimation and appreciation for the visual arts in Poland has lagged behind other cultural forms, especially the literary tradition. Throughout Polish history it has been the writer not the visual artist that has served as an important social voice, first as purveyor of romantic nationalistic myths, and later as dissenter and critic of an oppressive regime, such that "literature, in particular poetry, was connected in the Polish cultural tradition with the ethos of resistance, struggle for independence and

service to the nation" (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 291). While the writer was one of the most important cultural dissenters in Poland, Piotrowski (2009b) notes that "the factors that stimulated the development of openly politically critical tendencies in Polish literature were almost entirely missing from Polish visual arts" (p. 291). Indeed, as Magdalena Ujma (n.d.) states, "the elite's mistrust of visual arts is a deeply rooted trend" (para. 5), which has resulted in longstanding reluctance on the part of intellectuals of "entering into dialogue" with art (para. 1). This disengagement permeated through the culture, and resulted in a situation in which authorities would believe and be threatened by what they read and heard (text), but not what they saw (images) (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 54). The tradition of privileging the word, and valuing it above other forms of expression has therefore dampened the development of a strong understanding or appreciation of visual culture among Poles, but also freed it from excessive oppression and censorship during the socialist regime (Piotrowski, 2009b).

The 'thaw' that followed Stalin's death and was fully in place in 1956 refers to a loosening of the ideological grip, one that resulted in "the introduction of a few elements of consumerism and, above all, the appearance of political pragmatism" across the ECE region (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 10) as well as in "an outburst in spontaneous activity in the realms of culture" (Rottenberg, 2011, p. 5). Consequently, through the end of the 1970s, in exchange for political indifference, silence, conformity, and a "complete withdrawal from politics," artists were given certain amounts of freedom, specifically the freedom to experiment with form (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 289). More specifically, in return for their lax censorship rules and support of formal innovation, the regime demanded

> ...neutrality, lack of criticism and respect for ritual linguistic conventions, as well as active production, formal experimentation and the use of Modernist or rather postmodernist stylistic approaches that could attest to the 'modernity' and 'Occidentalism' of the post-totalitarian society (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 288).

Such modern experimentation (to be explored in the following chapter) was a showcase to international observers that socialism fostered and nurtured creative expression, that there was freedom and a highly learned population. These forms were respected as experiments, but not as something whose content or message was taken too seriously. The state was permissive and even needed the artists to boost its image, while the artists also relied upon the state and its financial support. This partial openness on the part of the regime was therefore beneficial to both sides, the artists as well as the authorities (Kluszczyński, 2000; Piotrowski, 2009b). Hungarian writer and activist Miklós Haraszti (1987) famously described this situation using the analogy of a 'velvet prison' in which the artist's "political indifference ensured that his prison was lined with velvet" (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 289): the illusion of freedom could not hide the fact that certain lines could not be crossed, and that this freedom was conditional and limited.

The result was that at a time when Polish society was in crisis, the artists associated with Modernism and the neo-avant-garde, immersed in their formal experimentalism, were rather engaged with "their search for identity on the international sphere of universal—rather than Central European—culture" (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 23). They were not so much concerned with thinking about their region as particular or different, since they monitored and aspired to the 'universalism' of Western artistic culture, movements, and trends[x]. So while the local population was in large part

disconnected from the West and enveloped in local problems, visual artists were preoccupied with looking outward, leaving aside critical and politically engaged expression to writers and intellectuals. As such, artists were not 'there', reflecting upon Polish society, deep in the trenches, as were the writers. If anything, they removed themselves even further from relevance to mainstream Polish society, which did not perceive visual art to be 'speaking' to them. According to Piotrowski, as the regime enlarged the 'prison' and gave the artists greater freedom of experimentation, their desire to break out and create dissenting political work gradually faded, resulting finally in the depoliticization of visual art. Art and art criticism "embraced a fundamentally uncritical attitude" (Piotrowski, 2009b, p.289): there was no alternative art scene and no ethos of the (politically) independent artist who engaged in a systematic and uncompromising critique of the regime, and as such there was no tension between the art community and the regime, nor sustained communication between artist and site.

Piotrowski's emphatic assertions regarding the apolitical nature of art in the 1970s are not however unchallenged. Some scholars have suggested that the formal and material decisions artists were making were themselves of a political nature. Media scholar Ryszard Kluszczyński (2000) suggests, for example, that the negotiation of the television as mass medium, especially by the artists of the Workshop of the Film Form, and the development of video art, which built from earlier experiments with cinema, were linked to, or the result of, a political analysis of television (Kluszczyński, n.d.). Piotrowski is not so sure these explorations of form had much political significance, as members of the Workshop "did not engage in a direct critique of ideology or the politics

of the culture invested in the industry of narrative cinema" but rather provided "an analysis of the formal structure of film" (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 338). In other words, they were approaching these experiments and innovations as artists interested in their craft and the possibilities of form, navigating outside of the mainstream to in part disengage from the political and focus on what has been called the analytical or conceptual tradition that characterized much of the neo-avant-garde movement of the 1970s.

Nevertheless, this generally apolitical situation changed in the 1980s when large-scale events such as nationwide protests (e.g. Solidarity), martial law, a boycott of official cultural institutions by Polish artists and intellectuals, and the development of the underground and church art scenes created a new political terrain, and artists could no longer turn a blind eye to the situation surrounding them (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 395). This led the shift away from the silence and conceptualism of the neo-avant-garde to neo-expressionism and performance or intervention-based activities. The newfound popularity and spurt of groups focused on organizing events, interventions, street theatre and guerilla art reflected the changes in the re-politicization of art, and a different kind of engagement with everyday Polish society that was more inclusive, direct, and participatory. Artists created situations that challenged the status quo, rejecting the conformity and complicity of the 1970s, and contributing along the way to the momentum of Solidarity, a trade union and movement established in 1980 that become so popular that it resulted in the imposition of martial law in December 1981, but that eventually had to be negotiated with by the authorities.

Post-Socialism (1989—?)

The collapse of the Soviet Bloc threw East-Central European states into a spatio-temporal crisis of global proportions. The 'information revolution' was transforming the world, creating a post-industrial (Bell, 1999), postmodern (Harvey, 1989), supermodern (Augé, 1995), or global (Albrow, 1997) age, organized as a village (McLuhan, 1962), a collection of flows and networks (Castells, 2000), or assemblages and rhizomatic structures (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2004). This was a deterritorialized, schizophrenic, hyper-mobile liquid world (Bauman 2000; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2004; Urry, 2007), creating new dynamics between past, present and future (Huyssen, 1995). People, things, and information could be moved, shared, exchanged, and connected at previously unheard of speeds. The 'liquification of modernity' led to an alleged annihilation of space and time through the degeneration of boundary, border, and territory; the rhythms of the world, but also of life and the everyday, saw drastic changes spurred by accelerated global networks of communication as well as by the transformation of modes and speeds of transportation. In the post-socialist context the experience of everyday life became especially emphasized as a constant process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Czepczyński, 2008), making the creation of a sense of belonging in such heightened unstable conditions a dubious, hesitant, and confusing task (Hörschelmann, 2008). From being a hermetic society in which movement was controlled, to a place where people had opportunities to become 'nomads,' the conversion into a 'placeless' society was slowly taking shape; romantic notions of the nation and the nation-state became unfashionable and unrealistic, a static remnant of a different reality.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Poland, along with the other nations of the former Soviet Bloc, was characterized as a state in transition, one that was "'delayed' in relation to the democratic achievements of the West" (Rabikowska, 2009, p. 165). There are many ways of thinking about the post-1989 transition and transformation from socialism to democratic capitalism. Some concessions can be traced to as early as the post-Stalinist period in the late-1950s, and the subsequent post-totalitarianism which allowed for the slow development of a (mostly private) civil society within the socialist regime (Matynia, 2001). But transition into capitalist democracy fervently and unquestionably began after 1989. While the political landscape changed more quickly and suddenly than was expected (Castle & Taras, 2002), the shifts and changes that happened at every level of society were part of a fragmented and slow process in which adjustment was uneven and laborious. In his study of the post-socialist landscape, Mariusz Czepczyński (2008) describes the transformative process as liminal, and one that can be divided into three phases: separation, transitions, and reincorporations. These stages are not set into clear-cut chronological divisions, but rather occur multiple times in various domains, expressed through everyday political and spatial practices. This is helpful for understanding the changes in Poland, as in the rest of ECE, as often chaotic and complex, rather than linear or following a predetermined path that follows the rules of logic or 'progress'. Using this scheme, *separation* occurred immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain and was marked by a forceful rejection of the recent past. *Transitions,* which can be "shocking in their speed and multiplicity" (Marciniak, 2009, p. 177) and appear as "smaller or larger revolutionary shocks" (Tismaneanu, 2001, p. 186), constitute

the most long-lasting step characterized by a renegotiation and reinterpretation of places, events, people, and things. For example, the culture of socialism is most remembered as one of prejudice, surveillance, suspicion, and intolerance, and this is a culture that lives on in Poland (Marciniak, 2009). Indeed, despite the new narratives of modernization and Westernization which have overtaken the country since 1989 and with extra fervor from 2004, the ghost of the PRL is still strongly felt on an everyday level in contemporary Poland (Szczerski, 2009; Marciniak, 2009). This 'haunting of the past' by socialist memory and history was foundational to post-1989 Polish collectivity and identity, and the "strategies of forgetting/remembering" which were to become "the critical element of the foundation of the new Poland" continue to linger unresolved (Szczerski, 2009, p. 86). (More on these negotiations of the past in Chapter 3). This stage, according to Czepczyński, still requires at least another decade to be complete. Finally, transformation concludes with *reincorporations*, a period that is slowly taking root, in which the divisions between old and new gradually disappear and a newfound cohesion replaces the overriding uncertainty of the transitional moment. The time-period focused upon here, 2004-2009, occurs between transition and reincorporation when the specificity of site was in negotiation, and choices were starting to become increasingly solidified, fixed, and entrenched as elements of new hegemonies and ecologies.

The major goals of the transitionary period were the move to a neo-liberal market and the consolidation of democracy (Rabikowska, 2009), whereby Polish integration into the West was, and continues to be, a process of economic and material modernization for Poland (Crowley, 2003). And yet, over twenty years on, and despite Poland's

membership in the EU, the goals to achieve a Western-style capitalist democracy have yet to be fully achieved (Rabikowska, 2009). Not only was the Western idea of a "homogenous collective or a liberal society...a mythical project" (Rabikowska, 2009, p. 167) but it is still not clear what *kind* of democracy post-communist countries were meant to aspire to, strive for, and implement. There is no singular socialism nor is there a singular democracy, and since the transition between the two is messy, each case is unique, rather than systematic. Significantly, in ECE "the revolutions of 1989 liberated democratic passions and commitments, *and* isolationist, xenophobic, illiberal, anti-Western energies and resentments" marking the post-communist arena as "one of uncertainty, confusion, and ongoing struggle between democratic and ethnocratic forces" (Tismaneanu, 2001, p. 189). This polarization of society has prevailed since then and remains unresolved (as indicated for example, by the recent Polish presidential elections in 2010 that again strongly featured an oppositional rhetoric between the pro-Europeans of the Civic Platform Party and the ethno-nationalists of the Law and Justice Party).

According to Wojciech Włodarczyk (n.d.), while 1989 was a transformative political turning point that marked the demise of the socialist system and the dawn of a new democracy, this "...did not have much influence on the nature of... art" (The Eighties and the Nineties section, para. 1). Rather, artists retreated from the activism of the 1980s, now open to global art markets and opportunities, and "seemed to stop taking an active interest in the development of political affairs" so that

> [t]he devaluation of ideas about social cohesion, the painful price paid for the building of democracy, liberalism with its concept of

> unlimited freedom, the pauperization of artistic milieus following the introduction of free-marked principles, the lack of any kind of cultural policy of the state—all this has done little to encourage artists to participate in current events or to deal with them in their own art (Włodarczyk, n.d., Between the Media and the Body section, para. 12).

Artists turned instead to issues of individual identity, religion, otherness, sexuality, as well as conceptual thinking about the political role of the arts and offered challenges to staid national traditions of visual art (Szczerski, 2009, p. 86). For example, the body became one of the most important sites of experimentation during this period (Kowalczyk, 2006, para. 1), and the place that "most emphatically unmasks the oppression of our culture and its ideologized character" (Suchan, 2008, p. 12). One critic summarized the situation more positively by noting that the 1990s were marked by activities that "map[ped] our new ethical and aesthetic models of the artist as citizen in the post-communist era" (Szylak, 2000, p. 55). By the late 1990s the trends of the period were grouped under the idea of a Critical Art movement[xi] and described as an art that is "a critique of the dominant symbolic power that supports the social and political status quo" with its particular objectives summarized as "1) recovering that which is repressed and restoring the public sphere; 2) expanding the public sphere of discussion; and 3) negotiating the shape of a common reality" (Markowski, 2007, para. 1). Some of its prominent practitioners included Katarzyna Kozyra, Artur Żmijewski, Robert Rumas, Grzegorz Klaman, Zbigniew Libera, Alicja Żebrowska, Zofia Kulik, and others. Izabela Kowalczyk (2006) summarized their interests by indicating that "[i]t accomplished its critical work by revealing and divulging what is hardly obvious, subcutaneous, unclear,

marginalized" (Critical Art – Concepts section, para. 3) and by continuing to question freedom at a time when the rest of society was ready to stop worrying about it. So while artists moved away from the 'concrete politics' of the 1980s and rather turned to "civilization as a whole" (Włodarczyk, n.d., Between the Media and the Body section, para. 12), they engaged nonetheless with their new political and social reality. The criticality employed in the practices and the responses their art engendered (including censorship) meant this art produced "deep critical incisions into the layers of our culture" (Kowalczyk, 2006, Context section, para. 4).

2004—

The period of 2004-2009 is not a separate or disconnected period, but rather characterized as an overlap between the transition era—still defining itself in relation to a communist past—and a new post-transition period in which Poland forges a new European economic, social, and cultural identity. While the rhetoric of transition and theories of transitionality were especially prevalent in the 1990s, accession into the EU marked a new step in the transformative process. Within Poland the decision to join the EU was an extremely polarizing and spurred a populist backlash replete with a "resurfacing of an antidemocratic political culture" (Rupnik, 2007, p. 23). One the one hand, belonging to the EU achieved the market goals of the pro-European left, the liberal transition-era elites that privileged constitutional order and economic liberalization (and were often plagued with accusations of large-scale corruption) (Rupnik, 2007). On the other, the conservative, xenophobic, Catholic, Euroskeptic right gained momentum, resulting in the

formation and election of the rightist Law and Justice Party of Lech Kaczyński in 2005. Their brand of authoritarianism was marked by the "attack on the independent press, curtailment of civil society, centralization of power, and exaggeration of external dangers" (Rupnik, 2007, p. 18)[xii].

During this time and since then, the right wing has worked to maintain an ethnocentric realization of the nation, one that in Poland has also traditionally been tied to hyper-Catholicism. While this strict adherence and determination by political geography (i.e., borders) along with essentialist, xenophobic, and fundamentalist views of what constitutes 'Polishness' ignore and are out of sync with the organization of global movements and relations, as well as with the related problematized notions of culture and identity, this entrenchment is entirely in tune with what Michael Peter Smith (2003) labeled the paradoxical, but not uncommon, situation in which "the expansion of transnational connections has contributed to the reigniting of essentialist nationalisms" (p. 19). In other words, in Poland like in many other places around the world, there is in some segments of the population a retreat inwards as a reaction to the potential de-homogenization of a nationalistic culture. On the opposite end of the spectrum is the position of ambivalence towards the nation-state, one which is eager for Poland to be respected and included once and for all as Western, European, and global, and for its citizens to experience the ideals of movement, nomadism, and mobility which have been become staples of life in the hypermodern West. This position often privileges Western alliance over other aspects of developing a strong society (e.g., a public sphere, civic awareness and engagement, social solidarity, shared historicity). The danger however is

that the eagerness to 'join' the West leaves no time for pause or reflection, that in this jubilation something will get lost, and that the sense of place and rootedness that Poland connotes for its dwellers becomes diluted under the euphoria of possible belongings elsewhere. Moreover, there is some risk that elements of what have defined 'Polishness,' those elements which are not reflected in borders or land but rather those that have been used discursively or imaginatively to build a solidarity, are here being used as bargaining chips, lost in exchange of 'integration' with the West. Indeed, together these two extremes reveal the tension at play between the "desire for instant westernization and a general cultural makeover alongside the ever-escalating need to reassert 'true' Catholic Polishness" (Marciniak, 2009, p. 182).

As of yet, the so-called spatial and economic inclusion granted by the EU has not produced total or seamless unification between East and West. The compromise, as Močnik warned, appears to have to be made by the weaker and newer European states at their own expense, and these latecomers to Western European modernity have been "left to stew in their own juices and to seek, desperately yet in vain, local solutions to globally caused problems" (Bauman, 2004, p. 18). Rather than integrate into the European community on "somewhat equal terms," ECE has faced economic integration into "a global capitalist system already in the process of restructuring according to neoliberal rules that marked the end of an era of social democracy" (Buck-Morss, 2000, p. 229). Moreover, for ECE the EU "implies a redefinition of national sovereignty and identity" (Rupnik, 2007, p. 22), one that has had barely enough time to be reformulated after 1989. But as the unevenness in such areas as economic disparity is slowly equalizing, what

remain as interesting problems or barriers are cultural and historical differences which continue to produce rifts despite this attempt to create a united front, collectivity, or community. The first five years of integration capture this tension at its roots and expose a Polish society divided, in limbo, and in the midst of an identity crisis at the crossroads between opportunity and risk.

Within Poland, though more than two decades have elapsed since the collapse of the Iron Curtain, democratization is still an unfinished process with "serious deficiencies" (Tworzecki, 2008, p. 48). To date, research on post-communist development in Poland has concluded that while the "commitment to democratic values may be strong in a declarative sense" it can "in fact be quite shallow when it comes to the acceptance of pluralism, respect for political opponents, tolerance of difference viewpoints and so forth" (Tworzecki, 2008, p. 58). This attitude is especially visible in the continued disengagement of the Polish population in civic and political life, among the worst on numerous accounts in all of Europe: voter turnout (in 2005 the worst in national elections among 25 European countries at just over 40%), participation in political activities other than voting, trust in political parties, accurate representation, voter volatility, etc. (Rupnik, 2007; Tworzecki, 2008). Two hypotheses have been offered for this hesitance towards participating in democracy in the largest 'newly European' post-communist country. First, as a reflection of the general, widespread, and global crisis of democracy in which political representation is not aligned with new visions of democratic politics, thus creating a rift and a recoiling between citizens and political parties/representational bodies/establishments (Tworzecki, 2008). In Poland as in many other ECE nations, the

problem is not for example that organizations "have outlived their usefulness" but that they "do not last long enough to become useful as intermediaries between the state and society" (Tworzecki, 2008, p. 50). In addition despite all the transformative changes and expectations that have marked the Polish situation since 1989, there has been "a rather unchanging and limited supply of people, ideas and solutions" (Tworzecki, 2008, p. 50).

The second hypothesis proposes that the lack of civic engagement can be traced to some basic values held by the population, in part formed during the communist era in which political life was understood as a black-and-white 'us versus them' confrontation. According to Tworzecki (2008), this explains the enthusiastic participation in politics during the clearly divided period of socialism, and the subsequent withdrawal in the messy pluralism of post-1989 democracy. The result has been the persistent belief that the main political actors are not relevant to the way voters "think about and experience politics" resulting in complete "disenchantment and withdrawal" from mainstream political culture and public civil society (Tworzecki, 2008, p. 50). Put differently, communist ideology thwarted the values of trust and reciprocity but, even more importantly, it caused a "virtual destruction" of civil society based on what Stefan Nowak (1981) coined the "sociological vacuum" between the levels of the family and the nation which resulted from an "absence of...institutional guarantees that would...make possible the rise of an actual *public sphere*" (Matynia, 2001, p. 927; Tworzecki, 2008). Jacques Rupnik (2007) describes the challenges of democratization by noting that in the first fifteen years after 1989 "constitutionalism took precedence over citizenship and participation" (p. 19) to such an extent that "the weakness of political participation and

the absence of powerful social actors were seen as favorable conditions for the conversion to a market economy" (p. 20). In other words, economic development benefited from a weak civil society and the new elites (i.e., the "transition-era elites" of the post-communist era) "thrived by consolidating democratic institutions without participation and by forming a policy consensus at the expense of politics" (Rupnik, 2007, p. 20). However, the widespread disengagement of the Polish public towards civil society and organized politics deserves to be challenged and this is where critical art, as a process of action and experimentation, not as a defined movement, finds its opportunity.

This is the context of the art community from the mid 2000s onward, one still finding its footing in regard to its role, function, and position in Polish society and culture. The public is still learning how to interpret and understand contemporary art, how to engage with art exhibitions, and what to make of novel experimentation (Mariusz Jodko, personal communication, May 2010). In the mid-2000s Paweł Leszkowicz noted that "artistic, curatorial, and critical output is blooming" (2006, para. 2), and indeed this period saw a "significant revival, expressed in the large number of participants and the numerous events organized" (Ujma, n.d., para. 1). Ujma (n.d.) however qualified this enthusiasm as a "weak though growing public interest" (para. 1). Other critics have expressed a more concerned outlook when they declare that "society has separated itself from art" and wonder how in turn "art can be restored to society" (Ruksza, 2010, p. 10), especially as the art community on the whole has become divided and at times polarized in its commitment to the political. While some have expanded upon the tradition of Critical Art, reveling in the possibilities of a new kind of politics (Ujma, n.d.), in large

measure in the 2000s the “critical blade was...dulled” as artists were increasingly influenced by popular culture in form and subject (Kowalczyk, 2006, Art after 2000 section, para. 3; Włodarczyk, n.d.). These changes were the result of the rapid modernization sweeping the country at the time and the effects of “contact with popular culture, consumer culture, the free market of media and a quickly accelerating lifestyle, where what counts is a capacity for mobilization rather than time for contemplation or celebrating the community” (Ujma, n.d., para. 12). As such, Critical Art lost much of its appeal and even Żmijewski, one of the movement’s most prominent artists “started to criticize this kind of art for being self-indulgent and for lacking any visible political success” (Pyzik, 2011). Żmijewski formulated his concerns in his manifesto “Applied Social Arts” where he bemoaned the institutionalization of Critical Art but continued to argue that art must participate in political discussion because of its “ability to use different strategies, its familiarity with intuition, imagination, and premonition” (2007, The Applied Social Arts section). One attempt at defining the general trend of this period was made by Leszkowicz in 2006 with his term Młoda Sztuka z Polski or MSP for short (Young Polish Artists, or YPA for short, based on the term YBA for Young British Artists). This was defined as an art again founded in “strong local foundations” but with “more to say about the human condition in general than about the post-communist condition” (Mazur, 2008, p. 14). Artists were starting to find a balance between a local context and a global audience, able to reflect on Polish history or politics, but not necessarily, and not at the expense of being relevant in a global art market. As Leszkowkicz noted, the art community “learned to take advantage of local democracy,

the market, the pluralism of communication, subsidies from the EU and the energy of a new 'European' generation" (2006, para. 2). MSP referred to a new approach and attitude that while fully embracing the opportunities provided by the ongoing integration of Poland into global flows (and subsequently slowly shedding the affections of being a margin), could turn inward again but in a different, perhaps even liberated, way. MSP was just a movement referring to young artists, but one that also saw a rediscovery of Polish art history, where "a rising interest in contemporary 'archaeology'" was manifested in various retrospectives of Polish artists from the 20th century across European cities (Mazur, 2008, p. 15).

This is the context surrounding the artists discussed here, though it is debatable which, if any, would label themselves members of a Critical Art or MSP 'movement'. Rather the very fact of continued criticality despite allegiance to particular movements is a distinguishing factor of the works discussed in the following chapters. Critical art here is not political in providing a united or unified manifesto, but it rather exhibits the traits of critical art as defined by Mouffe (2007) as an art that questions the dominant hegemony, "that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate....[and] aim[s] at giving voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony" (p. 5). An important element of this kind of criticality then is the possibility of difference, plurality, and agonism, even in and within acts of resistance. In addition, the notion of criticality is here expanded to include a critique of ecologies as nodes where hegemonic structures are manifested—and disguised—in everyday life. Therefore, the works of critical Polish media artists explored

here do not exist within the confines of an art movement, but rather create an opening up to the world through experimentations of site.

Conclusion

This dissertation asks how artistic practices are contributing to the negotiation of a 'new' Poland. The five-year period between 2004-2009 can be characterized as an overlap between a late moment of transition and early reincorporation (and/or as post-accession), where the present was the result of the past and of history, but was also searching for ways to redefine and maintain site-specificity in the face of a cosmopolitan rhetoric of porosity and simultaneity. Transformations (post-1989, and post-2004) continue to take place at all levels of Polish society. Yet there has been a lack in developing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding these complicated shifts (Zaborowska, Forrester & Gapova, 2004). Specifically, there have been limited attempts in forming critical cultural or aesthetic evaluations of transition which have received considerably less attention than other areas of change (IRWIN, 2006). Cultural narratives, traditions, and forms reveal underlying tensions, attitudes, and values of a society, providing clues about self-identification, imaginations of the future, and relationships within and without their particular localities. Artistic intervention is one way in which the gap between the disinterested public and civil society can be narrowed by offering spaces of mediation, contemplation and reflection, and self-enfranchisement outside of the ineffectual discourses and institutions of national politics, which are alienating and suspicious. The politics of the state apparatus carry too much weight and negative connotation to, on their

own, mend the weakness and privacy of Polish civil society. Civic awareness and re-engagement in this case must begin at the local level, within particular spaces, slowly making public that which was once private. This is a Poland uplifted by the opportunities of being part of the EU but also unsure how to maintain its own identity. It is learning to exist outside of dichotomies, the seeming either/or between isolation and integration, and to find a strong (perhaps even nodal) position within a more distributed network, one in which its local features are not in opposition, but rather in addition to and in communication with, the global structures and exchanges to which it seeks to belong—and participate—on equal footing. And while there is something perhaps easier and exciting about shedding locality and identity in the name of global integration and universal cosmopolitanism, to reflect and to remember is a stance against neoliberal deterritorialization, one that shows a desire for the self-enfranchisement of localities and rooted places, and for understanding the current ecologies of the Polish site. It is in this context that this study of media art takes place, one which appreciates the political climate, the historical backdrop, and the social and cultural renegotiations that underlie the Poland of the mid to late 2000s. How does the negotiation for a 'new' Poland benefit from a re-politicization of artistic practice? This focus on media art is significant, as a particular contemporary art form that, as it will be argued in the following chapter, affords unique possibilities for site-specific reclamations and that, moreover, despite its emergence as the art form of a contemporary "placeless" time, is a potent producer of 'ecological experiments' that inform broader discussions on the localization of digital cultures and practices.

[i] All emphasis is according to the original, unless otherwise noted.

[ii] Wolff (1994) ascribes this to Count Segur of Prussia in 1784 (p. 6).

[iii] Wolff (1994) attributes the first remark to Edmund Burke at the end of the eighteenth century (p. 280), and the second to an unnamed French officer kicked out of the Polish army (p. 342).

[iv] "...in Poland, that is to say, nowhere"; from the introduction of the first performance in Paris of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, 1896 (as cited in Bartelik, 2008, p 119).

[v] The Third Partition completed the process started by the First Partition of 1772 and Second Partition of 1793, which gradually divided the Polish Commonwealth.

[vi] Only then was the (ethnically) homogenous Polish nation-state created (a fact often misrepresented in mythologies of the Polish nation as having always been the case and used to stoke the ideological claims of conservative nationalists) (Brubaker, 2006)). Indeed, during the Third Partition Poles coexisted with other nations in a cosmopolitan environment such that multinationalism characterized ECE empires until the early twentieth century (Bartelik, 2005; Brubaker, 2006; Shore, 2009). It is also interesting to note here that the development of independent modern nation-states in ECE emerged *after* transnationalism, unlike in the West where nation-states were formed before they joined in 'international' interconnectedness.

[vii] The PRL is the acronym for Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, or the Polish People's Republic, as the country was called from 1952-1989. Though the Communist Party was in charge of Polish government from the end of WWII in 1944, their power was firmly entrenched once they had established the PRL in 1952.

[viii] The political system of the time is referred to alternately as socialism and communism here and in much of the literature. Though not strictly communist, it was habitually referred to as such during the period.

[ix] See for example the novel *The Polish Complex* (Dalkey Archive Press, 1977/1998) by Tadeusz Konwicki for a vivid account of the period.

[x] Polish artists could not align their views with that of their Western counterparts; ideas developed in the West often did not resonate in the East. For instance, whereas the rhetoric of universalism was perceived as repressive for Western artists, for the Polish artist existing at the periphery it was perceived as liberating, freed from the excessive regionalism which separated East from West. Moreover, the idea of the autonomy of art, which in the West was seen as an impediment to social and political critique, was in the East considered a relief from the forced politicization of art (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 179).

[xi] Critical Art as a Polish art movement is term many suggest was first introduced by Ryszard Kluszczyński in the 1999 article "Artyści pod pręgierz, krytycy sztuki do kliniki psychiatrycznej, czyli najnowsze dyskusje wokół sztuki krytycznej w Polsce." ["Artists to the Stocks, Art Critics to the Psychiatry Clinic, or Recent Discussions on Critical Art in Poland"] in *EXIT. Nowa sztuka w Polsce, 4*(40), 2074-2081.

[xii] The sudden death in 2010 of President Lech Kaczyński has further polarized the nation, and the subsequent election campaign was loud with debates between open, porous cosmopolitanism and closed-off nationalist populism. Bronisław Komorowski, a pro-European from the Civic Platform Party, won the election with 53% of the vote.

CHAPTER 2/
An Archaeology of Polish Media Art: Legacies of Experimentation

> "Paweł Kwiek. 1971-1980 secular avant-garde artist, 1980—conversion, 1980-2004 raising the status of the religious avant-garde art, 1991-2002—five-time psychiatric hospitalization, a couple of psycho-spiritual deaths and resurrections."
>
> —Paweł Kwiek (as cited in Sienkiewicz, 2010, para. 1)

> "May everyone know that we shall not allow them to calmly deceive themselves."
>
> —Waldemar "Major" Fydrych, Socialist Surrealism Manifesto (1980)

Critical media artists produce works that act as 'ecological experiments' that participate in and contribute to the re-imagination and reclamation of the Polish site. The idea of the experiment is a central concept for understanding the opportunity of these practices. Experiments are used to explore and produce new situations, arrangements, behaviours, and perceptions, and sometimes even new politics. In the history of art, the experimental mindset has been most clearly and definitely associated with the avant-garde of the early twentieth century, who often explicitly conceived of their work as an experiment or as taking place in a laboratory. Each generation of artists in the twentieth century since then has questioned why to experiment, and inherited "the impulse of the avant-garde to reinvent the role of art in society" (Kibbins & Lord, 2002, p.5). These days, the ideals of

a 'revolution through art' can seem groundless, utopian, or passé, and technological art can especially be misconstrued or fetishized for its formal qualities at the expense of any broader vanguardist ideas about the potential of experimentation. In question here are not only experiments with form, but with ideas and modes of seeing, understanding, and organizing the world in a way that supports, to echo Gary Kibbins and Susan Lord (2002), the notion that the experiment is not just a style, but also a practice. And in particular it is a practice often conceived as taking place in a laboratory as a space that bridges the gap between the aesthetic and the functional, and that "recognizes both the kinship of experimentalism and the activist, agonistic, and futurist tendencies and the relations that bind avant-garde culture to modern praxis" (Poggioli, 1962/1968, p. 136). Interestingly, Judy Radul (2002) suggests that in the laboratory of the artist what occurs is a "valorizing [of] the act of 'trying' rather than testing," an idea that she in turn associates with Hannah Arendt's concept of action (p. 97), whereby

> [e]xperiment, the rebuilding of the world to see what the world is like is laborious....Through elaborate preparations of space and materials, the artist tries to produce the atmosphere that is conducive to a change, and hopes his and her interventions will be generative....trying *is* a kind of doing, trying *is* a beginning and beginning sets things in motion (p. 98).

One way of engaging contemporary artists with the experiment—with trying—is by restoring experimentation as a methodology of critical art. What follows is not an argument for restoring the avant-garde or for creating an essentialist connection between art and social utility, but for imagining, in the Polish context, the potential of media art as a vanguard, a site of novelty, experimentation, and subversion. Experimentalism, as

Renato Poggioli (1962/1968) noted, that "tends not so much to form the artist as to transform the public, that is, to educate it" (p. 135). Suely Rolnik (2003) for example explained that the "intermingling of the political and the aesthetic affects.... depends on the accumulation of infinitesimal experiments throughout the weave of collective life." (p. 11) and as such all the examples in the chapters that follow in some way challenge perceptions, imagine something different, and experiment with the possibility of a different kind of reality. They exemplify the idea that media art can be a site of critical thinking, of experimenting, with the structures that define the contemporary ecologies of the Polish site.

In order to contextualize and historicize these media art activities, to understand them as emerging and responding to site, this chapter proposes an archaeology—as history and theory—of Polish media art through the lens of experimentation. The idea of archaeology is significant since it challenges "the rejection of history by modern media culture and theory alike by pointing out hitherto unnoticed continuities and ruptures" (Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011, p. 3) and by providing "parallels between seemingly incompatible phenomena" (p. 5). And it moreover supports the claim that "[t]he awareness of history animates the understanding of art, just as the critical experience of art sophisticates the understanding of historical process." (Harrison & Wood, 1992, p. 6). So here this includes a discussion of the experiments of the avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s, those with new electronic technologies of the 1970s, with new modes of experience in the 1980s, and with the digital 'new media' from the 1990s onward. The

intention is not to provide a comprehensive or definitive 'History' of media or experimentalism in art history (which would require their own studies, and include, for example, a discussion of experimental film and theatre, Expressionism and Futurism, among many other influences and progenitors). Rather, this is a proposal for how to think about an archaeology of Polish media art, one that is both sensitive to site-specific activities and to globalized theoretical approaches, and tries to consider some of the 'seemingly incompatible phenomena' that have influenced the development of media art. The archaeology of experimentation is therefore a way of historicizing and localizing media art practice within Polish aesthetic developments and traditions. And since in visual art the experimental "doesn't locate a coherent body of work or discourse" (Radul, 2002, p. 93), and since media art is a hybrid practice, this trajectory considers a variety of activities. In doing so it establishes some roots for reclaiming media art as not only as technological, but also social, political, and cognitive, experimentation.

Background

The twentieth century witnessed transformations in all aspects of human culture, technology, and thinking, which also spurred changes in the way people saw and perceived the world. Indeed, "[t]he changes in capitalist man's view of himself and the world between 1880 and 1914 were so far-reaching that they produced as many problems for artists as they did stimuli" (Hughes, 1980/1991, p. 16), which resulted in momentous explorations in the arts. The avant-garde, which can be defined through what William C.

Wees (2002) calls its "revolutionary frame of mind" (p. 18), or Richard Wollin described as an "oppositional discourse," and Herbert Marcuse called "a revolution in perception" (as cited in Wees, p. 17), presented responses to this changing world. What is certain is that the avant-garde offered a new way of seeing the world and that its experiments produced a radical shift in perception. In Poland, key figure of the Polish avant-garde Tadeusz Peiper concluded his famous manifesto, *City. Mass. Machine.*, with the following statement about the renewal of art through the machine:

> Instead of seeing the development in art in terms of successive forward and backward movements, instead of patiently enduring the comings and goings of the same aesthetic ideas, instead of, at best, introducing into art minute changes, we can start work with a moment of collective thought, one act of collective will, which shall liberate us from the boredom of constant repetition, which will transform art into something it had not been before.... But *instead of repeating we can speak with our own voice; instead of copying, we can create* (1922/2002, p. 272).

To *create* here is as a process that results not only, and often not even most importantly, in a 'work of art', but that implies something more, an open-endedness to what could be created, and produces a situation that encompasses the dual aesthetic and social commitments that were foundations for the avant-garde. This open-endedness moreover requires experimentation, since "experiment precedes creation" (Poggiolo, 1962/1968, p. 137), or put differently, experimentation as a process of intuition, imagination, and inquiry, is a step in the process of creation.

The avant-garde was characterized by a constant search, experimentation, and striving to reach beyond (over)used forms and, most importantly, as a "destruction, or at

least breaching of the old, established way of thinking" (Baranowicz, 1979, p. 5). The three "most important" movements of the avant-garde were Cubism in Paris (1907), Futurism in Milan (1909), and Constructivism in Moscow (after the revolution of 1917) (Nash, 1999, p. 159). Though these early avant-gardes are largely credited for establishing a framework for thinking about experimentation in art, rendering experimentalism "[o]ne of the most important aspects of avant-garde poetics," they were not the first to approach art in this manner. As Poggiolo (1962/1968) has argued,

> ...one easily recognizes an immediate precedent in romantic aesthetic experimentation, the anxious search for new and virgin forms, with the aim not only of destroying the barbed wire of rules, the gilded cage of classical poetics, but also of creating a new morphology of art, a new spiritual language (p. 57).

Poggiolo (1962/1968) points to some early manifestations of experimentalism in the Impressionists ("perhaps the first coherent, organic, and consciously avant-garde movement"), the symbolism of poets like Mallarmé or Rimbaud, and in Wagner's music drama (p. 132). In terms of the visual arts, while the nineteenth century saw discoveries pertaining to vision and optics such as that by the Impressionists, in the early twentieth century there was a broad interest in the matter of time as a fourth dimension, in space-time, which influenced the activities and experiments of the Cubists and Futurists (Baranowicz, 1979, p. 5). Together these two groups laid the groundwork for the twentieth century avant-garde. Cubism, which was instrumental in introducing geometric abstraction and constructivism, has been especially regarded as a catalyst in the reimagination of art, to such as extent that it has been suggested that Cubists produced

"the first radically new proposition about the way we see that painting had made in almost five hundred years" (Hughes, 1991, p. 14). Their experiments were foundational in the formation of the Russian Constructivism which "learned from both earlier movement" (Nash, 1974/1999, p. 159), and which itself became central to shaping the activities of the Polish avant-garde.

Though the avant-garde was international, "each country had its own specificity" which emerged from "national features and traditions...[and] the social and political situation" (Baranowicz, 1979, p. 7). The Polish avant-garde was responding to and influenced by the activities in the rest of Europe, and its artists were connected to the movements happening form Paris to Moscow, and indeed wanted to be part of this conversation: the Formists were drawing on the trends from Paris, and especially the work of Paul Cézanne and Guillaume Apollinaire; the Poznań Expressionists were responding to German Expressionism; the Young Yiddish group was looking to traditional Jewish art as well as Jewish modernists in Western Europe such as Marc Chagall; and the Futurists were responding to Russian Cubo-futurists, Italian Futurists, and early Dadaists (Bartelik, 2005, p. 3). The Polish Constructivists, which is where this archaeology of Polish art experimentation begins, were for their part linked to the Russian Constructivist movement. Władysław Strzemiński, a painter that was one of the founders of Polish Constructivism, was born in Moscow and "brought up in the experiences of Cézanne and in Cubism" (Baranowicz, 1979, p. 74). While still in Moscow he found himself in the circle of Kazimir Malevich (or Malewicz, as is the

original spelling of the name for this Russian-born ethnic Pole), himself one of the founders of Constructivism and of Suprematism, and brought this experience with him when he moved to Poland in 1922 with his wife sculptor Katarzyna Kobro.

Lessons in Experimentalism: Władysław Strzemiński and the Constructivist Avant-Garde, 1920s-1930s

Strzemiński was one of original members of the group BLOK (1924-1926) that also included Kobro, Henry Stażewski, Mieczysław Szczuka, Teresa Żarnowerówna, Henryk Berlewi, and others. While the work of BLOK members was usually abstract in nature, as Constructivists they worked to achieve clarity and efficiency of form in a way that was reflexive of the simplicity and logic of machines. As the first Constructivist group in Poland they established its principles and search for a mechanization of art through the use of new and industrial materials, transforming art from an object of beauty to one of functionalism. Constructivism after all meant a "translatability into the language of arithmetics or mechanics" and that "[a] work of art must be as logical as a machine"; it was a place where the "artist was treated as an engineer" (Turowski, 1973, p. 37) (Strzemiński was in fact formally trained as an engineer). As Irena Kossowska (2004) points out, the Constructivists' search for universal rules and belief that the world could be radically reimagined through the forms of art was inextricable from experimentation and analysis.

Upon the dissolution of BLOK, former members including Szczuka, Strzemiński, Stażewski, and Kobro formed Praesens (1926-1929). Guided by Szczuka and influenced by the functionalism of the Bauhaus however, Praesens became increasingly focused on architecture, and its brand of functionalism was steeped in concrete and singular solutions that alienated many of its members, including Strzemiński. Along with Stażewski and Kobro, he left Praesens to form the new group a.r. (1929-1936) acronym for 'revolutionary artists' and 'real avant-garde.' Their functionalism was more broadly defined, more abstract and theoretical, not tied to finding one-size fit all architectural solutions to social problems. The group's five members (Sztremiński, Kobro, Stażewski, Julian Przyboś, and Jan Brzękowski), a mix of artists and poets, with the exception of Brzękowski who lived in Paris, were for the most part headquartered in the city of Łódź, shifting in the process the centre of the Polish avant-garde from Warsaw to this industrial city. Strzemiński was the theoretical anchor for the group, and wrote elaborately either alone or in partnership with Kobro, expanding on his theory of Unism, which he had already started to formulate while in Praesens.

a.r.'s most notable and long-lasting achievement was the establishment of the International Collection of Modern Art, which brought together works by the most important artists of the European avant-garde and which to this day remains the cornerstone of the collections of the Museum of Art in Łódź. But it is the conceptual work of its leader Strzemiński and his theory of Unism that exemplifies what Bruce Nauman meant when he said that "art is a means of acquiring an investigative attitude"

(as cited in Radul, 2002, p. 102), that it is "a way towards such an attitude. This inquiring, interpretive attitude... is 'produced' by the experiment and is as significant as the artwork that is the more obvious result" (Radul, 2002, p.102). For Strzemiński, creation was a process of conceptual thinking about how the world should be (re)imagined and (re)thought, and Unism remains one of the most meticulous theorizations of the principles of Constructivism in Poland, or anywhere. Strzemiński shared with the rest of the Constructivists a belief that art would reconstitute society, but he saw this as emerging from artistic experimentation, not just social utilitarianism. The general principle of Unism, which could be applied to all forms of artistic expression, was a detailed account of how an artwork emerges from its formal qualities. In its first iteration Strzemiński (1928/2002) proposed a theory of Unism as it applied to painting where "[t]he inherent properties of the picture (square picture and the flatness of a picture plane) are components of a pictorial construction, perhaps even the most important ones since pictorial forms can only emerge in relation to them. They must be dependent and closely connected" (2002, p. 654). So painting, because of its inherent physical qualities, was a quadrilateral composition defined by a frame that exists independently of its surroundings. Strzemiński then took these principles and adapted them to sculpture, architecture, and typography, maintaining throughout that formal experimentation was the fundamental activity that would contribute to the social good. In his discussion with fellow artist Leon Chwistek in 1934, Strzemiński admitted, "[f]or me, art means two things: formal experimentation and discovery (that is formulation of an idea), on the one

hand, and its practical, utilitarian exploitation in everyday life, on the other" (as cited in DeBoer, 2005, p. 71). a.r. was based on an "utopian belief in the ability of the work of art to organize life and its functions" (DeBoer, 2005, p. 72) and as such exemplified the avant-garde's attempt to fuse art and life, emphasizing in the process that Unism is not just an artistic theory, system or manifesto, but also as a type of worldview (DeBoer, 2005, p. 31). But because this totalized and utopian vision of social progress could not be so successfully implemented in practice, i.e., it was not very functional at all, formal experimentation remained the "essential foundation" of Strzemiński's theory (DeBoer, 2005, p. 10) and as such it is this orientation toward conceptual experimentation in and of itself that is important to remember as the legacy of a.r. Indeed, Strzemiński is most remembered for his theoretical work rather than its practical application[i].

Like the other Constructivists groups a.r. was invested in architecture, if in another manner and with a different purpose. Along with Kobro, Strzemiński undertook a sustained engagement with questions of architecture through the development of what they called spatial compositions, ideas that they explored in their 1931 book *Space Composition: Time-Space Rhythm and its Calculation.* In their view, society would evolve to resemble the organized canvas of a Unist painting, in which each part and element were carefully considered. Architectural designs along with the spatio-temporal rhythms they produced would further implement the Unist ideas into everyday life. Strzemiński integrated these ideas in his *Architectonic Compositions* (1926-1932) series of seventeen paintings. But the ideas about space were especially focused on the

exploration of sculpture, where Strzemiński and Kobro's ideas were premised on the idea that "each sculpture one way or another addressed the relation of space enclosed within it to the space outside it" (DeBoer, 2005, p. 43), creating a fluidity and complementarity between sculpture and the world that surrounds it. In fact, the manipulation of space became central to the project of Unism, as "the shape in the Unist sculpture is not the goal in itself, but only a representation of the spatial relations" (as cited in DeBoer, 2005, p. 37). The reorganization of space would bring about a reorganized society and was explored in all manners of environments, home and city (DeBoer, 2005, p. 51). Moreover, in their analysis, an architectural arrangement of space exists in terms of networks of rhythms, and Strzemiński described the role of the artist of the future as the "organization of the rhythms of life," where art "ought to become the formal organization of the course of everyday phenomena of life" (as cited in Turowski, 1973, p. 33). In a later article from 1937, "A Sculpture is...," Kobro concluded that

> [t]he task of a spatial composition is the shaping of forms, which can be translated into life. The spatial composition is a laboratory experiment that will define the architecture of future cities. The spatial composition, in becoming architecture, organizes the rhythm of human movement in space. The rhythm of a work of art then becomes the rhythm of the movement of crowds and individuals (as cited in DeBoer, 2005, p. 54).

Strzemiński and Kobro's engagement with space underscores their thinking about the interconnections and dependencies between art and the environment, and also reflects their attitudes about the necessity of experimentation to make art functional. For them, sculpting and manipulating space was one way artistic practices reflected and changed

social conditions. Not unlike McLuhan, who a few decades later offered the insight that media technologies must be understood as producing new environments that altered space-time relations, Strzemiński and Kobro's worked on understanding how forms alter human consciousness and phenomenological experience. Thinking about space, and especially that of the city, was a recurring motif for these thinkers who tried to explain how technologies produced particular environments and ecologies, and a particular politics and psychic configuration of reality. It is not however the theory of Unism as such that illuminates contemporary media art practices, but rather the value placed on aesthetic experimentation as a mode through which to imagine ("try") social change. Unism is relevant here not for the lessons on formalism, but for its work into how artists experiment with forms to produce 'revolutions in perception' that can result in the emergence of particular spaces that affect and change human experientiality.

Experiments with Electronic Technologies: The Workshop of the Film Form, 1970s

The twentieth century saw an explosion of electronic media technologies. From the radio in the 1920s, the television in the 1950s, to video and satellite in the 1960s and 1970s, new questions and opportunities were being presented to artists in the face of these new devices and tools. In 1965 the first art exhibitions of computer art took place and 1968 became a "watershed year for electronic art" that used motion, light and time (Shanken, 2009, p. 21). In Poland this electronic experimentation with new technologies was especially visible in film and video and the 1970s are considered a prolific period of

experimentalism[ii]. In fact, it has been argued that "any historical summary of Polish contemporary art or of art in the twentieth century, without an adequate, true picture of the 1970s would be incomplete" (Kluszczyński, 2000, p. 91)[iii]. While the recognition for this period of conceptualism in Polish art history has been slow in coming (often due to an attitude that anything interesting and worth studying was happening abroad, in the West)[iv], recent expositions by such scholars like Łukasz Ronduda (2009) and Luiza Nader (2009) have produced seminal material for problematizing and rethinking its influence.

Poland had seen "a clear return to avant-garde experiments" as early as 1955 with a noticeable proliferation of culture, from the Polish Film School, the Polish Poster School, theater, cabaret, and jazz, when "visual arts went beyond all former boundaries" (Rottenberg, 2011, p. 5). But the 1970s emerged as a critical period in terms of developing the concept of 'media', which started to be reflected in artistic work and that produced a new language to discuss the production, reception, and experience of this art. In the 1970s, while still "a strange, even schizophrenic country" (Crowley, 2007, p. 19), Poland was in a relatively stable period of real socialism (or as Václav Havel called it 'post-totalitarianism'), the beginning of an era that was no longer tied to the direct aftermath of World War II, the tumultuous events of Stalinism, or to the aesthetic limitations of socio-realism. For Kluszczyński (2000), the significant shift between the 1960s and the 1970s is especially meaningful because of the move away from a classically rooted avant-garde interested in the categories of form, style and value,

"towards a neo-avant-garde approach, (characterized by the de-materialization, de-formalization and self-analysis), from representation and expression, to action and communication, from the object to function and from the fine arts to media" (p. 91). Conceptual experiments in film and video were part of a new mediated reality, and the focal, though not exclusive, point of this activity in Poland was the Workshop of the Film Form.

The Workshop was established at the State Academy of Film, Television and Theatre in 1970 in the city of Łódź (home to the a.r. movement), and became in that decade the most serious and important example of neo-avant-gardism in Poland, and to this day unparalleled in its commitment and achievement of analytical art (Kluszczyński, 2000, p. 90; Ronduda, n.d.). Following in the footsteps of the Constructivists, the Workshop cemented Poland's reputation as a site of highly developed conceptual practice. Members of the Workshop were interested in breaking with the classic narrative modes of movie-making, and in making work that was rather "in dialogue with the domain of fine arts, with conceptual and analytical tendencies...and with the tradition established by early-twentieth century Polish and Russian Constructivists" (Ronduda, n.d.)[v]. For certain members the "[i]deology and practice of constructivism...became a very important source of artistic inspiration" (Kluszczyński, 2000, p. 94). The group, whose most important and central contributors included Józef Robakowski, Wojciech Bruszewski, Ryszard Waśko, Andrzej Różycki, Paweł Kwiek, and Andrzej Mikołajczyk, became central to film and media experimentation, to projects of expanded cinema, and

acted as a catalyst for innovations in video and media art. Some example of films by the Workshop include Kwiek's *1, 2, 3... Operator's Exercise* (1972) which consisted of a collage of footage assembled to challenge interpretation of Socialist imagery and rhetoric; Waśko's *Window* (1972) which was comprised of a static frame looking out of a window onto the street juxtaposed with audio of the artist moving around in the apartment from where the shot was being taken; *Exercise* (1973) by Robakowski in which short or long shots of a single letters in close up were accompanied by the sounds of an organ or synthesizer; or Bruszewski's *YYAA* (1973) which showed a man in close-up producing the sounds 'y' or 'a' for the duration of each shot.

Like the Constructivists, the Workshop members fashioned themselves "artist-engineers" who discussed their work in terms of a "theory-practice" (Ronduda, n.d.). The Workshop was concerned with media's transformative capacity, not least of which was the important work by Robakowski on subverting traditional ideas of film (e.g. *Test*, 1971, in which the artist punctured dozens of holes in over-exposed film), as content and form. The artists undertaking these formal conceptual and analytic experiments were ultimately concerned with "the impact which electronic media had on shaping new perceptions of the world...and new mental structures" (Kluszczyński, n.d.), with how the media restructured the sense(s) of the real, such that "by performing a different kind of communication, it seeks to achieve a different kind and better way of shared living, where direct and open forms of exchange finally liberate social life from the power of ideology" (Verwoert, 2007, p. 39). Members of the Workshop sought to provoke

"viewers to reflect on the nature of the video medium, the limits and reliability of human perception and on communication possibilities" (Kluszczyński, n.d.), showing that there was a belief in the inherent transformative power in the technology to create new environments and change perceptions (these ideas will be taken up again in Chapter 5). And they also aspired to "provoke themselves into changing from authors to signal transmitters and participants in communication" (Verwoert, 2007, p. 34). The result or intention of these provocations "therefore effectively lies in the sharpening of the artistic form to a gesture that refuses the historical reality of an ideologically over-formed social life and strives for both a direct and radically open form of intersubjective exchange" (Verwoert, 2007, p. 37). The group's legacy to media art is in its overall commitment to understanding through analytical means how media of various kinds were 'folded into' everyday life, how they changed the way individuals constructed their structures of reality, and how these questions could be posed through a manipulation of the media form itself.

While the group was affiliated with a university film program, its members came from across artistic disciplines—photographers, poets, musicians, sculptors, performers—and their experiments and actions far exceeded the confines of the academy or of classic notions of film studies or filmmaking. The ideal of interdisciplinarity was reflected in the group's manifesto (1975) which states that the

> Workshop realizes films, recordings and TV transmissions, sound programs, art exhibitions, and different kinds of events and artistic interventions... [The] Workshop also does theoretical and critical

> activity. It studies and has the ambition to broaden the possibilities of audio-visual arts.

Indeed, one of the characteristic features of the Workshop was its interest and use of an assortment of technologies and media in the development of a multi- or inter- media practice (though they did work primarily with video – Kluszczyński, n.d.), along with an interest in exhibiting work or creating interventions and events in a variety of places and environments, including the public spaces of the city (Kluszczyński, 2000). The Workshop's experiments with material, form, and time, are closely related to contemporary multimedia interactive work not only because of their engagement with the materiality of mediation, but also because of their interest in the communicative dimensions of art, and its provocations of viewer participation (Kluszczyński, 2000). As members of the neo-avant-garde, they rejected the traditional art object and moved towards dematerialization, which was marked by a "shift from aesthetic to epistemic goals of art, from artistic to meta-artistic stances, from result to process, from appearance to function and structure" (Ronduda, n.d., para. 1). The Workshop was a place of 'trying' while its formalism fortified conceptualism as foundational to media experimentation in Poland.

One of the pioneers of multi-medial experimentation was Kwiek, who combined forms such as photography, video, and drawing (Kluszczyński, 2000). He was particularly interested in creating situations that allowed the audience to think about the way technologies affected their reality, and the way mass communication is structured by

the medium. In the *Studio Situation* (1974), for example, he gave a live performance on national television during a broadcast devoted to the Workshop: standing in a studio, Kwiek directed the cameras to film him, indicating which camera should be used when. He subsequently demystified the whole episode by explaining to the audience what they had just seen, this time with the studio and different cameras visible in the frame. It was a project aimed to provide social awareness, to demystify the media experience for the viewer. While a member of the Workshop, he was also influenced by and collaborated with the Warsaw neo-avant-garde, which included his brother Przemysław Kwiek[vi]. Together, and along with Zofia Kulik and Jan S. Wojciechowski, they produced *Open Form* (1971), an experimental film whose themes foreshadowed Paweł Kwiek's subsequent work on the communicative nature of media. *Open Form* was a sort of 'dialogue' with architect Oskar Hansen's theories and practice of 'open form' (who himself was inspired by Kobro and Strzemiński's ideas of Unism), where the makers

> ...made their art with the goal of improving interpersonal and social communication. It was based upon negating traditional, hierarchic and non-symmetrical relations between the artist or author and viewers. Finally, it postulated the introduction in their place of new, dialog-based communicative relations that would increase individual potential for self-determination and self-development. The artists believed that their ideas linked into to postulates for a more democratic political life or improved communication between state and society" (Ronduda, n.d., Paweł Kwiek section, para. 1).

Kwiek was particularly interested in distorting the role of artist and audience, in deconstructing the apparatus of the cinema, and challenging expectations of film and other media technologies including, for numerous projects, the television. In his projects,

such as the aforementioned *A Studio Situation,* as well as *I Control the Image's Brightness by Breathing—A Meditative Installation* (1975), or *Video and Breath. Information Channel* (1978), among many others, Kwiek explored the relationship between mind and media and the "various ontological aspects of artistic communication" (Kluszczyński, 2000, p. 99). In *Video and Breath* he filmed his own breath condensing onto a TV screen, thus controlling the brightness of the screen. In *Mirror*, a "film provocation," the artist stood in front of the projector during the screening and used a mirror to reflect the projector's light at the audience (Ronduda, n.d., Paweł Kwiek section, para. 3). These small examples reflect Kwiek's interest in manipulating the media in a way that challenges the viewer's expectation or interaction.

The Workshop as a whole was engaged in a multi-faceted exploration of television, which resulted in the exhibition "Operation Workshop" at the Museum of Art in Łódź in 1973. This exhibition "marked the advent of video art in Poland" (Kluszczyński, n.d., para. 2) and included a number of installations. Różycki's *Television Screening* was concerned with broadcast television and its place in everyday life; Kwiek, in an unnamed performance, addressed the television as an object of mass culture fetishization; and the group collaborated on a project called *An Objective Television Broadcast* to think about direct transmission (Kluszczyński, n.d). Together the projects formed a set of experiments on one particular form of media—television—and how it worked to transform the everyday and craft reality in specific ways. Though other activities in experimental film and video were taking place in the Polish neo-avant-garde

at the time (for example with feminist artists such as Ewa Partum or Natalia LL), this analytic approach was dominant during this period.

Experiments in Subjectivity: New Modes of Experience, 1980s-1990s

The Workshop officially disbanded in 1977 and with it the predominance of conceptualism in Polish vanguardist movements. There was no unified or canonized vision or group that replaced it. Rather, in the 1980s most artists rejected the analytical trends of the 1970s and its "intellectual vigor and hermeticism in favor of a subjective approach and emotionally free expression" (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 406).[vii] There was thus a resurgence of more expressive explorations that emphasized the subjective, intimate, and experiential dimensions of artistic activity and everyday life. While it was not quite a shift to the other extreme, to the time-honored traditions of Polish Romanticism and its patriotic and tragic sentimentalism (this was, after all, still a vanguard), the rejection of conceptualism produced new opportunities and practices defined by a desire to create and understand new subjectivities and experiences. The political situation of the period energized the artistic community as they rejected the political complicity of the 1970s in favor of a more critical stance (see Chapter 1), and the artistic landscape took a turn "in the direction of sensualism, collage, appropriation, heterogeneity and stylistic eclecticism, as well as strong emphasis on individual and subjective expression" (Piotrowski, 2009b, p. 401). Kwiek, for one, asserted he had "experienced a mystical awakening" (as cited in Sienkiewicz, 2010, section 2, para. 2).

One aspect of these new interests was the surge of performances, interventions, and happenings, often inspired by theatre and taking place in the public spaces of the city. While performance-based activities and urban interventions were not new in Poland[viii], the 1980s and 1990s saw a distinct trend in groups interested in experimenting with new conditions, questioning the experiences of a volatile political reality. The popularity of these activities is in keeping with the idea that "in the best cases the experiment does become an authentic experience...all too often, in the more literal-minded and narrow avant-gardes, it remains merely an experiment" (Poggioli, 1962/1968, p. 135). Or, even more definitely, that "in the experimental there is often a desire for, or assumption of, real experiences" (Radul, 2002, p. 100). In other words, the experiment puts a value on presence and participation and in this way becomes personal and subjective, internalized as a personal experience as much as a detached artistic, social, or formal endeavor. Groups such as Orange Alternative (1980-1989, 2001-present) or Gruppa (1982-1989) infused artistic activity with spectacle, participation, humor, and political critique. The Orange Alternative, for example, who began in the south-western city of Wrocław as a student paper by Waldemar "Major" Fydrych, had their first 'action' in 1982 when they drew graffiti in the shape of dwarves[ix] on buildings across the city where the police had plastered over anti-regime slogans. Over a thousand dwarves ended up being painted on buildings in cities across Poland, and by the mid to late 1980s, this turned into an organization of happenings organized across the country. Bronisław Miszka (1992) wrote about this movement that it started as "a relatively small and vanguard form of street

theatre to a form of manifestations of one's discontent with the world of symbols" (p. 55). Focused not on providing a clear ideological alternative but rather on provocation through absurdist and surreal slogans, the Orange Alternative designed "public resistance productions never before attempted on such a grand scale" (Romanienko, 2007, p. 143). The culminating action, *The Revolution of the Dwarves*, took place on June 1, 1988, when over ten thousand people marched in Wrocław wearing orange dwarf hats. The Orange Alternative existed not only as an intervention, but as a provocation to think independently; it satirized the regime, while also becoming an important faction of the Solidarity movement. Meanwhile, some noteworthy interventions of the period which took advantage of media technologies included Underground Solidarity TV and the Bolek i Lolek transmitter. Notably, both were the work of engineers, not artists. In the first case a group of astronomers from Toruń University built a television transmitter that superimposed subversive pro-Solidarity messages on the evening news (on September 14 and 26, 1985). In the second case lecturers from the Warsaw Technical University's Electronics Faculty built a transmitter that superimposed the caption 'Solidarity lives' on an official TV broadcast depending on the location of the transmitter (Krenz, 2007). These interventions into mass media are small examples of the spirit of intervention of the time.

Performances also made their way into video art, where new technologies were increasingly visible and developed "both as an autonomous form of artistic expression—above all as films and installations—and as a form entwined within complex spatial

arrangements, multimedia and multi-substance audiovisual constructs…and video concerts" (Kluszczyński, 2000, p. 7). Video artists such as Jan Brzyszek, Mirosław Koch, Krzysztof Skarbka, Robakowski, Piotr Wyrzykowski, and Izabella Gustowska expanded their interest in performance and intervention to produce video-performances that clearly foreshadow the multimedia installation. Gustowska's spectacular and often theatrical works are a good example of the legacies of performance on media art. Trained not as a filmmaker but as a painter, Gustowska's early theatrical and performance work in the group Od Nowa (see note vii) established the elements of spectacle and theatricality which became so important in the media art projects and installations of her subsequent work, and still characterize her practice to this day (see Chapter 5). In the 1990s she solidified her position as an important figure in media art by providing a humanistic counterpoint to the traditions of analytical conceptualism through video installations and video performances such as the *Dreams* cycle (1990-1994), *Voices* (1992), and *Floating* (1994-1997). In *Voices*, for example, Gustowska created a performance-installation in which she sat reading a text at a desk in a white room while the audience watched her on seven monitors in a separate black room, all of which was accompanied by a sound composition performed live.

Some have suggested that Gustowska's "separate position in video art is indisputable, since the artist breaks free of its powerful conceptual foundations, dominated by a formal analysis of the electronic message or its intellectual or ideological deconstruction" (Leszkowicz, 2007, p. 84; Kluszczyński, n.d.). Her probes into how a

mediated world of images and stimuli is reflected or incorporated into reality and identity is considered either unique, as per Kluszczyński (n.d.) or an example of a difference tradition, for example by Paweł Leszkowicz (2007) who ventures that she

> ...has created a certain female line of video art, fully aware of its connotations, in contrast to the male line, strongly delineated by Józef Robakowski. Her projects are conspicuously intent on the feminization and biographisation of this traditionally masculine and analytical medium (p. 84).

Indeed, her interest in the metaphysical, the dream, in the world of the unconscious, and her explorations of these themes through the lens of emotion, feeling, the body, and femininity make her work an important marker of a different genealogy or tradition which complicates the archaeology of media art, and infuses it with a humanism that is often forgotten or marginalized by the dominance of the analytical tradition. Her focus on the "interiorization of media" (Leszkowicz, 2007, p. 82) and emphasis on corporeality was attuned to the Critical Art of the 1990s and its concern with "the body treated as a medium, the body in a cultural and biological context, that seems to be the other fulcrum, the counterweight to the stereotype proposed by the media, the counterweight to the virtual reality of the electronic media" (Włodarczyk, n.d., Between the Media and the Body section, para. 8). Interestingly, Gustowska was exploring these humanistic and subjective themes through the media, or as Leszkowicz (2007) puts it, "in spite of her means of expression...which are censured by many critics as having dehumanizing and alienating effect" (p. 82). This lineage of media art is rooted in humanistic thinking, in spectacular multi-mediality, and in the creation of sensory and immersive experiences.

Gustowska, like the Orange Alternative, was experimenting with alternate realities, creating experiences that tried to create moments of criticality for the audience/participants, while also experimenting with the way they interacted and engaged with the artistic process.

Experimenting with the Digital: From the New Media Vanguard to Post-Media and Beyond, mid-1990s—

By the mid 1990s in Poland as elsewhere digital technologies were starting to reconfigure every aspect of contemporary life. *Wired* magazine launched in 1993 with a clearly techno-utopian editorial agenda, and in 1994 Netscape introduced the first commercial web browser, marking it as a "watershed year in the linked histories of media technology and digital culture" and paving the way to what appeared to be a "major societal shift" (Tribe & Jana, 2006, p. 6). By 1995 the world had entered the dot-com bubble, a time of naïve optimism and a quasi-euphoric imaginings of the world through the networking and communicative capabilities of new technologies. It is in this context that the digital in particular was embraced as "offer[ing] entirely new possibilities for the creation and experience of art" (Paul, 2003, 7). This first wave of digitization was fuelled by the belief in the fundamental socially transformative capacities of digital technologies, something in step with the discourse of an information technology 'revolution.' A 'New Media' art movement was fully taking shape, creating its own language and community (for clarity, the movement will be capitalized and the technologies not).

The situation was no different in Poland where artists joined the global exploration of digital possibilities, replete with the utopianism of the 1990s (as is noticeable for example in the work of Piotr Wyrzykowski and his group C.U.K.T. that will be explored in Chapter 5) and the subsequent sobering up of the 2000s. Artists began to experiment with the new digital media technologies and to create new networks to reflect new artistic practices. They were increasingly pulled to the global 'phenomenon' of new media, which was indicative of a "fascination with means of transmission, but also an attempt to draw attention to the nature of the mass consciousness that is being shaped by them" (Włodarczyk, n.d., Between the Media and the Body section, para. 3). Piotr Krajewski and Viola Kutlubasis-Krajewska (2010) characterize the mid-1980s to mid-1990s as the 'hidden decade' of video art as it has received so little attention. But, as this period is also the period of the introduction of digitization, of the breaking of media art from video art, this indicates that the beginnings of digital media art in Poland have also been underexplored. Some early pioneers who paved the way to intermediality include Gustowska, Wojciech M. Wójcik, Katarzyna Kozyra, Brzuszek, Koch, Alicja Żebrowska, Zygmunt Rytka, or Barbara Konopka, many of whom worked in the creation of video-performances, not quite yet clearly projects of media art. But they did experiment with the increasing fluidity between forms, the production of installations that combined video, performance, objects, photography, and the newly emerging digital technologies. But soon it was no longer enough to focus on experimental film or video or even video-performances or installations, as new digital technologies were producing

different kinds of works, which no longer fit into old categories. In the 2000s artists like Laura Pawela or Kuba Bąkowski (and those discussed in the case studies in Chapters 3-5), continued the move away from traditional forms to indeed create different experiences and interactions that reflected the particularity of the increasingly ubiquitous new media, as well as of their relationship to analog forms. Pawela for example explored technologies such as the interface of the desktop in *Reality LP* (2004) and of mobile phones in *Reallaura* (2002-2004). In both cases there is a clear sense of the artist negotiating her identity through these new technologies. The mobile phone/Internet project *Reallaura*, for example, was inspired by the "fashion for ringtones, logos, and displays for mobile phones" (Zwiefka-Chwałek, 2003) at the time. Pawela created graphic images (green screen with distinct black pixels making up text and images) which she would e-mail or SMS (the project was also then shown in galleries with the images on larger screens). The images acted as a kind of diary where she revealed aspects of her life, asking personal questions next to pictures of herself and occasionally a man, such as 'Beautiful?', 'Overall we are lacking in time and sex', or 'I want to move out'. The project was both an exploration of new technologies, but also of everyday life and the ability of anyone to produce their own 'reality TV' (Zwiefka-Chwałek, 2003), whether what they were presenting was actually real or not (Branicka, 2007). Indeed, while the "little scenes from everyday life were initially treated like spam, they quickly became watched like episodes of a telenovela" (Branicka, 2007, p. 128). Their existence can be understood as partially the product of the Polish site, but this kind of

experimentation must also be considered as taking place alongside a global emergence of artistic practices with new media technologies. Therefore, a broader framework on the practices and theorization of media art are in order.

While in the 1970s and 1980s technologies were slowly changing the artistic landscape, by the mid 1990s a distinct global movement could be pinpointed which required a whole new set of responses, from gallery goers to art institutions. This was the New Media movement. Tribe and Jana (2006) describe the New Media art movement as existing at the intersection of 'art and technology' and 'media art.' The former they define as including practices such as electronic, robotic, and genomic art that "involve technologies which are new but not necessarily media-related," while the later includes video and transmission art, as well as experimental film, or "art forms that incorporate media technologies which by the 1990s were no longer new" (Tribe & Jana, 2006, p. 7). New Media described projects that were on the cutting edge of technological experimentation and that were thinking about the unfolding of this 'new era'. Fuelling the New Media art movement were new digital technologies, so that the primary transformation of the time had to do with the increasing digitization of materials, infrastructures, and networks and the responses in art reflect the novelty of digitality[x]. Its reach was as globalizing as the technologies it was using and it was important from the beginning that New Media was an international and global movement, another manifestation of the idea of the 'global village' that was resurrected with the networks made possible by digital technology. According to Tribe (2012), founder of Rhizome.org

(a foundational organization in the emergence of New Media), New Media as a movement existed from about 1994 to 2004, at which time it could be understood as exhibiting some typical markers of avant-gardism (whether in the writing of manifestos, collaborative work, appropriation, etc.), but more generally, as existing as a vanguard. In these early years of new media, artists were energized by the experimentation (imagination and inquiry) with digital tools. Boundaries between media were converging and it became increasingly necessary to find a language of new media and a shared space of exploration. In this sense, the 'golden age' of New Media art can be understood as an important legacy for contemporary media art as a moment that produced new digital forms and aesthetics, and began to shape the language, conceptual thinking, reception, and institutions that would accompany mediatized artistic practice.

The popularization and even institutionalization of New Media is reflected in the international and interconnected nature of the movement, and allowed media art to be shared across borders whether through the Internet (for example on Rhizome.org which was launched in 1996) or through the emerging and rapidly proliferating international biennales, exhibitions and organizations focused on media art such as Art Electronic (held since 1979), the International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA, launched in 1988), Transmediale (launched in 1988 as VideoFilmFest), ZKM (founded 1989), V2 (which began its focus on electronic media in 1994), Banff New Media Institute (founded in 1995), and the Daniel Langlois Foundation (founded in 1997) (see Shanken, 2009, p. 49-50). In Poland the first organized event that centered on New Media was the WRO

new media festival in Wrocław. Already founded in 1989 by Piotr Krajewski, Viola Kutlubasis-Krajewska, and Zbyszek Kupisz, these early pioneers sensed that there were "about to live in a completely different reality" (as cited in Wróbel, 2011) and established an annual event to showcase artistic engagement with these technologies. WRO included video works, computer-based projects and software art, and was the first in Poland to feature interactive media installations that engaged the public (Wróbel, 2011). While these organized events were essential for the distribution and recognition of media art, they did not necessarily indicate a mainstream acceptance by the art world or the public.

Though the New Media art movement is considered to have dissolved by 2004, it continues to "live on as a tendency—a set of ideas, sensibilities and methods that appear unpredictably and in multiple forms" (Tribe & Jana, 2006, p. 25). 'New media' has become such a ubiquitous term, it has ceased to imply any sort of novelty: there is not much 'new' any more about media. Artists continue to work with a variety of non-traditional media, such that working with electronic technologies is no longer a vanguard position. As a terminology it is challenged and dismissed, so much so that "each of the words in the term *new media art* can be hotly contested" (Graham & Cook, 2010, p. 3). And yet, as Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook (2010) point out, the very plethora of quasi-synonyms has not yet presented a clear or preferable alternative: "*art & technology, art/sci, computer art, electronic art, digital art, digital media, intermedia, multimedia, tactical media, emerging media, upstart media, variable media, locative media, immersive art, interactive art,* and *Things That You Plug In*" (p. 3-4). So, while the are

many difficulties in talking about, referring to, and defining new media art, there is still a need to think about the ways in which "new media are fundamentally different" (Graham & Cook, 2010, p. 62). Now that they are no longer made coherent by a movement and the zeitgeist of the digital boom, the search continues to capture the specific qualities that define them. For example, it is now taken for granted that it refers to work that is multimedial, audiovisual, time-based or process-oriented or, as proposed by curator Steven Dietz (1999), that exhibits the "distinctive characteristics" of interactivity, connectivity, and computability (A Different Kind of 'Greatness' section, para. 5). Similarly, Paul (2008a) suggests that "new media art is often characterized as process-oriented, time-based, dynamic, and real-time; participatory, collaborative, and performative; modular, variable, generative, and customizable" (p. 4) (note the absence here of references to digitality).

Media art can also be understood through its materiality. When Grau (2007) states that "the evolution of media art has a long history and a new technological variety has now appeared" (p. 8) this "new technological variety"—this 'new media'—can be interpreted as being tied to digitization or, more specifically perhaps, to its virtuality, its use of algorithms and computer code, and its connection to a network or to a live data (Graham & Cook, 2010, p. 63) or, as Paul (2008a) has stated, to a reliance on software. Paul's (2003) classification scheme of digital technologies as tool, media, and theme provided a language to talk about this new technology and to acknowledge that "there are certain basic characteristics exhibited by the digital medium" (p. 27). Taking the

approach of the digital-as-tool to its limit, Johannes Goebel (2004) considered the ultimate in small-scale in his suggestion of new media art as "'moving electrons' as material, condition, and consequence for artistic works which are 'time-based'....Works in 'new media' integrate the conditions of 'moving electrons' as tool and thus as material and thus as part of the experience." There has however been a backlash to this materialistic perspective. For example Graham and Cook (2010) have recently cautioned against an approach entirely based on media as tools since new media art

> ...uses a totally different system of relating meaning, one that is not based solely on the separation among maker, tool and work. The combination of technology and media is not just a tool in the studio, but a medium, indeed a system, for making the work and informing the methodology of the artists and the means of the work's distribution" (p. 36).

Indeed, digital technologies are more than tools because they also produce the conditions that structure the mediation, communication possibilities, and experiences of a work or practice. In this way, the digital-as-medium underscores the mediality of new media art practices and its existence within a larger system of negotiations and transactions. This 'system' is a reminder of the specificity of media practice and the importance of locating it within ecologies, whether geographic, historical, or social. In other words, to make sense of media art as media, there is an inherent value in understanding what exactly is being mediated, and thus how differences in ecology are reflected in the media themselves.

To recap, media art is a broad term that includes a variety of media, something which its critics argue makes it an ineffectual way of thinking about the wide range of practices that fall under its domain. It also indicates some disparity or disconnect between the idea of new media as a particular or distinct kind of media practice that uses the most cutting-edge technologies, but one that is still wrestling, explicitly and not, with the ongoing problem or question, or at least inevitability, of mediation as part of its process. But, it is argued here, 'media art' remains a productive term in that it reflects the fluid relationship between old and new media, so that the difference between them is not privileged to the extent that nothing of the old remains in the new. In fact, it is precisely the reverse, whereby new or digital media, in the words of McLuhan (1964) are the message, as the content of one medium is always another medium. In other words, media are always 'remediating' older forms, blurring the distinction between them, or simulating them (Bolter & Grusin, 2002; Paul, 2003; Hansen, 2006). Moreover, the privileging of 'new' media highlights the ambiguity for media art practices that do not fit into the ideas of 'new media' (for example, as one example will indicate in chapter 3, work that uses neon). In other words, media art can be understood as a practice that is based on experiments with processes and experiences of mediation, one that privileges the idea of media as mediators and communicators. Sean Cubitt (2011) suggests for example that "the role of media arts is to enter into mediation" and this mediation and connection is the "only universal for the media arts." In other words "the media history of art, and media art history as its avant-garde, is a history of mediations within and between

human, technological and nature processes, bodies in light and sympathetic vibrations" (Cubitt, 2011). This perspective is in tune with the proposition that media art is ultimately "a way of looking at works" (Broeckmann, 2005), one that can create a 'revolutions in perception' through artistic experimentation with media technologies.

Ultimately, it is debatable how productive is the hairsplitting over terminology. The question that endures however is how artists are continuing to use experimentation in the ongoing critique of the relationship between media, technology, society, and culture. Indeed, whatever the terminology, media art continues to exist as a type of art that is detached from the fetichization of the digital that defined the first wave of new media artists and that ventures to "explore the machinic dimensions of artistic engagement with technologies" (Broeckmann, 2007, p. 202). One response to the pervasiveness of 'media' as a term and thus its devaluation, and that anticipates the move away from materialist or form-based thinking, has been called 'post-media'. Rosalind Krauss (2000) coined the term when she observed a trend toward the devaluation of formal issues of material specificity and a move towards dematerialization. Cubitt takes up this idea when he argues that "media arts insist that all art is made with media; that everything is mediated and every process mediates" (Cubitt, 2011) as does Peter Weibel in his declaration that all contemporary art is now postmedia: "[t]he media experience has become the norm for all aesthetic experience. Hence in art there is no longer anything beyond media. No-one can escape from the media" (as cited in Quaranta, 2011, The Postmedia Condition section, para. 3).

But the idea of 'post-media' reveals a great paradox, for media have become so ubiquitous that they are no longer seen, and yet the mediated experience, as one that is transformative and formative, is central to analyses of the contemporary condition. As Canadian media artist Michael Snow (2011) has argued, media still matter and we should still be "trying to use its special capabilities to make a special experience" (p. 49). By leaving out formal and material concerns from these important discussions, a gap is formed in the very continuity and historicity of media practices and in the connections that these forms have to larger historical debates in art and technology. Therefore, continued engagement with the forms of media enables an understanding of forms as an expression of culture, and as emergent from site.

Some scholars have looked for an altogether different way of thinking about media by bringing together the materialist discussion into a world defined by its hyper-mediation. For example, Shanken (forthcoming) points out that "one of the most useful contributions that NMA [new media art the practice, not the movement] can make...is an understanding of the relationship between materials, tools, and techniques that embraces both medium specificity and the post-medium condition" (p. 11). Medium-specificity itself has been expanded, such that it can be not tied to a particular form (such as the digital) but rather looks at "what is specific to a specific work or practice: the specific assembly of devices, peripherals, software, operating systems, power source, lenses..." (Cubitt, 2011). From this perspective, while there is not much to be learned from trying to ascribe a particular aesthetic to specific forms, each work and practice is the product of

specific media which in turn inform, and are part of, its larger ecology. This allows for an underlying discussion of the new situations that are produced by media technologies, practices, and processes. Moreover, the condition of media—its qualities of mediation, its communicative forms, and the pervasiveness of media technologies in contemporary societies—is in fact the opportunity of media art: the very material nature of media renders media art more easily present in everyday life, whether through its content or presentation, and this allows media art to break out of the confines of the 'art world'. In this way media art differs from the early avant-garde which, despite its numerous activities, "was a proverbial drop in the bucket of traditional art, which was more easily digestible" to the average viewers (Baranowicz, 1979, p. 7).

Media art creates different kinds of experience. As Graham and Cook (2010) have expressed,

> [m]any new media art projects (though certainly not all) are not interested in the object outcome, but rather in the process, the engagement, and the interaction. *They are interested in how the system becomes both the space and the material of the work.* In this sense...new media art is not necessarily materialistic, but is instead concerned with method rather than with final form" (p. 61).

Taking these ideas even further, they have offered that the best way of defining new media art is as a set of behaviors, not as a medium (p. xiv), proposing a new way of taking account of the medium without committing to a position of specificity. They suggest that what has emerged as particular to new media art is its ability to create (i.e.: experiment with) and exhibit different kinds of behaviors and experiences which

challenge the understanding of art and the institutions of art, but also the relationship between art, artist, and audience, and that the technology or medium are only so important as the behaviors, processes and situations they create. Indeed, one's 'reception' or interaction with media art can come in a variety of forms, as a viewer, spectator, participant, collaborator, among others. Graham and Cook (2010) moreover suggest that

> [i]f we are to consider the issue of the physical properties of the work of new media art rather than its conventions or how it behaves, we would be continually chasing a vapor trail because the physical properties of new media are so mutable, emerging, evolving, being upgraded, and becoming defunct (p. 35).

In other words, what emerges as important in this practice according to these perspectives, is not the medium, which could be a variety of things, but the emergence of a way of understanding media art practice through the possibilities of creation and reception it produces.

By providing a way of addressing the kinds of changes that are evident in the production, reception, and dissemination of (new) media practice in relation to other artistic forms, McLuhan and his ideas on the new situations that media technologies produce again seems uncannily perceptive. Furthermore, the emphasis on the fluidity of media is not dissimilar to Strzemiński's experimental logic, the Workshop's conceptual activities, or the urban interventions of the Orange Alternative, all of which valued the process rather than the object. All of these are examples of how the experiment can be understood not only as one of scientific or technological innovation, but one with modes of being, seeing, and acting, with changes in consciousness and perception. Because of

the transformative role technologies play in shaping the ecologies of contemporary existence, media art is inadvertently central to understanding present-day human experientiality. Moreover, the focus, or interest, in space, which can be noted with a.r., the Workshop, or the performance groups, emphasizes the interconnections between the archaeology of the experiment with explorations of space and of the experiences of particular spaces. In media art, these archaeologies can be drawn upon to start to understand media art experimentation as an exploration not only of physical space, but also of the ecologies that produce and are transformed by critical practices.

Despite the apparent popularity and proliferation of media art, its position within the art world in the 2000s has remained precarious. Those working to legitimize new media art within the sphere of the mainstream art world argue that it should not be relegated to a subgenre and that the terminology is outmoded and should be expelled, (Graham and Cook, 2010, p. 21; Shanken, forthcoming). In the contemporary art world there is in fact an increasing blur between media and non-media works, artists and institutions. Domenico Quaranta (2011) suggests that media art "does not identify an art genre or an art movement, and cannot be viewed—as it usually is—as a simple medium-based definition" but that rather a work of art, whether it is based on technology or not is classified as new media art "when it is produced, exhibited and discussed in a specific 'art world,' the world of New Media Art" (para. 2). The situation is however paradoxical: for on the one hand there is a push to converge media art with the rest of contemporary art (in keeping with a logic of post-media), but on the other there is a persistent

dissonance or lack of integration between the so-called mainstream contemporary art world and the new media art world and the discourses that accompany them, which have become increasingly divergent despite the rising popularity of both (Shanken, forthcoming, p. 1). While mainstream contemporary art often employs and appropriates key terms of digital culture ("interactivity," "participation", "programming," and "networks"), Shanken (forthcoming, p. 1) argues that the use of these terms "typically lacks a deep understanding of the scientific and technological mechanisms of new media, the critical discourses that theorize their implications, and the interdisciplinary artistic practices that are co-extensive with them." Paul (2008b) pinpoints the particular challenges of art institutions in exhibiting media works[xi], challenges that offer logistical reminders of the difficult implementation of post-media theory in the "white cube" of the art world. These are some of the many questions surrounding media art, explored in some depth here to situate the murky space of contemporary media art practices. But, as the case studies in the following chapters will argue, media art provides unique opportunities for criticality and experimentation, ultimately creating communicative exchanges that stimulate continuous re-imagination of the Polish site.

Conclusion

This archaeology offers one way of tracing the influences and lineages of media art by thinking through the lens of experimentation. It is not however the only way. Another possible trajectory of the Polish case, for example, would have been to look at the

tradition of the 'pracownie' or workshop, which is a studio at a university run by an artist based on a particular form (e.g. painting, intermedia, drawing) or theme (e.g. space). These studios establish artistic histories through personal connections between artists and mentors and are integral in Poland in forming communities of artists working on common problematics. These affiliations form a web of interconnections in the Polish artistic community, as many artists emerge from the same studios. In this way, when it is known that an artist comes from the workshop of the sculptor Grzegorz Kowalski, for example, a whole set of assumptions and connotations are already put into play (in this case about their work belonging to a tradition of Critical Art). Kowalski in turn was trained in the workshop of Oskar Hansen, who also had in his studio Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek. In the 1990s his workshop was so renowned that it was nicknamed the 'kowalnia' (a compound of Kowalski+pracownia), from which graduated such important artists as Paweł Althamer, Artur Żmijewski, Katarzyna Kozyra, and Anna Molska. So significant are the studios that Krajewski (as cited in Wróbel, 2011) is comfortable making general observations like that the work of students in the workshop of Antoni Mikołajczyk were "expressive and analytical" or that the PL workshop in Gdańsk was "performative." The list could go on. It would be of historical and archaeological significance to trace these interconnections and 'family trees' between artists and between generations of artists since they contextualize the historical link between analogue and digital visual art as lived and explored by individuals and also by the interpersonal networks formed in the institutionalized studios of the universities.

It is perhaps an impossible project to trace all the influences that have produced contemporary media art. In this selective Polish archaeology I have proposed that a focus on experimentation provides an interesting way of understanding the challenge and opportunity of contemporary practices. I have considered the legacies of constructivist experimentation, neo-avant-garde analyticism, expressive subjectivity and performance, New Media, and post-media to contextualize media art as emerging from a variety of traditions and forms. What they all have in common is an emphasis on process, an interest in space, and a stake in the dialogue between social and aesthetic forms. Together they form a foundation for thinking about contemporary media art as ecological experiments. By proposing experimentation as a way of framing this archaeology, media art becomes situated not only as a technological feat, but as an opportunity to try to imagine a different world, or at least to think critically about the one in place. It is important to continue questioning how media art can be used not just for public utility, fetichization, or novelty, but how, through experimentation, it can effect a particular kind of criticality, offering oppositional (dare I say—revolutionary) experiences. As Radul has wondered,

> [c]an one experiment without goals?.... What seems to matter are not experiments on the stuff of the world, but rehearsing a way of making decisions in relation to material, context, history.... Art cannot 'test' anything. That is, it is not the material but the process with the material that is tested (p.101).

What follows are examples of how Polish artists are engaging in, experimenting, and reimaging their site through media, or how they are subverting ecologies of site through media art.

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[i] This is not to suggest that there was no Unist artistic output. On the contrary, Strzemiński continued to produce paintings and drawings as examples of his theoretical approach, while Kobro's sculptural work remains one of the best visualizations of Unism, particularly in the *Spatial Compositions* series she worked on from 1925-1933.

[ii] For more on this period in general, see for example Łukasz Ronduda and Florian Zeyfang (Eds.). (2007). *1,2,3... Avant-gardes film/art between experiment and archive.* Berlin: Sternberg Press.

[iii] It is however interesting to note that in his expansive exposé on the ECE avant-garde, Piotrowski (2009b) dedicates less than three pages to the Workshop, perhaps an example of continued disconnect between the genealogies of fine arts and technological arts, and in this case indicating a separation between filmic experiments from an overall art history.

[iv] Such an attitude was captured in the work of the art historian Piotr Krakowski, who, in a 1981 book exposing the newest trends in the art world claimed that, "I have purposefully left Polish art completely aside first, because our art milieu does not play any special role as far as the newest trends and tendencies are concerned. Rather, it interprets and transforms the ideas previously demonstrated and suggested by artists in the West" (as cited in Kluszczyński, 2000, p. 91 note 1).

[v] It has been suggested that the Workshop remains not only relevant in constructing a Polish media art history, but that, in fact, the activities of the group were so provocative that they bare relevance to the development of media art on an international scale. Kluszczyński (2000) suggests that because most of the Workshop members were trained and based within a film department, they "transformed film from the inside—they have tested and experimented on it, with the aim to purge them of other art forms," while American counterparts, coming to film from a variety of disciplines were not as familiar with film to begin with, which "led to the transformation of film from the outside, or to the nobilitation of the amateur and his typical equipment" (p. 15). In other words, because many Workshop members were trained in film, they were especially positioned to manipulate it materially, to engage with the form itself, to imagine it stripped from its narrative purpose, as they did through their conceptual experiments. Their familiarity with the medium allowed them to push it to its limits, in a way that someone new to the material form arguably would not or could not. This lineage of media art in Poland is therefore rooted in a formal and structural subversion of the materiality of film.

[vi] Przemysław Kwiek worked with Zofia Kulik from 1971-1987 as KwieKulik, one of the most important neo-avant-gardist groups of the time. Together they explored the engagement between artistic practice and social organization by implementing a scientific approach to their work, which ranged from video, to installations and happenings.

[vii] There were some exceptions, such as Robakowski who stayed dedicated to analytic explorations.

[viii] As was noted, the Workshop members organized some of their events in the urban space, as did KwieKulik, and the Od Nowa group (1970-1978), which included among its members Izabella Gustowska, and organized "para-theatrical performances" such as *Space Above the City* (1971), *Laboratorium* (1972), and *Pneumatic Form in Cityscape* (1974) (Hornowska, 2007a).

[ix] The dwarf represented a "citizen's fate as one of elf-like subservience and docility" (Romanienko, 2007, p. 149).

[x] For insight on the materiality of new media practice, see for example Anna Munster's *Materializing New Media* (Dartmouth, 2006). This idea of a material new media is one important way of understanding media art through the lens of media studies as opposed to art histories that trace media art as a culmination of processes of dematerialization.

[xi] Paul (2008b) captures these difficulties as challenges to engage the audience who may complain about the gratuitous use of technology, not understand why it is located in an art institution rather than a science museum, or about not wanting to look at art through a computer, a technology associated with with work. The audience might also feel frustrated that often times the technology is not working or that it is not more high-tech, or that there is constant expectation to interact rather than look (see pp. 66-74).

CHAPTER 3/
The Many Stories of Site: History, Memory, and Pluralizing the Past

"...we were left only the place and an attachment to the place

we govern ruins of temples ghosts of gardens and houses

if we lose our ruins we are left with nothing"

—Zbigniew Herbert, Report from a Besieged City (1983/2007, p. 416)

"As an artist, you are in a position to reconstruct things which did not exist,

things which are not certain."

—Hubert Czerepok (as cited in Smith, 2009, para. 7)

History and memory have traditionally been deeply engrained in ideas of 'Polishness.' So much so that they have often come to be considered a weighty burden, a residue from a more romantic or melancholic time, or a decidedly outmoded lens through which to consider the country, one that is frequently tied to ideas of martyrdom, sacrifice, and religiosity. During the socialist era, the Soviet Bloc ensured the erasure of local differences, including those rooted in history and memory, for the sake of an ideologically united community of workers. Poland was therefore faced, after the cataclysmic events of 1989, with the task of reclaiming and rebuilding a lost history and identity. In the post-socialist early 1990s, in keeping with the mood of the period famously captured by the then Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki that the past should

be "cut off... with a thick stroke," artists in Poland moved away from historical themes to focus on questions of identity and a reappraisal of the political role of the arts in their new society (Szczerski, 2009) (see Chapter 1). History, in the sense of a grand narrative of the Polish nation, and even histories, became outmoded, an affliction which could finally be shed along with the isolationism of the socialist period. In this process socialism itself is at risk of being forgotten: as shedding and rejecting that particular moment of the past were privileged over dwelling and the difficult work of coming to terms with confusing and challenging memories, the result has been not so much an acceptance or thoughtful reflection on history, but rather a 'haunting of the past' by the 'ghost of socialism' (Till, 2005; Rabikowska, 2009; Groys, 2010). This 'culture of amnesia' allowed Poles to negate their own post-war history and rely on a few national narratives of WWII itself, a decision with profound long-term repercussions. If the extraction and destruction of memory is also the removal of site from identity, then 'amnesia' opens the doors to an unobstructed and uncontested reappropriation of site with different and new memories, narratives, and identities. As Karen E. Till (2005) warns, "we must learn to take our ghosts seriously" (p. 12).

By the latter part of the 1990s and especially in the early 2000s, there was a notable resurgence in questions of history and memory and some artists found provocative new ways of probing into this subject through narratives which "started to investigate the relations between the individual and his or her immediate surroundings, defined both in spatial and cultural terms" (Szczerski, 2009, p. 87). This new approach was explicitly concerned with complicating master narratives, focusing on experiences of

the everyday and on valorizing the individual. The ecology of the past became not only important, but a key subject in the constitution of a contemporary Polish society and the reimagination of the Polish site. Indeed, as Andreas Huyssen (2003) notes, "at stake in the current history/memory debate is not only a disturbance of our notions of the past, but a fundamental crisis in our imagination of alternative futures" (p. 2). In other worlds the "issues of memory and forgetting...emerged as dominant concerns" in rebuilding Polish society and became fundamental concerns in the negotiation of the public sphere, democracy, nationhood, citizenship, and identity (Huyssen, 2003, p. 15; Marciniak, 2009; Szczerski, 2009). However, rather than recycling old nationalistic narratives, alternative histories and memories must be made visible and circulated as part of the processes of Polish self-enfranchisement and as a reflection of the heterogeneity of the Polish site.

Since negotiations and affirmations of memory and history are important components of rooted sites, "a turn toward memory is subliminally energized by the desire to anchor ourselves in a world characterized by an increasing instability of time and the fracturing of lived space" (Huyssen, 2003, p. 18). Put differently, the past is important in Poland on two levels: as a means for a general grounding amidst the fluidity of our contemporary condition (as existing 'in a place'), and as a mode of concrete site-specificity (as existing 'here', in Poland, but even more particularly, in Wrocław, Poznań, Warsaw, etc). As Blair A. Ruble (2003) has argued, "new pluralistic legends, memories, and histories must be nurtured if viable democratic politics are to emerge," and "art, in its production of different perspectives on reality as well history, by asking questions about them and forcing critical thinking, can in an important way strengthen democracy"

(Kowalczyk, 2010, p. 18). That is to say, by presenting alternatives to official and institutionalized history-making, artistic endeavors and interventions like the ones discussed in this chapter open the door to the pluralization of the past, giving voice, making visible, and circulating buried, dismissed, hidden, or forgotten narratives, thereby creating, at least for a moment, an open and potentially public space. While a monolithic history and memory are central to the formation of national communities and identities, the 'breaking up' of the past lays a foundation for forming politically engaged societies that can build a pluralized and heterogeneous society.

Since the 2000s there has been a noticeable surge in Polish artistic work addressing questions of history (Kowalczyk, 2010, p. 21). And since media old and new challenge notions of longevity, archiving, and dwelling, they afford particular possibilities for manipulating time and destabilizing what once was fixed, stable and enduring, creating provocative ways of playing with temporalities and creating a type of ephemeral experience which briefly connects and mediates present, past, and future. The artists discussed here offer some examples of engagement with the past by embracing alternative histories to make meaningful assertions of site-specificity. Their use of different media to explore forgotten or repressed local histories is an attempt to resist the 'collective amnesia' which has marked post-socialist attitudes towards the recent past, if not the more general crisis of amnesia that Theodor Adorno ascribed to capitalist culture (Huyssen, 1995, p. 5). Here the focus is on two types of "memory works"[i] that, though mutually constitutive, merit to each be considered as a different component in the process of a temporal anchoring of site. This kind of artistic engagement serves as an example of

a critical art that "undertakes a deconstruction of history" and "proposes entirely different ways of looking at history than is conventional" (Kowalczyk, 2006, p. 21). It does so by enabling a circulation of communicative memories—whether of places, events, or individuals—as alternatives to cultural memory.

The first is work that is concerned with the history and memory of specific places—and here in particular the focus in on cities—and the way the circulation of alternative local (urban) narratives contributes to the rewriting of official or dominant versions of (national) history. Mediatized art interventions provide Polish city dwellers with the opportunity of (re)turning to history through encounters with the built form, or materiality of the city, and function as powerful assertions and imaginings of locality, place, and site. The technologies used, along with their ephemeral nature, create interactions and juxtapositions between the physical and material, but also between temporalities, revealing memory and history as foundational layers of site-specificity. Two artists provide the case studies for this discussion. The first is Rafał Jakubowicz (1974–), an artist reminiscent of the conceptual tradition. His work in variety of media and spaces is continuously engaging with the matter of history, of the dangers of forgetting and the importance of reflecting on the past. The second is Aleksandra Polisiewicz (1974–), who also goes by the pseudonym Aleka Polis, a radical feminist artist who also works in a variety of media and is committed to the subversion of hegemonic structures. In very different ways both create experiments in how to call attention to marginalized or forgotten urban histories.

The second kind of work explored is concerned with the individual as a central actor in the pluralization of official history through personal memories or beliefs. The artists discussed are Grzegorz Rogała and Hubert Czerepok. Rogała (1956–) is a filmmaker interested in the manipulation of traditional film and photography alongside digital experimentation to understand the present and the 'now'. Through the layering of these media he blurs the viewer's sense of presence and time while exploring the fluidity between past, present, and future. Czerepok (1973–) meanwhile is a multimedia artist known for his absurd and ironic perspectives that deal with urban myths, catastrophes, conspiracy theories, and the like (Sienkiewicz, 2007). Always questioning institutions and the structuring of human behavior, he points to the ridiculous state of organized human existence. In the work of both of these artists there is an attempt to bring the individual to the forefront as an actor who is responsible for thinking differently about history.

The Circulation of Communicative Memories

The connections that can be made between a site and its past serve as a grounding mechanism that allows individuals, as well as societies, to maintain a sense of continuity as well as particularity. It is useful here to remember Anthony Smith's (1999) argument that one of the difficulties in developing a collective identity on a global scale, unhinged from place, is the inability to find the common history, past, and memory which build allegiance and emotional attachment essential in building a collectivity. Moreover, it is only by finding ways to commemorate and adjudicate historical traumas that "the

unprecedented task of securing the legitimacy and future of [an] emergent polity" can be secured (Huyssen, 2003, p. 16). Site-specific memory is a search for a temporal and spatial anchor in a world characterized by the universalizing idealisms of globalization, so much so that the "ability to formulate and know one's history as it is defined by place is a means to self-enfranchisement" (Czaplicka, 2003, p. 27). But it is not enough to stick to official History, to 'dealing with' trauma, or institutional ways of place-making, or about making or agreeing upon "places of memory," physical locations which can help in the process of "memory-work" (Till, 2005). Rather, it is about creating moments which can challenge usual ways of negotiating the historical, about finding history in unexpected places and in original ways that may reenergize the conversations about the past and provide new ways of thinking and seeing the local. For these reasons, this analysis is not concerned with memorials, monuments, museums, or other permanent markers, but with works that make public alternative narratives that help pluralize the memories, and histories of particular sites. Instead of official narratives of history defined by institutions, and rather than choosing between forgetting/amnesia or stagnant cultural memory, there is an alternative of fragmentation, whereby the past can be acknowledged and remembered, but in a way that supports a democratic ideology of pluralism.

In the 2000s many Polish artists are working to challenge and pluralize history as something contested, continuously relevant, and central in the construction of the 'new' Poland. They are "asking about the place, or more precisely about the memory inked to given places, about the 'scars of history' and about the 'ghosts of the past'" (Kowalczyk, 2006). Artists have taken history out of its confinement and fragmented it into many

contested pieces, challenging the public to think in new ways about 'old' events. They are not only challenging collective memory (Halbwachs, 1925/1992), but questioning the idea of the collective memory itself. Indeed, they are making visible the distinction between types of collective memory. Jan Assmann (1995) proposed that there are two kinds of collective memory, and that they function very differently. 'Cultural' memory is "shaped by the specialists from above as part of a publicly celebrated master narrative" (as cited in Thum, 2009, p. 80) and is articulated by institutions, public debates, theory, art, and literature (Huyssen, 1995). It can therefore be understood as helping to explain the way a society thinks of the past and its subsequent appropriation into collective identity. This is a problematically top-down approach to memory, in which some stories are privileged over others and in which some actors have a more powerful and authoritative voice, which is used to construct a certain mythology and ideology. 'Communicative' memories however can be understood as "circulating in everyday communication but not necessarily part of the master narrative" (Thum, 2009, p. 80). These kinds of memories only last three of four generations, and therefore precede cultural memory or, put different, cultural memory begins where communicative memory ends and is rather "characterized by its distance from the everyday" (Assmann, 1995, p. 129). But the circulation of communicative memories and histories also offers opportune ways for challenging, rewriting, and reclaiming the overarching stories of the master narrative since they can function as a debunking, transforming, and subverting of cultural memory. These do not however have to be limited to everyday interactions and speech, but, it is argued here, can also be circulated through the particular experiences produced

in media art. Here, artists Jakubowicz and Polisiewicz are circulating communicative memories of a particular site—the city—while Rogała and Czerepok are inserting the individual into the history of the site by problematizing the memories of particular historical events.

It is worth noting the irony that it is an ephemeral technology, one often anchored in digital processes, that is being used so effectively to bring memories back into the present. Indeed, as Huyssen (1995) has noted, "the struggle for memory is ultimately also a struggle for history and against high-tech amnesia" (p. 5). In other words, the ideals of preservation, storage, archiving, permanence—i.e., memory—have been challenged by the very impermanence inherent in high-tech technological forms like digital media. Therefore, if we consider the a-temporal, unstable, and impermanent nature of the digital form, then these 'memory works' can be considered a subversion of the medium that they are using. The fleeting moments these new media art works generate, produce, and create, are especially conducive in the pluralization of memory and the ungrounding of history from a monolithic and singular narrative. These spurts of memory, little moments that hint at alternative stories, are free of the burden of History, while nonetheless being able to reflect and circulate memories of the past. In this way, the ephemeral nature of new media art is an asset, an advantage for negotiating that which is contested. In the urban landscape, media art interventions make visible the communicative memories of a site, functioning as a pluralized version of the permanent structures meant to solidify and validate one History. Rather than work on the premise that certain locations should become representative and privileged places of memory (places that, inevitably must be

agreed upon), these projects question the past in unexpected and novel ways that resonate with everyday experiences. This pluralization of history and the reinsertion of the individual experience reaffirm the relationship between the site and the viewer, whereby the artist has created a situation of mediation and communication between site and citizen.

Alternative Narratives 1: Stories of the City

In Poland's continuing transformation and transition, the city has become a focal site of change that embodies the range of issues facing the social, cultural, and political spheres of the country. The city itself is arguably where "site-specific urban histories originate outside the grand historical schemes projected by authoritarian and globalizing regimes" (Czaplicka, 2003, p. 25). In her descriptions of Berlin, Svetlana Boym (2001) suggests that the

> ...affective imagined community is frequently identified with a nation, its biography, its blood and soil. Yet identification with a city...is no less strong throughout modern history. Urban identity appeals to common memory and a common past but it is rooted in a man-made place, not in the soil: in urban coexistence at once alienating and exhilarating, not in the exclusivity of blood (p. 76).

The commonality built around the city emerges from sharing a place, from living together, not from being the same. But since they are artificial, cities lack intrinsic meaning or stability, "they are fluid mosaics and moments of memory, matter, metaphor, scene, and experience that create and mediate social spaces and temporalities" (Till, 2005, p. 8). As such, they are not only important sites of commonality, but they have

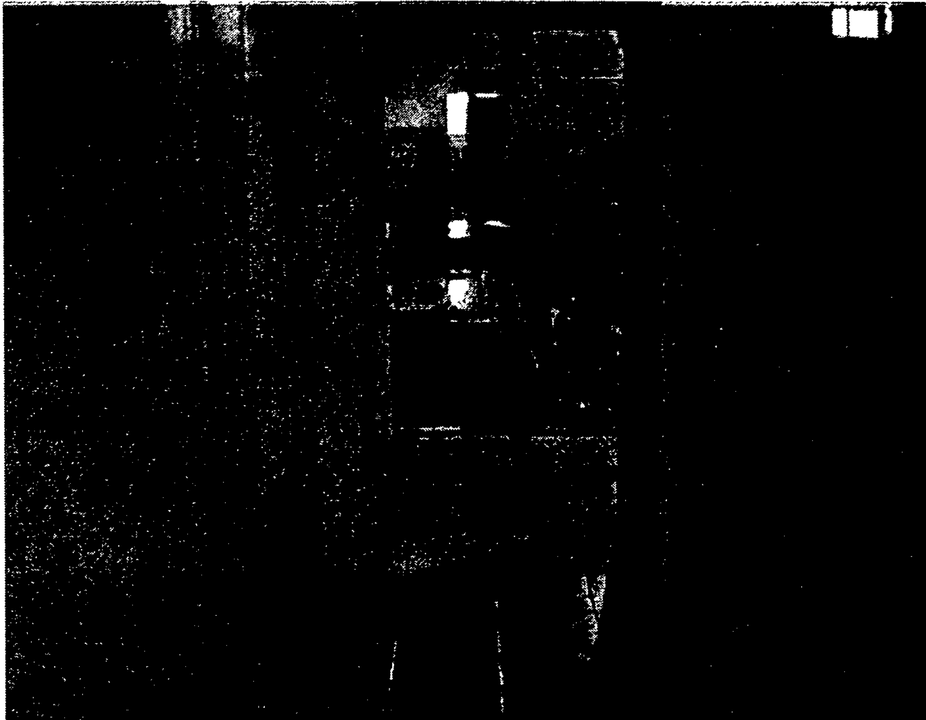
become a powerful nexus of negotiation and transformation that can weave together the narratives of global integration and local transformations into the experience of the everyday (Isin, 2000; Boym, 2001). Though interest in questioning the urban landscape is growing, for example through events like the month-long annual Warsaw Under Construction: An Urban Design Festival organized by the Museum of Modern Art since 2009, according to Czepczyński (2008) there hasn't been much work done on studies of urban structure or landscape in the former East since 1989 because most of the public's attention has been on political and economic transformation. The city as testament of the Polish past is taken for granted despite its very contested nature and questionable identity. The forms and structures of the urban—its buildings, architecture, design, infrastructure, monuments, etc.—are an everyday reminder that there is some continuity and residue from the past lingering in the present. Indeed, history leaves material traces, rendering the built form an opportunity for reclaiming memory.

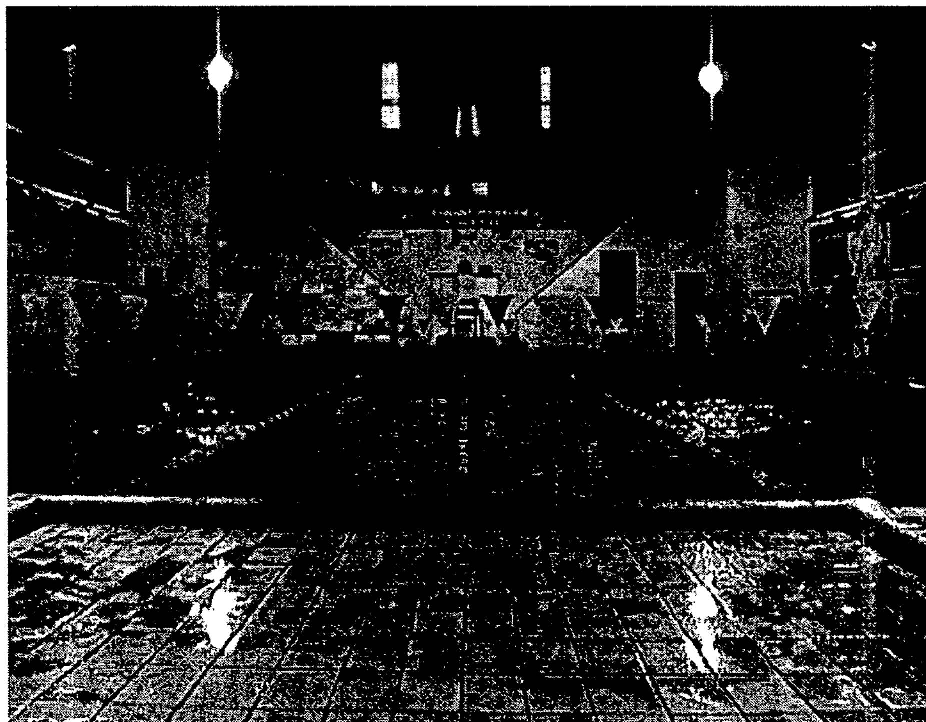
Polish history is often framed as a succession of revolutions and regime changes, each time warranting an architectural makeover to transform the city so as to reflect the ideological tenets and the glorified but constructed legacy of the new political doctrines. Complicated attitudes and negotiations of temporality are therefore reflected in the treatment of the built environment and its architecture, old and new. In the socialist era, history would be drawn upon the façades of structures to narrativize buildings, districts, and other local sites, as an example of architecture treated as a palette onto which (a selective) history and ideology is written. Artists were hired to paint historical graffiti on exterior walls, giving the built environment a didactic purpose, often illustrating tales of

heroic Polish figures and myths, "etching" a city's story and selective cultural memory onto its façades (Crowley, 2003; Kaminska & Nesselroth-Woyzbun, 2010). The work of Jakubowicz, which is, in a way, continuing the tradition of "etching," is a reminder that buildings should not to be trusted to provide an irrevocable narrative of civic history. And, like Jakubowicz, Polisiewicz takes on this idea that architecture, like the city, is continuously created and interpreted, itself a fluid ecology of meaning and interpretation. In these examples, both artists are (re)animating history, making it public by showing it on or through an urban environment that is shared and by offering slices of history—whether representations or interpretations—which offer alternatives to the static structures which mark official narratives. Through a circulation of communicative memories, they are working to make visible local histories, offering the urban as a site not only of a singular national event, but of specific local tragedies, erasures, and stories. Polisiewicz and Jakubowicz are examples of artists who have found ways of producing works that explore Polish-centric contexts and histories while remaining critical and engaged. They offer important and provocative ways of 'staying local' without being accused of xenophobia, patriotism or conservatism, offering examples of the way in which artists can provide resourceful and original ways of exposing and circulating the communicative memories that are crucial for developing the alternative narratives that Polish society needs to maintain its specificity within a European and global networks and communities.

Rafał Jakubowicz

Rafał Jakubowicz engages with the memories of the city by challenging the perception of its architectural remnants. In the projects examined here, he uses large-scale projections and neon to reflect on the residue of the past, and shows an explicit concern with history, memory, and the dangers of forgetting or amnesia. *Swimming Pool* (2003/2006) and *Es Beginnt in Breslau* (2008) are set in the cities of Poznań and Wrocław, respectively, both of which were severely damaged during WWII. In *Swimming Pool,* Jakubowicz projects the words 'swimming pool' in Hebrew onto an old synagogue that was turned into a swimming pool in 1940. To accompany this visible public statement, he captured the moment onto a postcard, one side featuring the picture of this projection, and the other a picture of kids swimming in the pool at the same time as the outside projection. The project also includes video from both the projection and the swim.





Figures 1-4. Rafał Jakubowicz, *Swimming Pool,* Poznań 2003/2006, postcard and video stills. Courtesy of the artist. Courtesy and © the artist

From one side of the postcard to the other, inside and outside of the synagogue/pool, each is invisible and unaware to the other. In this building Jakubowicz sees something that was and is common: a public building whose history has been forgotten and that needs to be redefined as historically shared rather than appropriated by the vortex of amnesia. The uncomfortable story of Polish Jews has, in this re-appropriation, been conveniently erased and skirted through the banality of a swimming pool. As the swimmers are oblivious to the building's history Jakubowicz's raises questions not only about the kind of collective memory that is formed, but about whether collective memory can even emerge in such indifference and silence (Jedliński, 2002). Indeed, the challenge is even more complex, as it is not about societies producing singular memories, but rather,

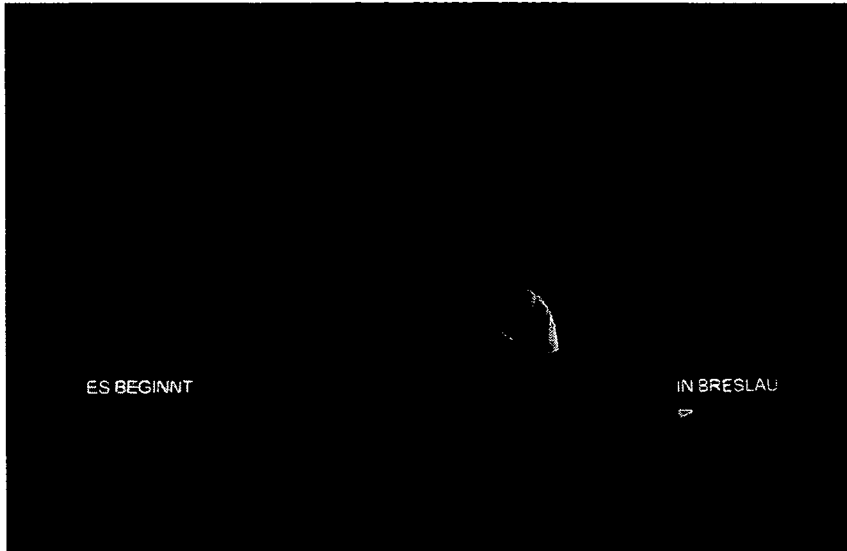
through an ongoing process of communication, to affirm the existence of a plurality of stories, and in this case, the story of Jews in Poland.

When asked why he chose this particular building to undertake this kind of project, Jakubowicz explains that it was a building he passed everyday on the bus, and that eventually he started asking himself what could be done, and what kind of intervention would be possible there (personal communication, May 21, 2010). It is this kind of questioning of history that emerges from the routines and mundane repetitiveness of everyday life and sights that indicates a kind of reappropriation of city space to expose, reflect, and produce histories that exist outside of the official narratives and propaganda of institutionalized History-making. Moreover, while the story of Jews continues to present some discomfort in Polish society, this project is in a way a reminder not only of the anti-Semitism during and after the war, but also of a Jewish presence beforehand, in an earlier time when the 'Polish' landscape was ethnically diverse, cosmopolitan, and relatively tolerant (Brubaker et al, 2006; Shore, 2009). As Kowalczyk (2006) reflects, this is a work "about absence, about the deletion of dramatic facts from our imagination.... [and] points to what has been repressed and forgotten.... this art becomes a kind of therapy" (Towards History section, para. 7). Meanwhile, the medium of the projection itself reflects a fleetingness, almost like a mirage opening into the past; it is the materiality of the architecture which remains, containing within itself the layers of history while also becoming the surface on which memories can be reignited. It is an example of what Boym (2001) has called architecture as the "screen memories for urban dwellers, projections of contested remembrances" (p. 77). The text beamed onto the building can

be read literally by the viewer but also, because of its temporal and material fluidity, creates a sort of "ghostly" conversation with the past, a way for history to speak without the weight, commitment, or finality, of a permanent artifact.

In the project *Es Beggint in Breslau,* Jakubowicz responds to the earlier work *Fragment of the System* or *This Begins in Wrocław* produced in 1970 by Zbigniew Gostomski (Breslau is the name of this city while it was German). While Gostomski's project "is completely decontextualized" (Moskalewicz, 2008, p. 31) from the history of the city of Wrocław/Breslau despite being presented at a symposium celebrating the 25th anniversary of the return of Western and Northern lands to Poland (the so-called 'Recovered Territories'[ii]), Jakubowicz produced a site-specific work in a few ways. First, his work at the outset explicitly references, concerns, and was shown in a public setting in Wrocław (the message is positioned on the outside walls of the once Hatzfeld Palace, now home of the Gallery BWA Awangarda). Secondly, he is building upon and referencing the work of Gostomski and the Polish history of the 1970s neo-avant-garde. And, last but not least, he is bringing to the surface the often uncomfortable history of German Breslau and its subsequent 'recovery.' Jakubowicz describes these references as in a way making this a work difficult to access for viewers outside of Poland who are unfamiliar with these histories, and that while "in a sense that is a problem, in another, it is a comprise, something for something: that is how we can have a real dialogue with a local context" (personal communication, May 21, 2010). In the project, Jakubowicz uses neon to write the words 'Es Beggint' on one side of the palace/gallery door, and 'in Breslau' on the other. Each side is illuminated at an interval, whereby the sentence, 'This

begins in Breslau' written in German is separated and drawn out, cyclical, and ultimately confusing and meaningless, as one is not sure what begins nor when. The words are blinking, "blinking, in other words changing; changing, but nonetheless existing in time" (Moskalewicz, 2008, p.28). The sentence is mysterious in its ambiguity. Its first fragment can be promising, or foreboding: 'This begins'. And the ending, which appears after a pause, disturbing, or anticlimactic: 'in Breslau.'



Figures 5-6. Rafał Jakubowicz, *Es beginnt in Breslau*, Galeria Awangarda, Wrocław 2008 (Work can be found in the collection of the Dolnośląskie Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych), neon, installation on façade of gallery building. Courtesy and © the artist.

The viewer is offered the difficult route of reflection and uncertainty: what is it that begins? And where? The sign's promise of something constantly beginning plays upon a desire and curiosity for the new, while leaving up in the air its location—where is it exactly that we are? And what remains here of Breslau? How do we know that we are in Wrocław now? Where and when does this end? To be able to resolve this and get out of this circuit, to create stability and longevity, we have to stop the flickering by agreeing on a beginning and a location. In silence we are unable to commit to keeping the lights on, or off, or to accept or deny the Wrocław of the German past. The neon sign at once harks back to the art of the 1960s and 1970s while also invariably referencing consumer culture and old-fashioned outdoor signs or ads[iii]. On the one hand the lag and repetitiveness between beginning and end functions as a juxtaposition and throwback to the drag and

cyclical nature that characterized life in socialist Poland, while on the other the beginning is the unmasking/illumination ("odczarowywanie", literally 'un-spelling' or 'breaking the spell') regarding the cultural memory and knowledge of the 'Recovered Territories' (Moskalewicz, 2008, p. 30). Morever, Jakubowicz's use of neon is inself a meaningful shift from the use of projection. Whereas projection is an immaterial and ephemeral visual image, the use of neon rematerializes light by adding a physical structure that renders it a physical object. Even when a neon light is flashing or turned off, it still exists and the unlit tubes indicate something enduring, if extinguished, about the work and its message/meaning.

While there was an official effort during socialism to deny the German history of Wrocław in any public setting, there were pervasive traces and remains of 'Germanness' indoors, in the privacy of people's homes (Thum, 2009). In Jakubowicz's work there is in a way a reversal, a public display of a hidden site-specific history, one which has officially been hidden and whose narrative has been manipulated at the mercy of competing ideologies. This tension between public and private history exemplifies Gregor Thum's (2009) argument that in Wrocław cultural and communicative memory "did not just poorly correspond but even stood in direct contradiction to each other" (p. 80). But Jakubowicz refuses to deal with the "dark heritage" of the Polish landscape by giving buildings new functions and new positive meanings (Czepczyński, 2008, p.58). Rather, he is forcefully taking off these new cloaks and creating glimpses into a forgotten past and staging difficult confrontations with the ideology of amnesia, a reminder of the important historical reality that before 1945 Wrocław was Breslau, a German city.

Aleksandra Polisiewicz

Warsaw is often considered a tragic city where progress is founded upon destruction, a city built from rubble and ashes, atop cemeteries and ruins, where the boundaries between life and death are fluid (Crowley, 2003; Zaborowska, 2004). It is a city that has never been stable and exists almost in spite of the instability of its built forms, unwillingly bound to the old utopian dream of being "freed from the metaphysics of place" (Crowley, 2003, p.12)[iv]. To push the point even further, not only have the structures come and gone with every major regime change, but the ground itself, the foundations are by nature fluid, unstable, and impermanent. A city built on sand, Warsaw is physically and metaphorically rooted in mutability and endangerment wherein grounded longevity is an impossibility. Alongside this fluidity and constant redevelopment emerges a sensation of absence, made visible by empty plots and barren spaces or voids once occupied by structures that no longer exist (Crowley, 2003). But also, as Polisiewicz explores, the memories of now long-forgotten plans linger as ghosts of potential Warsaws.

Wartopia I. Berlin: 518, Moskwa: 1122 (2006) is a project that addresses the rebuilding of Warsaw and the implications of different forms of urban planning on the nature of the city. It is a visual representation of an unfulfilled plan for Warsaw, a kind of possible alternative narrative, exposing now archived plans for the city in a "critical mediatising of collective memory" (Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2009). At the heart of *Wartopia* (a joining together of 'war' and 'utopia', as well as 'war' and 'topos'), is a project which creates visual representations of two unrealized plans for the city of

Warsaw as conceived by the Soviets and the Germans during the period of WWII. There were many elements to the project as it was exhibited in Berlin, including stills of a virtualization of the Soviet plan produced by Edmund Goldzmat in the Stalinist era. But the components that are of particular interest here are the miniature model and the 3D video-game-like virtual reconstruction in which the viewer flies through the city with the use of a joystick. These are based on the plans German nazi urbanists Hubert Gross and Friedrich Pabst created for Warsaw in the early years of the war for 'Die Neu Deutsche Stadt Warschau' or 'the new German city of Warsaw.' Designed to be an outpost German town of about 40,000 inhabitants, this new city was to be built atop the rubble of Warsaw and have the primary function of serving as a communication and transportation hub between East and West. Under the Germans, rather than a populous, grand, or powerful capital, Warsaw was to become an icon of modernist totalitarian architecture designed an as ordered city-camp (Majewska, 2009), one which could be replicated elsewhere without regard to context. While Polisiewicz's project uses plans particular to Warsaw, similar reconstructions were planned by the Germans in towns around Poland through their Programme for the Refashioning of Cities (Czubak, 2007), rendering *Wartopia* at once specific to Warsaw, but also representational of a common urban history within the now-Polish lands. In fact, for the German planner the association with site was so loose that "this city could have been built anywhere in the whole area under control" because it lacked "any concrete location" (Turowski, 2007, p. 68).

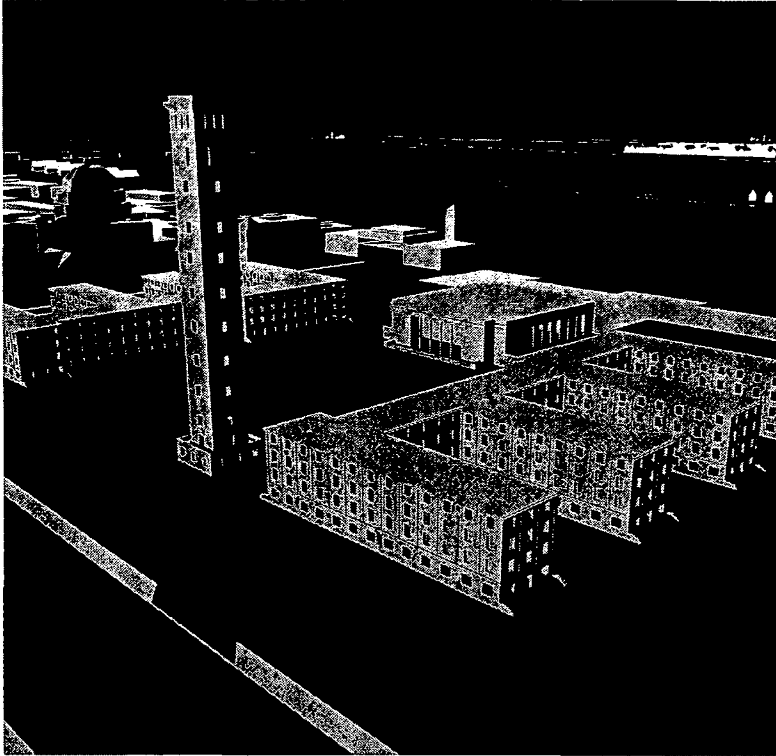


Figure 7. Aleksandra Polisiewicz, *Wartopia*, Gauforum, 80 x 80 cm. Courtesy of Le Guern Gallery © the artist.

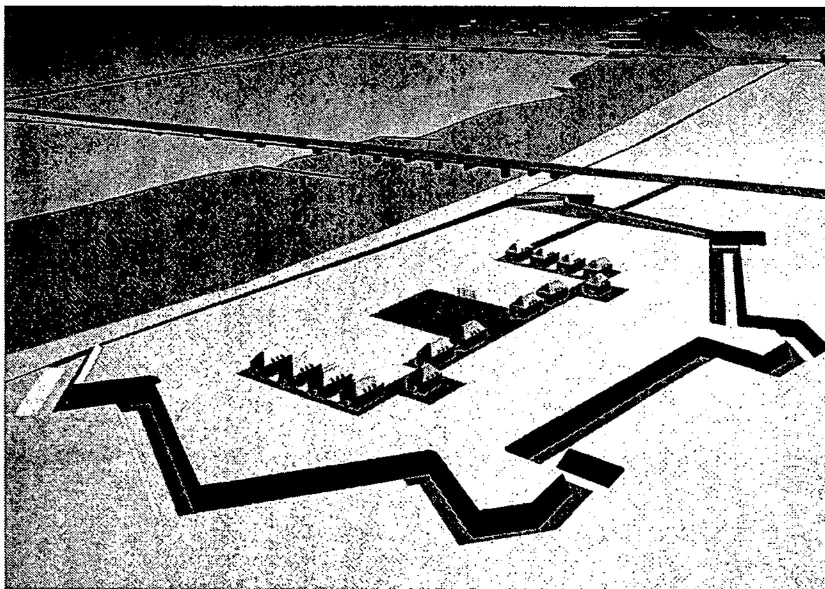


Figure 8. Aleksandra Polisiewicz, *Wartopia*, View of the Citadel from the West, 19 x 26 cm. Courtesy of Le Guern Gallery © the artist.

As the curator of *Wartopia* Bożena Czubak (2007) notes, both the German and Soviet plans proposed a "radical re-organization of the city space" (p. 50). They offered visualizations of the city-town under totalitarian rule, with the Germans offering "functionalist ideas and the extreme to the utmost rationalization of architecture" and the Soviets envisioning "spectacular monumentality of edifices" (Czubak, 2007, p. 51). These visions were built on ruins, and this element of the plans is as important as the plan itself. To destroy the city is to destroy its memory, implementing Le Corbusier's "radical approach of the *ex nihilo* designing on the ruins of former towns which were to be eradicated from memory in the new forms planned for them" (Czubak, 2007, p.52). Gross was explicitly striving to achieve a rejection of history through this 'liquidation of the Polish city' (Czubak, 2007, p. 52). *Wartopia,* then, presents a version of the city based on destruction of Warsaw both physical and historical. This destruction also meant that something entirely new could be built, and provided the opportunity to put into form the utopic ideals of these totalitarian regimes; on the ruins of Polish cities would emerge placeless Soviet or Nazi-ist utopias.

Polisiewicz provokes her viewer into a reflection on the ideological nature of architecture and ultimately of the reorganization of time and space by totalitarianism (Kowalczyk, 2007a). In *Wartopia,* history is contained in virtuality and provides a stirring and shocking ("wstrząszające") look at Nazi Warsaw (Jarecka, 2006). But seeing what Warsaw could have been if completely redesigned and rebuilt as a totalitarian dys/utopia is also a way of coming to terms with what Warsaw actually is and is not: part concrete and overwhelming Soviet outpost, part duplication and reproduction of its old

charming and colorful pre-War self, part eager participant of capitalist development. Perhaps Polisiewicz's retrospection, Dorota Jarecka (2006) writes in her review, succeeds in creating an association with present-day Warsaw, forcing the viewer to question how the remnants of totalitarian infrastructures continue to shape everyday experience and ultimately limit political practice and democratic participation in the city today. The historical possibility contained in these plans-as-memory is a constitutive element of present-day Warsaw. By visualizing a history that never came to bare, a hidden layer of Warsaw's past is revealed, one that normally would be lost and buried in the archive.

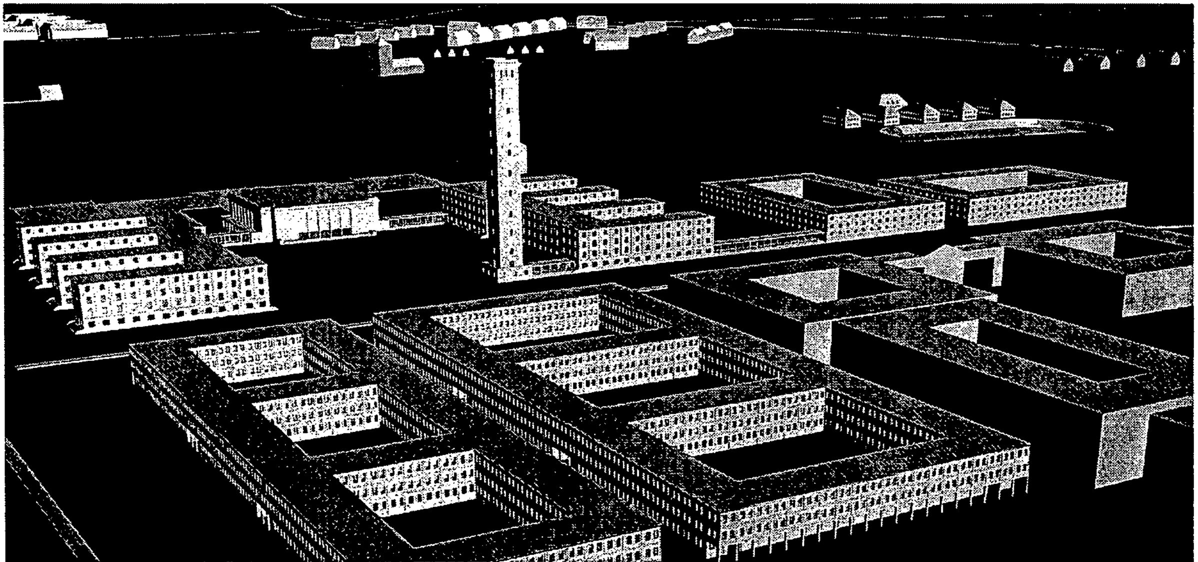


Figure 9. Aleksandra Polisiewicz, *Wartopia*, Gauforum, general view from the North-West, 19x39 cm. / Courtesy of Le Guern Gallery © the artist.

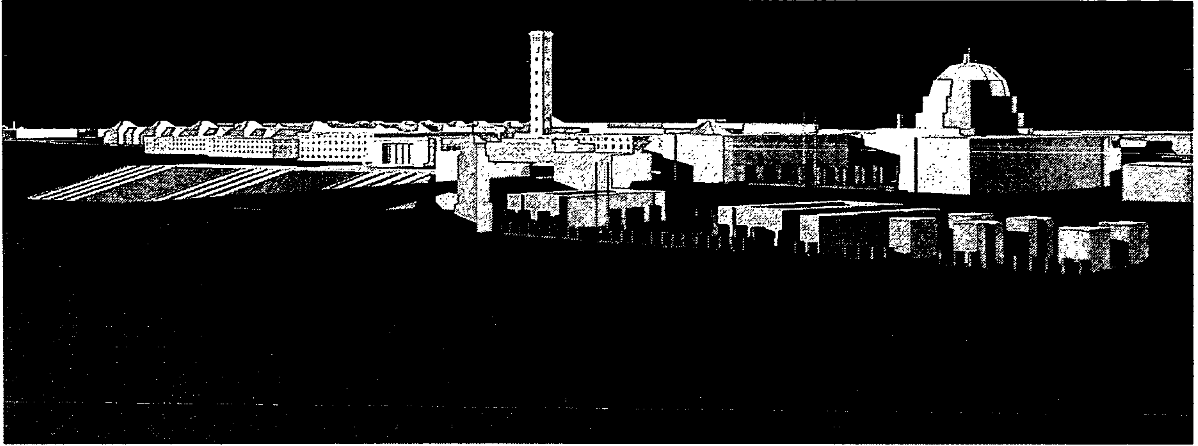


Figure 10. Aleksandra Polisiewicz, *Wartopia*, View of Gauforum and Volkshalle from the North, 38x100 cm. / Courtesy of Le Guern Gallery © the artist.

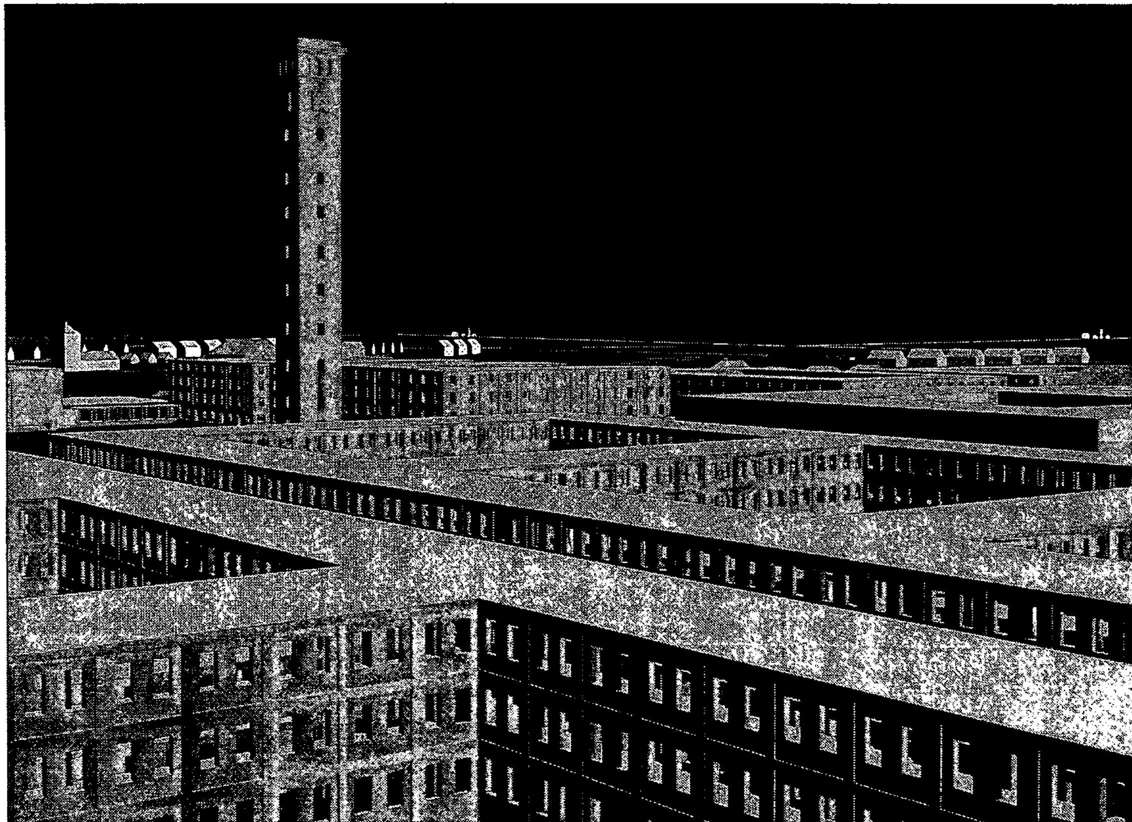


Figure 11. Aleksandra Polisiewicz, *Wartopia*, View of Gauforum from the West, 26 x 35 cm. Courtesy of Le Guern Gallery © the artist.

Wartopia presents a world that noticeably lacks traces of humanity, but also a world that is fun and can be played with like a game. This aspect of the project makes viewers not only stare at a model, but also engages them and sparks their curiosity (Kowalczyk, 2007a). The viewer here becomes more than that: he becomes a wanderer in this Warsaw city-camp, in "something of a journey through history" (Czubak, 2007, p. 53). Indeed, as Kowalczyk writes (2007a), there is a reason this project was exhibited in galleries and produced by an artist, rather than as part of an architectural review or a scholarly historical project. In being an artistic work it becomes important to consider how Polisiewicz has chosen to apply this historical information, and to acknowledge her use of a mediatized virtual 3D game-like environment.

The idea that an unrealized history is now represented in the transient form of the virtual is especially meaningful for an understanding of the experience of time and the associations of durability, longevity, and meaning, that are associated with material structures which comprise the forms and structures of the city. By making the focal point of this project a digital game, *Wartopia* reveals not something fixed or stable, but rather a trace of a vision of an 'other' Warsaw, with another narrative and identity. This ethereal experience is like a pulse into the past, opening it up in a way previously unseen, chronologically juxtaposed rather than linear with the present. What digitization allows here is a new kind of reflection: it modifies previously stable memories and circulates them in ways impossible with analog tools and forms (Szczerski, 2009), creating opportunities for alternative, or communicative, memories to be shared and exchanged. In *Wartopia* historical possibility provides an important layer and grounding of present-day

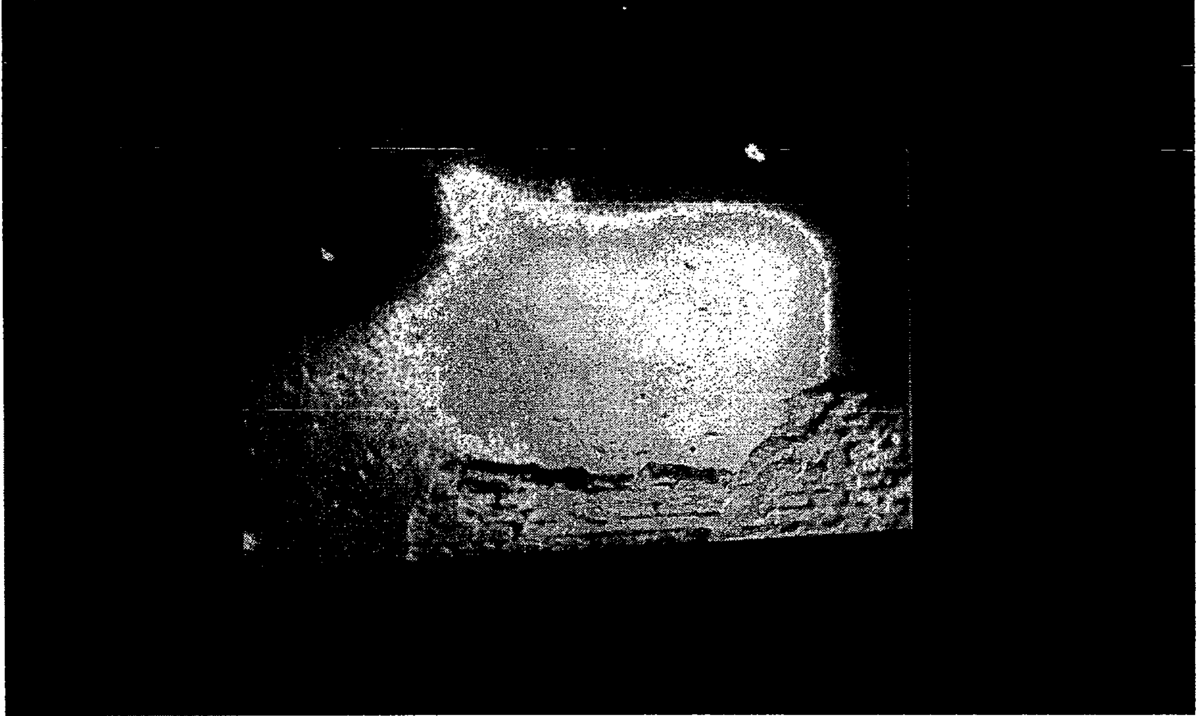
Warsaw as a locality and site emergent from a plurality of real, potential, or imagined narratives and memories.

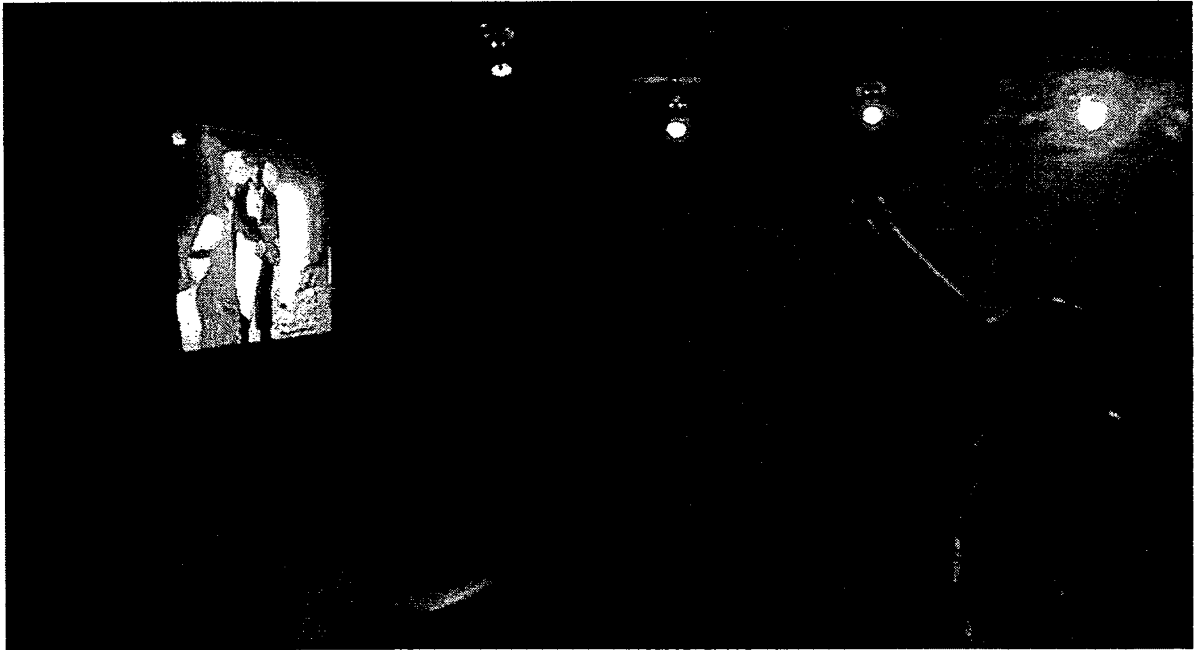
Alternative Narratives 2: Personal Memories and Histories

While a lot of studies focus on the importance of memory in the reconstructions of place, the consideration here for the refashioning and reimagining of site entails not only a reclamation of place, but of ideas about what history is and who decides which memories are most valid and valuable. Alongside projects which introduce local urban variations to national or official story-telling, another important kind of 'memory work,' or artistic intervention which challenges institutional narratives and History-making, is that which is based on individual and personal experience, because "[s]tories about the self are always situated; they have a particular time and place" (Till, 2005, p.14). So while on the one hand history and memory are renegotiated through localities and places, another important element is the valorization of the individual past. In other words, in striving for a democratization of history and cultural memory, an important goal must be its fragmentation through the stories of the very individuals which make up the collective so that individual memories are told, heard, acknowledged, and circulated. In the project by Grzegorz Rogała discussed here the artist is interested in imagined participation in a historical event, while Hubert Czerepok questions the value of personal memory and the way a society decides what is real and authentic in constructions of History.

Grzegorz Rogała

Grzegorz Rogała's *Shadow* (2008) is concerned with the personal connections people make to specific events of powerful and reverberating magnitude. It is an example of a project using interactive approaches to help reshape the memory of certain events and make history more immediate and prescient. Specifically, Rogała is concerned with the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 when citizens of Warsaw organized themselves into a resistance against the Germans, ultimately losing the battle but gaining a place in Polish mythology as martyrs who, with their meager means, tried to resist the powerful German army. While this is a frequently and officially commemorated event in Polish history[v], Rogała's photographic interactive installation takes an unusual approach by questioning the importance of presence in the remembering of historical events. The artist layers projections of archival photographs with images of the viewers looking at the installation. When viewers are still, they only see themselves reflected in the gallery space, but if they make a move, a flash of archival imagery of the Uprising is layered onto the image, creating a fleeting moment in which past and present meet in the mirage of the juxtaposition. In the words of the reviewer Grzegorz Borkowski (2008), "the virtual and ephemeral character of this meeting...awakens a mobilizing need, a desire to search for more contacts with this past" (Test Historyczny section, para.1).





Figures 12-16: Grzegorz Rogała, Stills from *Shadow*. Interactive Projection. Courtesy and © the artist.

The fleeting and momentary nature of the superimposed images becomes a surprising sight, a brief glimpse of oneself in history. By creating windows or portals through which individuals can transport themselves to 1944, Rogała is not only generating some level of curiosity (for the event as well as the technology used to create this effect), but also another way of telling the story of the Uprising. In this interactive environment, by being visually transported in time individuals can for a short instant imagine the historical event as personal memory. As such, Rogała is working to make history palpable, real, personal. Taken out of the history book or commemorative celebrations, the Uprising takes on different meaning, one which can reconnect Poles to their past through personal imagination.

Hubert Czerepok

Personal memory is also the focus of Hubert Czerepok's unconvential projects. While Jakubowicz is dealing with concrete history, Polisiewicz with one that is planned but unrealized, and Rogała is wondering about the personal connections to specific historical events, Czerepok is tackling another kind of history altogether, one that might or might not be real, and that may or may not have happened. On the surface some of his projects like *Strange Tourists* (2007) or *Haunebu* (2008) seem unrelated to the issues discussed here: both explore extraterrestial life, UFOs, and space travel. But underneath the sensationalistic or conspiratorial nature of these works, Czerepok is fundamentally questioning the nature of history and the way it is created, written, propagated, and institutionalized. His interest in how history is manipulated, how the lines between fact and fiction are blurred, and what constitutes the real, are central to the challenges of cultural memory, to inserting alternative stories and narratives, and to pluralizing history. Czerepok is playing with some familiar questions about how history is made, but in choosing to do so using the trope of aliens, he is able to discuss some old and sensitive questions in a new and more open way. In *Strange Tourists*, Czerepok investigates a certain (factual) Jan Wolski from the town of Emilcin who claims he was abducted by aliens on May 10, 1978, and taken on board their spacecraft for various tests. Wolski's story was not believed by the public at the time and he was taken in for psychiatric testing, though he maintained that he was telling the truth. In *Strange Tourists* Czerepok brings together different components to tell the story of this event: photographs taken in Emilcin and a video of a drive through Emilcin along with archival footage on conspiracy

theories; a film made upon Wolski's 'return' in 1978, *Odwiedziny;* the video-document *Unidentified Flying Object* which was based on Wolski's story; a film about the affair from the alien's point of view, and a model UFO (Mleczko, 2007).

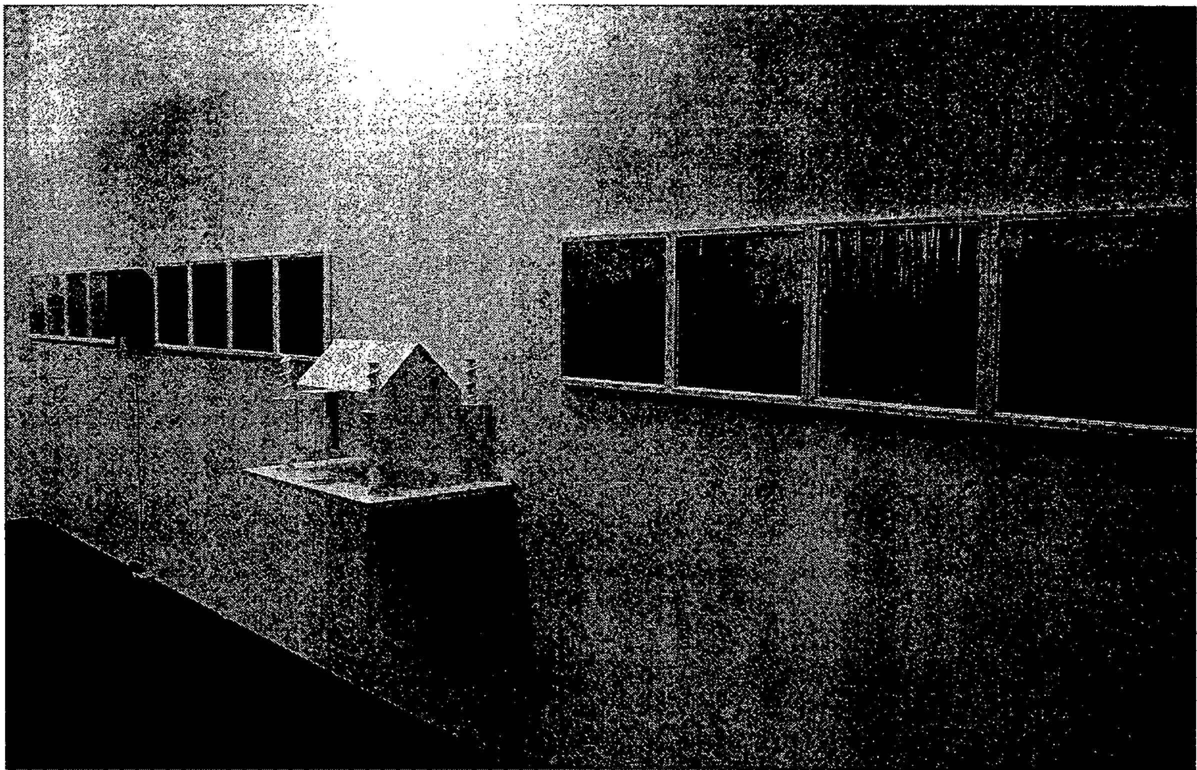


Figure 17. Hubert Czerepok, *Strange Tourists,* 2007, installation view, 2008
Courtesy of ŻAK I BRANICKA, Berlin © the artist.

Figures 18-19. Hubert Czerepok, *Strange Tourists,* 2007, series of 18 photographs, 38 x 38 cm each. Courtesy of ŻAK I BRANICKA, Berlin © the artist.

The installation also includes the comic strip *Przybysze* from 1978 by Grzegorz Rosincki and Henryk Kurta, which retold the event (and that Czerepok read as a child). Clearly depicted in the comic strip were details of the events as recounted by Wolski, including that the spaceship looked like a typical Polish house.

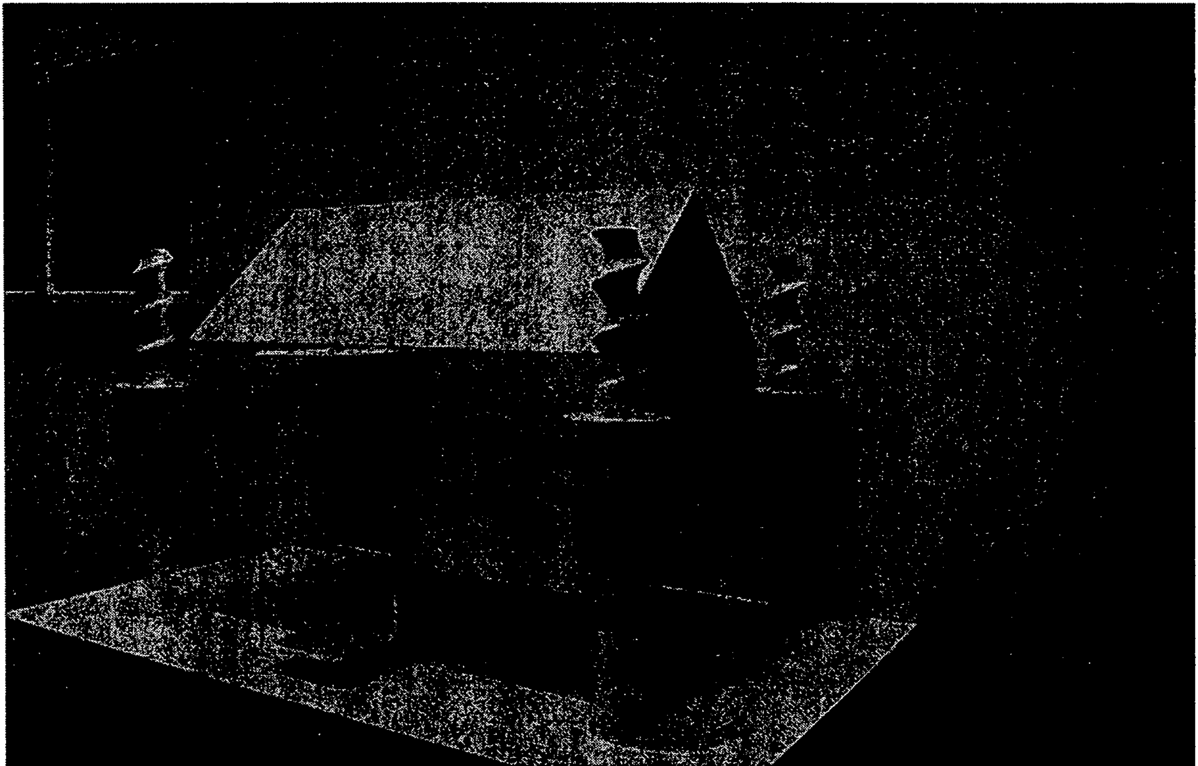


Figure 20. Hubert Czerepok, *Strange Tourists. The Flying Saucer,* 2007, model 1:10 Courtesy of ŻAK I BRANICKA, Berlin © the artist.

What Czerepok is asking in this work is when individuals stop believing in someone else's stories, how they decide what stories, legends, or myths are true when part of the population believes in them and the other does not (Branicka, 2008)? How do they discern what is real when, in terms of autobiography, individual memory often blurs the line between 'fact' and 'fiction' (Kowalczyk, 2010, p. 316)? Through this project,

Czerepok is challenging the spectator not only to question to validity of Wolski's story, but to wonder about the role of the individual and her memory in the making of history. Of course, stories of UFO abductions and the negotiation of their validity are not unique to Poland. But a work like this takes on additional meaning in the Polish environment (especially when the UFO is a Polish house!). It is important as an investigation of history that is not tied up to the War or socialism, to Germans or Russians, but a story about one local man in small village. Wolski's personal experience and story are an example of individual narrative intersecting large-scale national events. How does his story, real or not, fit with the official construction of the past? It is also an interesting reminder of the idea of Poland as a 'country on the moon', in which its own history is often alienated and dismissed by the West as something Other, as not belonging to the European master narrative. Here, Polish houses are transformed into something universal, as a joining of the local site with space itself. In this small and deliberately exaggerated way, Czerepok is questioning what gets constituted as history and by whom, who validates individual narratives and memories, and who decides what is real and what becomes discarded, literally un-believable. How is personal memory understood at a time when the individual was devalued, i.e., in the socialism of the 1970s, but also now, when cultural memory is stronger than the voice of the individual dissenter? Czerepok continues to questions the past through the controversial, conspiratorial, subject of aliens in *Haunebu*.

Haunebu is a work that investigates an alleged flying saucer project developed by Nazis. The idea that German engineers had spaceships was "one of the most thrilling

conspiracy theories of WWII" writes Monika Branicka (2000a, p. 2). Czerepok uses this story to create visualization of myth and legend, trying to present it as much as possible as real (as cited in Branicka, 2008b). The project is based on a mysterious structure in the Polish town of Ludwikowice. No one knows what the structure is for, but legend has it that it was used by the Germans in the construction and testing of their spaceships Haunebu and Vrill. The story goes that at the end of the war all prototypes were sent to a German military base in the Antarctic, and Haunebu was allegedly taken by Americans in 1947 (Branicka, 2008a). Again, this is a project questioning the impact of fact and fiction in the production of history, about "a moment in history, which could have changed the course of events" (as cited in Branicka, 2008b). Like *Wartopia*'s visualization of archival plans, Czerepok is recreating a possible reality, "questioning official versions of history, which are not always true" (as cited in Smith, 2009). Specifically, he is interested in the many versions of truth and the "most secret and ambiguous moments in history" (as cited in Branicka, 2008b) and his search for understanding how history is manipulated, created, and propagated is ultimately central to challenges to cultural memory.

Like Polisiewicz, and to a lesser degree Jakubowicz, Czerepok makes use of archival material to create his installations. But he is especially known for his unconventional and often largely unreliable use of sources. Unlike Polisiewicz who can claim her plans as legitimate, much of Czerepok's research is based on sources found online, further complicating any claims to their authenticity and validity. As Branicka (2008a) writes, "[h]is aim is not to contradict anyone or prove anything. He bluffs, he manipulates the viewer, and he wants to generate uncertainty. Just as one is never sure if

what is commonly believed has in fact taken place, one must also question if what we think is absurd could only be fiction" (p. 4). So while this installation consists of a wooden model, design sketches, and photographs (some clearly doctored) (Smith, 2009), the production of these through the manipulation of online sources and found footage makes this a project about the possibilities of media manipulation in the creation of history.

Figure 21. Hubert Czerepok, *Haunebu,* 2008, c-print, 125 x 125 cm
Courtesy of ŻAK I BRANICKA, Berlin © the artist.

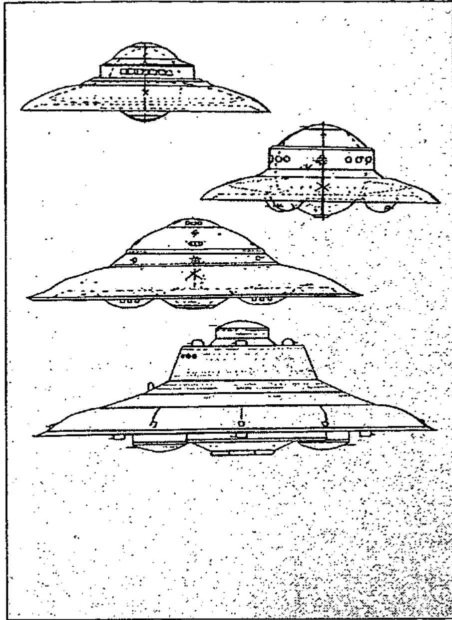
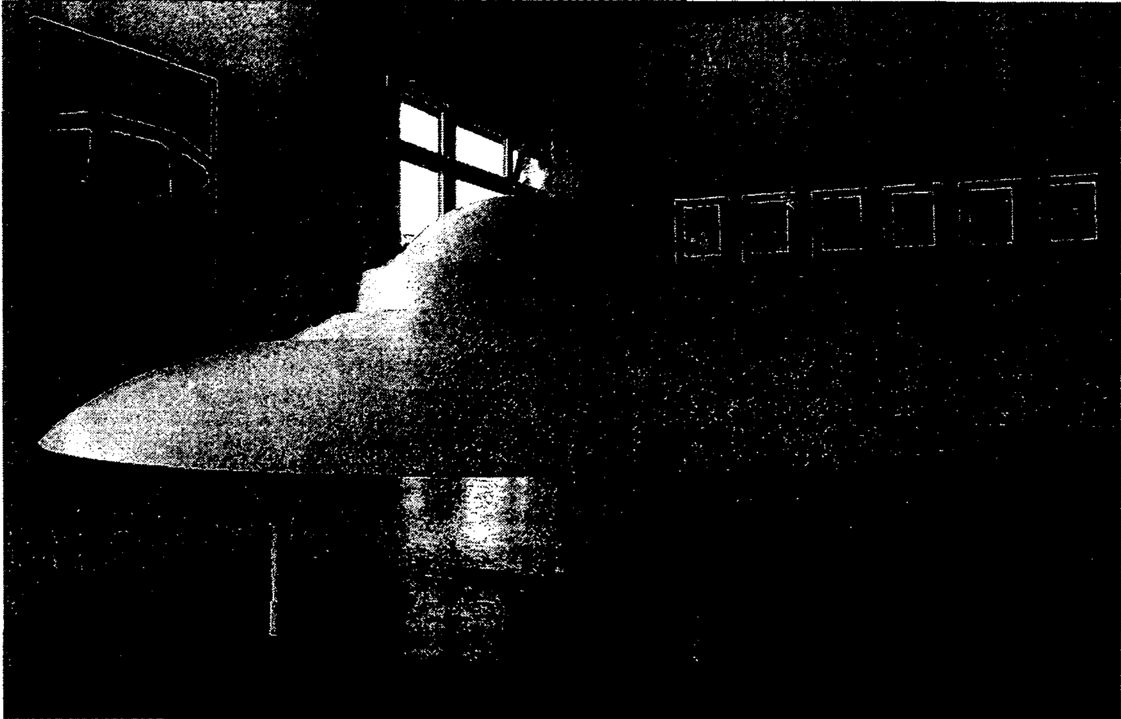
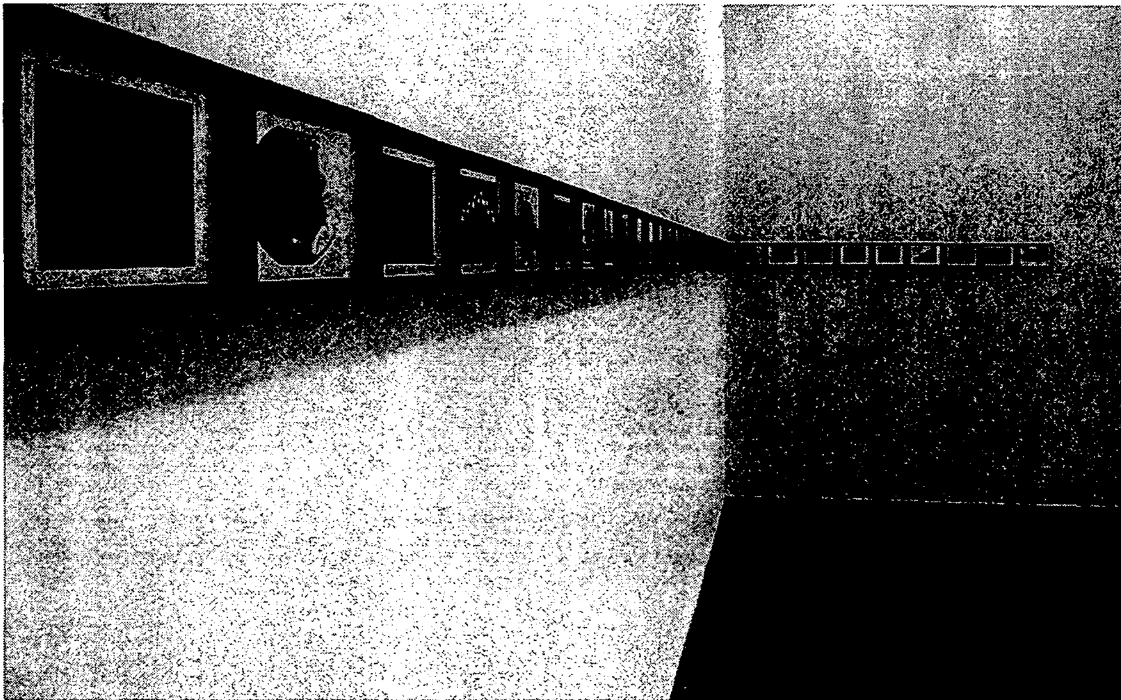


Figure 22. Hubert Czerepok, *Haunebu,* 2008, set of 10 drawings, 42 x 29,5 cm each
Courtesy of ŻAK I BRANICKA, Berlin © the artist.

Figure 23. Hubert Czerepok, *Haunebu,* 2008, set of 46 photographs, 13 x 18 cm each
Courtesy of ŻAK I BRANICKA, Berlin © the artist.





Figures 24-25. Exhibition view Hubert Czerepok, *Haunebu* at ŻAK I BRANICKA, Berlin, 2008
Courtesy of ŻAK I BRANICKA, Berlin © the artist.

In both of these projects, Czerepok is using technology not only as a tool or means of presentation but, through his online research and assemblage of found materials, he is invested in exploring what technology has to offer and how it can be manipulated and tested. More explicitly, in searching for the way history is written, technological forms of information dissemination like the Internet have created new layers of uncertainty and manipulation, blurring the distinction between fact and fiction in interesting and definite ways. Indeed, one critic has written about Czerepok that "the artist assumes the strategy of the pirate, who edits found and reappropriated materials, arbitrarily fitting them in a new web of meanings, but also the strategy of the inexperienced gossiper, who disseminates unnerving whisperings" (Szablowski, 2006, Hubert Czerepok section, para. 1). The very openness of the web, the ability to disseminate anything, real or not, with an equal measure of authority or gravitas, is fundamental to Czerepok's explorations. Indeed, the accessibility of the Internet by anyone, allows for the propaganda of any version of history or memory, and this is a central concern in Czerepok's practice.

Conclusion

These four artists are not creating nostalgic or melancholic works. Rather, theirs are dynamic reflections for the present and future, interventions that seek to maintain a site-specific context outside or beyond a romanticized history. As Huyssen notes, "the act of remembering is always in and of the present" (2003, p. 3), and it is always active and political. These artistic practices reveal a dissatisfaction with complacency and a refusal

to be content with the leap created by silence, working to rescue the invisible and forgotten from collective amnesia and reintroducing it into processes of re-territorialisation. History and memory are, as Jakubowicz has stated, important because they create the foundations of dialogue, confrontation, and the exchange of ideas (as cited in Fuss, 2008). These artists are making public and visible different histories, offering alternatives to official narratives. The mediation of history and memory challenges the cycle of amnestic relations to the past, such that this immediate and palpable regeneration and circulation of communicative, localizing and plural memories is one way to ward off the emptiness, isolation, and disconnect of collective erasure and placeless communities. To reflect and to remember is a stance against a globalized neoliberalism and shows a desire for the self-enfranchisement of the site, and for an understanding of the current Polish landscape in relation, rather than in denial, of its past self. The artists are able to create a window into history, a temporary contact or exchange of past with present in a way that creates a space of reflection, however temporary or fleeting. This space is a momentary event that can be public, and the next chapter further explores how media artists are experimenting with the creation of public spaces.

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[i] Memory-work is a frequently used term that refers to the "process of working through the losses and trauma resulting from past national violence and imagining a better future through place" (Till, 2005, p. 18). The idea of 'memory works' here is a play on this popular term, referring at once to the idea of addressing complicated past through the working through of memory, but also referring to the works themselves, as artistic interventions which make work that is about challenging memory. Therefore 'memory works' can be understood as both process and project.

[ii] The Recovered Territories ("Ziemie Odzyskane") was an official term used by the PRL to describe those parts of pre-war Germany that became part of Poland after WWII. They were called "Recovered" or "Regained" because this land had at earlier times in history been part of the Polish state.

[iii] It is worth noting that there is a substantial tradition with neon in Poland and especially as associated with the urban socialist landscape, something reflected in part by the recent publication of *Warsaw Polish Neon* (Gazeta Wyborca, 2008) and *Polish Cold War Neon* (Mark Batty Publisher, 2011), both by Ilona Karwinska, and the opening of the Neon Museum in Warsaw in 2012.

[iv] Crowley is in particular referring to 'Warszawa Funkcjonalna', a city plan developed by Jan Chmielewski and Szymon Syrkus (1931-1934). The plan proposed that municipal and national boundaries would be dissolved, creating a Warsaw defined by movement through networks—road, rail, and rivers—rather than by fixed borders. In this sense, Crowley writes, "Warsaw was not simply projected as a European city: it was to become Europe itself" (p. 12).

[v] A museum devoted to the Warsaw Uprising opened in 2004 making extensive use of new media.

CHAPTER 4/
Creating Public Space: Media Art Interventions and "Me"

"It is not just about depiction or representation, but about passion, action, intervention and transformation—this is what art can do. It is good for the discussion of public art to recognize this idea of hope."

—Krzysztof Wodiczko (in interview with Youn and Prieto, 2004)

"I don't treat reality like an unchangeable status quo that I have to painfully accept. How we organize the world and the way we coexist in it, depends on us—residents of the apartment blocs, the city, the country, the world..."

—Joanna Rajkowska (in interview with Zmijewski, 2010)

The negotiations of the past in the Polish site continue to be relevant and meaningful even alongside the contemporary shift from the geographic framework of the nation, to the topography of the cosmopolitan city. This is a city where citizens are citizens of the world, "for whom the real place of debate is at once the city agora, but also universal space (Piotrowski, 2010, p. 79). The city-world, or world-city (cosmo: universe; polis: city) has rendered the city a site of the local and transnational, a particular place which reflects the crossing of trajectories, histories, and networks in a way which gives its space a sense of becoming, interaction, and openness that speaks to the plural and simultaneous nature of a globalized society. But while the city has arguably become as significant if

not more important site of identification than the regional or national, and while Poland's urban population has increased from 34% to 62% of the total population from 1946 to 2000 (as cited in Castle & Taras, 2002, p. xiii), there has not been much formal work done on studies of urban structure or landscape in the former Eastern Europe since 1989, a situation that can be attributed to a dedication of the public's (as well as academic) attention on political and economic transformation (Czepczyński, 2008). And yet, since 1989 it is the city that that has benefitted in meaning at the expense of the nation (Piotrowski, 2010, p. 79). Cities that, according the Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2002) exist as "sites of everyday participation, intermingling with others and daily confrontation between the private and the public, between the citizen and institutionalized power" (p. 131). But they are also simultaneously folded into neoliberal modes of organization, in which "there is no room for excess, marginality, unrest or 'dissensus'....Problematic areas do not fit in the picture of a clean, attractive and culturally dynamic city" (Davidts, 2008). But there can be subversion, communication, and agonism in the city, and it can take place in the formation of public spaces. In the words of Rosalyn Deutsche (1996), "how we define public space is intimately connected with ideas about what it means to be human, the nature of society, and the kind of political community we want" so that "supporting things that are public promotes the survival and extension of democratic culture" (p. 269). The processes, systems, and relations of democracy are practiced in public space and nowhere are participation, intermingling, and confrontation more apparent.

This chapter considers what strategies are available to artists in order to challenge the hegemonic appropriation, encroachment, and depoliticization of the urban 'public' space, how indeed they can experiment in the terrain of democracy. To follow-up on Deutsche (1996), "what political issues are at stake in the discourse about art and space" (p. xii)? It will be argued that more than just being symbolically important for representing a new and modern Poland, the public spaces of the city serve vital functions as sites of plurality, dissension, and inclusiveness, made possible through artistic interventions which enable, support, and foreground individual appearance and speech. Without a doubt the questions that emerge from the struggle over urban space are representative and actual extensions of many of the tensions brought on by democratization: between past and present, isolationism and 'Europeanization', nationalism and cosmopolitanism, tradition and progressivism. Put differently, societies are defined, negotiated, and reproduced in their public spaces. And while these are themes and questions that reverberate throughout the spectrum of Polish contemporaneity, the challenge for the new Poland is to create, shape, and promote those spaces that promote democratic values and the diversity of Polish society. In other words, creating spaces that reflect the heterogeneity of a newly democratic society is an essential challenge to past socialist or communist ideas in which public space functioned for decades as a site in which homogeneity and unity were represented and reproduced under the dictates of a totalitarian ideology.

Urban scholars, political theorists, and art historians alike have presented critical artistic practice as an "important dimension of democratic politics" (Mouffe, 2007, p. 5; Deutsche, 1996; Piotrowski, 2010). The appeal of agonism and its easy adaptability to the

needs of the Polish public illustrates the desire for a movement that allows for both visibility and difference. Using case studies from three artists, this chapter considers the ways media art interventions contribute to the production of a democracy, in particular arguing in its use and transformation of the urban public space in functioning as a site of visibility and publicity, contemplation and self-reflection, encounter and confrontation, communication and appearance.

The artists that are considered in this chapter show a desire to produce work that reflects on the nature of urban publicity and the role of the individual in the social and political context of the city-site. The first is Krzysztof Wodiczko (1943–) who, as a pioneer in public new media art interventions since the 1970s, and as an artist who has spoken and written considerably about his work, is a key figure in thinking about the potential of art in urban space. While he has not been a full-time Polish resident since 1976, he remains one of Poland's most renowned artists and, importantly, continues producing work in this region and participating in its artistic communities. Dominik Lejman (1969–), also an established artist who originally trained as a painter, focuses on the material and aesthetic elements of architecture and its public setting, and uses technology as a means to explore and question the role of the spectator as co-creator. Lastly, Aleksandra Wasilkowska (1978–) pushes the idea of public engagement in the "reactive art" project considered here in which she brings together experimental art, science, and technology. She is an artist-architect whose work, regardless of medium, is consistently committed to the exploration of urban space. Together these artists offer

different examples of work that strives to create moments of publicity through interventions which foregrounds explorations of identity, body, and voice.

Public Art in Poland

Public art, in its different guises, is not a recent addition to the urban landscape whether in the form of sculptures or monuments, installations, design elements or interventions. Appropriately, it has a lengthy, varied and rich history within art theory as well as urban studies. The intention here is not to provide a thorough or complete history of ideas about public art, but rather to point to some key shifts of the past few decades to understand what comes next, and to offer clues about how to think about the Polish context. Therefore, while some of this history is based on developments in the West, and there are obvious important differences to be made in regard to the situation in Poland where, in these same modern times, public art was habitually conflated to propaganda, the knowledge learned about the value, meaning, or function of public art in each instance is valuable regardless of its origins. That said, the current theoretical framework for thinking about public art in democratic spaces can be traced to the modern movement of the mid-1960s (Lacy 1995; Kwon, 2004)[i]. Kwon (2004) usefully synthesizes this recent history using three paradigms, or ways of classifying public art. The first she calls the art-in-public-space model. Popular in the mid 1960s-1970s it was primarily interested in placing art in an outdoor setting, so much so that it is only the artwork's placement in an open location that rendered it 'public.' The second paradigm, what she calls the art-as-public-spaces approach embraced design-oriented work that strived to shape the urban

landscape through artistic means. Ultimately, this focus on the utilitarian "prioritized public art's use value over its aesthetic value" (p. 69), pushing it outside the realm of interest for many artists. By the 1980s the third paradigm set in, the art-in-the-public interest model, a term coined by Arlene Raven (1989) which lead to what was described by Suzanne Lacy (1995) as 'new genre public art'. This was art motivated by the production of relationships of engagement, and was "distinguished for foregrounding social issues and political activism, and/or for engaging 'community' collaborations" (Kwon, 2004, p. 60). This was the beginning of site-specific art as a mode of urban intervention. While she challenged the consensus-driven ideals of community, Deutsche (1997) developed and pushed the ideas of site-specificity (1996) calling them an "urban aesthetic, or "spatial-cultural" discourse, which combine "ideas about art, architecture, and urban design, on the one hand, with theories on the city, social space, and public space on the other" (p. xi; Kwon, 2004). In other words, by this stage art that was site-specific continued to be aesthetic, while at the same time necessarily reflecting the context in which it was located (whether a physical location, or, if a discursive site, one that is mobile and unfixed) (Kwon, 2004). This was a public art that was striving to reflect on the plurality and fluidity of space, to challenge the conceptions of finite space and a finite public.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, Polish visual art from the late 1960s onward was given 'freedom' in exchange for remaining apolitical and uncritical (unless it was the official art of the regime, in which case it was blatantly propagandistic), creating a situation where, through the 1970s, "there was no wider criticism of the authorities

expressed in art, and no connections between art and citizenship" (Niziołek, 2010, p. 147). This began to change in the 1980s when groups like the Orange Alternative organizing a series of so-called protest happenings (Misztal, 1992), which "offered a cultural alternative to the dominating order of meanings" (Niziołek, 2010, p. 148) (see Chapter 2). The trend towards performance art alluded to the democratic ideals of public art as serving, reflecting, or engaging the public. Polish sociologist Katarzyna Niziołek (2010) argues that in the studies about art as an element of civil society that emerged during the particular reality of the 1970s and 1980s period, "the link between aesthetics and citizenship...inevitably reduced this kind of engagement either to political opposition, or counterculture" (p. 145). However, she observes the shift since the 1990s as one where art began to be seen as "conceptually or thematically connected to the wider society (i.e., not restricted to the 'art world'), but also, and even more importantly, as participatory and functional, and as such, [as] evolving into a tool of social change in the hands of the more or less organized citizens" (p. 150). While Niziołek characterizes this as Poland's move toward community art, one which in the West began in the 1970s, it is unnecessary to bind or equate a public interest in public art into a project of community building. There is merit in moving away from consensus-building of 'new genre public art' and community-based activity, and rather supporting and promoting agonistic artistic practices which promote the idea that disagreement and plurality are necessary for a healthy democracy in such a way that "public art must disrupt, rather than secure, the apparent coherence of its new urban sites" (Deutsche, 1996, p. xvi). After all, the apparent "coherence" is a manifestation of a hegemonic appropriation of space, one that

is unaccepting of a co-existence of difference (Mouffe, 1993/2005). Public art should illuminate the openness, heterogeneity, and relational quality of space, and challenge notions of it as closed, complete, or unchanging (see Massey, 2005). This, to extend Kwon's formulations, could be called an art-as-publicity, a public art which brings to the surface the plurality of a society and its publics by creating spaces of appearance and communication.

While Polish public art increased in popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, it has experienced a significant reemergence since the 2000s. Artists working in a variety of media have been producing work that has transformed and questioned urban space in a variety of ways, from the problematic to the playful. One famous example is also one of the most iconic works of the 2000s, namely Joanna Rajkowska and her *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue* (2002) project in which she placed a giant constructed palm tree in a central roundabout in Warsaw, right in front of the old Communist party headquarters, now the site of the Warsaw Stock Exchange. The gesture outlived the official exhibition period and has become (at least for now) a permanent and prominent marker of the urban landscape. Some other important artists working in, and celebrated for, their work in the urban public realm would be those like Joanna Warsza (Laura Palmer Foundation), Julita Wójcik, or Grzegorz Klaman (all associated with performance-based interventions). Furthermore, a myriad of special organizations, events and festivals emerged and spread across the country, whether in the shape of local events, such as Urban Legends and Drugie Miasto in Poznań, Art Boom in Kraków, Another City Another Life and Passengers in Warsaw, or Open City in Lublin. Additionally, there have been projects

organized on a (inter)national scale, such as participation since 2003 in the European-wide Night of Museums with events in dozens of cities and towns throughout the country. On the other side of the spectrum are grassroots and academic research, curatorial, and artistic groups and collectives organizing a wide range of activities and programs dedicated to the study of public space. On an institutional level, a prominent example includes the Art, Public Space, and Democracy Department in The Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Communication, which includes among its prominent lecturers both Wodiczko and Wasilkowska. In other words, the subject of the urban (public) landscape has gained popularity and reach within the Polish artistic, cultural, and intellectual realms, and the range and amount of activity suggests a lively and active emergence of public art throughout the country (one indeed deserving of its own study). However, this apparent enthusiasm for urban and public art is somewhat misleading and the public nature of art (whatever its location) in Poland is still very much in question. According to Piotrowski (2010) Poland is one of only two countries in East Central Europe (the other being Russia) in which artists are still, to a degree, 'controlled' by the repressive state apparatus (p. 267). The ongoing problem of censorship by the state is a crippling factor in the development of an art that engages in public debate and culture across topics and without fear or reprimand. The Polish state has continued through the 2000s to exercise its power by censoring works that it deems to be 'obscene', offensive, or otherwise uncomfortable, especially in regard to religion, sexuality, or history (for example Dorota Nieznalska's *Passion* in 2002 and Rafał Jakubowicz's *Arbeitsdisziplin* in 2002). This can be limited to the censorship of the work and thus its removal from a

gallery or event, but can also have deeper repercussions and be manifested in ways which include pressuring curators to the point of their resignation, blacklisting artists, fines, and even imprisonment (in the case of Nieznalska) (Piotrowski, 2005; Piotrowski, 2010). Conservative religious groups, such as those centered around Radio Marija, have gained the political power to assume the role of guardians, in effect rendering the artist and curator subject to their moral compass, but also holding artistic freedom in their grip, ultimately keeping hostage the very notion of freedom of speech central to democracy. The strategy of censorship and the belief that it is the only way of 'protecting' oneself, reflects in part a lack of tradition for protecting the visual arts and a lack of a broadly-conceived culture of debate (Piotrowski, 2010, p. 286). But this is precisely why artists have a critical role to play in Poland at this time, since, along with intellectuals, it is they who

> ...hold dear the ideals of freedom, who feel the discomfort of unfulfilled hope, the discomfort of unfulfilled democracy; intellectuals and artists, who see their place on the agora, in the heart of public debate, whose actions direct the proceeding of agoraphilia (Piotrowski, 2010, p. 287).

The examples here are concerned with work that is not only taking place in public locations, but also that is experimenting with the political potential of urban public space. Put differently, this is an argument for and about public space and the proposition that media art can create moments of publicity and encounter, not simply an exposition of art projects or objects which happen to take place outside the gallery space or that only loosely take into consideration their location in a public space. In other words, this is an exploration of art-as-publicity.

Public Space in the Polish City

A certain kind of thinking has prevailed for a long time in which the public space was articulated through the particular notion of the public sphere, a politicized public space that sought and strived for consensus amidst its members (Habermas, 1962/1989). In this Habermasian construction, the public sphere was a distinct place in which the (male) bourgeoisie could discuss matters of 'public' or 'common' interest. But this space was "always necessarily an ideal" that has since been widely criticized for its patriarchy, idealized abstractions, and lack of contribution by sub- or counter- cultural publics (Fraser, 1990; Kwon, 2002). As Bruce Robbins (1993) suggested, such a space perhaps has only ever existed in the imagination, and we must instead move "away from the universalizing ideal of a single public and [attend] instead to the actual multiplicity of distinct and overlapping public discourses and public spheres" (p. xii). This idea of pluralizing and multiplying the concept of the public sphere was not new to Robbins, and can be traced to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's critique of Habermas in *Public Sphere and Experience* in 1972. Since then, there has been a push to understand alternative public spheres, counterpublics, and the notion of one public has been problematized and contested by scholars like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), Nancy Fraser (1990) and Deutsche (1996). The argument is that the consensual space, as a modernist and socialist creation, does not reflect or speak to the so-called postmodern paradigm of fragmentation, or in this case to the spirit of change that is driving Polish aspirations of freedom, individuality, and heterogeneity that are foundational to its post-communist democracy. In a rudimentary sense, this means that what and who is hidden or

muted must be made visible and heard so that there can be actual publicity. It is in this that lies the power of public art in contemporary Poland: to engage in the production of sites of appearance and communication for the plurality of Polish publics.

Plurality

Habermas argued that there is one public and that it has shared interests. However, this idea of the public, one composed of the bourgeoisie, of a male segment of the population of a certain socio-economic status, is fundamentally an exclusionary space: while it presumes to work for a larger public interest, it is *their* interest that is construed as that of the 'common' good. There have been countless critiques of Habermas's original ideas since their publication, and one of the most resonant is this inability to account for any other kind of publics, from women to marginalized groups because of its "assumption that the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward greater democracy, and that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics" (Fraser, 1990, p. 62). It is here where the ideas of Negt and Kluge (1972), Fraser (1990), or Massey (2005) are particularly fruitful, as they propose ways of thinking about the public as comprised of many publics, one reflexive of the plurality of any society. Fraser's (1990) feminist critique is for instance especially concerned with placing women into the public discourse, and describing how a public realm can also account and include their interests. Taken up by Mouffe (2000/2009) in her theory of radical democratic agonism discussed below, what is at stake in the idea of pluralism is "the legitimation of conflict and

division, the emergence of individual liberty and the assertion of equal liberty for all" (p. 19). Plurality is a belief in not only the existence of differences, but in their necessary co-existence in any democracy without the attempt to unify or homogenize. But, as Mouffe (2000/2009) notes, plurality does not mean that there is no 'we'; indeed, there is no value in extreme types of pluralism which refuse to construct "a collective identity that would articulate the demands found in the different struggles against subordination" (p. 20). In other words, the argument for pluralism is not the same as the one for outright individualism.

Inclusion

Underlying and implicit in the argument for plurality is one of inclusiveness. Rather than exclude individuals or groups, inclusiveness is rather an attack on the exclusionary methods of the bourgeois public sphere. In his study on agoraphilia[ii] in the art and democracy of post-communist Europe, Piotrowski (2010) calls attention to one of the biggest challenges for the formation of a public space and public life in Poland by turning to what Arendt called the right to have rights (p. 10), a practiced freedom of speech, and ultimately for the acceptance and equality of 'otherness' (p. 264-5). He is pointing to the continued exclusion of certain groups within the public realm of Polish politics and culture (for example gay and queer communities which are not readily accepted by the religious right). Because there continue to be many marginalized communities with unequal rights or lack of visibility, it has become especially relevant that Polish spaces work to include alternative, minority, or subaltern identities in such a way that equality

becomes not only embraced on principle, but that it is reflected in the construction of the Polish public, as one which is diverse in sexual orientation, religion, political beliefs, etc. As Mouffe (2000/2009) has argued, the elimination of exception as to who can be included in the agora is fundamental to the upholding of public space and requirement or prerequisite of democratic organization. Democratic public space by definition must be one of plurality and inclusivity. Lastly, there is one more characteristic which describes the relationship between individuals and publics in a radical democracy, one which argues for a way of organizing that supports a 'citizenship from below' and that challenges the ideologically-driven search for consensus: agonism.

Agonism

Since her 1985 work with Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe's has persevered in her argument that a democratic plurality must be expressed in the form of an 'agonistic struggle', that this is in fact "the core of a vibrant democracy" (2007, p. 3)[iii]. Building on the ideals of plurality and inclusion is the proposition that the way to organize this polyphony, to create a "healthy democratic process," is not through consensus or compromise, but through "a vibrant clash of political positions and an open conflict of interests" (Mouffe, 1993/2005, p. 6). Agonism (unlike antagonism) is a productive tension that is at the heart of the democratic process, one without which democracy is not fulfilled or practiced. This proposition that that there should *not* be the expectation of agreement is in radical opposition to the ideals of deliberative democracy suggested by Habermas and others (for example John Rawls), which are based on a belief that a public

can work only in so far as it is able to decide upon rational consensus. But, for Mouffe (2000/2009), consensus "always entails some form of exclusion" and can only lead to "apathy and disaffection with political participation" (p. 104). Deutsche (1996) has also articulated this position, and stated that "conflict, far from the ruin of democratic public space, is the condition of its existence" (p. xiii). The argument for agonism, for the benefits and productivity of plurality and as a process that supports the values of democratic modes of organizing, are especially resonant with Polish cultural critics, artists, and scholars, who have embraced the proposition of an agonistic public space (Wodiczko, 2003; Wasilkowska, 2009; Piotrowski, 2010). Dissensus provides critiques of the status quo of liberal democracy and late capitalism and the inequalities they perpetuate, as well as offering "its own utopia based not so much on tolerance (which always has a hierarchical and acquiescent character) but on equal opportunity and coexistence" (Piotrowski, 2010, p. 11). And like plurality, agonism does not preclude a collective identity that can articulate political demands. These three characteristics—pluralism, inclusion, agonism—are the ingredients of democratic organization, and media art practice acts to promote and sustain these conditions in the generation of spaces of appearance and communication.

The Space of Appearance

To Mouffe's suggestion that public space, as the site of democratic agonism, is a kind of battleground, it is useful to add the ideas of Doreen Massey (2005), who provides much insight into the discussion of plurality as expressed, negotiated, and manifested within

space. Her argument is about space as a place of opportunity for plurality where, rather than existing as a container for constituted, static, and fixed identities, it functions as a site of heterogeneous and relational identities, and political subjectivities. In other words, there is a coexistence between difference/heterogeneity/multiplicity/plurality and space which render the latter changeable and fluid, and a process of continuous negotiation and responsiveness (Deutsche, 1996). As such, Deutsche (1996) also argues that "public space is not a preconstituted entity created for users, that it arises only from practice (or counterpractice) of use by those groups excluded from dominated space" (p. xvi). If space is a fluid process or practice, it can also be understood as an event (Massey, 2005). But how does the idea of this kind of fluid event-space act upon the practice of a productive agonistic plurality? The proposition here is that prerequisite for the plural and agonistic space is that it act as a space of appearance and communication. Appearance, that to appear, be seen and heard, is, as argued by Arendt, a requirement of political action. It is an essential step in the development of the Polish public space where privacy, uniformity, and secrecy have only recently been challenged and replaced by the emergent notions of the individual and the fragmented public. Arendt (1958/1998) defines the space of appearance as one which is, "in the widest sense of word, namely, the space where I appear to others as they appear to me" (p. 198). In this space Arendt argues that individuals reveal 'who' they are as opposed to 'what' they are. The space of appearance is not fixed to a location but rather is always potentially there wherever people gather, "but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever" (p. 199). In other words, the space of appearance is the potential of public space, not an intrinsic quality; a public space can

be one of appearance for only a moment. Like space itself, it is a state, one that is fluid and temporary, and which must be created, not taken for granted. Moreover, by suggesting that "individuals only act insofar as they appear before others" (Barbour & Zolkos, 2011, p.1), that they can only exist in the plurality, Arendt is placing a tremendous importance on seeing each other and creating spaces where this interaction or relation can occur. The potential of the media art intervention in the urban space is to materialize this potential and reconstitute this site from being one of control, and reappropriate it as one of freedom, plurality, and solidarity. This is one way, the space of appearance, that the Polish public space serves an important democratic and political function. This other is as a space of communication.

The Space of Communication

If agonism and plurality are necessary for developing Poland's democracy then it becomes all the more imperative to examine how individuals interact and communicate with one another. When John Durham Peters (2000) suggests that communication must be understood in the sense not of communion or connection, but as a project of "reconciling self and other" (p. 9), his idea of reconciliation is not about coming to an agreement, consensus or uniformity, about becoming 'one', but rather about recognizing otherness and difference (p. 29-31). As he puts it, communication is a "dance of differences" and not a "junction of spirits" (p. 65). Peters is not then proposing the deliberative communication of Habermas which strives for rational consensus, but rather calls for communication as the means through which we can express and understand

plurality, in which we can know the other. Mouffe might take a skeptical stance towards communication as a means to overcome the chasm between individuals since it could be construed as a desire or idealization of agreement. But Peters' intention here is more complex. He suggests that the bridging of the gap or chasm as a means of understanding the other—and ultimately treating her with justice and care—is not equivalent to agreeing or consolidating with the other. For Peters communication is in fact what we do because there is difference and otherness, something part of "the task of establishing a peaceable kingdom in which each may dwell with the other" (p. 268). How is the polity formed despite or through plurality? There is no other way, argues Peters, than to begin by communicating. Here it is suggested that artistic interventions can generate the bridges, albeit in temporary and ephemeral spurts, and can offer the spaces or moments of presence that Peters calls for as necessary to bridging these chasms. Presence, like appearance, echoes the importance of the public space, a site in which a society can see and hear the members of its plurality, and provide a space for its publicity. The artists discussed here produce, in this sense, communicative works in which not only the participant and artist enter into a conversation (sometimes unknowingly), but also in which there is some communication with the audience that questions the nature of the (Polish) public and the Polish site. Their interventions offer an instrumental way of not only producing public spaces of appearance, but also in generating communicative exchanges that are required in building a democracy.

Public projections have become a popular ways to animate the urban landscape. Indeed, one of the most pervasive uses or manifestations of media art have been

projections, whether contained in the gallery space or in an outside space. The projection is powerful in its ability to exist on a variety of contained and open screens, juxtaposing a moving image with a myriad of fixed backdrops. The previous chapter discussed how this can be a used to layer different temporalities. Here, the projection is an example of something else, as a way of literally projecting individuals onto the public, of making them visible within the terrain and architecture of the city.

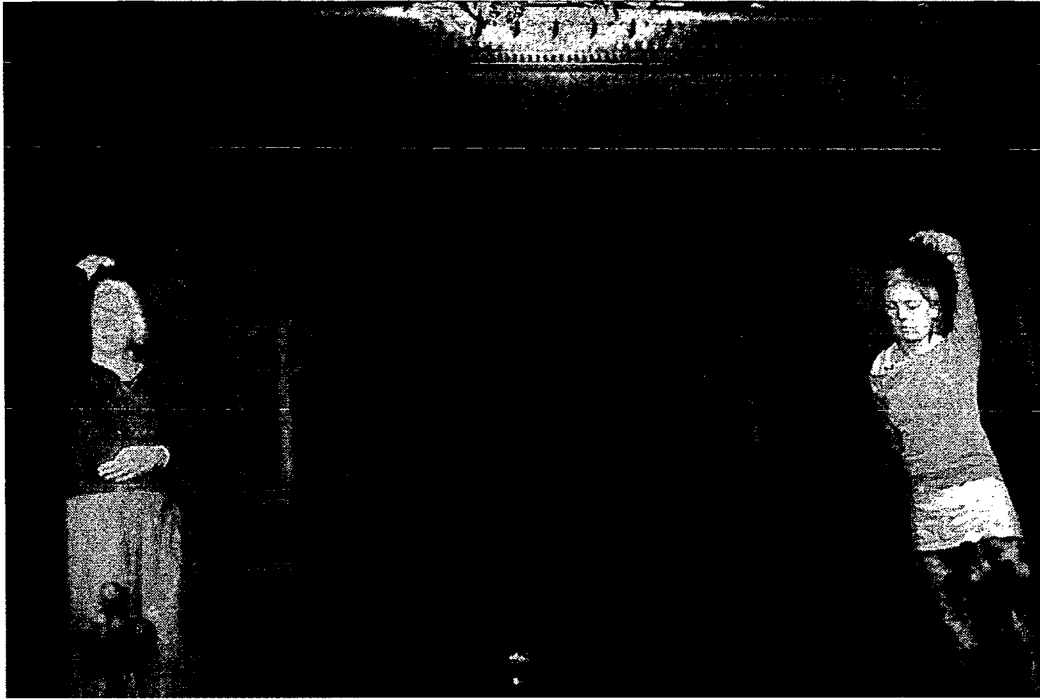
Krzysztof Wodiczko

Throughout his career, Krzysztof Wodiczko has maintained a consistent commitment to presenting his work in public settings and to participating in the conversation on the creation of public space within an urban context. Wodiczko's projections create theatrical moments that animate the materiality of architecture. His goal has been to treat structures (existing or made) like vehicles that generate or inspire transmission and communication often through audience involvement and participation, and a healing between people as well as between people and their environment (Wodiczko, 2003). He has done numerous projects exploring these ideas, including *City Hall Tower* (1996) project in Kraków, Poland and the *Tijuana Projection* (2001) in Mexico, among many others. In 2005 the Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw conducted a retrospective exhibit of Wodiczko's work entitled *Monument Therapy*. The term 'monument therapy' was not new for Wodiczko, and it brought together two central themes in his work: the memorial (monument, memory) and therapy (the process of healing, participation). In these works, Wodiczko's projections of whole or partial bodies onto architectural façades, combined

with spoken testimonies "disrupts our traditional understanding of the functions of public space and architecture" (as cited in Art:21, 2009). Specifically, "he challenges the silent, stark monumentality of buildings, activating them in an examination of notions of human rights, democracy, and truths about the violence, alienation, and inhumanity that underlie countless aspects of social interaction in present-day society" (Art:21, 2009). One of the components of this exhibit, and of particular interest here, is the projection especially created for this occasion, which used the exterior wall of Zachęta as a screen.

Warsaw Projection (2005) was concerned with domestic violence towards women in Polish society. The projection consisted of images of Polish women, one projected on each side of the main door of the museum. They were heard recounting their stories of personal trauma and violence, their subsequent guilt, silence, and secrecy, and ultimately their inability to live harmoniously with others as a result of the harm inflicted upon them. This public projection was a unique opportunity for these women to be seen and heard in such a way that "what normally remains in darkness was brought into the light; the secret was made public" (Bartelik, 2006). In Poland like in many other places, the subject of domestic violence is one that is "usually kept hidden as a 'private matter' rather than dealt with as a serious problem" (Bartelik, 2006). Indeed, as Fraser (1990) discusses, it has only recently been considered a matter of common concern, "and thus a legitimate topic of public discourse" (p. 71). A project like this one by Wodiczko helps in the creation of the subaltern counterpublic, which brings out its concern from the private and intimate to the realm of the public. Put differently, the inclusion of women as public is one example or signal indicating the emergence of a pluralization of 'the public'

(Fraser, 1990). According to the artist, this mode or presentation, where the story is mediated and presented through the projection, offers a particular experience for the viewer, one which makes it "much easier to accept [the women] for what they're trying to say…than, for example, listening to someone speak directly" (as cited in Art:21, 2009). As viewers, we are not only seeing the women tell their stories, but we also hearing their voice, something which renders them 'real' or potentially active as members of a democracy. The spectacle of the projections amplifies the message, and is opposed to the way the stories of these women (and many like them) are habitually silenced or unspoken, hidden or denied.



Figures 26-28: *Warsaw Projection*, 2005. Public video projection at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland. Organized in conjunction with the retrospective exhibition *Monument Therapy* © Krzysztof Wodiczko. Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York.

The transformation of the projection into testimony makes this a space of communication that provides the opportunity for speech and voice, as well as for visibility. As Jane Mansbridge has suggested, "subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard" (as cited in Fraser, 1990, p. 64). It is Arendt (1958/1998) who argued that speech is what ultimately makes a person a political being, and "corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals" (p. 178). In other words, to speak is to appear and act, to have freedom and be a political being; "participation means being able to speak 'in one's own voice'" (Fraser, 1990, p. 69). Wodiczko (Phillips, 2003) likens his emphasis on speech, which developed during his career, to Michel Foucault's (2001) ideas on fearless speech. Foucault examined the role of the public speaker "without who democracy cannot exist" and how this 'fearless speaker' participates in "the agora or contemporary public space" (as cited in Phillips, 2003, p. 34). Wodiczko finds an affinity with these ideas which support a belief that speakers must be able to tell the truth, that there must be 'fearless speaking' in a democracy. Alternately, Piotrowksi's (2010) analysis of Wodiczko's earlier work can also be applied here in which he uses Georgio Agamben's language, whereby in the act of speaking, in the architechtonic agora, there is a metamorphosis of "bare life" into political life, or else the citizen's life (p. 240). It is precisely those that have been marginalized and traumatized who are "the most important speakers in a democracy. They should speak because their have directly experienced its failures and indifference" (as cited in Phillips, 2003, p. 36). *Warsaw*

Projection is one example where Wodiczko creates an environment and space for speaking, and produces situations in which participants trust him and his vision to open up in a moment of 'fearless speaking,' of becoming active citizens with a voice and actors in political life.

The *Warsaw Projection* was only featured as a one-time presentation in November 2005, subsequently being shown as a video document inside of the gallery, "as if it had simply passed through the walls and arrived indoors" (Bartelik, 2006, p. 304). Bartelik (2006) makes an acute observation when he states that "as the exhibition enfolded, moving from its vertical display suggestive of monuments to a position of horizontality, Wodiczko's critical stance was, in effect, internalized by the building—turning the museum into a site of public awareness rather than aesthetic contemplation" (p. 304). This was another example of the fleetingness of Wodiczko's work, and indeed, of the 'effect' his work produces. For Wodiczko, the city functions much as a theatre, in which the production of public space is ephemeral, only generated when all the elements that are necessary, briefly come together. And it is only

> ...by understanding the theatrical ideology that forms the space or stage on which such acts of revelatory communication must occur, [that] we may produce, if only for a moment, a public space. But it is one that, like a phantom, immediately disappears, leaving us continually in pursuit of it" (Wodiczko, 2003, p. 67).

The ephemeral quality of media art projects plays into and upon this experiment in creating moments and experiences. Rather than producing static structures like memorials or monuments which become absorbed into a space and can easily become unnoticed

elements of a landscape, Wodiczko's work, like many others who produce projections, creates spectacular projects that necessarily have to compete with the spectacular nature of the city as an aesthetic environment (Art:21, 2009). Arguably, the creation of spectacular endeavors is one way to create momentary public spaces, but so is the very ephemerality of the media art form which gives the viewer a sense that what she is witnessing is unique and temporary, that in a sense she is part of an experience and moment which cannot be recreated exactly in the same way. There is some element of solidarity attached to witnessing a media art projection in the city, in which spectators are experiencing something together, and in that brief moment are united by the spectacular.

Wodiczko's understanding of public spaces is inextricable from his views on the nature of the city. He has wondered whether cities are "environments that are trying to say something to us? Are they environments in which we communicate with each other? Or are they perhaps the environments of things that we don't see, of silences, of the voices which we don't, or would rather not, hear" (as cited in Art:21, 2009). For Wodiczko, the places of real interest in the city are "hidden in the shadows of monuments and memorials," and it is the voices that are there that should we should be listening to. It is for this reason that Wodiczko strives to bring those usually marginal, forgotten, or oppressed voices and experiences not only *into* public space, but *of* it, as a way of animating it, "in a kind of inspiring and provocative way—maybe in a way of protest" (as cited in Art:21, 2009). This desire to make public that which was private, hidden, or brushed aside in a society is one way of challenging the institutionalizing of the consensual, exclusionary city, of bringing to light its fundamentally undemocratic

inequalities through a kind of group therapy. As the artist says of his role, "sometimes I'm thinking of myself as...someone who protects the process in which others can develop and create something in an atmosphere of trust, develop the ability to cope with life though often damaged and wounded by their experiences" (as cited in Art:21, 2009). Using this approach, Wodiczko's work makes important reflections about notions of democracy. While the artist tends to humbly shy away from a single theoretic allegiance, ("they are not systematically organized in my head because I am not a theorist"), he makes intricate and thoughtful connections between public space, democracy, and public art (as cited in Youn & Prieto, 2004). Specifically, Wodiczko has described himself at the convergence of three theories or concerns: Mouffe's agonistic democracy, the ethico-politics of Michel Foucault, and the psycho-politics of Judith Herman (Art: 21, 2009). In Mouffe's idea of 'dissensus' or agonism, Wodiczko finds power in the nature of disagreement, which "acknowledges and exposes social exclusions" (as cited in Youn & Prieto, 2004). But to these ideas Wodiczko infuses some other elements that better reflect the ideas emergent from his practice, which cannot be captured or contained within theory (Youn & Prieto, 2004). One such infusion is through Foucault's ethics of the self and Other as characterized by the already mentioned idea of "fearless speaking," and the other, a therapeutic theory of alignment in which public art functions as a sort of therapy for individuals as much as for society. Here he leans on the expertise of trauma specialist and therapist Herman, who advocates "a psychotherapeutic recovery through 'reconnection'... [and] emphasizes the role of public truth-telling and testimony" (as cited in Youn & Prieto, 2004). Together, these ideas provide a good way of

understanding Wodiczko's ambitions and projects, and his commitment to the creation of public spaces through his experiential projections which reveal otherwise hidden and traumatic aspects of a society.

Dominik Lejman

While there might be some similarities between the work of Wodiczko and Lejman outwardly—both create large-scale public projections—the impulse and motivations behind their work, as well as their techniques, offer very different types of new media art interventions. Where Wodiczko is committed to creating work which treats architectures as site of a potential public space, stripping it away of its purely aesthetic or superficial qualities, Lejman takes advantage of these very aesthetic qualities, pushes them to their limit, and through projections rewrites and rewires the meanings, histories, and politics typically ascribed to certain structures. He has worked in a variety of spaces—hospitals (*Little Discoveries*, 2003-4), cathedrals (*Breathing Cathedral*, 2005), and gardens (*Gardens*, 2008)—and his large body of work offers numerous examples of his public interventions, but one will be discussed in detail here: *It Is Enough To Go For a Walk* (2008).

Dominik Lejman was trained as a painter and his work has always retained certain qualities, elements and concerns from this 'traditional' form. Indeed, he has said that "it is not necessary to paint with a brush in order to be a painter" and continues to think of himself as such regardless of the tools and materials he is using (as cited in Gorządek, 2004, para. 9; personal communication, May 22, 2010). Some of his early new media

work (e.g. *Powerprayer*, 1998) was specifically concerned with juxtaposing and layering painting and projection, pushing the material qualities of both in a sort of formal confrontation, what Gorządek (2004) has called "electronic paintings" or "incorporated pictures" (para. 6). This interplay is one reason Ronduda (2005) has characterized Lejman's work as a "specific oscillation between the elements characteristic of the gallery 'white cube' and the cinematographic 'black box.'" Lejman himself has described his interest in the filmic experience by reflecting on "the specific moment in the cinema when, after the film ends, there are the closing credits, and people who get up see their own shadows on the screen" (Gorządek, 2004, para. 13). For Lejman this is an interesting moment because the viewer is jolted from being the passive observer into becoming part of the space of spectacle; the show has finished and all that is left is "a virtual crowd of individuals hypnotized by their own loneliness" (as cited in Szablowski, 2006, para 6.). At that particular moment the viewer is part of the screen as an ephemeral and ghostly presence. Lejman is inspired by moments like these in which the spectator is reflected or projected back on to the screen, becoming an integral part of the spectacle, and for whom the work becomes lived experience. Whether working in a gallery space or in public setting, whether hospitals, gardens, cathedrals, or city streets, one of the most continuing themes or concerns in Lejman's work is the spectator, and more precisely, the "surface between spectators and what they observe" (Gorządek, 2004, para. 9). In the communication with the spectator the "structure becomes dynamic and open and the creation process has practically no end" (Gorządek, 2004, para. 13), and the work "does not have a clean delineation between center and periphery, between the receiver and the

painting, between the space of the projection and real space" (Ronduda, 2005). This very process, Lejman states, is a political reflection on the manipulation of the spectator. The delay in transmission that is programmed in the projection of the spectator back onto the screen, has, Lejman suggests "political connotations. Firstly, it says something about responsibility. We did something a moment ago and now we have to see it, suffer the consequences. Secondly, it is a basic assortment of technical means used by the censors" whereby even when we are watching 'live' programming there is in fact a 15-second delay between filming and transmission (as cited in Gorządek, 2004, p. 13; personal communication, May 22, 2010). In other words, in Lejman's use of the 'delay' technique, the viewer sees himself as manipulated through the mediation process, something which can at once cause some self-reflection, but also reflection on the recording mechanisms which 'caught' him and 'used' him. There is no turning back for the viewer, and once she is filmed she has entered a relationship from which she cannot escape, and which creates a specific problem for her (Wasilewski, 2008). This integration, often through a critique of surveillance technologies, of the public in his work, and as integral to his projects, makes the work by their very structure and design, by the integration of the 'viewer' as a sometimes unwilling and unknowing participant and 'co-creator,' public. But while Lejman deliberately integrates the spectator and thus comments on the nature of audience participation or manipulation, the spectator is also fundamentally of interest to Lejman as an individual. For Lejman is concerned with the everyday rhythms and patterns which individuate the person vis-à-vis the rest of society, the moment an individual, through

their rituals of the everyday, can recognize herself as such "before melting away in the soothing beauty of statistical abstraction" (as cited in Ronduda, 2005).

It Is Enough To Go For a Walk (2008) took place in Warsaw's Old Town over the course of a few days. A camera was installed at Saint Anna's church, located in a popular area for tourists as well as locals. During the day people walking around Saint Anna's were filmed, while in the evening these images were projected at the base of Zygmunt's Column, a large open-space that is a focal and meeting point in the Old Town a few steps away from Saint Anna's (the delay in this case lasting a few hours at least). Each day more people were unknowingly recorded (i.e., under surveillance), and in the evening their images were projected on top of those that were there already, until, on the final evening of the project, all the people who had walked there were 'present.' In this case the delay between the capture of the image and its projection was not "an interactive gadget but serves the purpose of reflection" (as cited in Wasilewski, 2008). It is somewhat disconcerting to know that one's captured image can be broadcast later and repeatedly, even when one is no longer there and no longer an 'active' participant or spectator, or even present. This collection of projected individuals created, according to Ewa Gorządek (2004) "a monumental moving pattern that consisted of thousands of small histories" (para. 16). But Lejman did not strive to make coherent stories, or to tell the stories of the individuals he captures (as does Wodiczko). He says, "I run away from narration, try to find places to stop" (as cited in Wasilewski, 2008). Rather than providing a forum for speech, Lejman creates the possibility of fleeting visibility, of being seen.

Figure 29. Dominik Lejman. *It Is Enough To Go For a Walk*, 2008. Projection view. Courtesy and © the artist.

The title of the project perhaps indicates that it is enough to go on a walk in order to be made visible and make public that which otherwise would be private—ourselves, our bodies. Old Town does not just consist of old monuments, buildings and structures—it is not merely historical nostalgia (since the 'old' here is really all a reproduction from the originals destroyed during WWII)—but it is also alive in the present, and lived in the everyday by all the people who pass through it and the relations they produce. Indeed, it is enough to go for a walk through Old Town to make it a place of today, to reclaim the site of contemporary Warsaw. Moreover, for Lejman this project offers Varsovians the opportunity to remember that public space can be used for other purposes than advertising, and that art does not need to have a purpose, to sell anything, or any version of truth (cited in Wasilewski, 2008; personal communication, May 22, 2010). At the

same time, the layering and interconnecting of these individual lives, the retransmission of their images, creates a projection which reflects recurrent themes for Lejman. In a way, showcasing all the superimposed individuals without their stories or their voices, accentuates the problems of a contemporaneity in which no matter of visibility can replace the publicity associated with voice and communication. And yet, the project remains powerful in its involvement and critique of the participant-spectator, and in its display of plurality, if only superficially. The ephemeral experience between spectator and work, is reminiscent of Wodiczko's belief in the fleeting nature of public space. Though manifesting it in different ways and with different commitments, both Wodiczko and Lejman are working to create a moment in the urban landscape which creates a reflection upon a society and create explorations of the individual in society: while Wodiczko is more concerned with telling the stories that are habitually unspoken, Lejman's interest in the moment in which the individual is caught and 'illuminated' from the rest of the crowd or spectacle. In this particular project, Lejman works to change the way we perceive certain spaces, to challenge our ideas of what a space is and could be. *It Is Enough To Go For a Walk* arguably produced this kind of experience, even if on a small scale, even if it was only that, "simply put, [people] were looking at the sidewalk differently" (as cited in Wasilewski, 2008).

Aleksandra Wasilkowska

While projections have become regular features of artistic interventions in the urban landscape, there are other kinds of media art that can engender different kinds of

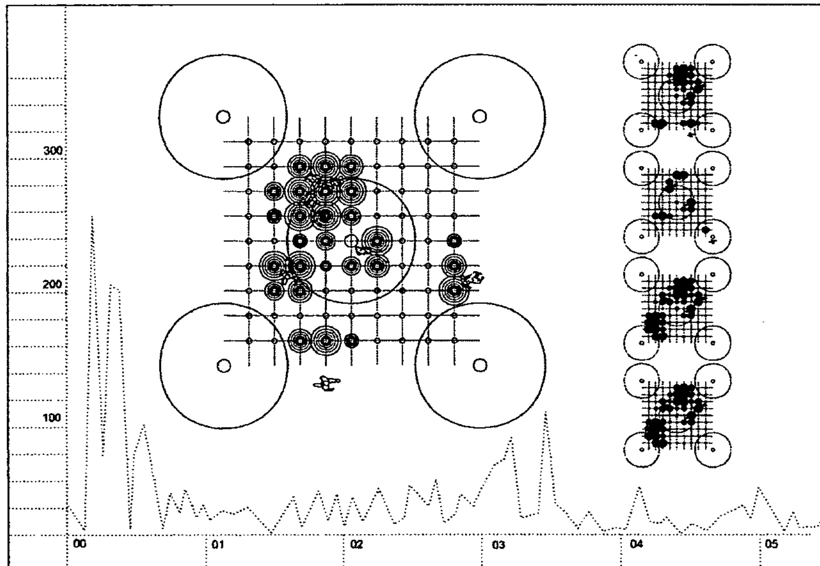
interactions and experiences. One in particular that offers some innovative theoretical propositions is sensorial work, or what Christiane Paul (2008b) calls "reactive art", a term "commonly applied to projects that require no direct interaction but instead 'read' the viewers' presence or movements—primarily through video recognition software—and react to them" (p. 62). As a type of interactive art, the projects using these tools create a particular kind of interaction with the audience, one in which the audience's body is literally integrated into the production of art. From being projected, to being 'sensed' and causing a reaction, this kind of work renders individual participation essential, and by doing so it underlines the importance of the individual body in the environment, natural and human-made.

Artist and architect Aleksandra Wasilkowska's work is a reflection of her ideas of the city as a nonlinear emergent system. Her effort has been to understand the ways the city can exist as an organism that is able to integrate the bottom-up activity characteristic of the city. She asks the practical questions about how to enact and plan the city of plurality and agonism, and tries to visually understand, if and how Warsaw could exist as a process of continuous coexistence and negotiation between down-top and bottom-up initiatives. Wasilkowska (2009) suggests that cities that develop in ways strictly adhering to a masterplan, to top-down planning, are often stiff and sterile, and "stifle the potential of heterogeneity" and proposes instead that what is needed is an institutionalized space of negotiation, one based on the "rubbing together of all potential actors, including nonhuman ones" (p. 18-19). Rather than seeing urban activity as chaotic and unstructured, Wasilkowska finds patterns and rhythms that can provide clues about the

larger attitudes, behaviors, or movements of individuals, crowds, and publics. Like Lejman, she explores the individual's movement in the city, and the potential of this activity, or, in other words, the way in which the individual can be rendered political through an understanding of her movements in urban space.

One key concern for Wasilkowska is to challenge the relation between center and periphery, to propose a way of organizing a plural and equal society in a distributed way. In a 2009 reflection on her project *Em_Wwa 1.0*, she points to slime mould to think about the ways individuals (like slime mould cells) can exist and survive as separate units but can come together, without any directive from a central body, as a unified larger organism when it is beneficial to do so. Wasilkowska uses this example to illustrate the adaptability of a system based on communication and collective intelligence, one that does not require a central 'brain' or nervous system (p. 19). She also hints at the work of philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, and especially his *Spheres* project (the three volumes consisting of *Bubbles*, *Globes*, and *Foam*). In this expansive rewriting of history through the concept of spheres, Sloterdijk suggests that the bubble is the space in which all individuals inhabit and, when joined with others, become foam, a structure that is comprised of many independent and self-reliant units of bubbles. This is not unlike the organism of slime mould, whereby each unit (bubble; individual) is an independent unit that can self-organize (foam; plurality). In her focus on the individual as body, Wasilkowska's project operates as a space that enables the visualization of the 'bubble' as a step toward or element of appearance.

In the project *Fluctuating Microclimat* (2007), Wasilkowska worked in the Nowy Targ Square in Wrocław during the Festival Wrocław Non Stop. This interactive installation took place in a leafy public square and consisted of creating a reactive microclimate regulated by the movement of those who walked through the space. Sensors hung down from the trees, which emitted sounds that amplified depending on the surrounding movement, while a stream of bubbles followed the pedestrian flow. An urban park-like square, covered with trees in the centre of the city, the location of the project is a hybrid of the city square and the urban park. It is a green space that makes a pronounced connection to the ecological context—not only is the green space an ecology, a precise system of sustenance, survival and existence, but so too must the urban space be understood ecologically, as a space in which there are rhythms and patterns, links and inter-relations between all units and systems.



Figures 30-32. Aleksandra Wasilkowska. *Fluctuating Microclimat*, 2007. Installation view. Courtesy and © the artist.

It would not be a stretch to propose that the seemingly innocuous and playful stream of bubbles is a reference to Sloterdijk's bubble. Wasilkowska (n.d.) explores the idea that the city is "a changing microsystem, a system of hidden relations" and that the "capacity to react and inter-dependence of changes are the essence of urbanity." In other words, each individual is an independent unit, but it can 'rub against', coexist, and even, in moments, join with another if needed. Contact between bubbles produces a reaction, in the way that each individual has the ability and power to induce change or action. What the artist is conveying here is that it is people who are manipulating this microclimate, and as such *they* are the "vectors of change" (n.d). Put differently, this is an experiment in plurality, in the equality of each body. What takes precedence is presence, and the unit of the body itself, whereby a literal effect and reaction—whether in the raising of sound or leading the stream of bubbles—is generated by each body. This is a space in which each person affects a reaction, a potential 'foaming' up. Using the objectivity and undiscriminatory nature of technology, Wasilkowska creates a situation of equality among all bodies, suggesting that as much as each body in this heightened situation changed the microclimate of this space, so does each body play upon the ecology and potential of a society, a public, and a politic. The comparisons to slime mould or the bubble/foam is a an important one to dwell on, as they speak to Wasilkowska's attempts to understand how a plurality can function not only as a collection of individual units, but as units which can work together without melding into one another, without consensus. As such, Wasilkowka's work provides an artistic exploration, through technical means, of the relation between individuals in a polity.

Conclusion

The shift from communist mass society to the post-communist individualism of the post-1989 era leads to interesting questions regarding the formation of contemporary Polish society. Arendt (1958/1998) suggests that in 'society' and 'mass society' individuals become equal at the expense of the public realm, whereby "distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual" (p. 41). It follows then, that, using the words of Piotrowski (2010), there emerges a certain agoraphobia, a fear of publicity. "Society" in this sense is not merely a co-existence or togetherness of individuals, but a depoliticized structure that stifles the possibility of action in a public realm. But in the Polish context the recent and ongoing struggles over the restructuring between the public and the private realms face more basic concerns. The 'emergence' of the individual post-1989 remains an important site of ongoing democratic transformation, so much so that Poles are still discovering or experimenting with the way in which as individuals they can be public and political while still forming a 'we'. There is still a need to establish individual rights and equality as markers for democratic progress, and the search for equality and freedom continues to challenge the rights of the individual within the Polish site. As such, there is a desire in bringing out individuality and singularity from the private realm and out in the open, to been seen and heard, to emphasize the heterogeneity of the Polish landscape. This is, in fact, a central struggle in forming a democratic politic. In this regard, borrowing from Massey (2005), there is a 'becoming' through (public) space for Polish individuals and its society; this is not yet the mass society as defined by Arendt, but a 'becoming' society, or a society-in-process which is redefining itself

through the pluralism of the individual, after emerging from socialism, a mass formation pas excellence.

Wodiczko, according to Piotrowski (2010), believes that "only technology provides the opportunity for understanding, breaking through alienation, making contact, only it can cause that the stranger will become a political subject in our society" (p. 242). To explore this theme further the next chapter turns to mediation. This is the third ecology of experimentation in which media art can participate in the generation and negotiation of Polish site-specificity and self-enfranchisement. The idea of presence or appearance has undoubtedly shifted with the emergence of technologies, which challenges ideas about what constitutes publics as well as the sites of their action. Indeed, the technologies of communication which have created new ways of organizing publics support the suggestion that a public space does not necessarily imply a physical location, that individuals can appear and act within the realm of the technologically produced, virtual site. What will be explored is how the media art intervention contributes to the negotiation of a new reality, one in which sites and identities are destabilized and mediated through technological experience.

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[i] It is worth noting here then that this established and canonical history of public art is modeled on the American experience.

[ii] Piotrowski defines agoraphilia as "the breaking down of barriers which divide culture from citizen's initiatives/engagement, a critique of the status quo in the name of shaping a social organism" (2010, p. 7).

[iii] This is, according to Mouffe, a difference between hers and Arendt's notion of pluralism. She argues that while Arendt embraced and emphasized pluralism, "she never acknowledged that this plurality is at the origin of antagonistic conflicts" and as such, ultimately, her pluralism lead to an ideal of "intersubjective agreement" and consensus (Mouffe, 2007, 4).

CHAPTER 5/
Narratives of the Media Ecology: Mediations of Self and Site

"In order to find one's place in the world one not only needs to have their own story but also must be able to tell it."

–Ewa Hornowska (2007b, p. 73).

"People…cannot live without being attached to a place, because only then do they become real."

–Olga Tokarczuk (1998/2003, p.176)

In the previous chapters, the past and urban space were examined as lenses through which to undertake the necessary reimagining of Polish site-specificity, and as approaches artists can take to engage with locality. Both are grounded in the ideals of a pluralization of narratives as a necessary step in the development of the Polish public, its sense of self, and its transition into a plural and inclusive agonistic democracy. Here the ecology of media is explored and considered as an important element of the transformation of Polish society through the concepts of mediation and narration, or how identity, experience, and imagination of self and site are processed through and by media technologies. How are artists telling the stories of technologies and of mediation? The media technologies in question—from the web to mobile devices to virtual reality and interactive screens—are pervasive and taken for granted, but are also, importantly,

construed as necessary and desired if not inevitable achievements of Western progress and modernity. Through the lens of two artists, this chapter examines the way the mediatized everyday, despite being charged with uprooting human experience from locality, has also produced new ways of existing in and understanding the world that emerge and are inextricable from presence. Turning to alternate stories of mediation is a beginning towards local understandings of how the aesthetic space of media art is also a political space of reconstruction that produces new forms of thinking, being, and creating in the world (Dinkla, 2002; Cubitt, 2002).

The two artists discussed in this chapter are Izabella Gustowska (1948—) and Piotr Wyrzykowski (1968—). Both are considered, in different ways, pioneers of media art in Poland. The recent projects by Gustowska discussed here are *Art of a Hard Choice* and *She-Ona: Media Story*, expansive large-scale works that reveal the fragile boundaries between reality and fiction, consciousness and dream, and challenge the way the body and mind exist in mediation. In a general sense Gustowska is committed to uncovering the humanistic implications of technologies. She turns to the cognitive and phenomenological experience of media to explore the transformative quality of exposure to media content and form on the experience and perception of reality, on human psyche, on the construction of identity. By creating situations that shed light on how narratives of society and self, life and death, imagination and experience, are manipulated and constructed by communication media, Gustowska's media spectacles reveal and make visible the impacts or effects of ubiquitous and pervasive mediation on the fabric of contemporary life and the 'constitution' of the human mind. In contrast to this

preoccupation with the humanistic recovery of media technologies, Wyrzykowski is interested in media as materials of social and political organization. An artist with a pronounced activist bent, he has made a career of challenging spectators to think about the establishment, institutions, and the 'technocratic order' in projects such as *Wiktoria Cukt*, touched upon here. However, recent projects have indicated a departure in terms of both theme and materials, for example as is evident in *Only Those Who Planned It Will Survive,* which discloses a personal as well as a political transformation. This work centers on his recent turn towards the intimate and to the older medium of the book to reflect upon Polish institutions and democracy. Whether as screen, performance, or interactive software, the technological for Gustowska and Wyrzykowski is a site of constant visibility in that it offers a witnessing, reflecting, and projecting of contemporary life. But it is also a way of thinking about the Polish site through a particular lens, whereby the media experience is considered not through its tremendous, but broad, effects on global capitalism, networks, or flows, but as negotiated by individuals—by the artist and the audience—on the scale of the minutiae of lived, everyday relations, perceptions, thoughts, structures, and materials. Through their media experiments and via the intimate, personal, and localized lens of the artist, the spectator can rediscover and rewrite the narratives of mediation, the stories of technological change, and mediated reality. Hyper-mediated society is experienced by each person through the choices they make, each person writing their own story amidst the plethora of options offered through an overstimulation of data, each body materializing the experiences of mediation.

The Stories of the Mediated Society

The transition into a hyper-mediatized society happened in the Polish site alongside the deep political and social changes that marked the country in the last decades of the twentieth century and early part of the twenty-first (see Chapter 1). It would not be inaccurate to suggest that, in many regards, the development and expansion of the mediated society symbolized ascendance into the West, a measure through which to mark progress in becoming an advanced industrial nation based on technocratic capitalism and widespread communication, media technologies, and networks[i]. Technological change was a welcome and an inevitable 'side effect' of becoming 'modern,' of catching up and being contemporaneous with the West. The result was a mediatization with little social debate, a contemporary Poland that has lacked contemplation and reflection on media change, not only through analyses of the media industries (which themselves are sparse[ii]), but also in the form of critical observation and debate on the very nature of mediation, on the kind of world and people media technologies produce, concerns which have, in large measure, been taken for granted. The underlying context is one in which Poland, as a site still dealing with a variety of negotiations, as a country, a nation, a history, and a public, is also feeling the often intangible and overlooked 'symptoms' of hyper-mediatization which structure the environment and reverberate all the way down to the individual and her experience and interpretation of life and self.

The proliferation of screens, digitized interactions, and devices of personal communication are just some examples of the embedded, normalized, and routinized mediatization and mediation of everyday activities and experiences. Indeed, media

technologies are constantly (re)mediating, transforming, changing, impacting, and affecting, the world and the self. For those like McLuhan (1964), the 'effect' of media is radical, almost impossible to overstate as the very experience of reality, of perception and knowledge, is subsumed to mediation, so that "the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance" (p. 33). One of McLuhan's chief insights was to understand media as translators rather than conduits, where the passages of information through media produced new experiences and new ecologies. The 'conduit' or 'transmission' approach, articulated in the Shannon-Weaver theory of information, suggested that "ready-made messages are encoded in a particular way, sent over a channel, and decoded on the other end" (Ryan, 2003, p. 2). Walter Ong (1982/2002) said of this model, that it "distorts the act of communication beyond recognition" (p. 172). Instead, in McLuhan's translation model the passages of information through media produced *new* situations. McLuhan was particularly concerned with how these new media environments altered the individual's psyche and perception, experience and understanding, of the real. He proposed that the very 'sensations' through which individuals navigate the world, as well as the cognitive structures they have in place, are mediated (translated, transformed, negotiated) through technology. McLuhan (and Harold Innis) laid the foundation of what Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) would later call "medium theory," or "the transformative role of media technologies [in] ascribing powers or consequences to the introduction of new media platforms" (McQuire, 2011). These ideas permeate concepts such as McLuhan's notion of narcosis and numbness (1964), Baudrillard theories of simulacra and simulation

(1981/1994) or Virilio's concept of dromology (1986), all of which propose ways of articulating how media have redefined the very experience of the real.

In the way that studies have been done on the 'effects' or philosophies of technologies like print (Eisenstein, 2005), radio (Weiss, 1995), cinema (Eisenstein, 1949/2001), or television (McLuhan, 1964), or even earlier as explored in the analogue forms of the Constructivists for example, media art needs be explored not just as an art form, a product or result of an artistic lineage, but also as a particular medium of communication technology that produces concrete relationships, situations, and ecologies. Media art works that are explicitly concerned with developing new knowledge about the experience of mediated reality and produce in this sense work that is 'meta-technological' put into question how the narratives of self and society have been, and continue to be, rewritten by the mediated nature of the everyday and strive to make sense or meaning of a hyper-mediated environment. In other words, they reveal the way technologies become part of the narratives of societies and cultures, but also part of the stories each individual uses to navigate the world. They produce much-needed situations, or opportunities, for thinking, reflecting, and turning a critical eye on the technological environment, illuminating along the way the interconnectedness of technological change, social transformation, and human experience. The contemporary media artist is therefore necessarily always already emerging, responding to, and participating in the architectures of a media ecology, either by challenging, creating, or reproducing its structures. Critical media artists create experiments that exploit technology, revealing the ubiquitous and invisible mechanisms of mediation. The focus here is how they provide a way to be

critical of their media environment by subverting its grasp on contemporary human experientiality. Because of the technology it uses, the situations it is able to create, and the behaviors it fosters, media art provides a particular kind of experience and knowledge that creates the opportunity of criticality for the viewer to challenge the way media technologies are used and understood. To experiment, to try to mediate the world differently, to propose a different media story, that is what media art can do.

Media ecology is a way of thinking about media 'post-media' in which "[a]ny understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments" (McLuhan & Fiore,1967, p. 26). All media—along with their practices, reception, etc.—exist as part of larger media ecologies. As was explored in Chapter 1, an ecological way of thinking provides a way of understanding the complexity of contexts. The media ecological approach was used by scholars like Harold Innis (1950/2007) and Jacques Ellul (1954/1967), but was coined and made popular as a terminology by Neil Postman (1970), who understood it as a kind of environmentalism that looked "into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival" (p. 161). He understood media ecology not as a clearly defined subject or discipline but as a "field of inquiry" which implies "the active pursuit of knowledge. Discoveries. Explorations. Uncertainty. Change. New questions. New methods. New terms. New definitions" (p. 163). Matthew Fuller (2005) has expanded upon this particular way of understanding ecology (one which he suggests is "too often symptomatic of other, more fundamental shifts in cultural modes" – p. 4) by combining it

with the work of Félix Guattari, who emphasized the political and ethico-aesthetic dimension of media (p. 5). This is a media ecology that combines art history discourses, cultural responses, and technological analyses to form an understanding of media in particular contexts. What all these perspectives share is an understanding of media not as stagnant objects, but as processes and objects with a poetics (Fuller, 2005), such that they are responsive and dynamic and only make sense when understood as part of the larger context, or environment, in which they exist. This theoretical framework allows for understanding of media art as ontologically important because of their material qualities, but also as existing within particular environments and producing particular situations. In turn media art can then be understood to offer a critical exploration of the complex ecologies that produce and are transformed by media practices, and of the way media restructure our mental structures and our sense of the real. To think about media as an ecology provides a way to account for the behaviors spurred by media objects-in-process while also valuing their particular materiality. Lastly, it allows for some formal analysis but without falling into the narrow and essentialist determinism of certain technological approaches. The question that emerges here is how artists are continuing to use experimentation as a way of sustaining a critique of the relationship between media, culture, and self. And, even more pointedly, understanding how media as part of larger ecologies—political and aesthetic—"poses a demand for the inventive rigor with which life among media must be taken up" (Fuller, 2005, p. 5). So how does media art experimentation with forms, behaviors, or situations, function subversively to create 'revolutions in perception'?

It is essential to approach this task by thinking through the site as a tactic for retrieving the philosophies of media from narrowly-conceived accusations of determinism. Indeed, through the exploration of site-specific practices, for example as manifested in media art, there can emerge media philosophies which at once continue the important work of understanding how media technologies are ontologically constitutive of our realities, while also allowing for socio-political contextualizations and cultural relativism. One way to do this is in particular by thinking of the stories of technology; rather than formulate the interaction with media as one of universal 'effects', stories open up the possibility of a plurality of experiences, while also being able to take into account site-specific contexts and histories (stories that perhaps also reflect various philosophies of media). Since one of the central stories media tell is that of technology itself, media art affords an invaluable perspective and opportunity to observe, document, and reflect on how societies, cultures, and individuals make sense of the saturation of media technologies in their environment. While media art experiences are often interpreted using concepts like experiment or play, as fleeting, immersive and sensorial moments in which the audience 'participates' or 'interacts', by asking what stories the audience creates out of these exchanges there is a way of developing an understanding of how experiences of media art become subsumed into the narratives we tell ourselves and each other to make sense of life and self.

McLuhan was acutely perceptive when he observed that "[t]he serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception" (1964, p. 33). This is the position taken up

here, whereby the artist functions as a narrative voice of the processes, experiments, and experiences of mediation, able to expose the moment of translation as an important site of negotiation, decision, and reflection. The narratives of mediation[iii], the stories used to make sense of this transformative capacity of technology, provide a way of making visible these negotiations and provide distance or breaks through which to reclaim human experience from the indiscriminate processes of mediation. Moreover, the narrative is useful not as an object of interpretation or as "making sense of stories" but rather as a means, where stories are used as "tools for thinking" (Herman, 2003, p. 14) or for "sense-making" (Walsh, 2006, p. 861). After all, mediation is in itself an experiment of human culture, and the narratives of media can offer some way to structure, make sense, or challenge the experiences it produces. Put differently, the narrative is used to interpret, a thinking-through-narration. And while stories and narratives are often conceived as linear, they can also be structured as non-linear, as networks, rhizomes, cycles, etc., so that the narrative does not necessarily have to suppose "universality" or even be limited to "a static and spatial model in place of a dynamic and temporal one" (Cubitt, 2002, p. 6). As Söke Dinkla (2002) suggests, the narrative can also be thought of as a variety of evolving and changing strategies that reflect that "there is no longer a linear relationship between cause and effect and no distanced point of view" (p. 38). In this way, the rhizomatic structure is a particular type of narrative though it is non-linear. As media acquire new forms and their narratives change, new stories and indeed philosophies are required to translate the implications of such a restructuring on lived experience, for example on social organization or interpersonal communication. By thinking about the

transformative qualities of media technologies through the heuristic of the narrative, and more specifically through stories—of the artist, the technologies themselves, of the audience experience—we, as members of a hyper-mediated society, can witness the ontological dimension of media, its transformation of life and self, and make sense from and through technologies more frequently characterized, described, or interpreted as fragmented and fragmenting, as experiments in novelty, sociability, or play, for example.

The works of Gustowska and Wyrzykowski are complex and layered. Here, they are especially provocative if considered as explorations of the stories of mediation. Gustowska is concerned with the psychic impact of the media spectacle, and the effects of media representations and mediations on how individuals narrate their lives and their identities. Wyrzykowski's individual trajectory and narrative meanwhile is significant in providing an unusual entry point for thinking about the political potential associated with technology, one that ultimately proposes the intimate and the unspectacular as a way of resisting the ideological technocratic culture behind the pervasive mediatization of society, culture, and politics. What makes their work particularly thought-provoking, why in fact they could be dubbed 'media stories', to borrow from Gustowska's vocabulary, is that they derive much of their meaning and power when considered as stories by and about media. Spectators are confronted with this very fact, with the way human narratives of society and self, life and death, imagination and experience, are manipulated, shaped, and constructed by communication technologies.

Izabella Gustowska

Izabella Gustowska has been working with video since 1985 and has built a reputation for spectacular multimedia installations. It would be unfair to speak of her works as passive or finite creations, since they are, especially recently, more akin to total and immersive environments which transport the spectator into an alternate reality in which what is at stake is 'humanness', or at the very least the experience of the real in a mediatized and mediated culture. The emphasis on the narrative suggests that media not only change the social aspects of human experience, but that they benefit from being analyzed through the intimate lens of subjectivity to understand how they also fashion stories about life and identity. In Gustowska's spaces, the spectator is often folded into the story, a participant in both the act and interpretation of storytelling. The spectacular form is indeed misleading, for Gustowska's interest is in the intimate and paradoxical experience of technology.

In many ways Gustowska has a "separate position" in Polish video art, one that is not connected or derivative of the oft-discussed lineage rooted in the conceptual (structural, analytic) tradition of Józef Robakowski, since she was never as interested in formalism and deconstruction as she was in the personal and humanistic qualities of new technologies (Leszkowicz, 2007, p. 84). She is able to use her artistic practice to not only reflect on the way digital technologies have changed the fabric of societies, but how they, and media technologies more broadly speaking, transform human psyche and un/consciousness, or, in the words of McLuhan and Fiore (1967), how "they work us over completely....they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered" (p. 26). As

such, she shows a concern for how media not only change the social aspects of human organization, but how they benefit from being analyzed through the intimate lens of subjectivity and experientiality. As Alicja Kepińska and Leszkowicz (2007) point out, Gustowska not only treats technologies as reflecting or mirroring something that is already there, but she also "interiorizes electronic media" (p. 82) to show her spectators that the media are in fact always already part of their unconscious, their subjectivities, their identities. Through her projects, which transport us into a realm of the fantastical and even hallucinatory, she creates a space that hovers in between the unconscious, the dream and the real, where the audience struggles with the reconciliation or reconstruction of the human and the technological. Izabela Kowalczyk (2007b) describes Gustowska's work as

> ...the joining of poetry and technique, monumentality and intimacy, the world of media and the world of feelings, tradition and modernity—and thus worlds, which on the surface appear contradictory, mutually exclusive and impossible to reconciliate (3 – Cyborgism section, para. 1).

Gustowska aims to challenge the stubborn conceptions of technology as necessarily anti-humanistic, rather proposing and exploring the fluid exchange between these two realms. Indeed, she positions herself as an artist not only aware of the past and of herself, but one that is actively interested and engaged in documenting the present, rendering her an astute critic and witness of the contemporary moment. This coming together of the interior self, that emotional, deeply human, quality of Gustowska work with her technique—the technologies of media and spectacle—are paramount examples of how the media artist serves as storyteller, mediator, and narrator of the media environment.

Art of a Hard Choice

Art of a Hard Choice was recently exhibited as part of a major retrospective show of the artist's work under the name *Life is a Story* held at the National Museum in Poznań from March 4 to April 1, 2007. The story in this case was of the artist and her life's work, as it was about the exploration of more general ideas about life or living in a media environment. The entire exhibition was held in dark rooms, illuminated only by the green or red lights emanating from the works themselves. This atmospheric lighting was accompanied by sound—fragments of conversations, whisperings, telephone rings (Kowalczyk, 2007b). The combination of the eerie glow and the passing sounds, the large scale of the exhibition space and the sheer number of visual and aural data, created not only an art installation, but also a self-contained media environment, one where the images were fleeting and where the experience of traversing space, of looking as well as listening, produced a kind of alternate reality or fantastical space. Indeed, the audience was described as "feeling as though it were 'somewhere else'—in an unusual magical world conjured up by the artist" (Kowalczyk, 2007b, para. 1)[iv]. The artist explains the project in this way (2005):

> It is a collection of many signals resulting from various situations in life, from daily behaviors, through passions, to abstract gestures. The states are mentioned by the presence of an object, an installation, an interference with space, and most of all by the virtual presence of a video projection. They connect all the motifs, both from the past and from now.

This exhibition of epic scale—it spanned a space of 1500m^2—was compared to a total work of art, one that not only included painting, photography, video films, computer simulation, light, color and sound, but that, in its response to the museum's architecture, also gave this composite new-old structure new meaning (Kowalczyk, 2007b), whereby the artist worked to transform its structure and to in a sense, "build it anew" (personal communication, May 20, 2010). It was spectacular not only in scale, but also in the very inclusion of so many works, bringing together projects, cycles, copies of works, that the artist had worked on since the 1980s, including *Dreams, Relative Similarities, Sources*, and many others. However, these were not simply shown again and reused in their original form; rather, all of them were exhibited in a "completely new arrangement, thanks to which they took on new power and new meaning" (Kowalczyk, 2007b). As Kowalczyk (2007b) writes, the exhibition was more 'retrospecting' ('retrospekcyjna') than retrospective ('retrospectywna'), whereby the intent was not to provide a clear chronological (i.e., linear) showcase of the artist's works over the past few decades, but rather to remember and revisit their themes and analyses, and to include these new perspectives into new renditions of the works (para. 2). One of the prominent works of this show was *Art of a Hard Choice*.

Art of a Hard Choice was originally presented at Galeria Program in Poznań March 31—April 21, 2006. In the version shown during the *Life is a Story* retrospective the installation took place on the entire surface of a very wide and high wall, with all images tinted in green, as is characteristic of the artist's work. The wall was divided in half by a large circular projection of a large rolling marble ball. On either side were

projected nine round images of equal size. These images comprised dozens of fragments of famous movies flashing by, with some audio fragments also added to the mix, of conversations, laughter, singing, and the sound of water. The flashing images might at first seem unrelated and chaotic, and yet they were thematically connected through either the emotion or behavior displayed by the actors in the scenes. The audience could see, for example, nine figures displaying sadness, or nine figures talking on the telephone, or else kisses, crying, reading books, animals, smoking a cigarette, etc. On the same wall but below these moving images was the installation of 66 round light boxes (33 on each side), also illuminated with green light. These light boxes showed stills from the movies on the screens, as selected by the artist. While the fragments passed on the screen, one instance among many, here a few were presented as chosen moments, ones to be remembered, fragments of a film, but also of a life.

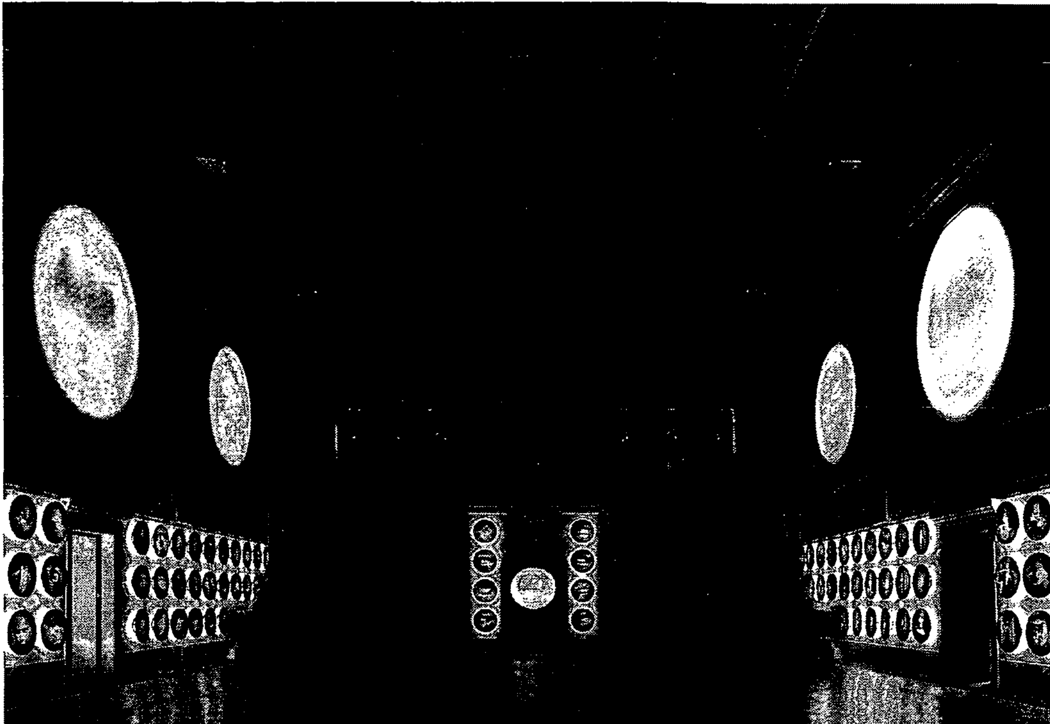


Figure 35. Izabella Gustowska. *Art of Choice*, 2006. Multimedia installation. National Museum in Poznań, 2007. Courtesy and © the artist.

Figure 36. Izabella Gustowska. *Art of Hard Choice*, 2006. Multimedia installation. Program Gallery, Warsaw. Courtesy and © the artist.

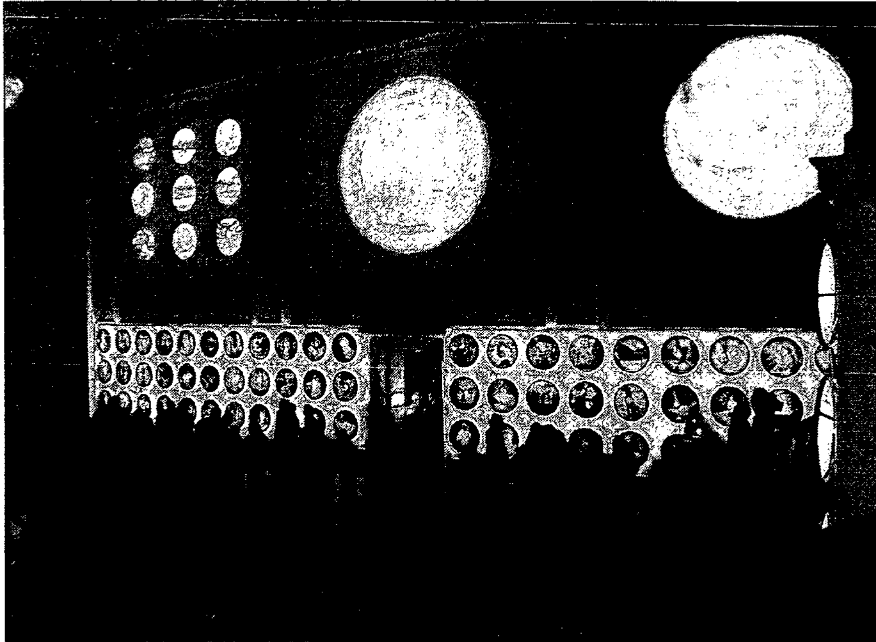


Figure 37. Izabella Gustowska. *Art of Choice*, 2006. Multimedia installation: 8 projections, 150 light box, objects. National Museum in Poznań, 2007. Courtesy and © the artist.

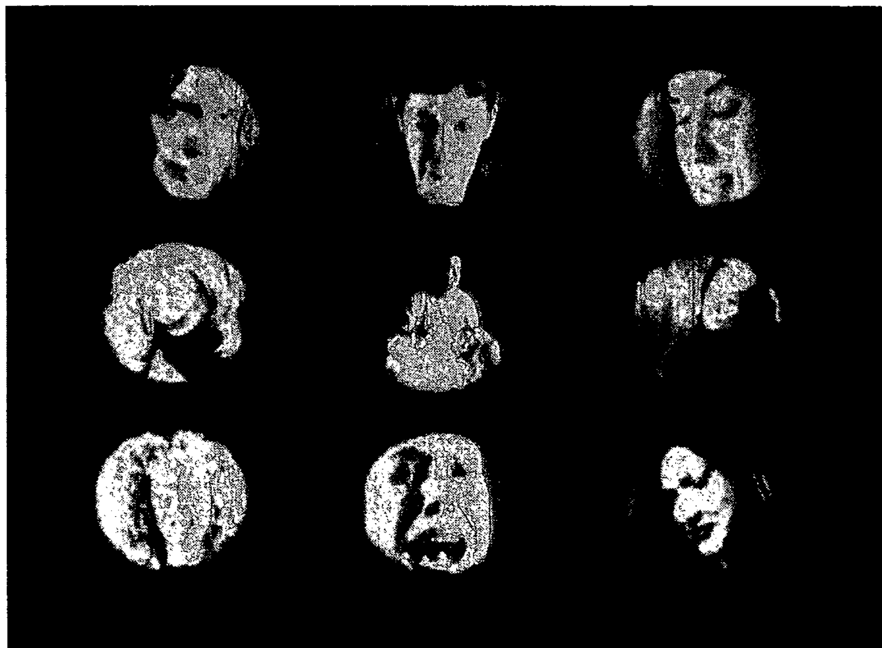


Figure 38. Izabella Gustowska. *Art of a Hard Choice*, 2006. Frame projection/Crying: 1 of 24 different sequences of sound video image. Courtesy and © the artist.

Leszkowicz (2007) observed that this collection of found footage acts as Gustowska's movie archive on these subjects, while also presenting life as the weeding out of choices and possibilities. Not unlike the bombardment and hyper-saturation of media and information in everyday life, the overwhelming amount of footage being shown at a quick pace made it impossible for viewers to grasp or see in its entirely, forcing them to continuously make choices about what they should look at, often succumbing to chance (Urbańska, 2006). Marek Wasilewski's description of this installation as an "avalanche of sounds and sights" highlights the dilemma of the spectator who has to decide how to "move in this labyrinth of gestures and signs, where we will stop for a while longer, which images we will ignore, and to which we will return" (2006, p. 7). The choice is not only about where to looking, but perhaps, figuratively, about the choices made in regard to the way the mediated representations of an emotion reflect or affect the individual's own demonstrations and interpretations of life's intimate moments, revealing a path of navigation through the overstimulation of the media terrain. In other words, the stories of life are not only narrated, but also mediated (Kowalczyk, 2007b), emergent only as the result of a number of decisions that intrinsically shape the stories told. The story then—life—is the result of decisions, of choices, which occur both in the process and as a result of narration and mediation. As Hornowska (2007b) described,

> ...we no longer tell our own stories but instead look for bits and pieces out of which we spin our own tales for the benefit of others, and the art of storytelling has become an 'art of hard choice,' where what really matters is not so much the construction of a true identity but the satisfaction with the decision taken (p. 71).

The disquieting effect of constantly changing and flashing film fragments is only emphasized by the green tint and light of the projected images that bathed the whole space in green, creating the illusion of a "suspended moment" [moment zawieszania] where everything takes on different meaning. The artist compares this to the "moment where the body is held up by water, where it is removed from its physicality, and a person finds themselves in a strange state, in which everything passes as if in slow motion" (Urbańska, 2006). This is the experience of walking through many of Gustowska's installations where, through the creation of a literally sensational environment, she explores the passage of time in the nebulous space between the real and the metaphysical. More than that even, Leszkowicz argues that the combination of the dark space and the visual illuminations create a space in which "we are no longer on the outside of the mind, where we contemplate at a distance the images it projects, but rather stand inside of it, in the darkest and profoundest recesses of it at that, those tied with the unconscious" (2007, p. 93) such that the installations are like "the darkroom of someone's mind, body, and life, where reality and fantasy intertwine" (p. 81). It is as if the artist is asking what from culture and history is present within each person, each viewer, and how the personal expression of certain states, for example happiness or grief, corresponds to cultural models and convention. How indeed does the individual craft or weave her identity through the selective process of traversing the media 'stream'? In this sense, the technology of the projection is powerfully significant, as it 'projects', in the

words of Leszkowicz, a collective unconscious filled with media representations of what it means to be human.

The world Gustowska creates in her media installations is fantastical, like a dream, "situated ambiguously between experience and narrative" (Walsh, 2006, p. 864). Indeed, this juxtaposition of lived experience, the spectacular event, and the narrative (of life, and lives) is at the crux of Gustowska's work. In his catalogue piece, Wasilewski explored the visual nature of memories and psyches, which, "through media, permeates into every aspect of our lives and often becomes a parallel life, ultimately squeezing in between our waking life and dreams" (2006, p. 4). Again media are presented as translators between the real and the metaphysical, an in-between space of transformation and uncertainty, interpretation, choice and possibility. These images of film, a "catalogue of gestures, movements, and sounds" (Wasilewski 2006, p. 4), presented in Gustowska's overstimulating world, reflect everyday reality, blurring the lines between the mediated film, the hypervisual, and the real, between imagination, fantasy, fiction and reality. To push the analogy of the dream further, one in which there is a constant ambiguity of consciousness between the experience and the narrative, the way the dream experience is interpreted or narrated is ultimately an act of self-interpretation. Choices, at conscious and unconscious levels, create sequences in dreams through which individuals are able, or choose, to make sense of themselves. Interestingly, during *Life is a Story, Art of Hard Choice* was paired with the exhibition *Art of Easy Choice*, a mirror-like complement in which what was screened were not fragments of films but rather footage the artist collected over five years using her camera, a collection of her visual notes on everyday

life reflecting her subjective perspective, a display of the private choices of her gaze. As Gustowska (2006) has written about these two works, "it is up to us which reality we find more fulfilling."

The body, whole and fragmented, has been a key visual image, even the "essence" of Gustowska's work (Hornowska, 2007b, p. 71). She has especially used the visibility of the body to "refer to the existence of an individual, to speak about a person by means of the image of their body, to spin their story" (Hornowska, 2007b, p. 66). Images of women, of their faces, fill the screens produced by the artist, particularly the woman's mouth, which has become a staple of her iconography. It is after all through the mouth, through the voice and speech that it produces, that stories, and life, are told (and which are a reminder of Arendt's association of speech and action). Often, Gustowska renders her mouths mute, or speaking in hushed tones and whispers that make the utterances incomprehensible. For example, in an image from *Life is a Story* (2003), a woman's mouth flows with water while a luminous marble ball (not unlike the one seen as a central element of *Art of a Hard Choice*)—a stand-in for the woman's voice— alternately emerges out of (is borne from) the woman's mouth, and then re-enters and disappears there (Leszkowicz, 2007). Of this image Hornowska comments that "it is hard to obtain a more beautiful, intense, more condensed and depressing vision of an 'existential state' of a woman's story" (2007b, p.71). Here the woman is giving birth to the ball, to her voice, a symbolic image of how the "labour of body and of culture intermingle" (Leszkowicz, 2007, p. 81). The emphasis Gustowska places on the body in the media experience is not dissimilar to Mark Hansen's (2006) correlation of "the aesthetics of new media with a

strong theory of embodiment" in which, drawing on Henri Bergson, he describes "the body function as a kind of filter" that makes selections among "the universe of images" (p. 3). Indeed, Gustowska's work can be interpreted as a response to the so-called de-materialization and de-territorialization of (digital) media ecology by drawing attention to the body and to presence as an 'enframer' of the media experience (Hansen, 2006).

In her interest in the intimate experience of technology, the figure of the individual is understood paradoxically, as at once existing in and changing over time and thus as never 'finished', but also as having a concrete life, which begins and ends and thus is finite (Kowalczyk, 2007b), as being literally tied to a body. In other words, Gustowska brings together the at-times difficult to reconcile nature of being human: to be fluid and change, to experience shifting realities and consciousness, to negotiate with technologies that alter the very experience of humanity, but also to be confined to bodies which expire. The transformations experienced by every individual are always confined to the parameter of literal life and, by extension, stories of transformation and change exist within the boundaries of narration. Here Gustowska's interest in the stories of the everyday human experience and in the states of human existence can be understood as an exploration of how the stories of life are mediated (stressing mediation as representation, communication, and transformation) through technology[v]. Through these experiments or probes into the nature of mediated human experientiality, Gustowska marks her work as constantly revolving around the narrative, its processes as well as its ramifications.

She-Ona: Media Story

She-Ona: Media Story ('ona' means 'she') was presented on the premises of the Stara Rzeźnia (the "Old Slaughterhouse" is a complex built in the late 19th century now used for large events) in Poznań during the Malta Festival, June 23-28, 2008. Gustowska again created a "multimedia spectacle" of a staggering and stunning ("oszałamiająca") scale (Kowalczyk, 2008, para. 1), composed of 33 video projections, three plasma screens, a surveillance system, an installation made of clothes, a light show, an audio recording, and a real-life performance. In her review, Kowalczyk (2008) confidently proclaimed it "the greatest work of multimedia art in Polish art to date" (para. 1)

The central figure of this exhibition was a/the woman in red. Spectators were introduced to her even before entering the interior space of the gallery-abattoir listening to a male voice while in line waiting to enter. The man was talking about a woman he had briefly encountered and fallen in love with and his subsequent search for her. His only recollection of her however is that she was wearing red amidst a crowd before vanishing without a trace. As the audience listened to this story, it was being introduced to the narrative thread of the exhibition. Once inside, they were confronted with the magnitude of the installation where, amidst all the sensory information, all the fragments of sounds and images, was the constant but fleeting figure of the woman in red. Women in red passed by on screens, while moments later in-the-flesh women in red appeared among the crowd, performing the same actions as on the screen (for example, walking a dog). In one room filled with lyrical music, images of women doing everyday types of activities flashed by, again on large circular screens, creating the impression of watching them

through a peephole, the audience towing the line between searching, watching, gaping, and surveillance. In another space, the audience was shown Google Earth images that zoomed in until they revealed a particular location in the world, looking into a crowd searching for the woman in red. Gustowska filmed these crowd shots on her travels, at the Venice Biennale, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, a vacation in Greece, at a jazz concert (personal communication, May 20, 2010). As her camera panned across the crowd, a sea of green with bursts of red clothing, and then targeted and zoomed into potential 'she-women', the audience became complicit in her project of surveillance, watching unsuspecting people around the world. In another space, two women in red projected on opposite walls followed orders from an unseen male narrator (heard through earphones) telling them to walk, or raise an arm, etc. At the same time, two in-the-flesh women walked in the space, in red of course, amidst strewn about (mainly red) clothes. In another space there were two cyborg-women, avatars from Second Life (prepared by Cezar Ostrowski), along with one male avatar who could be heard saying, "You do not understand! She's a copy!". In all the spaces the woman in red functioned to constantly blur and cross the line between virtuality and presence, between reality and fiction. Again the body is the site of engagement with media, whereby the question of embodiment is at the crux of Gustowska's exploration into humanistic mediation.

Figure 39. Izabella Gustowska. *She-Ona: Media Story*. 33 projections,1 monitoring, 3 Plasma,10 extras, 1 dog. Old Slaughterhouse, Poznań. MALTA: International Theatre Festival 23-28 June, 2008. Courtesy and © the artist.

Figure 40. Izabella Gustowska. *She-Ona: Media Story*. Old Slaughterhouse, Poznań. MALTA: International Theatre Festival 23-28 June, 2008. Courtesy and © the artist.

Figure 41. Izabella Gustowska. *She-Ona: Media Story*. Performative space with twins. Old Slaughterhouse, Poznań. MALTA: International Theatre Festival 23-28 June, 2008. Courtesy and © the artist.

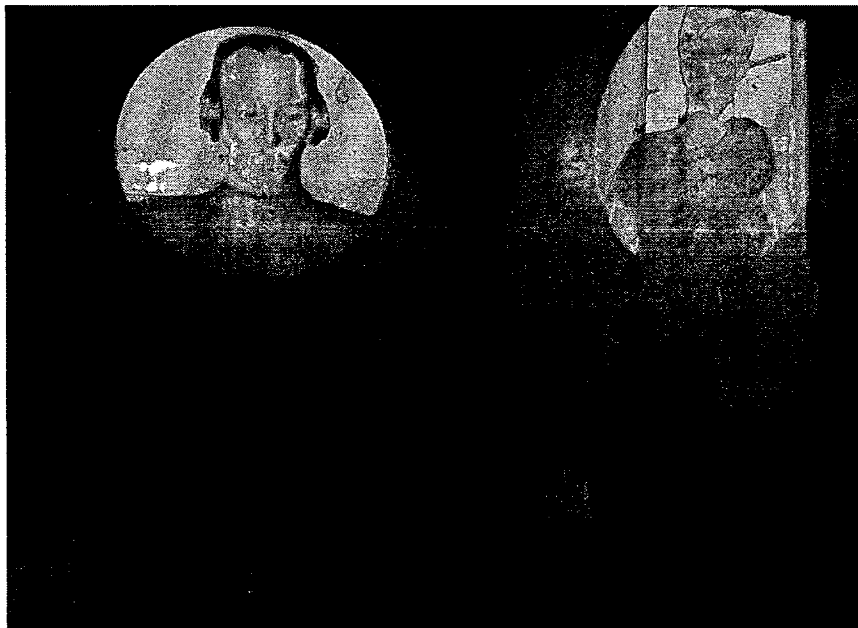


Figure 42. Izabella Gustowska. *She-Ona: Media Story*. Old Slaughterhouse, Poznań. MALTA: International Theatre Festival 23-28 June, 2008. (Second Life work in this photo by Cezary Ostrowski). Courtesy and © the artist.

The woman in red, a figure moving so fluidly but so nonsensically within the space and across media, multiplied and disappeared, rendering her existence uncertain and fragile, but also possible. This uncertainty is part of the disorienting experience, and an arresting way in which the artist is able to make the audience witness the mechanism of mediation and the ability of media technologies to manipulate and mediate ideas about what is real. Kowalczyk (2008) points out that this theme, the exploration of the problem of mediation is really about the problem of a reality "in which it is impossible to quell the desire for presence." Despite fleeting apparitions and mediated encounters, the woman in red remains 'unfound'. There is hope only in her body, but there we are confronted by her multiplicity and replication, and the inability to know which is the original 'one'. The audience cannot access the 'original' woman in red, technology rendering authenticity, the real woman in red, out of reach; perhaps it is because of this that the viewer can never find and recognize the 'SHE' woman, for she is "not only elusive but though she is present everywhere, represented by so many figures, she is above all else, untouchable" (Kowalczyk, 2008). It is not much of a stretch to make the connection between the desire for presence and embodiment, and the actuality of the body in site. Indeed, this emphasis on physicality and the body, or finding the *authentic* body, underlines the humanistic implication of Gustowska's work and, ultimately, the inevitability of people and their bodies existing in real, physical places.

What Gustowska is proposing is not the annihilation of the real (as per Baudrillard), of an identity entirely subsumed by mediation, but rather one that is transformed, layered, hybridized; a convergence between body and mediation. She is

creating environments in which the interplay of fiction and reality, of the media upon perception and consciousness, can be witnessed and felt rather than hidden behind the veil of everyday life, ubiquity, or pervasiveness. In this project the seeming traversal between the screen and the real is additionally turned back and onto every member of the 'audience' who is always potentially being filmed. Their own presence in the space is made uncomfortable by the possibility that their image is on a screen in another room, somewhere. As they follow the women in red, real and virtual, their own bodies are transported elsewhere for others to see, never certain if they are mere audience, or also part of the performance. The experiment puts a value on presence and participation and in this way becomes personal and subjective, internalized as a personal experience as much as a detached artistic, social, or formal endeavor (see Chapter 2). By turning this disquieting space back onto the viewer-participant, Gustowska has made the spectator lose control over their mediated self, making her feel uncertain and exposed as she is surrounded and immersed in a spectacular environment, as if in the belly or womb of our mediated reality. For Gustowska (as cited in Kowalczyk, 2008, para. 3),

> *Media Story* is not a determined theatrical spectacle, but life scrutinized, fragmented, chaotic, not subsumed to the rules of the stage. Because it is not theatre. It is the viewer who puts together his media story from the fragments, texts, surveillance. There are no scenic actions, but spaces opening themselves up to the public, among which the careful observer will find the same or similar women–namely SHE.

Like in the retrospective exhibition *Life is a Story* Gustowska here created a total media environment, one characterized by fragments, complete sensory stimulation, immersion

and spectacle. The idea of the spectacle should not be taken for granted in Gustowska's work as it is inevitably a purposeful strategy in her search for a humanistic understanding of mediated environments. This installation, as Kowalczyk writes (2008), is not so much about the woman in red, as it is about media themselves, an analysis of media and a "story about the world, where everything is transformed, digitalized, changed into an image and displayed for show."[vi] Gustowska's work is in part a response or exploration of Guy Debord's (1967/1995) pessimistic observations that the capitalist society founded upon spectacle is subsumed to its rules and becomes lived as an image. As he explained, the society of the spectacle, lived and experienced through the media and its screens, eliminated the possibility of authentic experience since it produced an alienating mass culture in which reality is replaced by its visual representations. But counter to this proposition which bemoans the media world and/or accepts that human agency is subservient to a technological determinism, Gustowska's constant underlying humanism provides her work with hopefulness. While there is unmistakably a critique, even a caricaturing, of the society of spectacle in the very scale of her work and the dreamlike disorientation which it creates for its audience, the discomfort she creates reveals that individuals are still able to think outside of mediation—to be affected—to look at if from the outside, to remove themselves from its grips and be outsiders, and to think critically about the mediated experience. Indeed, events like these offer a kind of illumination or revelation of media technologies for what they really are—not merely providers, transmitters, or containers of content, but also, invariably, transformers, translators, and mediators of reality. Gustowska's emphasis on the bodily experience of her media

spectacles, of entering 'into' a particular media ecology, is a reminder of the 'realness' of the body, the space it takes and in which it resides. Hansen's (2006) describes this affectivity as a "capacity of the body to experience itself as 'more than itself' and thus to deploy its sensorimotor power to create the unpredictable, the experimental, the new" such that "affectivity comprises a power of the body that cannot be assimilated to the habit-driven, associational logic governing perception" (p. 7-8). For Gustowska as well the subversion or re-imagination of media ecology is located in the body, in the presence and realness of the body, and the experiences of the self that it contains. It is the body that produces or generates the affective response to technology, and allows the individual to enframe and narrate her media experience. As a result, Gustowska's humanism is not only a destabilizing of media ecologies, but also serves as a reminder that bodies and the self, which exist in concrete places, are contributors and actors of a media ecology, rather than passive 'receivers' of mediation.

Gustowska says the younger generation sometimes calls her "old school," presumably due to her mix of the sensational and the personal and especially her critical distance towards media (personal communication, May 20, 2010). But it would be a mistake to overlook Gustowska's work. Indeed, she is a careful witness of mediation and of media transition, an observer and note taker, an unusual, and perhaps increasingly rare example of a media artist that can think about media poetically and philosophically, through the lens of generation that has lived through and remembers the spectacular changes of the twentieth century, indeed to reflect upon its media stories.

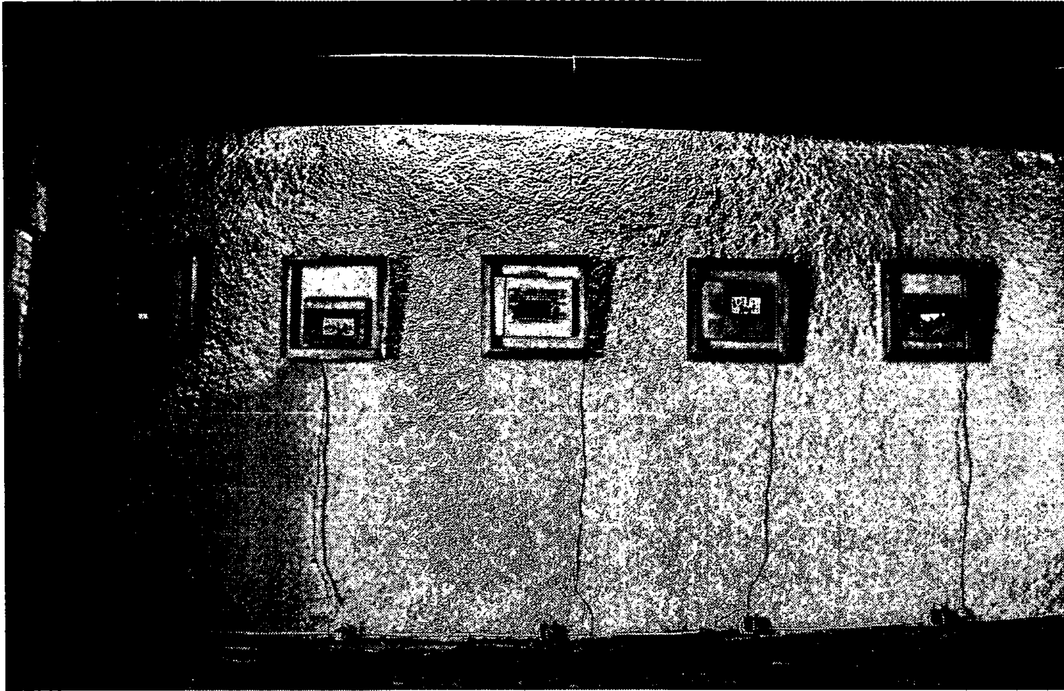
Piotr Wyrzykowski

Piotr Wyrzykowski, aka Peter Style, has been working since the 1990s. He studied interior design and painting in university before switching to intermedia arts. Since then his projects have included everything from performances, video installations, interactive works, interventions in public spaces, network projects, and multimedia shows (Wyrzykowski, 2010, p. 48). He has stated that he very purposefully moved away from traditional forms as a way of rebelling and cutting loose with the rigidity and stiffness of classical arts and the traditional culture and political regime they represented (personal communication, May 25, 2010). From very early on in his artistic career, Wyrzykowski became involved and engaged in so-called public works, deliberately towing the line between art and activism, and rejecting conventional institutions of the art world. As a co-founder of C.U.K.T. (Polish acronym for the Technical Culture Central Office) in 1995, he created a collaborative environment where, as he stated, "[i]t is not important… whether what we are doing is art or even politics or play. C.U.K.T. doesn't create—C.U.K.T. illuminates" (C.U.K.T., 2000). Mediated art afforded him particular opportunities for existing outside of the space and institutions of galleries, to go directly to the public. In many ways Wyrzkowski was an artist-activist, one believing in the transformative potential of new technologies to provoke new kinds of thinking, and to create situations of self-reflection and education for the audience. It was an idealistic approach, but one which can be attributed to both the excitement and utopian belief in technology of that time, as much as in the liberating and promising ideas of a by-then newly democratic Poland.

Wyrzykowski's experimentation with the ecologies of media is captured in his personal narrative, in his evolution as an artist who went from being a champion of new media technologies to a cynic more interested in retrospective and intimate reflections. To understand this meaningful turn it is useful to take a comparative approach and consider one of his earlier projects, for instance the collaborative *Wiktoria Cukt* made in 2000, the final project of C.U.K.T. In this project he and his collaborators embraced the potential of media technology to create democratic spaces and offered the viewer an escape from the thralls of propagandistic politics and mass media. This was a large-scale participatory event that purposefully stepped outside the institutionalized spaces of the art gallery (though some events were held there). In this project, which lasted the length of an election year, C.U.K.T. created a virtual candidate, aka Wiktoria Cukt, and all the elements of a campaign: a website, a platform, publicity, interviews, and press coverage in newspapers, television, and radio. This project, an almost transparent or blatant collusion of media, art, and politics, was a somewhat absurdist critique of political and mass mediated cultures. It was also, in its use of a specially designed software they called the OSW (acronym for the Citizen's Electoral System) a showcase of the way technology could be used to challenge parliamentary democracy and empower individual citizens. This software allowed anyone to ask questions to and respond as Wiktoria Cukt in real time, creating a database from which to form her, or indeed, the people's, platform. More than ever Wyrzykowski's role was that of the provocateur. The project challenged the boundaries between the technological and the real (is this a 'real' candidate?), as between art and activism. On the one hand it was an obvious critique of politics, its systems and

candidates through a challenge or experiment in democracy, and a questioning of our relationship to technology and the technological, or put differently, a social and political critique of Poland at the turn of the century. On the other hand however it was also a statement about the role and institutions of art, a hopeful and optimistic project that embraced a belief that this hybrid art-technology was a powerful critical tool that paved the way to action.

In his recent project *Only Those Who Planned It Will Survive* (2009), Wyrzykowski however presented a newfound and uncharacteristic interest in producing closed, intimate, and even nostalgic work. *Only Those* was a project originally commissioned by the Moscow Biennale for an exhibit entitled *New/Old Cold War*, and then presented at the Galeria Arsenał in Białystock Poland in late 2009. The project emerged from the artist's reflection on the theme of the Cold War and hinged on his use of American books from the 1960s-1980s that provided homeowners tips on how to protect themselves in the event of a nuclear disaster. Small wooden frames surrounded, but were not mounted onto, books folded open to pages featuring drawings, sketches and instructions reproduced from the original materials. Peering from underneath these pages were videos of people living in underground shelters performing everyday family or group activities: a birthday party, preparing a meal, kids playing, rest, taking a group photograph, etc. Although performing innocuous activities, everyone in the videos is wearing a gas mask and there is an undeniable and underlying sense of surveillance or voyeurism.



Figures 43-44. Piotr Wyrzykowski. *Only Those Who Planned It Will Survive*, 2009. Wooden frames, books, LCD monitors, drawing on tracing paper, sound, 50x50x12 cm.

The catalog's creative text, written by Daniel Muzyczuk (2010), adds an additional layer of interpretation to the piece, one that contextualizes these videos as hypothetical scenes from a post-apocalyptic world:

> You may run but will never hide. There is nothing better that might have welcomed you in this new narrow world built for people like you, better, more intelligent and able-bodied than a whole crowd of those doomed to fall victim to radiation sickness and mutations. Visions of life underground assume coercion as a prerequisite. The underground is both a refuge and a prison for humanity, lost because of its own faults. The maintenance of order calls for discipline and surveillance... (p. 19)

And it concludes with these lines:

> Retro-futurist underground dystopias are filled first of all with stories about the political past and future that could be planned at the time.... The end of the cold war is accompanied by the ever-dwindling number of dystopias and utopias. Many believe in the end of history. Either all the manholes have been soldered down or perhaps the surface has disappeared (p. 28).

As the title of the exhibition suggests, the story here is that only those with power will survive and technological salvation only belongs to the few while the rest is doomed to technological apocalypse. The importance of the text should not be undervalued. Indeed, the very fact that a piece of creative writing accompanies the exhibit provides a reflection of the artist's newfound interest in the 'old' technologies of the book and the mode of writing itself. In another iteration of this work, the catalogue was presented on a large floating screen within the gallery space, with the voice of a narrator heard reading the text. The text reveals the complexity of the work and presents an analogy of the underground with that an oppressive political system. It creates a sort of double-world, the superficial activity of everyday life alongside the unknown structures of regulation

and power. These two themes, the political underpinnings juxtaposed with familial activities and the corresponding changes in form, from interactive mega-projects to text-based precious objects, capture the confluence of changes in Wyrzykowski's work.

Compared to his earlier projects, *Only Those* presents a noticeable and self-acknowledged loss of utopianism. While Wyrzykowski believed in the transformative and empowering nature of technology, in its potential as a source of a more direct democracy, his newest work betrays a rather fatalistic and doomed vision of the future. As the artist put it,

> I once really believed that technology could guarantee us a certain immortality, a kind of eternal life. I still believe in this, but our lasting, if it ever does take place, will be manipulated and guaranteed by the provider with whom we are subscribed (personal communication, May 25, 2010).

But we can also see that though he has lost hope in what would have once been technology's revolutionary possibilities, he is still preoccupied with technology's grip on reality, and the move inward and, in-a-manner-of-speaking backward, or towards the past, is in itself an emphatic disenchanted critique of the Polish site through an experiment with its media ecology. As he has done throughout his career, he is challenging the position that there is little need or clarity to be had from exploring the ideas of mediation, of critiquing media technologies, of being reflexive about the way—and by whom—reality is mediated.

Another noticeable element in Wyrzykowski's work is the subversion of institutions, a central concern for the artist throughout his career, especially in terms of the way the individual can exist amidst rigid and homogenizing systems. *Only Those* can

be interpreted as a parody of socialism, a critique of an above-ground regime which infiltrates all spaces, even the private ones of the home. The title itself reveals an interesting ambiguity: *Only Those Who Planned It Will Survive*—but planned what? The end of the world, or the building of shelters? Wyrzykowski's message here might not have the immediacy or timeliness of *Wiktoria Cukt,* but it nonetheless reflects the artist's ongoing commitment to political critique. And, *Only Those* reveals a newfound concern, or curiosity, for the immediate and intimate forms of social organization, such as the family unit, suggesting that Wyrzykowski is thinking in new ways about social norms, individuals, and the way individuals become members of a society and a culture. As he has said,

> The work *Wiktoria Cukt*, though it is universal, and could have taken place in any country, was the result of our need to enter into the discussion that was then taking place, not somewhere out there but here exactly, in this Polish context. I had a lot to say...about the Polish situation. However, recently this element has disappeared in my work which has become more universal....I'm much more immersed in my own world, in my family. So it has been a change of 180 degrees (personal communication, May 25, 2010).

These universal stories for Wyrzykowski are now personal, material. But they also reflect a continued particular dissatisfaction that is based on site. In his loss of hope Wyrzykowski is implicitly commenting upon an unredeemable Polish situation in which corrupt politics have destroyed any ambitions of true democracy.

That Wyrzykowski has entered the gallery is especially significant, since he has strongly objected to institutions throughout his career. There is the surrender or retreat, to a degree, to the art world. And not only has Wyrzykowski moved into the gallery, he has

literally moved his work into a frame, enclosing the project so that every component here is a self-contained square layered on top of or within another: first the border or screen of the image, then the boundary of the book, followed by the wooden frame, the gallery space and ultimately and by extension, the 'art world'. Despite its apparent fatalistic futurism, *Only Those* feels nostalgic, fetishistic, and intimate. Each layered box is an object that is neither networked or process-based, interactive or participatory. Rather, the viewer is looking at a complete artifact, a partially re-materialized object, in a relationship largely reminiscent of the way audiences take in traditional forms like painting, or sculpture, or books. Indeed, where once books and drawing represented an artistic regime that had to be challenged and rebelled against for Wyrzykowksi, a literal artifact of a rigid and hierarchical status quo, he has re-turned to them almost defiantly, disregarding his status as a pioneer of new media:

> I had to give up and surrender to the pressures of the commercial art world where the artist is more or less forced to generate work which lasts and endures.... My old works in large measure rejected the classical forms, negated them. I guess in a way this is a return to *something* (personal communication, May 25, 2010).

In *Only Those* the electronic technology is almost transparent, a window into a house and into the future, delicate and fragile, 'protected' by the book and frame, an ephemeral digital image drawing the viewer to it because of its quirky surveillance-like content and style, and its miniature quality, but also because in the context of the book's enframing it allows the viewer to experience a sort of re-discovery of the moving image. It is as if she

can experience for the first time the wonder of this technology that is no longer novel, rediscover it but also see it anew.

Wyrzykowski's new incarnation highlights the chronic difficulty of defining art made using electronic technologies and especially challenges ideas of progress or natural evolution in terms of the intertwining of art and technology. In effect, he challenges the story of media art as defined by the narratives of progress. While *Wiktoria Cukt* embraced and demonstrated all three behaviors of new media art, interactivity, connectivity, and computability (Dietz, 1999), *Only Those* is a clear retreat from this kind of experimentation. In a sense in *Only Those* Wyrzykowksi re-captures the knowledge, perhaps even the salvation, of the book and the text, as well as of the experience of reading and privacy, individuality, and self-empowerment. But it remains important to consider Wyrzykowski not only as a contemporary artist but as a media artist, not because of his use of the latest technologies or in his production of new kinds of behaviors or environments, no longer a 'new' media artist as in his days with C.U.K.T., but because of his interest in the manipulation, layering, and juxtaposing of media, in his reflection on the properties and possibilities of media technologies, and in his underlying belief that technology is inextricable from an understanding of the world and the construction of the experience of 'real', embodied, life. Wyrzykowski is producing media art deliberately and self-consciously, in the sense that he is literally exploring forms of media. But in his experimental juxtapositions he challenges viewers to think about technological art in a way that does not stress its novelty; rather, his work plays with what is already ordinary media, and makes meaning from this taken-for-grantedness. In

the case of *Only Those*, the experiment for Wyrzykowski is not about how to use media art practices in an attempt to directly challenge democratic institutions, but rather about how thinking outside of the parameters of the 'new' is a response to, and a rejection of, the unequal distribution of technological power that is reflected in both site-specific and global hegemonic practices.

Conclusion

Gustowska and Wyrzykowski are both inscribing their own narratives, subjectivities, and identities into an understanding of media history and ecology. They provide a way for the spectator to think about contemporary society in the broadest sense, as a particular experience of reality and life, of individuality, and the creation and narration of self, and also about the stories *of* media and the stories that media tell. Art using mediating technologies can be spectacular—whether in terms of novel technology, or scale—but also intimate, reflexive, grounded, and nostalgic. Together these insights pave the way for developing media philosophies which can accommodate a plurality of narratives, and that can emerge from the experiences of presence in the specific ecologies of the site.

These projects and others like them are inherently political in their reflection upon, if not critique of, technology, especially if Piotrowski's (2010) claim that "media criticism is political criticism *par excellence*" (p. 126) is accurate. There is however a need to look beyond the content, beyond analyses of the information presented through media technologies, and to think about how forms are part of a larger ecologies and experiences of the site, about the way media act as translators of the real, about the

political meaning of this mediation, and about what each form of mediation produces in the realms of social and political organization. This is the point that needs to be emphasized, that media art spectacles can in fact function as critiques of mediatized cultures and societies and they should be considered as such, used as opportunities for thinking about politics and ideology through the lens of technology, and indeed for thinking about the politics and ideologies driving technologies, which in turn write the stories of human experientiality.

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[i] Interestingly however, according to Internet World Stats, which compiles information from census and data published by Nielsen Online, ITU, GfK, local NICs and private sources (http://www.internetworldstats.com), Poland's internet user growth has increased over 700% between 2000-2011, among the top in all of the European Union. And yet, despite this growth, current internet users in Poland represent only 58% of the population, one of the smallest in Europe, lagging behind Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and others, and the average penetration in Europe of 67%.

[ii] See for example, Slavko Splichal's *Media Beyond Socialism* (1994); Colin Sparks and Anna Reading's *Communism, Capitalism and the Mass Media* (1998); Peter Gross's article "Between Reality and Dream: Eastern European Media Transition, Transformation, Consolidation and Integration" (2004), or Karol Jakubowicz and Miklos Sukosd's edited collection, *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and European Media Change in a Global Perspective* (2008).

[iii] It must be stressed that the intention here is not to provide a comprehensive study of works dealing with technological culture and its many forms, nor is it explicitly concerned with theories of narratology in 'new media' as such, or exploring what media technologies mean for the possibilities of narrative as a specific type of content, nor in terms of the restructuring of storytelling as such.

[iv] The translation into English here loses some of the mystical quality of the quote. The word used here for 'conjured up' is 'wyczarowanym', which has at its center the word 'czar' or 'spell'. As such, the artist can be said to not only be conjuring up a world, but creating one as if from a spell.

[v] As with most of Gustowska's oeuvre, her projects feed off each other and can be thought as part of larger cycles of work. They are complex, layered, and expansive installations, and as such it is impossible to address all the different components, spaces, and elements that went into the two exhibitions discussed here. Rather, these are snapshots, select moments in much larger events, which point to the scale, themes and concerns of the artist, and the ways in which they are environments of storytelling and narration about the self in the mediated world.

[vi] While they are not the focus here, it would be remiss to not allude to the many other themes that could be expanded on in this complex work: the use of the colour red; the space of the Abattoir reminiscent of a church; the voice of the always-male narrator, and indeed, the absence of a female voice (apart from one communicating in sign language); participation and interactivity; the gaze; the identical and replicated figure of the woman in red, a reference to all women, to clones, to similarity (Kowalczyk, 2008).

CONCLUSION/

As I was sitting down to write this conclusion, the important art critic Claire Bishop (2012) published a brief essay on the digital divide in contemporary art in the widely read and benchmark publication *Artforum*. Her comments reveal how much of a disconnect there continues to be between art critics and media theorists, between analog and digital art, and between the so-called mainstream art world and the world of new media art. She writes:

> So why do I have a sense that the appearance and content of contemporary art have been curiously unresponsive to the total upheaval in our labor and leisure inaugurated by the digital revolution? While many artists use digital technology, how many really confront the question of what it means to think, see, and filter affect through the digital? How many thematize this, or reflect deeply on how we experience, and are altered by, the digitization of our existence? I find it strange that I can count on one hand the works of art that do seem to undertake this task. [....] There is, of course, an entire sphere of "new media" art, but this is a specialized field of its own: It rarely overlaps with the mainstream art world... (para. 2-3)

The first question is, why this lack of overlap, a separation that Bishop only reinforces in her article? It is after all remarkable that Bishop can only count one hand's worth of such works, somehow simultaneously dismissing the sphere of 'new media' as if it did not matter or count, or existed in a different and unbridgeable sphere beyond or outside her conception of contemporary art. This dismissal is a part—symptom and cause—of the very problem: not including 'new media' in her assessment keeps new media at an

artificial distance from the so-called mainstream. But why is the art establishment so resistant to digital and new media intrusion, to thinking about the condition of mediality[i]?

Part of a broader reflexive social engagement with media technologies is a continued discussion about media—not as deterministic, but as ecological processes existing, changing, reacting, and shaping environments. This is instrumental in developing a philosophy of media, which as Scott McGuire (2011) suggests, is to understand "...the problematic of media technologies in terms of key philosophical questions of time, space and being" and to make sense of "[t]he transformed conditions in which embodied human beings are required to make judgments, exercise agency, and form relations to others—to past and future, to the natural world and to particular living environments" (McGuire, 2011, p. 108). 'Media philosophy' tries to reinstate the importance of forms in shaping the way individuals understand and experience the world, and reaffirms the importance of the process of inquiry, creation, and experimentation—of trying—to continue to think critically about how technological and mediating processes are integral to our social, political, and psychic structures. While Bishop refers to an 'unresponsiveness' that contemporary art has with the digital condition, in his retort to the article Oliver Grau (2012) exalts the privileged position of media art as a space for engaging with media philosophically:

> Isn't is so that as we know, compared to traditional art forms—painting or sculpture—Media Art, has a multifarious potential of expression and visualization; and therefore, although underrepresented at the art market, which follows other interests, it became, we might say, "the art of our time;" thematizing complex challenges for our life and societies, like genetic engineering and the rise of post human bodies, like ecological crises, like the image and media revolution and with it the explosion of

> human knowledge, the rapid growing mega cities, the change towards virtual financial economies and the processes of globalization, just to name a few.... Media art can deal with questions and challenges of our time in a way traditional art media simply can't do...

This is the position of this dissertation, that media art provides an access point for thinking and forming a media philosophy, and offers the response, reflexivity, or awareness to the digital that Bishop claims does not exist in contemporary art. In other words, media art provides a unique space for understanding the particular contemporary condition that has been formed by new media technologies.

The study of the contemporary Polish rooted site is essentially also a study of a particular technological time—a study of the local reverberations of global transformations—one that is suited to scrutiny and uniquely reflected through media art practices. Put differently, media art presents 'pivotal' opportunities for insight into the Polish site: media exist in ecologies and must be understood as emergent from specificities associated with site such that the social, political, and cultural effects of media art are best contextualized and understood by turning to site-specific practices and histories. There is much research to be done in regions that do not align or fit in with the dominant histories and theories that have resulted from the 'center.' It is in this effort that this project worked to highlight to a Western audience some of the art histories, experiments, ecologies, and artists from the Polish site in order to challenge the idea that globality and/or universality—of the so-called art world, of mediated culture—is sufficient for grasping the rooted local site as it exists in the everyday.

Thinking through the site has forced some critical discussions and debates in the study of media art. David Teh's (2011) recent work on contemporary art in Thailand for example provides an important contribution to the site-specific study of media art, one that turns upside down some narrow and limited ideas about what constitutes (new) media art. He points out that much of the work there concerned with media and technology uses 'old' forms, whether billboard painting or parts found in a hobby stores, which do not reflect the "techno-centric accounts of the field" of new media art "which have struggled to plot places like Thailand onto their global maps" (p. 137). In other words Thailand is out-of-sync with high-tech Western definitions of new media, but it nonetheless possesses characteristics and features that push the limits of media art thinking and practice, confirming that "formal renovation does not imply technical invention" (p. 137). Indeed, Teh questions how thinking about media practices through local, site-specific lenses problematizes new media theory and calls for a different way of thinking about the relationships, current and historical, between art and technology in a way that does not privilege the 'new'. Even more important, Teh argues, would be the integration of 'peripheral' sites in the way that media is theorized in the center, since

> [w]e might revisit the question of the medium per se: instead of seeing it as a technical thing, we might consider it as a social *process*, focus on what it *does*, rather than what it *is*. Such an approach would put a medium's relationship to older media at the centre of the analysis. It would mean attending not just to the contingent, local history of a given medium, but also to histories of mediation and mediumship that reach beyond the bounds of any single medium....And it would help explain why 'the program' (Vilém Flusser) of this or that medium can be so different in places like Thailand than in the West" (italics in original, p. 137).

Building, excavating, and thinking about media art practices as processes emergent from particular ecologies is therefore at once a project of understanding a particular site, but it is also a contribution to the pluralization of media art archaeologies and theories and an attempt to problematize the 'global' media art discourses as they are shaped from 'the center.' So at the same time as media art provides insights into site-specific contexts, it also reflects a broader global condition of media pervasiveness that resonates across sites, whether in the peripheries or margins, on in the center. As such this exploration of media art practices found in the Polish site is a case study into how to think about possibilities of media art, not just for Poland, but everywhere. Moreover, in thinking about site and about media as products of both local and global processes in a way that reflected the larger questions of the 'center/periphery' as well as the 'global/local,' the intention here was to present the ongoing challenge of the self-enfranchisement of the Polish site while making an argument that rootedness and re-territorialisation are essential for the political strength of Polish citizenship.

In a recent attempt to align East and West, and perhaps in retaliation against any negative associations with being 'Eastern' (and thus implicitly backwards), the term 'New Europe' has surfaced to acknowledge the two-sided nature of an expanded Europe as a move beyond the divisions, wars, and 'othering' that marked the 'old' Europe. 'New Europe' at once refers to the new members of the European Union but also to a new Europe—one sparked by possibility, novelty, and the future, which includes the old as well as the new members of the EU. This 'New Europe' is a hybrid, one in which however the differences between East and West must continue to be negotiated in such a

way that ECE does not lose itself through so-called Westernization, 'Europeanization' or globalization processes by being treated as behind or inferior, but rather can redefine Europe as much as it is being changed by it. This idea of 'New Europe' proposes that we have reached a moment of 'coevalness' or contemporaneity which includes East and West in a post-Soviet condition marked by a shared historical moment, one in which different registers in the organization of time and space are finally overcome (Buck-Morss, 2006; Condee, 2008). This would mean that East and West now exist together in a 'shared time' and that though their temporalities are different, they are joined by a shared future (Smith, 2008, p. 9). However, it is important that this newfound contemporaneity—or as Geeta Kapur (2008) refers to it, a global 'time of now'—exists in relation to and with named historical, political, and geographic entities such as sites (she suggests nation-states). In other words, expressions of contemporaneity are still spatially defined and the product of particular, geographically-defined physical sites. The question remains whether this acceptance of multiplicity and plurality is merely theoretical, or whether and how ECE joins, participates, collaborates, and becomes equal in formulations of European contemporaneity, collectivity, and solidarity without sacrificing its own specificity. And, as was explored here, how artistic practices continue to contribute to the political, social, and cultural negotiations of a site amidst the pull of global networks, markets, and opportunities.

Bringing together the ideas of site, media, and art together through the concept of experimentation, solidified the political positions and aspirations of this project. What really does it mean, in the cultural sphere, that something is an experiment? And why

have we lost that belief in the experiment that was so central to the social imaginings of the avant-garde? It became obvious that to understand Poland, as a site of new imaginings and beginnings, and to understand the opportunity of artistic practice in this context, the idea of the experiment could be a fruitful one, as a moment when there is a possibility, if even a flicker, of something different, of change. This would reinvest art with a natality and with it the political potentiality of mediation in the reimagination of site.

The idea of the experiment underlined one of the basic premises that this study has made, in that art is a powerful pedagogical tool that can still have a political function and meaning beyond being 'art for art's sake'. It argued that media art could be engaging precisely because media are ecological processes existing, changing, reacting to, and shaping environments. By situating media art beyond utilitarianism, fetichization, or novelty, this project has shown media art as affecting a particular kind of criticality that can offer some subversive or alternate experiences of site. It is an art that reestablishes the importance of the process of inquiry, creation, and experimentation—of trying—to continue to think critically about how sites are inextricable from constructions of the past, of polity, but also of reality and self. This is an art intimately tied to subversion and to action, one that has more meaning or 'value' than merely circulating within the networks of the art world. As such artists must continue to provide critical local perspectives despite integration the global capitalism and networks, including those of the art world and market. They must, as Rolnik has noted, overcome the "dissociation of resistance and

creation within artistic practices" (2003, p.9). To do otherwise is, she provocatively argues:

> [t]o simply remain in the ghetto of 'art' as the separate sphere to which the power of creation was confined in the earlier regime is to run the risk of keeping it dissociated from the power of resistance, and limiting it to being a source of value, of which its pimp, capital, can make an easy living. It is the risk of being reduced, as an artist, to the function of a supplier of hard drugs in the form of ready-made identities, completely outfitted with their glamour-drenched cartographies of meaning, to be pushed by dealers on the growth-market of subjectivities suffering the syndrome of abstinence from sense, and even from their own silhouettes. Taken to the limit, this position results in the cynicism of certain artists whose creation is oriented by the desire to belong to this glamorised scene, and who offer themselves voluptuously for exploitation by the pimp. (Rolnik, 2003, p. 9)

These are not new questions or concerns, but fighting for the social function of art has waned in the face of an art world preoccupied by the rules of the market. Nonetheless, it remains very much alive, if often simmering under the surface, as can be observed in the controversial events of the 2012 Berlin Biennale. Under the curatorial direction of renowned Polish artist-provocateur Artur Żmijewski, the Biennale took on the theme 'Forget Fear' and quickly became a battleground of debates about the social function and political nature of artistic practice. Żmijewski (along with his associate curators Joanna Warsza and Russian activist-group Voina) produced a show that asked "a perfectly reasonable question: What exactly is art good for anymore, other than generating high prices at auctions?" (Knöfel, 2012). Żmijewski, a known advocate for the need to think politically, critically, about art, was a member of the Critical Art movement in the 1990s, (as discussed in Chapter 1), and has continued on in this mission despite changing fads

and political climates. As a curator of the Biennale he has continued his life's work, causing controversy by choosing works primarily based on their political significance, rather than their aesthetic qualities or merits, producing a "mammoth, laudably intentioned, almost heroic demonstration of collective resistance to the forces of global political hegemony and capitalism's lubricating power to reduce art to frictionless pleasure" (Madoff, 2012). For Żmijewski, to have the discussion about the political nature or abilities of art is to engage with the potential of artistic practice. Aesthetics are not, for him, why art is important or interesting.

The result was an event "greeted with derision," called everything from "a disaster," to an "empty gesture" with "not much to see" and accused of "deep-seated stupidity" that has "failed spectacularly in its attempt to empower the arts" (as cited in Michalska, 2012) and that ultimately resulted in an exhibition that is "fearfully forgettable" (Madoff, 2012). But in sparking off such controversy it could be said that Żmijewski succeeded in creating a moment in which political discussion surfaced, something that is often swept aside in favor of aesthetic spectacle.[ii] Visitors were greeted into the museum by slogans such as "Revolution!" and "To create is to resist!" along with a banner created by the Occupy Berlin movement that proclaimed "This is not our museum/This is your action space" (Madoff, 2012; Schillinger, 2012), immediately constructing a space in which the role of the artist and of the political activist became blurred and intentionally transposed. Indeed, by choosing practitioners who "with their every public action practice politics," who cross over into "genuine action," the exhibition meant to subvert "the magical power of the object" (Żmijewski, 2012, p.11-

17). The exhibition reignited the symbolic confrontation between the way we think about art—aesthetically, formally, politically. But more than that even it brings to mind Rolnik's concern about creation and resistance, about the possibility of resistance in an art world governed by the principles of the market.

Whether Żmijewski was successful in his attempt to create an "art that offers its tools, time, and resources to solve the economic problems of the impoverished majority," as he called for in the catalogue (p. 15), is not ultimately the most important question (and indeed, critics were quick to point out that "art that 'actually works' as a new form of social expression to change governments and institutions is nowhere to be seen" and that Żmijewski does nothing but "shoot blanks" –Madoff, 2012). Perhaps it would be a more productive (and realistic) expectation or strategy to think of art that is political not because it is able to change political structures themselves, but in its ability to in some small manner alter how people think, perceive, or see in a way that would slowly or provocatively lead to the 'revolution in perception' that was called for in the experiments of the avant-garde. The 'action,' then, begins not in the revolution of institutions, but in the self, in the singularities that exist in democracies, in a reimagining at the level of the audience, of citizenship. By choosing "works of art that rub salt into various wounds—refugee camps, drug-related deaths, commerce, radicalization, the Holocaust" (Bartlick, 2010), Żmijewski privileged art works that act politically and communicatively in their production of a site-specific reclamation in art.

Inadvertently, the situation in Berlin raises the question of the Polish wolf once more, as the exoticisation of Żmijewski and his 'untimely' approach to contemporary art

again brings to light some sense that the West is looking at the concerns, product, and heritage—intellectual, artistic, political—from the Eastern curator as simply irrelevant, amusing, and naïve. But in this case it does not seem that Western critics perceived or evaluated the exhibition from a proclaimed vantage point of superiority (as it had in different times in history). Rather they positioned their criticism firmly within their Western rhetoric of art criticism, resistant to the collusion of art and activism whose hybrid seems to be an activism that is ineffectual and an art that is aesthetically stunted. But perhaps this is the moment of blindness produced by a superficial desire to think globally, without borders, or difference, in that it is limiting and short-sighted to understand Żmijewski's approach to art without considering where he and it is coming from, and acknowledging the lessons and positions that stem from his formation. To put it rather crudely: criticizing his artistic choices is one thing, but it is quite another to throw out an entire philosophy of art. At the very least this criticism of the Biennale gave the impression that somehow Żmijewski did not understand the fashions of contemporary art, and that the naiveté of his activist approach was invariably regarded as a sign of immaturity and lacking in sophistication and that, indeed, the wolf lives on in the East.

One of the early goals in this project was to capture the sense that there are unmistakable reminders of the history of the site that structure the experiences of the everyday. The result is a contribution to an understanding of site-specificity and an argument for the usefulness of thinking through the layers of ecologies, to the way these are reflected in cultural artifacts such that artistic practice is entangled with the social, political, and cultural markers of a site. And, at a moment when Europe is in crisis, as

hatred continues to be displayed not only in Poland in the manner of xenophobia, but in Greece and Italy and Spain where German flags are being burned today in reaction to critical economic struggles of the European Union, to understand the particularizes of sites and localities still matters. The economic realities (of the time this is being written, in 2012) are progressively redrawing the division of Europe between North and South rather than East and West, reigniting along the way a rethinking of the European project. As a response, the focus on the site provides a re-territorialization of action and common interest to counter-act the de-territorialization of economic interests. In this context, concepts like political solidary, citizenship, and self-enfranchisement—ideas with such different histories and meanings in the East—are useful for providing different approaches and genealogies of thinking about the "we" that exists even in plurality, or how the body, the singularity that makes up plurality, exists simultaneously to the solidarity and empathy of democracy. Polish skepticism towards the European experiment, its history, its experience as the Other—i.e., the many elements that constitute its site—can provide insights for an unsettled Europe, if given the chance to exist beyond the marginalized position of a locality without global resonance.

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[i] Reponses and comments to Bishop's essay spurred a lively debate and reignited (if it was ever dulled) the conversation about how to define media art. See for example the discussion to the article on the *Artforum* website (http://artforum.com/talkback/id=70724) and the entries for "Claire Bishop's digital divide piece in Art Forum" in September 2012 on the *New-Media-Curating Discussion List:* https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A1=ind1209&L=new-media-curating#4

[ii] And indeed, it would be interesting to compare the Berlin Biennale with the concurrent Documenta 13 which provided an overabundance and overstimulation of the senses. But as Żmijewski might say… and then what?

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Certificate #:	STU 2009 - 155
Approval Period:	11/24/09-11/24/10

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Memo

To: Aleksandra Kaminska, Department of Communications and Culture
kaminska@yorku.ca

From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor, Research Ethics
(on behalf of Daphne Winland, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

Date: **Tuesday 24th November, 2009**

Re: Ethics Approval

Digital East: Material Approaches for Localizing Media Arts

I am writing to inform you that the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee has reviewed and approved the above project.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: 416-736-5914 or via email at: acollins@yorku.ca.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM
Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor,
Office of Research Ethics

RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE

Upon receipt of an ethics approval certificate, researchers are reminded that they are required to ensure that the following measures are undertaken so as to ensure on-going compliance with Senate and TCPS ethics guidelines:

1. **RENEWALS:** Research Ethics Approval certificates are subject to annual renewal.
    a. Researchers will be reminded by ORE, in advance of certificate expiry, that the certificate must be renewed
        i. Researchers have 2 weeks to comply to a reminder notice;
        ii. If researchers do not respond within 2 weeks, a final reminder will be forwarded. Researchers have one week to respond to the final notice;
    b. **Failure to renew an ethics approval certificate or** (to notify ORE that no further research involving human participants will be undertaken) **may result in suspension of research cost fund and access to research funds may be suspended/withheld** ;

2. **AMENDMENTS:** Amendments must be reviewed and approved **PRIOR** to undertaking/making the proposed amendments to an approved ethics protocol;

3. **END OF PROJECT**: ORE must be notified when a project is complete;

4. **ADVERSE EVENTS**: Adverse events must be reported to ORE as soon as possible;

5. **AUDIT:**
    a. More than minimal risk research may be subject to an audit as per TCPS guidelines;
    b. A spot sample of minimal risk research may be subject to an audit as per TCPS guidelines.

FORMS: As per the above, the following forms relating to on-going research ethics compliance are available on the Research website:

a. Renewal
b. Amendment
c. End of Project
d. Adverse Event