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TWO WARSAW CONFERENCES ON MEMORY

GENEALOGIES OF MEMORY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: THEORIES AND METHODS Warsaw, 23–25 November 2011

The rapidly expanding field of (Polish) memory studies becomes institutionalised. It also gets historicised, as clearly shown by this issue of *Acta Poloniae Historica* (APH). The latter job is done not only by historians coming afterwards. It is obviously often done on the spot, so to say, by those engaged in particular social practices in the field. Such is the case of the first big international conference on (collective) memory, organised in Warsaw in autumn 2011 by the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw, Institute of Sociology of the Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Osteuropa Institut of the Free University of Berlin, National Centre for Culture in Warsaw and Bundesinstitut für Kultur und Geschichte im östlichen Europa. This broad institutional setting would not have worked, of course, had there not been a group of engaged people who brought up the idea of the conference and put much effort to push it into practice. It is not possible to mention all of them here, but the two key conference authors, in a strict and broad sense of the word, must be named. These are Joanna Wawrzyniak of the University of Warsaw and Małgorzata Pakier of the Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities. Their intellectual input shaped the content of the conference the most.

More than one year has passed since the event took place – enough, as it occurs, for its (self-)historicisation. What I mean is that it is no banality that those who were participating in the event (and maybe some of those who did not) recall it autobiographically today, telling stories and perhaps even vivid anecdotes; or, that we can read a conference report in one scientific journal or another. All that is of course true, but it is applicable to most international conferences, at least most large ones. What I am suggesting here is a much more substantial, or, possibly, self-conscious historicisation we may talk about in this case. This event is already perceived as a landmark, if not the turning point, of Polish memory studies – and will be even more so in the nearest

future, I should think. At least, of the memory studies branch which has coined the term and feels good when labelled by it.

One may say I am lacking distance at this point. Some fifteen to twenty conferences, workshops and large seminars on memory were held in Warsaw in 2011. This one was the biggest and probably significant, not least thanks to its generous budget, but still one of the many. I think, however, it was somehow a special one. Firstly, it was part of a much broader project – satellite academic events were following the ‘Genealogies of Memory’. They were organised with close reference to the central conference idea, which was in fact, if not in theory, exchange between foreign and Polish scholars in the area. These events were part of the seminar series conducted within the Social Memory Laboratory at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw (the Laboratory being a kind of soft background structure for intellectual exchange among a group of interdisciplinary-oriented scholars from several Warsaw universities or colleges who feel affiliated, in one way or the other, with the memory studies field). Nordic and French Memory Studies were presented with participation of prominent researchers from Sweden, Norway, Finland and, on another occasion, France. Another follow-up event held by the Laboratory was a one-day mini-conference on memory and space. But the most remarkable follow-up was, naturally, the second huge international event organised by more-or-less the same group of people – namely, the ‘Regions of Memory’ conference of November 2012 in Warsaw (reported on separately in this issue of APH). And, most probably, this was not the last event within this constellation.

Secondly, the list of participants was significant. Among many worldwide recognisable scholars representing contemporary memory studies – from whatever angle, in whatever discipline – two names are especially important: Jeffrey Olick and Aleida Assmann. The first, a sociology professor based in New York, is – one could say without much exaggeration – the founder of the contemporary memory studies in (at least) the American academia; the latter is professor of English literature in Konstanz and is, beside her husband Jan Assmann, probably the most influential, and surely most often quoted, German theoretician of cultural memory. I mention their participation in ‘Genealogies of Memory’ conference not to forejudge the intellectual quality of the whole endeavour but to stress how considerable potential of academic networking it provided.

There is probably no better way to illustrate this than to mention that a year later, at the ‘Regions of Memory’ conference in Warsaw, Jeffrey Olick was not just one of the participants, like a year before, but a member of the core organisational team. It is very well known to all of us that conferences, especially big ones, are very bad occasions for exchanging substantial knowledge, but great occasions for establishing and reinforcing interpersonal relations. In this respect, ‘Genealogies of Memory’ was more than successful

as it helped institutionalise Polish memory studies as recognisable and self-recognisable field within the Polish humanities and social sciences (or, at least, made a substantial contribution to this end). This is true, at least, to the studies' mainstream branch oscillating mostly on the crossroads of sociology, history, anthropology and cultural studies.

In parallel – the thing that, in the long run, might occur even more important in globalising (or Americanising) the scholarly field – Polish memory studies and particular scholars representing the field became recognised by the key actors in international memory studies. To make it simpler and more pragmatic: after the conference, some Polish scholars established friendly personal relations with some of their American and German peers. I think we can expect more Polish articles appearing in peer-reviewed journals, possibly some international research projects in the following years and, probably, some more fellowships for memory researchers from Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries. In brief, a more intensive and extensive academic exchange. But, to be sure, this exchange seems to be still mostly played along the East–West line. The 'Genealogies of Memory' conference, even if it tried to break this pattern, had to follow it. Western scholars were invited to see (and listen to) how good job in *their* field is being done in this part of the world, how advanced we are in Poland and in other Central and Eastern European countries too. And we did pass this exam very well, as I said. It has turned out that we have something interesting to contribute to this field, maybe even to its classics. This is already a lot. If its sounds ironical this is not against any of the engaged actors on any of the sides – just a point about the rules of international, if not global, academic game. The new field of Polish memory studies seems to have a potential to integrate and adapt them.

Having said so much about the meaning, importance and impact of 'Genealogies of Memory in Central and Eastern Europe. Theories and Methods' conference in Warsaw, I should finally say a few words about its content – that is, contributions presented and the construction of conference sessions, to provide some basic orientation in a variety of individual papers. This will really be just a brief outline, as I deem it pointless to report the conference session by session and paper by paper, since a rich and up-to-date conference website, providing a complete agenda, bios of all participants, abstracts and – still an extraordinary thing – full video recordings from every conference session, is easily accessible (at <<http://genealogies.enrs.eu/genealogies-of-memory-in-central-and-eastern-europe-theories-and-methods/>>).

The key conference goal, as formulated in the introductory address by Małgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak, was twofold: first, to see our local, Central-Eastern European memories (and memory studies) from a global, or at least more distant, perspective; second, in a more practical and long-run approach, to make our discussions and discourses on memory in Central-

Eastern Europe part of the global memory discourse. It is not quite possible to find whether these goals were achieved in each of, or in most, of the some seventy presentations, which were delivered in parallel sessions during the three conference days. How one could measure that? For certain, however, as it has already been stressed, the general impression is that the conference was successful in both respects.

Apart from the more generally drafted introductory plenary presentations by Harald Wydra, Sławomir Kapralski, Andrzej Nowak, Barbara Michlic, Dariusz Stola and Mathias Weber, gathered under the overall title: 'History and memory in Central and Eastern Europe: How special?' and the keynote lecture by Aleida Assmann delivered on the same day, the conference was running in smaller, parallel sessions grouped into several topics: 'Lieux de mémoire' (two panels); 'Dynamics of memory' – five panels: Biographies, Generations, Borderlands, Silence and articulation, Private/vernacular – public/official, Struggles for power and legitimacy; 'Theories and Concepts' – two panels: Theories, Proposals; 'Media of Remembrance' – six panels: Space/Place, Museum and Film, New media, The various role of historian, History in the public domain.

This bunch of labels covers a much more diverse and colourful assemblage of not only research projects on memory but also of different understandings of what social, collective, cultural memory is, and how it could be understood and researched. These various approaches are established, often unconsciously, on different philosophical grounds, and refer to different philosophical concepts of culture. Nothing new in the diverse and dynamic field of memory studies, one could say. Indeed, the conference 'Genealogies of Memory in Central and Eastern Europe. Theories and Methods' seemed to represent that diversity and unclarity of this field pretty well.

Still, while enthusiastically summarising the conference during its very last panel session, Jeffrey Olick pointed that the diversity in question was somehow unbalanced. He wished to have heard some more philosophically and psychologically oriented papers. The latter meant a wish for more research to be done on individual memory and its social/cultural framings; also, for more oral history-based research. Another visible point of unbalance was the lack of conference papers presenting research on religious memory frames, which – one could expect – might have been more significant in this part of Europe, if compared to the Western region. What, on the other hand, was overrepresented, as compared to its social or cultural significance, was political perspective. Many, maybe too many, papers focused on some kind of politically-shaped memories or even, more directly, on politics of memory. Too few researchers were able to analyse memory from the (cultural, social) bottom-up perspective. Instead, a top-down perspective prevailed. One could sensibly claim, however, that these postulates are as valid to memory studies as such, as they are for Polish or Central and Eastern European ones.

Memory studies define themselves as a complex and inter- or multidisciplinary academic endeavour. Still, to make it distinctive and visible, some disciplinary and/or institutional borders have to be established. A conference like this is certainly a step towards such distinctiveness of, at least, Polish memory studies. An important demarcation line runs – or, rather, is often drafted – between ‘traditional’ historical research and memory studies, as these two seem to be so close to each other. Both are interested in the past, even if the first is mostly fond of the past’s past, and the latter, in the past’s present and presence, to oversimplify the difference. It might be of interest to historians, however, that despite a dominant top-down perspective represented by many memory scholars, a strong historical argument was raised at the very beginning of the conference by Harald Wydra and Dariusz Stola. Their main point was that what constitutes the specificity of (national) memories in Central and Eastern Europe are unique historical experiences during the war and their post-war remembering and forgetting – on the private, social and national level (these often being in conflict). Direct and indirect references to Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands* (published in Polish shortly before the conference) and Tony Judt’s last books and essays came out a number of times during the conference. No matter how much constructivist memory scholars are, or attempt to be, and, how much they (we) try to distance themselves (ourselves) from historians, we were convincingly persuaded that on doing memory studies, it is hard to entirely avoid historical questions.

Apart from these historical questions, there was one, asked very directly, by a historian to memory students attending the conference. It was formulated, somehow ironically, by Dariusz Stola, just a ‘poor historian’, as he described himself. His main message was very clear: you, memory scholars, have the tools to interpret memory, so please help me deal with my sources. And his sources are, among others, reports of survivors and eyewitnesses – in particular, those who were directly confronted with violence during the war. Unfortunately, there are so many of them in this part of the world, probably a majority of today’s elderly generation. What to do with their stories – provided they want to narrate at all? How to interpret them? How to treat them as historical sources – and not only present, collectively framed memories? How to distinguish individual from collective memories? These are all very fundamental questions that Stola raised. They are not only methodologically, but also ethically serious. The latter makes them much harder to tackle, I would claim.

I doubt whether the memory scholars gathered in Warsaw in autumn 2011 were able to answer them. I have not heard many who would even take them seriously into account. Within memory studies shaped so heavily by Halbwachs writings, they might sound inadequate, if not naive. A bottom-up perspective was missing there. Jeffrey Olick, to recall him once again,

indirectly explained at the end of the conference why the entry questions of Dariusz Stola had not, and could not within the given framework, been approached. This was a kind of meta-level, negative knowledge about the field of memory studies that we could gain from the 'Genealogies of Memory' conference. A very important lesson, I think.

But there was also a positive message about the field in question coming out during the conference. Aleida Assmann was convincing us, in her keynote lecture, that constructed collective and cultural memories might have a transformative, healing power for the community. History shares, while memory unites or might unite; providing that we shape it in a dialogic, inclusive way. Therefore, the memory frame can become a moral frame. Its flexibility and adaptive potential occurs not to be a burden, as in case of historical, source-based research, but a chance for a better living-together.

'Genealogies of Memory in Central and Eastern Europe. Theories and Methods' seriously confronted me with these both sides of the (memory) coin. This is more substantial a content that could have been expected from an opportunity like that.

Piotr Filipkowski

REGIONS OF MEMORY: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON EASTERN EUROPE

Warsaw, 26–28 November 2012

Over 110 scholars in history, sociology, ethnology and political sciences from across the world gathered in Warsaw for the conference 'Regions of Memory', held, for the second time, by the European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity, Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw, Institute of Sociology of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Warsaw) and Osteuropa-Institut der Freien Universität Berlin. Unquestionably, the subject of memory or 'remembrance' – collective and individual – becomes increasingly relevant in all kinds of sciences, as well as for the comparative perspective in exploring European history. Nevertheless, most of the topics chosen by conference participants presented 'regions of memory' in a new or, at least, original light.

The keynote speakers' topics provided a background for the other contributors to talk about region-specific memory processes and the related research carried out in different parts of the academe internationally. Carol Gluck (Columbia University in the City of New York) pointed out the differences in operations of memory (regarding, especially, WWII) in Eastern Europe with the ones in East Asia, notably, Japan. Stefan Troebst (University of Leipzig)

shared his view on the limits and divisions of European memory, which was an outstanding introduction to discussions on mapping memory regions. Elizabeth Jelin (National Scientific and Technical Research Council, Buenos Aires) explored memories of the past state repression in the Latin America region, especially in Argentina. Gyanendra Pandey (Emory University, Atlanta, USA) presented 'archived' and 'un-archived' realms of memory and correlations between both types. Finally, Dirk Moses (European University Institute, Florence) described the process of decolonising memories in a global context; his speech built upon examples of memories about WWII.

Except for keynote speeches, other presentations were divided into parallel panels. The first, titled 'Mapping memory regions', referred, i.a., to theoretical debates on geographical scope ('How many European memory regions? Mapping EU memories' by Philippe Perchoc, Institut d'études politiques de Paris), and to European memories, with a comparative semantic analysis of several European countries ('Mapping the semantics of "European memory"' by Gregor Feindt, the University of Bonn and the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, along with Rieke Schäfer, University of Hamburg and University of Paris III).

Theoretical approaches to the memory of Eastern Europe constituted the topic of four presentations. Alexey Vasylyev (Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow) presented a comparative study on the 'Western' and 'Eastern approach' to the specifics of nationalism studies. His argument is that in the specific case of East Europe, it is a reflection of traumatic historical experience. In a somewhat intricate speech, Marta Karkowska (Polish Academy of Sciences and the University of Warsaw) presented counter-memory, alternative memory, and violence in Polish research on the social aspects of memory. An interesting idea was presented by Andrzej Szpociński (Polish Academy of Sciences and Collegium Civitas, Warsaw). He described a three-dimensional concept of social memory (the dimensions including: carriers, values, and production) as a starting point for comparative studies.

The other panel was devoted to 'Memory in the historical space of violence' and was divided into sessions about the ideological beginnings of the nineteenth century; authoritarian regimes (official narratives and counter-memories); the challenges of democracy and the market; justice, acknowledgement, compensation; and, finally, ambiguous aftermaths. The first session was opened with a speech by Maciej Górny (Polish Academy of Sciences), focusing on the relation between war atrocities and collective or cultural memory, based on examples of German soldiers' cruelty during WWI and other conflicts at the beginning of twentieth century – Austrian atrocities in Serbia, the Ukrainians in Galicia, the atrocities during Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Eastern Galicia. Another absorbing research was done based on analysis of memory contexts in contemporary literature (Seda Özdemir, Boğaziçi University), and analysis of the effect of archaeological studies on

the design of memorial landscapes (Anna Zalewska, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin).

At the session on official narratives in authoritarian regimes, the speakers focused on post-WWII history, referring, e.g., to the official representation of the 1956 Hungarian revolution before 1989 (Éva Tulipán, Hungarian Military History Institute and Museum, Budapest); discussed the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka (Rachel Joyce, King's College, London); or, the significance and importance of memories about the war against Israel in the last days of Hosni Mubarak's presidency in Egypt (Moustafa Menshawy, University of Westminster, London).

Papers dedicated to counter-memories in authoritarian regimes dealt with certain specific topics. Mariusz Kalczewiak (Justus-Liebig-Universität, Giessen) talked about the violence experienced by Jewish citizens of Argentina during the military regime of *junta*. The other ethnic groups of taken into consideration were Romani people and their process of remembrance (Sławomir Kapralski, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw) and Bulgarian Mohammedans (Shaban Darakchi, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences).

Another set of presentations analysed the challenges of democracy and the market. Jozsef Berta (Humboldt University, Berlin) discussed negative memory in post-colonial and post-authoritarian societies. Matthias I. Köhler (Humboldt University, Berlin) presented a meaningful critique of the western liberal-humanist notion of violence.

Some crucial conclusions were reached by the participants of the subsequent session, which was centred on ambiguous aftermaths of memory in the historical space of violence. Karine Ramondy (Paris IV-Sorbonne) described the impact of the political murder of the African leader Patrice Lumumba on the collective memory in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Dragoş Petrescu (University of Bucharest) examined a particular type of memories of violence associated with the regime change of 1989, which led him to a conclusion that only in Romania the collective and individual memory of the 1989 transition is associated with the so called 'Rashomon effect'. He explains his conception by analysing the process of reconstructing and remembering the 1989 revolution in Romania based on several cinematic narratives released in 2006. Lucia Popa (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris) investigated the fact that there is no official artistic vision of the communist past to be encountered in Romania nowadays, as opposed to the Socialist Republic of Romania – the time when the state held the monopoly on writing and illustrating the history (the argument being based on the portraits of Ceauşescu in post-communist visual arts). Nadiya Trach (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy) described the Chernobyl disaster as a concept in Ukrainian collective memory in spheres such as mass-culture, literature, cinema, political discussions, mass-media, visual culture, as well as linguistic representation in memories of people who lived in the Chernobyl area.

The last two sessions of the 'Memory in the historical space of violence' panel were dedicated to justice, acknowledgement, compensation. A theoretical point of view was presented by Valerie Rosoux (Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research, Brussels and University of Leuven) who investigated how, due to the remembrance, calls for reconciliation can be fruitless or even detrimental for peace and democracy. Other participants presented studies on those topics with regard to, i.a., Indonesia (Katharine McGregor, University of Melbourne), Peru (Luis Tsukayama Cisneros, New School for Social Research, New York), South Korea (Stéphanie Benzaquen, Erasmus University, Rotterdam) and Japan (Gyunghee Park, University College Cork). German history after WWII constituted the topic of three papers. Piotr Filipkowski (Polish Academy of Sciences and University of Warsaw) talked, among other things, about a unique 'Remembrance, Responsibility and Future' Foundation's project launched in order to research and narrate the story of German compensation payments after WWII, recently concluded with a four-volume publication. Stanisława Trebunia-Staszal (Jagiellonian University, Cracow) focused on Nazi German racial research carried out during WWII by the staff of the Nazi Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit, and on the memory of those events kept by the oldest inhabitants of the Podhale area. Joanna Szymoniczek (Polish Academy of Sciences) brought up an interesting problem of German WWII cemeteries in Eastern, Central and Southern Europe, their restoration and commemoration: an issue that may divide local societies and cause problems for institutions.

'Spatial frames of remembrance' was the title of the next panel, organised into four sessions: 'Displacement and memory'; 'Region as a figure of memory'; 'City as a memory scene'; and, 'Framing the national'. The first focused on the relation between displacement and memory. Ekaterine Pirtskhalava (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University) referred, e.g., to the memory of the Muslim Turks in the Soviet Union. Crimean Tatars of Sevastopol, local memory politics and 'national' activism among this group was the subject of Judy Brown's (University of Cambridge) presentation. Ewa Nowicka (University of Warsaw) illustrated the civil war and the evacuation in the biographical memory of Greek repatriates from Poland. Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper (University of Warsaw) explored the case of 'diaspora within homeland' via the example of the so called, in Polish, *Kresowiaci* (Polish and Jewish inhabitants of eastern regions of Poland) who were made leave their local homeland to join an ideological homeland, Poland. Using testimonies of post-war Jewish emigrants from Poland, Kamila Dąbrowska (University of Warsaw) presented their post-memory of Holocaust, the memory of exclusion and the process of creating identities in Polish memory realms. Claudia Draganoiu (University of Bucharest) analysed the diaspora of Romanian people; finally, Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek (National Science Centre, Cracow) delivered a paper on Kazakhstani Poles' biographical narratives.

Specific geographical regions can also be treated as figures of memory. Some of them formed the topics of papers presented at the next session. The examples of Gömör-Gemer and Macedonia proved to be of special importance. The first, a region situated on the border of Slovakia and Hungary, was investigated by Csaba G. Kiss (Eötvös-Loránd-University, Budapest) who analysed the process of building regional and national identities in both communities – Slovakian and Hungarian. Macedonia and the commemoration of the region in twentieth-century Greece was covered by Olimpia Dragouni (University of Warsaw).

After a lively debate on countries and regions, the time came for discussing city as a memory scene. Researchers analysed the topic via the examples of particular cities: Berlin (Jenny Wüstenberg, Free University of Berlin); Białystok and Lublin (Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska and Maciej Białous, University of Białystok); Mostar (Ana Aceska, Humboldt University); Frampol (Piotr Kwiatkowski, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw); and, lastly, Warsaw (Krystyna E. Siellawa-Kolbowska, Warsaw University of Life Sciences; Marcin Napiórkowski, University of Warsaw). Participants considered city as a place of history memorials (Warsaw being the case in point); a witness of processes such as remembering and forgetting (Frampol, Mostar), along with creating collective memory or even a collective trauma (Warsaw). Furthermore, the past shows that history of divided cities, such as post-war Mostar or post-wall Berlin, depends on the collective and individual memory of local societies.

The last session of the panel posed the question about how art reflects on the process of reframing the national differences or even conflicts. The contributing papers revolved around different ways of art expression such as music, theatre and photography. Agnieszka Topolska (University of Warsaw) described the phenomenon of West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, a project initiated in order to create the opportunity for dialogue between representatives of all parties to the conflict in the Middle East. Thus, the orchestra features musicians from Israel, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. Another example of using art for reframing the memory was presented by Stephenie Young (Salem State University, MA) who described how contemporary post-war photography is used as a forensics of traumatic events and a place-holder for memory.

The conference was concluded with panels followed by discussions on framing the future of researches on European regions of memory. The future of education in the area formed the topics of four speeches. Zlatko Bukač (Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities, Zadar) analysed the mechanisms through which the memory of civil war in Yugoslavia is constructed for children and how these mechanisms are experienced today. Attitudes of young Poles towards the memory of Jewish past, especially Holocaust, was the topic of Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs's (Centre for Holocaust

Studies at the Jagiellonian University) speech; the data she presented were the preliminary results of this author's longitudinal study on the subject. The scholars Tamara Pavasovic Trost (Harvard University) and Borislava Manojlovic (George Mason University, Fairfax, VA) based their investigations on analysing history textbooks and differences between facts shown in them in a comparative perspective.

It is noteworthy that art and public sphere can also be explored by researchers of regions of memory. During this session, participants referred, i.a., to art strategies of displaying, overcoming and criticising the paradigm of memory (Katarzyna Bojarska, Polish Academy of Sciences). Other presentations described places of memory as used by artists to remember past events (Uilleam Blacker, University of Cambridge) and, on the other hand, places that have become losing their connection with traumatic events (Agnieszka Kłos, Willy Brandt Centre, University of Wrocław). Another point of view was presented by Bozhin Traykov (School of Communication at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada) who illustrated the art of provocation as an act of symbolic struggle over meanings of the past through the lenses of the present.

The last two sessions were organised in cooperation with the History Meeting House in Warsaw (DSH) and were devoted to oral history and future of memory projects. Jarosław Pałka (DSH) briefed the attendees on the methodologies of oral history based on the experiences of DSH's and KARTA Centre's projects. Marcin Jarząbek (Jagiellonian University) and Karolina Żłobecka (KARTA) described an interesting oral history project called 'Poles in the Wehrmacht', which gathered testimonies of 30 former Polish soldiers in the Wehrmacht. The 'Future of Memory' projects, such as the lexicon of Polish realms of memory, or conferences similar to this year's edition of 'Regions of Memory' should demarcate the new directions for research on this unquestionably important subject, and would provide encouragement for other specialists.

Although some of the participants claimed that the 2012 edition of 'Regions of Memory' conference was not as revealing as the first one, it can unarguably be called a success. One of the event's advantages were commentaries of leading experts in the field, who helped attendees sustain the theoretical focus. Presumably, it was eventually recognised (like after the previous edition) that a three-day session was just fine to start raising some of the issues in a systematic way. It could be a framework for holding conferences in future, to continue the dialogue successfully started in Warsaw this year.

John Irving's statement could be a good summary of the 'Regions of Memory' conference: 'Your memory is a monster; you forget – it doesn't. It simply files things away. It keeps things for you, or hides things from you – and summons them to your recall with will of its own. You think you have a memory; but it has you!'

Natalia Szumska