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Vilnius Archipelago: Performative Walks around This Performative City

*(...) people are increasingly finding the world not a book to be read
but a performance to participate in (Schechner, 2002, p. 21)¹*

I

Who of us as a child did not hear warnings repeatedly and ad nauseam: “Look out, or you’ll fall down! Don’t stare at it! Watch your step!”. The purpose of this was to ensure our safety – to protect us from a potentially painful fall on the asphalt road surface or concrete pavement. Unfortunately, keeping an

¹ Richard Schechner is the author of the popular definition of performance as “restored behavior” (Schechner, 2002). According to Renata Hołda, “<Restored behavior> is a behavior, activity, process or action that is culturally consolidated and reconstructed according to a certain scenario – more or less precisely defined – but assuming the possibility of some change. (...)” (Hołda, 2015, p. 132).

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eye on the tips of our shoes and being afraid of falling down effectively limits the range of cognition, making our symbolic safety dependent on hanging on tightly to set strategies and limits. Crossing these lines is the task of every researcher who wants to square up to describing and analyzing the reality that surrounds us, which resembles scattered jigsaw puzzle pieces rather than a linear and cause and effect record of events.

During a library and archive query in Vilnius in November 2016, when I stumbled over the bumpy pavement near Vilnius University, I trod on a fragment of some text. I started to clean the wet snow off it and saw a quotation: “Vilnius liko man kaip stiprybė, kaip gyvybės vanduo. Marija Gimbutienė 1993 m.” (*Vilnius remained in me as power, as a source of life. Marija Gimbutienė 1993*)². A few dozen metres away at the university gate a famous quotation from Czesław Miłosz’s “Dedication” was waiting for me: “Kas yra poezija, kuri neišgelbsti nei tautų, nei žmonių. Česlovas Milošas 1945 m.” (*What is poetry which does not save / Nations or people? Czesław Miłosz 1945*)³. I also found the #skaitomevilniu hashtag (#wreadvilnius), which heralded a fascinating journey through the islands of the multicultural archipelago of memory scattered around the capital of the Republic of Lithuania.

II

Pavements, which we do not even notice every day, can be a fascinating space for exploration and discovery, as the Lithuanian poet, photographer and translator Julius Keleras writes in his book entitled *Vilniaus šaligatviai/ Vilnius Pavements*:

The pavements are the window to the city, my city. The fact that the window is not open to everybody, that it doesn’t open easily, doesn’t have a comfortable fitted handle? They are a window anyway, offering the best view of the city. Nothing else has yet fused freedom and history in Vilnius so successfully (Keleras, 2005–2010, p. 4).

The routes and symbols of urban identity – pavements, squares, streets, houses – not only organize a specific space, but they are also part of a larger

² If not stated otherwise, all translations into English are by the translator (Joanna Modzelewska-Jankowiak).

³ I quote Miłosz 2011, p. 143.

urban narrative, an individual and collective story about the past, about everything that is “remembered” and “forgotten” (cf. Connerton, 2012; Gaižutytė-Filipavičienė, 2015; Ambrulevičiūtė, 2016; Ricoeur, 2007).

The complicated past of Vilnius, as is so characteristic of the cities of Central and Eastern Europe, is marked with the painful heritage of a “city of changed blood” (Lewicka, 2012); at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries it faced a changing modernity and rapid Europeanization. This juxtaposition became a source of serious social and national problems, the roots of which dated back to the most distant and the most recent history of Lithuania, including Polish–Lithuanian relations⁴. The traumatic experiences of the Second World War (daily persecution and threat to life, the Holocaust, the exodus of people both to the east and west) was left unsaid – expunged from memory and subjected to repression – and found an outlet only after the fall of communism and the collapse of the USSR. After public communication had been freed from the pressure of the only proper Soviet historical and social narrative, the narratives which were parallel and rival to the basic discourse (here, the Lithuanian national discourse) started to speak more and more strongly (Safronovas, 2011, pp. 337–378). They also concerned the independent Republic of Lithuania and its capital, Vilnius, where, according to Tomas Venclova, “different traditions created distinct myths that are irreconcilable. (...) It seems hopeless to break free of this network of competing mythologies, but we should try” (Venclova, 2006, p. 138).

Vilnius, as a city strongly marked with the experience of totalitarianism, in an interesting manner shows the process of redefining the memory of this city space during the political transformation, the establishing of a new hierarchy of values and symbols, and, as a consequence, the process of making attempts to unify and appropriate the past in a distinctive way⁵. Vilnius, after all, has been building its complex identity and memory for hundreds of years, and both its builders and destroyers have worked on it. Therefore, today this

⁴ For instance, completely different opinions about the Union of Lublin, the heritage of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth or the issue of interwar Vilnius and the so-called repatriation of the Polish population from the former territories of the Second Polish Republic.

⁵ Elzbieta Rybicka described the modern city as a battleground, a space of “forgetting, denying, commemorating, and thus clashing of various conflicting strategies” (Rybicka, 2011, p. 203). See also Szacka, 2006; Kapralski, 2010; Kaltenberg-Kwiatkowska, 2011. About Vilnius, see also Nikžentaitis, 2011, pp. 285–296; Šutinienė, 2011, pp. 225–284; Wołkonowski, 2017; Walkowiak, 2018.

city is such an interesting research example: a cultural hybrid resulting from centuries-old cultural transgressions – “transitions, incorporations, transformations” (Welsch, 1998, p. 209). In the light of Wolfgang Welsch’s concept of transculturality, all types of memory – borrowed, adopted or enforced – are transcultural, which requires the use of adequate tools to describe an object of research (Welsch, 1998, pp. 195–222). This is difficult but also especially interesting in the context of the complex historical and socio-political experience of the cities and towns in Central and Eastern Europe. The overall description of such a moveable phenomenon is still a research utopia, but the performative perspective (the so-called performative turn)⁶ made it possible to attempt to comprehend this city that “is still becoming”, its “event tissue” and “connections, layers, bundles of events that constitute life in it together with its space, urban imagination and experience” without taking “the mechanism of the city to pieces” (Rembowska, 2008, p. 11).

As a researcher of the city’s memory culture, I am most interested in applying the performative strategy in the scientific field I explore. An example of the use of this method in research on collective memory is Paul Connerton’s book, which is already a literature classic, entitled *How Societies Remember* (1989), (Polish edition 2012)⁷, in which the author analyzes not so much intellectual memory processes as practicing memory (ceremonies and commemorations). This research approach places Connerton’s works in the performative current and the so-called performative social memory “which realizes itself in an action directed at a specific goal and which uses existing scenarios” (Napiórkowski, 2014, p. 342). The polemics with the above concept and undermining the necessity of the existence of the canon of scenarios led to a new understanding of memory as a kind of activity or performative act in which “memory operates through repetitions which constantly modify themselves” (Libera, 2005, p. 46). As a result of adopting a performative strategy to explore the city and its memory,

⁶ Ewa Domańska wrote, “the »performative turn« should be associated and analyzed together with the so-called »turn to agency«, i.e. a special interest in the problem of agency, not only of people, but also of inanimate beings (for example, things), a turn to materiality, i.e. a turn to things, and the rapidly developing interest in posthumanism (turn to what-is-not-human)” (Domańska, 2007, p. 52).

⁷ As far as the works of Polish researchers are concerned, Bartosz Korzeniewski’s book is worth recalling, entitled *Polityczne rytuały pokuty w perspektywie zagadnienia autonomii jednostki* (*Political rituals of penance in the perspective of autonomy of an individual*) (Korzeniewski, 2006).

the perspective of experiencing and describing the city also had to change⁸: from a textual-symbolic to an event-based perspective; from writing-reading the city's text (cf. Zeidler-Janiszewska, 1997) to an event, a game, a play, a performance; from semiotic analysis to analysis of the sensory experiencing of a space.

In a performative city, attention is drawn to mutual relations and interactions between events, their actors and creators, and their causative power⁹, which determines how a city changes us and how we change a city. Changeability is an immanent quality of modern urban centers: it is a constant creation of networks between individual cultural elements (including memories) that then interpenetrate and influence one another (including rewriting and deleting). The current of memory¹⁰ that interests me in the context of the analysis of the *#skaitomevilniu* urban project is particularly visible in cities with a multicultural past, which also include contemporary Vilnius and its rich memory culture¹¹. Memory is reflected both in group practices related to participation in city events (e.g. historical reconstructions and stage productions, location-based games, and tourist routes related to city *memorial sites*¹²) and in individual activities (e.g. writing, photographing, filming, drawing, playing roles). This division is not rigid because in both cases our individual relationship with the remembrance of the city – our “individual response to the city” – is most interesting from a research point of view (Rewers, 2014, p. 15).

In this context, so-called performative walks play a special role (Carlson, 2011, pp. 15–32)¹³. Studies on urban memories are historically connected with the figure

⁸ A basic performative relationship with a city is based on experience/experiencing, especially for situationists.

⁹ The equivalent of Austin's *power of utterance* (Austin, 1993, p. 333).

¹⁰ At this point, I refer to the article by Elżbieta Rybicka in which she proposed six currents (“lines that create a mobile communication network”) of the city's performativity: resistance, power, creativity, memory, community, and play (Rybicka, 2012, pp. 32–24).

¹¹ I understand the term ‘memory culture’ (German: *Erinnerungskulturen*) following Christoph Cornelissen as “the formal concept superior to all possible forms of conscious human memory of historical events, personalities, and processes, regardless of whether they are of an aesthetic, political or cognitive nature” (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 255). See also Assmann, 2009.

¹² I define memorial sites in accordance with the established concept of the French historian Pierre Nora. Memorial sites are not only an element of a specific space (social, political, cultural), but, above all, an element of a symbolic space, which is the base of community identity, which is often an important dominant visual feature of a particular territory (See Szpociński, 2003, pp. 17–23).

¹³ Following the well-known aphorism of Friedrich Nietzsche, we can say that “Only ideas won by walking have any value” (Nietzsche, 2004, p. 10).

of Benjamin's *flâneur* moving about the Parisian metropolis at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, in cities of the 21st century, the *flâneur* ceases to be a key figure (Rewers, 2005, p. 7) and is replaced by a passer-by drifting around the urban archipelago. For Benjamin's vagabond and wanderer, the process of exploring the city had an intellectual and aesthetic dimension, while the contemporary drifting person, who clashes with the inefficiency of Western culture, has to build their own city and "new set piece" (Ivain, 2015, pp. 34–35). According to Guy-Ernest Debord, one of the founders of the situationist movement and the author and practitioner of the drift theory (theory of the *dérive*), drifting (*dérive*) "can be defined as technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances" and it is "quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll" (Debord, 2015, p. 122; see also Hopkins & Orr, 2011, pp. 33–50). A drifting person can be both a participant and a subject of an urban performance, in which acquiring new information about a city is related to action and activity (here, walking). Taking up this challenge also becomes an individual threshold experience (i.e. crossing a *threshold*¹⁴) and makes it possible to enter the *between* sphere where it can be transformed and changed.

III

*#skaitomevilniu*¹⁵ is a social project implemented in Vilnius in the years 2016–2017 by the Vilnius municipal government, the "Time to read" organization (Laikas skaityti, n.d.), the Benediktas Gylys Foundation¹⁶ and the Association of Lithuanists (Lituanistų sambūris, 2017). The 7th of May – the project's

¹⁴ The "threshold" category was analyzed in the article by Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska: "(...) the concept of threshold as a between space is surrounded by a different semantic aura than the concept of boundary. The threshold invites us to cross it and, as a result, promises something positive: change of status, regaining health, acquiring new knowledge or skills". (Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2006, p. 21). Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), a leading researcher of performativity, also addressed this subject matter.

¹⁵ At this point, I would like to thank Dr. Darius Kuolys, a social activist and scientist from the Faculty of Humanities of Vilnius University, the initiator of the project, for his help in collecting the information I have used in this text. Darius Kuolys was the first Minister of Culture in the independent Republic of Lithuania (1990–1992), advisor to President Valdas Adamkus (1998–2002).

¹⁶ Benediktas Gylys is a thirty-year-old Lithuanian businessman, a millionaire compared to Mark Zuckerberg, the author of a guide on how to earn the first million on the internet, entitled *Bitonomija* (2017).

premiere – commemorated the lifting of the ban on Latin font printing in 1904 (introduced by the Tsarist authorities after the January Uprising, 1863–1864) and the rebirth of national writing. This date, which is important for the Lithuanian national identity, is celebrated in Lithuania as the Lithuanian Press Restoration, Language and Book Day. The *#skaitomevilniu* initiative consisted in writing literary and journalistic quotes (in Lithuanian or with translation¹⁷) in the central places of Vilnius: mainly selected pavements and information columns¹⁸ in the vicinity of the historical center, the National Library of Lithuania, Basanavičius street, the square at Rūdininkų street, the Green Bridge (Lithuanian: Žalioji tiltas) and the Užupis district¹⁹. The idea was not original because such forms of art presence in the living and changing tissue of the city are often used by artists from both the counterculture and the so-called official art (as in the presented example)²⁰. The basic message of the creators of the project, Darius Kuolys (doctor of humanities, junior lecturer/associate professor at Vilnius University, social and local government activist) and Rūta Elijošaitė (head of the Laikas skaityti organization, now defunct), was to make the inhabitants of the city interested in the text of Vilnius and to draw attention to its polyphony²¹. They selected the texts and invited the Lithuanian community (mostly students) and the city authorities, as well as well-known Lithuanian artists: the street art representative Jurgis Tarabilda and the creator of urban frescoes and mosaics Gitenis Umbrasas. Despite their strong subjectivity, Kuolys and Elijošaitė chose figures which are representative of the culture of Lithuania and Vilnius, including eminent writers, poets, social activists, politicians, scientists, and

¹⁷ Bilingual Lithuanian-Polish (3) and Lithuanian-English (4) inscriptions. In total, 32 texts were published during the implementation of the project in the years 2016–2017.

¹⁸ In 2017, the columns were abandoned.

¹⁹ That is, concerning the city thematically and/or through authors.

²⁰ In his official speeches, the then-mayor of Vilnius, Remigijus Šimašius, encouraged active participation in the project: “Vilnius has spoken by means of texts from the Neris banks to the Užupis district, from the Europa Square to the square at Rūdininkų street. I invite you to find Vilnius writers’ works in various places and to stop, read and give some thought to the meaning of these words at least for a moment” (*Citatomis išmargintos Vilniaus erdvės skleidžia skaitymo virusą*, 2016). Darius Kuolys, the project initiator, is equally important for the ideological message of the project. His vision of Vilnius – a city open to the Other and diverse in its tradition – accompanies him in his many years of activity in which he combines the official (formal) and personal (everyday) perspective of experiencing the city.

²¹ Semioticians very often pay attention to this quality of the city (Žyłko, 2000; Toporow, 2000).

intellectuals²²: Giediminas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania (1275–1341); Antanas Smetona, President of the interwar Republic of Lithuania (1874–1944); Sofija Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė (1886–1958), poet, translator, social activist; Vincas Kudirka (1858–1899), author of the Lithuanian National Anthem, poet, translator; Jurgis Kunčinas (1947–2002), writer, poet, translator; Tomas Venclova (1937), poet, essayist, translator; Judita Vaičiūnaitė (1937–2001), poet, essayist, translator; Jonas Strielkūnas (1939–2010), poet, publicist, translator; Ona Šimaitė (1894–1970), writer, librarian at the university library, during the Second World War she saved Jews from the Vilna Ghetto; Henrikas Radauskas (1910–1970), one of the most important Lithuanian emigration poets; Algirdas Julius Greimas (1917–1992), linguist, semiotician, essayist, myth researcher; Marija Gimbutienė (1921–1994), famous researcher of ancient cultures; Sigitas Geda (1943–2008), poet, translator, essayist; Kazys Bradūnas (1917–2009), one of the most important Lithuanian emigration artists, poet and publicist.

As it was important to show the polyphony of the city, the group of cited authors also included those not belonging to the Lithuanian ethnic group who were representatives of the broadly understood Vilnius culture²³: Teodor Bujnicki (1907–1944), Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński (1905–1953), Romain Gary (1914–1980), Moyshe Kulbak (Mošė Kulbakas, 1896–1937), Icchokas Meras (1934–2014), Czesław Miłosz (Česlovas Milošas, 1911–2004), Daniel Naborowski (Danielius Naborovskis, 1573–1630), Abraham Sutzkever (Avromas Suckeveris, 1913–2010), and Władysław Syrokomla (Vladislovas Sirokomlė, 1823–1862). It is worth noting that the names of the authors belonging to the Lithuanian canon of city texts determined by the authors of the project (e.g. Kulbak, Miłosz, Syrokomla) are written (presented) in the Lithuanian language, while the others (e.g. Bujnicki, Gary, Gałczyński) are written in the original version. It is interesting that we will not find Russians, Belarusians or Ukrainians among them. This emptiness is significant for the city, the oldest tradition of which leads to the Old Belarusian language²⁴, and you

²² Full list of names and location of quotations on the internet, cf. Skaitome Vilnių, 2017, p. 6; Mano Vilnius, 2017.

²³ This distinction applies to representatives of Lithuanian ethnic culture and representatives of other national cultures that form the Vilnius mosaic (see more: Gyventojai pagal tautybę savivaldybėse, n.d.).

²⁴ As the language of the chancellery of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania and the first Belarusian prints.

can still hear Slavonic languages²⁵ in the streets. Perhaps in the next editions of the project, which has been suspended due to organizational problems for two years, this emptiness will be filled²⁶.

The name of the #skaitomevilniu project, although it refers to the semiotic metaphor of the city-library, in practice has a code of wandering, drifting. The # sign directs us to the sphere of modernity – to the strategy of tags and internet information resources – thanks to which our specific three-dimensional spatial project gains virtual features. Its stage and audience, place of action and experience is, on the one hand, an urban space, but on the other hand it is a virtual internet space. Relationships which develop during urban drifting from one record to another (language experience) largely belong to the sphere of senses (sight, hearing, smell), while the internet provides us with knowledge and is a specific intellectual background of the #skaitomevilniu project. Thus, the framework of a fascinating location-based game (with the city) is created: the first step is told by the city (it is a text and a specific landscape that is not only a background but also a hero), and the following steps are individual choices of the participant who can read the complexity of a message in the next steps and discover the internal relationships between them and the whole project or, without entering into a dialogue with the city, give up participation in it. A specific game with the past of the city is also a game with its identity, which is another important aspect of the performative experience, i.e. the event experience of Vilnius, because “events produce places” (Rewers, 2005, p. 73). The performative strategy which combines the above elements actualizes them and brings to the surface of communication what was erased and long forgotten. An excellent example is the awareness of the presence of Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński in Vilnius (1934–1936); he worked in a radio station in Vilnius and lived with his wife Natalia in the Užupis district (English: *Beyond the river district*) at Malūnų street (Eng: *Mill Street*). Here his daughter Kira was born. The quotation from “Rozmowa liryczna” (Lyrical conversation) (1950) which was found on the pavement at Malūnų street, near

²⁵ As for contemporary Ukrainian language, its presence mainly results from the latest migration processes. On the basis of data taken from the 2011 census, the ethnic composition of Vilnius is as follows: Lithuanians – 338,758, Poles – 88,408, Russians – 63,991, Belarusians – 18,924, Ukrainians – 5,338 (Gyventojai pagal tautybę savivaldybėse, n.d.).

²⁶ At the time of writing (2019), the project is still suspended.

the “Žalia žąsys” (“Green Goose”²⁷) restaurant is the voice of the Polish past of the city: “– Pasakyk man, kaip mane myli. / – Pasakyčiau. – Taigi? // – Tell me how you love me. / – I will tell you. / – So?” (// – Powiedz mi jak mnie kochasz. / – Powiem. / – Więc?). Thanks to the fact that it has been updated (by means of a new form and translation into Lithuanian), it is no longer a part of colonial discourse but an example of love poetry and European literary culture that appeals to everyone. Thus, this performative city becomes a carrier of texts and the recipient of a text – a performative drifting person who makes an attempt to decipher the past in the process of reading – becomes an active participant of the process, which establishes new significant places.

#skaitomevilniu requires a departure from traditional reading by means of a paper book or a modern e-reader for *reading-viewing*. The need to quickly and efficiently find new elements of the urban jigsaw puzzle is a consequence of the urban pace, hurry, and fragmentary and superficial approach to reality. Therefore, each of the elements (quotations) must simultaneously be a whole and a part. In order to facilitate the recognition of quotations, they have been graphically standardized: they have the same template, layout, color and font type, information, and of course the *#skaitomevilniu* signature. The fundamental feature of the project is its openness (the possibility of adding next elements), non-centrality (each text is central in itself) and non-continuity (the texts do not refer to each other; they are like the broken threads of the Vilnius experience). This can be compared to the phenomenon of the archipelago (cf. Rewers, 2014, p. 43), to scattered islands surrounded by the depths of memory and non-memory, between high tides and low tides – uncertainty about what the future will bring. On the other hand, this is a figure that highlights what exists (although very fragile and ephemeral in the face of the elements) and not what does not exist. The archipelago is also an opportunity to fill the emptiness with discovered meanings and give it a name.

However, *#skaitomevilniu* requires specific reading and interpretation competences from drifting people: the ability to recognize the author and

²⁷ “The Little Theatre of the Green Goose” is a series of about 150 dramatic short pieces (1946–1950) by Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, based on a grotesque style and absurd sense of humor. Some of them were translated into the Lithuanian language and staged in 2009 as a diploma thesis by students of puppetry at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre in Vilnius. Konstanty I. Gałczyński also has a small commemorative plaque in Vilnius Old Town (Literatų g.).

to connect the cited excerpt with the urban landscape and cultural context. Some of these abilities are quite obvious, for instance the ability to recognize the Cathedral Square and connect it with the words of the Grand Duke of Lithuania and the founder of Vilnius, Gediminas: “Pirmiau geležis pasikeis į vašką ir vanduo pavirs plienu, negu mes atšauksime mūsų ištartą žodį 1323 m.” (*Iron will turn into wax and water will turn into lead before we will take back what we said 1323*). An important additional piece of information (we will find it in the description of the *#skaitomevilniu* project) is that Gediminas made Vilnius a European city. In the context of contemporary geopolitical conditions, such a declaration has additional sense and significance. Referring to the medieval history of the city, showing Vilnius as a space open to the Other, the authors of the project enhance and co-create the image of the Lithuanian capital, which is deeply set in the tradition and system of Western European values rather than Eastern ones. This is an important voice in the Lithuanian post-Soviet identity discourse, which has been taking place in Lithuania with varying intensity since its independence²⁸.

Another example regards the dark times of the Holocaust: at the junction of Rūdininkų street and Vokiečių street (English: *German Street*), on the border of the former ghetto, you will find the words of Ona Šimaitė: “Kiekvienas iš Vilniaus Geto žmonių, net ir pats mažiausias, visai to neįausdamas, buvo didelis herojus/ Without even realizing, every Vilna ghetto person, even the smallest, was a great hero 1965 m.” Ona Šimaitė was honored with the distinction and the title of the Righteous Among the Nations for helping Jews in the Vilna Ghetto. In 1944, she was imprisoned in Dachau. After the war, she remained abroad in France. In 2015, one of the streets in the Old Town was named after her²⁹. In the context of Lithuanian–Jewish relations and the judgment of the Holocaust, Ona Šimaitė’s voice acquired exceptional significance and inspired many young people to learn more about the Jewish past of Vilnius.

#skaitomevilniu refers to Lithuanian modernity in a very interesting way. First of all, it is a civic message that comes from the entire project and speaks not only with the voices of the representatives of the majority – the hosts of the city – but also gives the floor to the representatives of those who are absent or are a minority. However, the problem of filling in emptinesses still remains

²⁸ For example, the discussion intensified after Russia occupied Crimea (2014).

²⁹ In this picturesque street there are also stairs with quotations from the poetry of Czesław Miłosz.

an important challenge for the organizers and participants. The city speaks with the dramatic voice of one of the most eminent Lithuanian poets, Justinas Marcinkevičius: “Lietuva ką tu veiki? 1976 m.” (*Lithuania, what are you doing? 1976*). It also speaks with the appeal of the writer and social activist Sofija Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė: “Turime savo kraštą gražinti, šviesti, kad jau niekas iš Lietuvos bėgti nenorėtų 1926 m.” (*We have to beautify and educate our country so that no one wants to escape from Lithuania 1926*). Thus, the city actualizes and transforms historical texts in the face of the present challenges of the 21st century, becoming a weighty voice in contemporary Lithuanian-Lithuanian political and social discourse.

IV

The essence of the #skaitomevilniu project was an attempt to transform the urban substance of Vilnius by means of selected excerpts of prose writing, poetry, press articles, and essays from Lithuania and around the world. The initiative assumed that potential recipients would be “involved” in action in a way – obliged to engage not only intellectually but also corporeally through the physical experience of the city area. The introduction of literary text into the urban tissue not only triggered aesthetic changes in the urban space (an example of urban art), but also gave it additional meanings and enhanced the existing concrete informative message³⁰. Moreover, placing the text into the urban structure activated some drifting passers-by to reflect on the text they encountered and inspired them to join the “game with the city” and its past³¹. This opportunity to combine a strategy of moving in a particular urban space with a virtual space (with a key in the form of # which leads to internet information resources on the authors, cited works, history of places, thus supplementing and explaining them) resulted in the extension of the described project (metaphor of rhizome-text). In turn, the mixing of different styles of utterance, genres and epochs strengthened the fragmentary character of the project, which was

³⁰ It was expressed, for example, by the name of a street, the presence of memory carriers, the cultural connotations of a place, or the complete lack of them.

³¹ This is illustrated by photographs and films from the course of the project. See for instance: Mano Vilnius, 2017.

more like an archipelago than a well-organized library, which, as a matter of fact, was not its intention.

A vital question is how these ephemeral experiences (collisions with texts) can affect the building of longer-lasting and more conscious relations with the city. The variability and fluidity that are so characteristic of *post-polis* do not ease the building of such bonds. On the other hand, for particular social groups (e.g. the Association of Lithuanists and other people gathered around the *#skaitom-evilniu* project) preparing and developing the idea of *reading Vilnius for many voices* became bonded them (as illustrated by the activity in social media, on the website and in the Lithuanian media³²). The implementation of the project was a tangible action to gather information and share knowledge about the city, and its participants satisfied the need for education and manifested their group status. However, it is worth noting that although the project is of an egalitarian nature it was implemented mainly by a group of university students involved in learning about the city and its people (mainly from Vilnius University). It resulted in the popularization and consolidation of the idea of gaining more profound knowledge of the capital of the Republic of Lithuania in a quite homogenous humanist environment, as shown by the project's social media. In contrast, the information on the project on the Vilnius local government fan page (the official partner of the project) illustrates the low level of public interest in the initiative³³.

The cultural landscape surrounding the texts is not the background but an additional comment, an added value, the reading of which requires significant reading competence. It is also related to the change of the character of the subject who participates in a performative event: this person is no longer a sophisticated, well-educated 19th century *flâneur* who is walking and enjoying space, but a modern drifting *everyman* rushing through urban spaces.

As Jacek Wachowski writes, "(...) there are no aimless performances, because each activity that attracts the audience is intended to satisfy some needs of the performers and/or viewers (aesthetic, educational, sports, political, business, concerning professional activities, celebrating or manifesting one's own affiliation)" (Wachowski, 2011, p. 210). In the case of the presented project, it became the cement of the group trying to reach the essence of the urban

³² I mean the press articles and radio and television reports that accompanied the project premieres in May 2016 and 2017. More specific information is available on the project organizers' websites (Lituanistų sambūris, 2017; Laikas skaityti, n.d.) and on Facebook: Laikas skaityti, VšĮ (n.d.).

³³ See: Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė, 2016.

identity of Vilnius, with a strong sense of national pride³⁴; it also popularized Vilnius as a Western European culture city which is open and friendly for the Other. However, the most important factor is that the #skaitomevilniu project opened (or rather slightly opened) the door to meeting the world of other fully fledged residents of the Vilnius archipelago, in which everyone is both “one of us” and a stranger. However, we still have to wait for the social consolidation of the results of this opening.

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³⁴ It is reflected in an interesting way in a piece of information about the project published on the website of Lituaništų sambūrys (the Association of Lithuanists): “Selected texts written by people who are closely connected with the history of Lithuania have influenced and still influence our lives. Some of them are important for the history of Vilnius, and Vilnius still speaks by means of their mouths and words. (...) The idea of the project is not only to invite people to stop and reflect on them, but also to think over what a strong nation we are, how many interesting, wise, sensitive and famous people were brought up by our homeland” (Lituaništų sambūris, 2017). It is difficult to acknowledge that K. I. Gałczyński or D. Naborowski were “brought up by Lithuania”, but a specific “appropriation” of them by the authors of the project shows the evolution of the central idea.

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Archipelag Wilno. O performatywnym chodzeniu po performatywnym mieście

Niniejszy artykuł został poświęcony problematyce performatywnej pamięci miasta na przykładzie współczesnego Wilna, stolicy Republiki Litewskiej. Skomplikowana, choć tak charakterystyczna dla miast Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, przeszłość Wilna, naznaczona bolesnym dziedzictwem „miasta o wymienionej krwi” (pojęcie M. Lewickiej), zderzyła się na przełomie XX i XXI wieku z pełną zmianą nowoczesnością i pośpieszną europeizacją. Ta konfrontacja stała się źródłem poważnych problemów społecznych i narodowych (w tym relacji polsko-litewskich), których korzenie sięgają zarówno najodleglejszych, jak i nowszych dziejów Litwy i jej stolicy. Wilno jako miasto silnie nacechowane doświadczeniem totalitaryzmów jest ciekawym przykładem ilustrującym proces redefiniowania pamięci przestrzeni miasta w okresie transformacji ustrojowej oraz ustanawiania nowej hierarchii wartości i symboli. Jest także kulturową hybrydą będącą efektem wielowiekowych transgresji, której całościowy opis pozostaje ciągle badawczą utopią. Autorka artykułu podejmuje próbę opisu miasta, które „ciągle się staje”, na przykładzie realizowanego w Wilnie w latach 2016–2017 projektu #skaitomevilniu (pol. Czytamy Wilno) z zastosowaniem perspektywy performatywnej.

Słowa kluczowe: Wilno, #skaitomevilniu, zwrot performatywny, miasto performatywne, pamięć performatywna, dryfowanie, performatywne chodzenie

Vilnius archipelago: Performative walks around this performative city

The present study deals with the performative memory of a city, namely modern Vilnius, the capital of the Republic of Lithuania. The difficult past of Vilnius that is shared by other eastern and central European cities and is marked by the bitter legacy of the “city of changed blood” (Pl. “miasto o wymienionej krwi”, a notion introduced by M. Lewicka) has been subjected to a number of changes effected by modernity and dynamic Europeanization at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The confrontation between the past and modernity has resulted in serious social and national problems (e.g. Polish–Lithuanian relations) dating to the early as well as the most recent history of Lithuania and its capital. Having experienced various totalitarian regimes, Vilnius is an interesting example of the redefining of the memory of the space of a city at a time of a changing political system; it is also an example of the establishing of a hierarchy of new values and symbols. Vilnius is also a cultural hybrid resulting from long-lasting transgressions. However, a comprehensive account of its history still remains utopian. Drawing on the #skaitomevilniu (‘We read Vilnius’) project that was carried out in Vilnius in 2016–2017 and which adopted a performative perspective, the author of the present study attempts to describe a city *that is constantly becoming*.

Keywords: Vilnius, #skaitomevilniu, performative turn, performative city, performative memory, *dérive*, performative walks

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