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PERIPHERAL (NON)POLISHNESSES. MUSEUMS, CREEPING CONFLICTS, AND TRANSFORMATIVE FRICTIONS*

Abstract

Whilst Poland appears today as a paradigmatic example of a homogeneous, exclusive national and cultural identity, reinforced by the hegemonic historical policy of a semi-authoritarian state, it is also challenged by Polish minority histories (civilian, multi-ethnic, non-Catholic, women). The main concern of the present article is the plural 'Polishness' that emerges from the constellation of these non-default histories. To examine the frictions of historical narratives in action, authors use spaces of historical museums as a field of observation, perceiving them as memory agents fostering not only confrontational but also negotiative memory politics. To identify situations in which tensions between the 'central' Polishness and its unorthodox variants are particularly evident, the paper takes a look at 'non-central' Polish territories i.e. 'post-German' areas, characterized by a complex heterogeneous past in which Germanness and Polishness, but also 'Silesianness' or 'Borderlandness' mutually clash and dialogue. Analysis of selected exhibitions' construction reveals peculiarities of different local contexts in transitional spaces and strategies of resolving creeping conflicts between 'the Polishness' and plural, peripheral 'Polishnesses'. As authors argue, these case studies – instead of a static

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model of open memory conflict and binaries – offer dynamic models of memory, and allow to introduce the concept of memory frictions.

Keywords: historical museums, Polish museum boom, memory frictions, national memory

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Poland appears to be a paradigmatic example of a homogeneous and exclusive national and cultural identity, reinforced by the hegemonic historical policy of a semi-authoritarian state. No matter how firmly embedded the frame of this imagined 'Polishness'' is and how effectively it delineates a 'default' form of cultural practices relating to the past,[1] it is yet to be challenged by Polish minority histories: civilian, multi-ethnic, non-Catholic, women's, and queer, to name but a few. From the constellation of these non-default histories plural 'Polishnesses' could eventually emerge. It is not necessarily, however, an open confrontation between these different visions and sensibilities. Although there are cases of spectacular mnemonic wars, 'creeping conflicts' more often emerge, and new solutions arise from careful negotiations, balancing risks and gains.

To examine these frictions of historical narratives in action, we use spaces of historical museums as a field of observation; we see them as memory agents fostering not only confrontational but also negotiative memory politics. We are interested in historical exhibitions as cultural apparatuses that support, shape, and determine memory processes; we also explore these exhibitions as indicators of tendencies emerging in memory culture. In our account of historical museums, which have flourished in twenty-first-century Poland as the media of memory, we develop a visual, rhetoric, spatial, and narrative analysis of their exhibitions in order to unpack complex messages revolving around 'Polishness'. The 'museum boom' forms an opportunity to use museums as a particular mnemonic laboratory, by investigating ways in which the past is exhibited to express various mnemonic agendas – most notably including (but not limited to) national state interests. New museums, which use intensive, interactive, and polisensual media to create persuasive and influential

[1] Maria Kobielska, *Polska kultura pamięci: dominanty. Zbrodnia katyńska, powstanie warszawskie i stan wojenny* (Warszawa, 2016).

experiences, can be described as 'memory devices' that produce tendencies of remembering by encouraging, supporting, and modifying mnemonic content for their users. The whole system of memory culture can be described as a mega-apparatus in the Foucaultian sense – a web of power relations, a heterogenous entanglement of various elements, managing human subjects – making them remember in particular ways, while discouraging them from others. In this memory research perspective, we discuss museums as memory devices and analyse them as part of Polish memory culture in terms of the experience – memory training – they create for visitors.

We argue that museum institutions, on the one hand, submit the framework of their exhibitions to the master narrative while aiming to maintain certain 'mnemonical security',[2] i.e., such a vision of the past that eliminates themes posing a threat to the sense of integrity of collective (national) identity, or are both problematic from the point of view of building the continuity of history and evoke a sense of shame or discomfort. On the other hand, these institutions (located in specific historical spaces) pursue the local politics of place that often involves the undermining of mnemonical security: they evoke ambiguous attitudes and non-heterogeneous identities and bring to mind events that erode the sense of historical continuity. Thus, contemporary museums, as we argue, provide a space for potential conflicts that arise from the divergent interests of various institutional actors and audience groups. At the same time, the conflicts in question are potential and creeping ones, violating the framework of the master narrative but not overturning it.

Our aim is to elucidate these nuanced and sometimes sensitive museum strategies that negotiate heterogeneous pasts and, as such, balance on the edge of mnemonical security. Our argument is based on three case studies. We have examined permanent exhibitions of four museums: the Dialogue Centre Upheavals in Szczecin [Centrum Dialogu Przełomy, DCU], Depot History Centre in Wrocław [Centrum Historii Zajezdnia, DHC], Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance [Dom Pamięci Żydów Górnośląskich] in Gliwice, and Silesian Museum [Muzeum Śląskie] in Katowice (as a supplement and a context for the less known Gliwice case). The analysis is grounded in detailed research

[2] Maria Mälksoo, '"Memory Must Be Defended": Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security', *Security Dialogue*, xlvi, 3 (2015), 221–37.

of complete exhibitions.[3] However, due to the word limit, we have only been able to refer to selected parts of the displays to substantiate our argument.

CENTRAL/PERIPHERAL DYNAMICS

To identify situations in which tensions between 'central' Polishness and its unorthodox variants are particularly evident, we look at 'non-central' Polish territories. Our understanding of the relationship between the centre and the periphery is twofold: spatial and symbolic.[4] The latter understanding takes the definition of the state provided within the modern paradigm as its starting point. According to Zarycki, in this approach, the state is "a homogenising machine that subordinates space to the centre, produces a simple centre-periphery division, in which the uniformed space [...] gradually embraces the entire space of the state, diminishing the peripheral areas which offer a greater or lesser resistance to the unifying processes".[5] Such unifying processes are usually addressed in three poles, reflecting the three dimensions of domination: military-administrative, economic, and cultural, the latter playing a particular role in that it is in charge of the mass production of universal knowledge.[6] Zarycki's observations are in line with Arjun Appadurai's insight, who, when analysing the phenomena of globalisation and glocalisation, notes that "The nation-state carries out an astonishingly contradictory internal project of creating a flat, border-locked, and homogeneous space of nationhood within its territories".[7] The central-generated production of locality is

[3] The research in situ was conducted by Maria Kobielska in the Dialogue Centre Upheavals in August 2022, in the Depot History Centre in May 2021, in the Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance in September 2020, and in the Silesian Museum in August and September 2015. Along with the research, curators of the exhibitions in Szczecin, Katowice, and Gliwice were also interviewed by Maria Kobielska, and details of the interviews, if used, are specified in respective footnotes.

[4] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, transl. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991); Tomasz Zarycki, *Peryferie. Nowe ujęcie symbolicznych zależności centro-peryferyjnych* (Warszawa, 2010).

[5] Zarycki, *Peryferie*, 13.

[6] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, transl. Richard Nice (London, 2010).

[7] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996), 189.

a response to the disintegration of (post-)modern subjectivity, closely intertwined with the production of a national community, accomplished through the intensification of the symbolic presence of the state in a territory. Balibar's concept of the composition of the national form operates in a similar way. He describes it as a modern narrative project involving the selection of historical knowledge to legitimise the right to self-determination. Such a practice is structured by genealogical narratives and is always subject to a specific geographical, historical, and identity orientation. The national form emerges from retrospective notions of heredity, stable territory, and substantive community that foster the illusion of a nation's historical continuity.[8]

We briefly recall these findings because the spaces we address in this paper historically fit in with the central-peripheral logic and the production of a national form. Namely, we are interested in museums located in Wrocław, Szczecin, Gliwice, and Katowice (i.e., the Upper Silesian metropolitan area): peripherally, in (or in the vicinity of) the 'post-German' areas,[9] characterised by a complex heterogeneous past in which Germanness and Polishness, but also 'Silesianness' or 'Borderlandness' mutually clash and dialogue. After the territorial and political shifts of 1945, which resulted in mass migrations, these territories became the scene of a fierce exchange of symbolic systems. As such, they were offered a special role to play in the identity politics of the Polish People's Republic. They were subject to centralised and homogenizing discursive operations aimed at sanctioning their Polishness. At the same time, attempts were made at eliminating manifestations of any cultural, ethnic, and national differences.[10]

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[8] Etienne Balibar, 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities* (London, 2002), 86–9.

[9] We use the term 'post-German' to describe the territories that remained within the borders of the German state (the Third Reich) until 1939 and were incorporated into the Polish state after the Second World War under the Agreements of Yalta and Potsdam. Kinga Siewior, *Wielkie poruszenie. Pojałtańskie narracje migracyjne w kulturze polskiej* (Warszawa, 2018).

[10] Siewior, *Wielkie poruszenie*. On the topic of postwar resettlements and migration see more Piotr Eberhardt, *Migracje polityczne na ziemiach polskich (1939–1950)* (Poznań, 2010); Beata Halicka, *Polski Dziki Zachód. Przymusowe migracje i kulturowe oswajanie Nadodrza 1945–1948* (Kraków, 2015); Hubert Orłowski and Andrzej Sakson, *Utracona ojczyzna: przymusowe wysiedlenia, deportacje i przesiedlenia jako wspólne doświadczenie* (Poznań, 1996); Thomas Urban, *Der Verlust: die Vertreibung der Deutschen und Polen im 20. Jahrhundert* (München, 2006).

The territories annexed to Poland as part of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements had remained within the boundaries of German statehoods for centuries. It was, therefore, an alien space for the Poles, marked by the strong presence of German cultural influences, whose acquisition required political and symbolic legitimacy. The official state propaganda policy of the communist authorities in the first post-war years was thus developed around the topoi of the so-called Recovered Territories [Ziemie Odzyskane] which are to be understood as an imagined geography. The central theme of this narrative was the reference to the heritage of the medieval Piast dynasty, which ruled several of the historic lands of western Poland in the early Middle Ages. Indeed, this fact was being presented as a guarantee of the primordial Polishness of the whole of the newly joined regions as well as an argument for viewing the post-war territorial acquisitions as a manifestation of 'historical justice'. Moreover, the narrative was underpinned by a vital – but not officially proclaimed – emotional component, in which the incorporated areas appear as the previously lost 'true' ancestral fatherland, intended as compensation for the Eastern Borderlands of Poland [Kresy Wschodnie], which were incorporated into the USSR.

However, besides the 'myth of the return', this spatial narrative used other semiotic codes, such as framing German-Polish relations as a Manichaean struggle between good and evil. The portrayal of this clash, then, encompassed a number of references to the recent war and experiences of occupation and other numerous historical conflicts dating back to the early Middle Ages. At the same time, it was seamlessly transposed into another new ideological conflict: between socialism and capitalism. Therefore, the centralised discourse of the Recovered Territories was built on a series of oppositions, the initial distinction of which was nationality (Germans/Poles), later extended to such oppositions as Germanicity/Slavicity, invaders/liberators, national socialism/communism, and capitalism/socialism.[11] In such a pattern of meanings, the peripheral position was given to individual stories of mass displacement, which was subject to various strategies of discursive 'dilution', erasure, or downplaying. The problem of resettlers' discomfort driven by the feeling of uprooting and alienation was likewise marginalised. That said, the experience of the local

[11] Siewior, *Wielkie poruszenie*, 79–80.

population, above all the Silesians or the Warmians, some of whom chose to stay 'home', remained outside of the official narrative. Many local ambiguous events and experiences, e.g., Versailles plebiscite (East Prussian plebiscite 1920, Upper Silesia plebiscite 1921), Silesian Uprisings, conscription (sometimes forced) into the Wehrmacht, the Upper Silesian Tragedy (1945), but also general heterogeneous national and religious identity, which did not conform to the central (both nationalist and communist) zero-sum axiology, were erased.

In summary, the post-war official state narrative of the Recovered Territories shows how national identity is centrally produced in peripheral and troublesome areas of the state regardless of ethnic and symbolic continuity. Discursive practices developed in those territories carried another essential function: they legitimised changes in the political regime that were directly related to geopolitics, namely border shifts and mass resettlements. The incorporated territories provided a trade card for the communists in their struggle for power over the 'citizens' souls': those resettled to the West but also those living in the regions far from the Recovered Territories. The aim of the official narratives was not so much to accustom the resettlers to their new cultural space, but also to accustom the entire population to a new political reality. Depopulated areas and the relocation campaign provided favourable conditions for building a model socialist society 'from scratch'.[12] That is why Western peripheries metonymically projected the whole of the national space, evoking a new national form: a socialist and workers' Polishness highly focused on industrial imagination. Not surprisingly, 'recovered cities' such as Szczecin, Wrocław, and the Upper Silesian metropolitan area became a crucial part of this new imaginary map: with their shipyards, steelworks, and factories.

'PERIPHERIES WRITE BACK'?

Ideological guidelines for the incorporated spaces established in the early post-war years provided the basis for their identity narratives until the fall of communism. Nevertheless, the central-peripheral logic of narratives about these localities is still in force today. Only the vectors of the master memory narrative have changed: the 'recovered

[12] See more Siewior, *Wielkie poruszenie*, 64–94.

cities' turned from the 'strongholds' of communism into 'strongholds' of anti-communism. However, alongside this principal transformation, the erased historical and multi-ethnic contents are gradually being restored by new public museums that explore local, urban, or group histories, and place them in the context of national memory. Gestures of pluralisation and integration are, therefore, intertwined with these negotiations. In the subsequent sections of the paper, we will look at examples of these practices *in situ*. We will focus on museums in Szczecin, Wrocław, and the Upper Silesian metropolitan area and discuss their exhibitions as a particular mnemonic laboratory.

Szczecin: Dialogue Centre Upheavals

The Dialogue Centre Upheavals is located in Szczecin, the capital city of West Pomerania, a region in north-western Poland bordering the Baltic Sea and Germany. It was incorporated into Poland no sooner than in 1945; the pre-war German population was expelled, the city was renamed, and new Polish inhabitants, mainly displaced from the eastern parts of pre-war Poland (transferred to the USSR), moved in. The German past of the city was repressed as a problematic topic during the times of the Polish People's Republic; after 1989, it was re-discovered as an alluring element of borderland heritage. At the same time, as Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz, Head of the DCU, puts it, the whole post-war history of the city has generally been disregarded.[13] It might have been perceived as provincial or uninspiring also because of the atomisation of the city's society: composed of uprooted individuals and lacking solid bonds. Given the circumstances, the mission of the museum, which opened in 2016, is to tell the story of Szczecin, with the Second World War as its starting point, and reveal its unique circumstances.

A perspicuous interpretation of this circumstance is suggested by the exhibition's title, framing Szczecin as 'a city of protest – a city of objection'. The Szczecin history follows the mainstream Polish narrative as a 'road to freedom' and the process of shaking off communist hegemony in a series of outbursts of resistance and 'upheavals'

[13] Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz, 'Centrum Dialogu Przełomy – ewolucja idei', in Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz (ed.), *Miasto sprzeciwu – miasto protestu* (Szczecin, 2015), 13–17.

highlighted in the very name of the museum. As Kuchcińska-Kurcz explained, the history of Szczecin is unique and somewhat paradoxical in that it gathers the entirety of the twentieth-century Polish experience: surviving two world wars and two totalitarian regimes, shifting borders, expulsions, migrations, struggling with constant feeling of insecurity, and yet taking part in each and every phase of resistance.[14] Anna Ziębińska-Witek classifies DCU as one of Polish 'identity museums' that seek to establish a coherent national narrative and promote the founding myths for collective self-image.[15] More specifically, she describes its message as that of a 'patchwork identity', typical of western regions of Poland.[16] The narrative of 'upheavals' is thus intended to integrate various (and disparate) twentieth-century experiences into the collective consciousness and a contemporary Szczecin, regional, and Polish identity.

To achieve this goal, the narrative generally needs to address two problems: Szczecin's pre-war German past and the post-war communist period. A potential for clashes with the Polish master narrative is evident. Firstly, the city was historically German (contrary to what communist propaganda claimed). Secondly, its contemporary Polishness was partially created on the efforts of the communist regime. The exhibition has to recognise these crucial aspects of Szczecin's history and integrate them into contemporary memory culture, with its national and anti-communist focal points.[17]

The exhibition narrative starts in the pre-war period: its creators did not shy away from acknowledging the German past of the

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[14] In an interview with Maria Kobielska, 3 September 2019.

[15] Anna Ziębińska-Witek, *Muzealizacja komunizmu w Polsce i Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej* (Lublin, 2018), 118.

[16] *Ibid*., 93, 96–9.

[17] Maniak and Kurpiel argue that the strategy of the DCU and the DHC toward the German heritage of Szczecin and Wrocław, respectively, should be described as absorption. Yet, the German past is acknowledged in the exhibitions, it is eventually – according to their argument – 'neutralised within the unified national [Polish] community' (62). We propose to reframe this question as a 'creeping conflict'. What we observe here is a fragment of cautious mnemonic frictions that are constantly hindered by the power of the national master narrative and yet can be reinterpreted as transformative (in the comparative context of Polish memory culture). Katarzyna Maniak and Anna Kurpiel, 'Przysposobienie i absorpcja. Strategie wobec niemieckiego dziedzictwa w szczecińskich i wrocławskich muzeach', *Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Muzealnej*, 8 (2021), 47–64.

region. Pre-war Stettin is presented in the first exhibition room with a meaningful choice of exhibits. First, there is a rare 1939 colour video, screened in a loop right at the entrance, presenting the city's landmarks in an aura of serenity and peacefulness. Yet, any temptation to nostalgically idealise the past is soon countered: the objects in the neighbouring showcase were chosen to problematise this image by documenting Nazi politics in the region (for instance, there are IDs of the city's residents with special inserts indicating their Jewish descent, or shoes that belonged to inmates of the labour camp in the area). The main text of the war section highlights that "Szczecin has [sic!] become a major centre for the Nazi movement even before Adolf Hitler came to power". The room is dominated by an artwork by Kobas Laksa, specially created for the museum to express the turning point in the city's history: the final days of the Second World War. The photographic panorama *The End of Dreams, Stettin, '45* features a multitude of figures and sites in a fully dynamic composition, to the effect of chaos and disorientation.

A transition from German and Nazi Stettin (symbolised in the panorama by a flag with a swastika hanging from a window of an apartment building) to Polish Szczecin (images of soldiers installing a new border post) unfolds in a series of exhibits showing the incorporation of the city into Poland as a story of subsequent migrations; it includes audio and video testimonies, databases and screens with texts, maps, photographs, and other images, placed in a symbolic scenography of a resettlement wagon. A large showcase groups objects that tell the story of people migrating from and to Szczecin, segregated in meaningful sections: first, visitors see 'German objects' to be found in post-war Szczecin, then those brought by the new inhabitants of the city from various regions of Poland and abroad, particularly from the exile in the USSR. A selection of witnesses and objects in this part of the exhibition is an attempt to pluralise the narrative about communist Poland by presenting migration as an experience shared by people of different backgrounds, social statuses, religions, ethnicities, and political attitudes. Communist authorities, which orchestrated the whole process, are also present in the story, but the main emphasis is on human lives. As a result, the process of 'Szczecin becoming Polish again' is shown less as an officially controlled (re)Polonization of the land and more in the context of ordinary people's fates, as an accumulation of various situations. Despite the diverse biographies

of the 'exposed' Szczecin pioneers, in the end, they are united by their motivation: to find a calm and peaceful place to live after turbulent wartime experiences and a fierce determination to make sacrifices and work hard in pursuit of this goal.

The communist regime and its representatives are central to the next chapter of the exhibition, depicting the Stalinist period of the Polish People's Republic as a time of propaganda, persecution, and violence levelled at their opponents. The sombre space is arranged as a movie theatre in which original newsreels from the turn of the 1940s and 1950s are screened; they present political show trials (including those resulting in capital punishment) from the time, and a malignant propaganda voiceover dominates the audio sphere. The 'movie theatre' is supplemented by other exhibits, including a vast concrete star from the Red Army memorial and scenographic art installations such as *Execution Room/Secluded Cell* by Robert Kuśmirowski. The purpose of this section is to define the communist regime as an enemy figure for the rest of the narrative. From now on, the focus will be on those opposing the regime.

The exhibition provides a series of close-ups on anti-communist upheavals, including the heyday of the Solidarity movement in August 1980, the introduction of martial law in 1981, and the political transition of 1989. This aligns with the post-war Polish master narrative framed around resistance against communism. Everyday life, economic and social processes, or cultural events are featured as a background for a highly politicised story.

Central to the exhibition narrative is a section devoted to the 1970 protests and a fitting illustration of its priorities and techniques. The stark contrast between light and darkness and black and white visually organises the space, adding to its grave, if not dramatic, atmosphere. The major part of the exhibition is plunged in darkness, with black walls and spotlighting. By contrast, the 1970 exhibition room stands out powerfully with its white walls. The workers' strikes and demonstrations started as a reaction to the price increases of December 1970; they mainly took place in coastal cities in northern Poland, and were soon violently suppressed. The aftermath of the demonstrations included more than forty fatalities, with sixteen people killed in Szczecin alone (however, Gdańsk and Gdynia monopolised popular imagination as the centre stage of those events). The storyline is presented mainly via visual documents from the period. The focus

is on seven large-format photographs showing the dramatic moments of 17 December 1970 in Szczecin, when the protest was suppressed by the Citizens' Militia and the Polish People's Army. Some of the snapshots were taken on the sly from the windows by observers who tried to document the situation. Visitors may now assume their perspective and look at the streets of Szczecin the way they did back in 1970. This is supplemented by a series of small photographs of the city's residents taken by the secret police during the demonstrations, a video material from a similar sources, and a showcase with several objects, including a moving album devoted to the memory of a killed sixteen-year-old made by her grieving father. An installation commemorating all sixteen Szczecin victims, in the form of obituaries or simple tombstone plaques placed on a wall near the exit, offers a powerful conclusion. This ascetic presentation of the December 1970 tragedy is supplemented by the next exhibition room providing a detailed account of the aftermath of those events.

The section is a dramatic and potent presentation of tragic events, arranged with simple means to create an atmosphere of concern, agitation, and mourning. Virtually everything in the room is black and white; this solitary brightly lit space at the exhibition will focus visitors' attention on its content, adding special prominence to the 1970 events. Szczecin protests are, therefore, presented as a momentous event of nationwide or even universal importance, with a persuasive image of the inhumane totalitarian power turning against the people who revolted and fought for their freedom. In addition to this gesture of universalisation, the narrative is also carefully localised and contextualised, embedded in historical details.

In summary, the DCU exhibition strategy performs a particular balancing act between the national master narrative and the peripheral Szczecin story, the latter distinguished by its German past. This part of the city's history is recognised, problematised, and left behind with a double gesture: highlighting Nazi German crimes and elaborating on the moment of transition, portraying the latter as a plurality of stories about ordinary people's experiences. The exhibition's design also acknowledges the transition and places it in its historical context while maintaining the general anti-communist message (clearly expressed via positioning the regime in the narrative as an evil antagonist).

Finally, a detailed presentation of the post-war history of Szczecin clearly depicts it as a heroic narrative of Polish anti-communist

resistance. In the exhibition, the identity of Polish Szczecin becomes crystallised in a series of 'upheavals', the 1970 victims, in particular, paying the highest 'price of freedom'. As a result, peripherality is inscribed into the central narrative. To make this happen, the exhibition meaningfully uses the general, historical perspective interwoven with one focusing on individual experiences. Consequently, with subsequent gestures of universalisation and localisation, the museum experience invokes universal values and national identity; however, it is also grounded in the subtleties of historical description and individual memories.

Wrocław: Depot History Centre

Wrocław is another 'recovered city'. In contrast to Szczecin, a geographically peripheral municipality with a prolonged uncertain geopolitical status,[18] the capital of Lower Silesia quickly became an attractive place to settle. While demographic data contradicts the popular thesis that the majority of new inhabitants of Wrocław came from Lwów/Lviv, it is a fact that the post-war resettlement action involved transports of entire workplaces. As a result, the scholarly elites of Lwów's Jan Kazimierz University and specialised engineering staff were brought to the city, which, from the get-go, secured the cultural capital of Wrocław. Post-war Wrocław became an important cultural centre, its identity resting on both the academic and economic potential and the legend of the (post)Borderland city. After 1989, this imagined genealogy became the framework for a new local narrative of Wrocław as a multicultural city.[19]

All these themes converge in the Depot History Centre, once again performing intricate operations to dilute the German past of the city and obscure the memory of more than 100,000 pre-war inhabitants who still resided in the town after 1945. The DHC is housed in a former municipal bus depot building in Wrocław, which was in operation from the end of the nineteenth century (originally as a tram depot

[18] In Szczecin, a city located on both banks of the River Oder, insecurity about state affiliation persisted until 1990, when the German-Polish Border Treaty was signed; in Wrocław this 'border anxiety' prevailed mainly in the first post-war years.

[19] See, for instance, Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse, *Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City* (London, 2003).

of Städtische Straßenbahn Breslau, partially destroyed in 1945, then rebuilt; in the 1980s, the building became the centre-stage of the Wrocław and Lower Silesia Solidarity movement). The museum's permanent historical exhibition was opened in September 2016, when Wrocław was designated the European Capital of Culture. Even though its first sections reach back to 1939, the exhibition focuses on the city's post-war history. As suggested by the exhibition's title *Wrocław 1945–2016*, the overall ambition behind its design is to bring the story to the twenty-first century.

As Ziębińska-Witek puts it, the DHC shares its main agenda with the Dialogue Centre Upheavals: both museums attempt showing formative moments for post-war local communities and its patchwork identities while framing its narratives to accommodate the heroic version of Polish national history.[20] The DHC showcases Wrocław as a place where 'over the course of half a century, a coherent identity of the city and its communities was formed from culturally distinct groups of people'.[21] According to Ziębińska-Witek, this is due to its political storyline that focuses on the Solidarity strikes of 1980 (as is the case of Szczecin). However, we will demonstrate that although both museums share some challenges for presenting peripheral histories that may collide with the central Polish narrative, they opted for different solutions to these problems.

First, the presence of the German past of the city is minimal in the DHC exhibition. The pre-war and war sections, somewhat surprisingly, tell another story, entirely non-Wrocław for its geography and focalisation. The first space in the exhibition, evocative of a square in a pre-war town, brings to mind the Eastern Borderlands of Poland, the homeland of many future resettled residents of Wrocław. As such, the exhibition's narrative tells more about the inhabitants of Wrocław than about the city(scape) itself. The city of Lwów and its architectural and symbolic milieu became the emblem for the new inhabitants of Wrocław. The war narrative follows the mainstream perspective of central Poland, and Warsaw in particular. The exhibition offers glimpses of pre-1945 Breslau, e.g., in a much later section on the Solidarity strikes of 1980, in which the depot's history – the centre stage of the protests – is explained.

[20] Ziębińska-Witek, *Muzealizacja komunizmu*, 94.
[21] *Ibid.*, 95.

Wrocław as a setting for the exhibition narrative appears no sooner than in the section on post-war border shifts. Spaces of a 'repatriation office', a resettlement wagon, and a railway station are displayed at this point in the storyline. The meaningful section titled *A Foreign City* allows visitors to assume the perspective of the 1945 newcomers to Wrocław (and never that of the former residents of Breslau). The exhibition also focuses on the collective effort of the migrants to organise a new life in a ruined city and rebuild it, both literally and metaphorically, as a new Polish regional capital. An implicitly obvious fact that the town was located in the Third Reich is not prominently stated anywhere in the exhibition; the Germanness of the city is indicated only by a reference to its post-war renaming, that is to say, its de-Germanisation (e.g., a station board of 'Breslau' with the lettering crossed out and provisionally changed to 'Wrocław', along with parallel street nameplates). Significantly, in excerpts of video interviews presented near the end of the exhibition, the inhabitants talk about their relationships with Wrocław, but none of them mentions the pre-war life in the city.

However, the concept of 'a foreign city' becomes nuanced at one fascinating point of the exhibition: when the story is told in material objects. A tiny room is crammed with everyday objects that fill glass showcases or hang from the ceiling; each is carefully identified and described on an adjacent board on the wall. The list contains more than 130 entries, some corresponding to groups of items. Almost all items are classified as 'Polish' or 'German' on the board. However, the difference is usually impossible to recognise when looking at them in the showcase. For instance, a "Polish leather wallet from the interwar period" neighbours a "German leather wallet from the interwar period", and two "wine taps: German and Polish (crescent)" are exhibited together. The display can be interpreted in two mutually exclusive ways: as a testimony to rupture (the 'Polish' objects replaced the 'German' ones in Wrocław) and continuity (the items are gathered in one place because they met in post-war Wrocław, those belonging to its former German residents and those brought by the newcomers). 'A foreign city' heralded in the previous sections of the exhibition was not an empty space; to the contrary, it was filled with objects, as a locus occupied by people and filled with history. Finally, in contrast to the display in the Szczecin museum, where objects are organised by chronology and geography, the Wrocław exhibition may suggest

that such a division is absurd or artificial. The 'national identity' of material things is almost impossible to discern, and so are the daily realities of those who use them, be they Polish or German residents of the city.

The post-war narrative of the DHC is immersed in the story of anti-communist resistance in general and the Solidarity movement in particular. The exhibition occupies two floors. Devoted to the 1980s, the underground part features a section on the strike in the depot in August 1980 and subsequent displays showcasing the activities of the political opposition in Wrocław and the region. A strong focus is on 'the battle of Wrocław', a protest organised in August 1982, arguably the largest during martial law or even 'the greatest illegal manifestation in the twentieth century throughout Poland', as one of the witnesses puts it in a film looped in the exhibition room.

However, the central part of the exhibition, presenting the pre-1980 period, cannot be reduced solely to the resistance formula. We argue that an alternative framework is tested here, which makes the exhibition rather unusual (although not entirely unique) within the Polish museum landscape. Topics such as propaganda, oppression at the hands of the communist regime, supply shortages, etc. are naturally present in the narrative, but the enemy figure for most of the exhibition is only lurking in the background. In search of alternatives to the politicised history of the Polish People's Republic, the exhibition creators explored the development of technology, sport, science, and culture in post-war Wrocław. Themes of this kind are, of course, present in many historical exhibitions but rarely move to the forefront of the narrative; they are usually presented in a perfunctory manner. At the DHC, they take centre stage in the exhibition space. The Wrocław cultural life of the period between the 1950s and 1970s is a case in point; it is not only shown via a number of text boards, posters, and photographs but also translated into a compelling scenography. Visitors enter a rotund 'dancefloor' space, where a captivating music video of the era is looped, visualising the most important cultural events and artistic accomplishments of the time. Interestingly, the exhibition also reaches for an international, European discourse by exploring the history of Polish-German reconciliation. In the final part of the exhibition, the presentation of Wrocław as 'the city of encounters' continues this idea. That said, the narrative itself is grounded in locality, highlighting experiences that distinguish Wrocław from the rest of the country,

including 'The Flood of the Millennium' of 1997. The final section presents the natural disaster as a dramatic test for the Wrocław community, its resilience, and solidarity – a test that the city and its citizens have successfully passed.

Thus, the exhibition becomes a success story that offers a positive self-image to the residents of present-day Wrocław. The story's focus is placed on collective life and cultural achievements, not heroism. Accordingly, the visitors' attention had to be carefully distributed between recognizing communist oppression and acknowledging the achievements of the period, which are not necessarily shown as opposing the regime. The exhibition presents areas of 'normal' successful life in the period, thereby nuancing the usual strategy of the total condemnation of the Polish People's Republic. This is in line with the overall vibrant atmosphere of the exhibition, highlighted by bold colours, which are very different from the sombre space of the Dialogue Centre Upheavals.

The Wrocław exhibition strategy is a balancing act between maintaining the national master narrative and moving away from it. Significantly, it refrains from a profound exploration of the German past of the city. This marginalised context is obvious, but notably underexposed, and the critical reflection on Germanness and Polishness comes in a modest, partially camouflaged and intellectually demanding form. We argue that this choice brings a shift in focus to the post-war specificity of Polish Wrocław.

Local identity is built in two ways: by inscribing Wrocław into nationwide master narratives and by presenting the hallmarks of its distinct character. The exhibition covers multiple obligatory themes for Polish memory culture, including anti-communist resistance and the exposure of Wrocław as a repository of the Borderland tradition and another central nexus of Polish master memory,[22] one that was (re)introduced with the new post-war inhabitants of the city. However, the exhibition also seeks alternative means to uphold self-affirmative memory and identity discourse in the local context. As such, it highlights particular civilian and cultural achievements of the Wrocław community instead of inscribing the city into the national heroic pattern. An original and compelling account of twentieth-century

[22] See Robert Traba, 'Kresy: miejsce pamięci w procesie reprodukcji kulturowej', in Tomasz Zarycki (ed.), *Polska Wschodnia i Orientalizm* (Warszawa, 2013), 146–70.

history emerges as a result. One possible reason for this is that the city has attracted many resettlers with high cultural capital, strong enough to (re)create their 'new' local identity.

Upper Silesia: The Silesian Museum in Katowice and the Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance in Gliwice

Ostensibly, the focus on the regional perspective and the German heritage of the land link the two previous cases with our next examples. On closer inspection, however, they reveal substantial differences. Contrary to the stories of Szczecin and Wrocław, two German cities that were transferred to Poland and their respective populations almost entirely replaced, Upper Silesia is a region with a long borderland history, changing hands throughout centuries, and profoundly transformed by the Industrial Revolution. Silesian culture is a mixture of Polish, German, and Czech influences. From the eighteenth century, it was part of the Kingdom of Prussia and then of the German Empire. However, more than half of its population were Polish speakers, especially among villagers and a poorer part of society, while towns and elites were German-speaking. Unlike the inhabitants of the Recovered Territories, displaced from the East, and their more or less uprooted descendants, Silesian society seems to have developed a strong minority identity built around a tradition of hard work (coal mining, in particular), a feeling of being special/different when compared to central Poland, and a distinctive dialect.[23]

After the First World War, the region was divided between Poland and Germany. After the Second World War, West Upper Silesia also became Polish. The population change was partial. However, most of the Germans left Upper Silesian cities, and many Poles from the East settled down in the region. An ethnic identity occupied, as we would say today, the realm of 'in-betweenness'. The Silesian dialect and

[23] For more about the recent history of Silesian identity, see e.g., Luiza Bialasiewicz, 'Upper Silesia: Rebirth of a Regional Identity in Poland', *Regional & Federal Studies*, xii, 2 (2002), 111–32; Maria Szmeja, 'Silesian Identity: Social and Political Problems', *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, xxii,1 (2007), 99–115; Patryk Orlewski, 'Identity and Distribution of the Silesian Minority in Poland', *Miscellanea Geographica*, xxiii, 2 (2019), 76–84.

ambiguous self-identification decisions from the inter- and post-war periods made the new authorities approach the Silesian population with not only distrust but also with open hostility. The collective trauma culminated in the Upper Silesian Tragedy (1945) when the Red Army entered the region, spreading violence (including mass violence against women) and mass imprisonments, including detention in concentration camps and forced deportation of Silesians to labour camps in the USSR. These events remain outside the framework of Polish collective memory, partly due to the exterritorialisation of the perpetrators (the Red Army) and partly because of the heterogeneous status of Silesian Polishness. Polish mainstream memory and identity patterns, prevalent in education, culture, and politics, often prove incoherent when confronted with the Silesian experience.

Located in the region's capital Katowice, the Silesian Museum would easily exemplify an institution that seeks to show its identity (Silesianness) and acknowledge its relation to Polishness and Germanness. The institution caters to a unique public: most often identifying as Polish but with a distinct background. As Jarosław Racięski, Head Curator of *Light of History*, the permanent historical exhibition in the Silesian Museum opened in 2015, put it: given their complicated pasts and identities, the museum was meant to create a space for the Silesians to settle, to 'offer a frame in which everyone could fit, adapt, and be given a sense of belonging'.[24] Although some of the experts criticised the final result of the work for 'avoiding sensitive issues and focusing on ostensible consensus',[25] it can be nonetheless reframed as mnemonic negotiations. The general structure of the exhibition can be interpreted as a careful attempt at expressing Silesian individuality and the complicated history of the region while placing it in the Polish context, but without dissolving the former in the latter.[26] The exhibition develops a set of strategic tools for the purpose: it uses some of the ultra-Polish narrative patterns and national *lieux de mémoire* in the story (above all, the memory themes

[24] In an interview with Maria Kobielska, 5 September 2019.

[25] Juliane Tomann, '"The Light of History": The First Permanent Exhibition on Upper Silesian History in Poland Avoids Sensitive Issues and Focuses on Ostensible Consensus', *Cultures of History Forum* (1 March 2016), DOI: 10.25626/0048.

[26] Maria Kobielska, 'The Touchstone of Polishness? Suffering Exhibited in "New Museums" in Poland', *Polish Review*, lxiv, 2 (2019), 121–31.

of the Solidarity, including the pacification of the strike in the Wujek Coal Mine in Katowice after the introduction of martial law in 1981), but not in its centre, framing it around labour and workers' agency.

Since one of us devoted a separate article to the exhibition in the Silesian Museum, we decided to refine this argument and add another context to the story by focusing on a less frequented and prominent museum in the region and one that allows a more complex discussion of Silesian memory negotiations. Our focus, therefore, will be on the Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance in Gliwice, where Jewishness and the Holocaust discourse present themselves as factors capable of nuancing the regional storyline.

The migration of Jews to Silesia dates back to the Middle Ages, their population reaching its peak in the nineteenth century. Upper Silesian Jews were generally assimilated into German society and rooted in German culture. Gliwice is a pre-war German city (then Gleiwitz) that used to have a significant yet not very numerous Jewish community. One of its traces in the present-day cityscape of Gliwice is a magnificent brick building that neighboured the Jewish cemetery and served as a funeral home from the beginning of the twentieth century until the Second World War. The building slowly deteriorated after the war. In the early twenty-first century, it became a heritage site; in recent years, it has been renovated under the auspices of the city council.

The building now houses the Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance, a new branch of the City Museum in Gliwice. Its permanent exhibition opened in 2018. This brilliantly designed state-of-the-art museum project presents an accurate and precise history of the Jews in Upper Silesia. Its agenda naturally requires confronting Polish mainstream memory patterns on multiple occasions. In this museum, central-peripheral mnemonic negotiations, which we aim to explore throughout our argument, reveal their most complex shape. As Natalia Romik, one of the museum's designers, put it, 'the history of Upper Silesian Jews is still to some extent a taboo subject within the Polish historical narrative, exposed as it is to a double exclusion'[27] as Jewish and German at the same time. Researchers have shown with multiple examples that Jewish heritage is often ignored or appropriated within

[27] Natalia Romik, 'Nothing Is Going to Change? Adaptation of the Jewish Pre-Burial House in Gliwice', *East European Jewish Affairs*, xlv, 2–3 (2015), 291.

Polish memory and Polish museums.[28] The Gliwice case is exceptional in that it deals with German-Jewish heritage and history in a contemporary Polish museum.[29] The Gliwice museum narrative is about people who were Jewish and German and were identified and identified themselves accordingly. In Polish culture, this means integrating two paradigmatic figures of otherness. Moreover, their story brings to the fore yet another fact: the space they inhabited became Polish only after 1945. Notably, the protagonist group of Upper Silesian Jews is not showcased with a figure that would be memorable and easy to identify with. Visitors are not encouraged to follow the life story of a specific person. It is more of a collective story, told from a suitably distant perspective, in a neutral, historical, and sociological tone.

The Gliwice museum, with its very building, institution, community, and exhibition, can be interpreted as an implicated subject or an implicated space. The issue was problematised by Michael Rothberg[30] and discussed in the context of museums by Erica Lehrer.[31] The term allows us to embrace positions occupied by contemporary subjects, communities, and museums in relation to complex pasts in which they still participate: not as victims or perpetrators but contributing to, inhabiting, inheriting, and benefitting from past violence and injustice. At the same time, the museum is a memory device deployed mainly by the present-day Polish inhabitants of the formerly German

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[28] See for instance: Erica Lehrer and Monika Murzyn-Kupisz, 'Making Space for Jewish Culture in Polish Folk and Ethnographic Museums: Curating Social Diversity after Ethnic Cleansing', *Museum Worlds*, 7 (2019), 82–108; Elżbieta Janicka, 'The Embassy of Poland in Poland. The Polin Myth in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ) as a Narrative Pattern and Model of Minority-Majority Relations', transl. Katrin Stoll and Jakub Ozimek, *Studia Litteraria et Historica*, 5 (2016), 1–76, https://ispan.waw.pl/journals/index.php/slh/article/view/slh.2016.003/3553 [Accessed: 20 Nov. 2023].

[29] It is worth noting that Jewish heritage is often absent in Polish-German narratives, albeit in the context of Polish-German history, the Jews are in a position of a particularly significant 'other', impossible to ignore. We would like to thank Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska for this remark.

[30] Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, 2019).

[31] Erica Lehrer, 'Material Kin: "Communities of Implication" in Post-colonial, Post-Holocaust Polish Ethnographic Collections', in Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius (eds), *Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial* (Leuven, 2020), 283–316, https://archive.jpr.org.uk/object-2208.

region that used to have a certain (and changing) percentage of the Jewish population. Polish residents form a community implicated in this post-Holocaust situation, historical Polish-German conflicts and tensions, and contemporary injustices inflicted by mainstream Polish memory culture. In this context, we seek to explore the possibility of tracking implications in the content and shape of the museum's exhibition. We want to find out whether it reflects or exposes the relations of implication, or dismisses and alleviates their traces.

First of the exhibits to investigate is the central object on display: a spectacular installation redolent of a crystal tree or chandelier, presenting Upper Silesian synagogues, commanding the full attention of the visitors as they enter the museum space. The synagogues' architectural shape, design, and location are described and illustrated by reproductions of precious archival materials. Many of these materials have been made available to a broader public for the first time. This mesmerizing object dominates, illuminates the room, and is multiplied by reflections in surrounding glass cases. It is to be walked around, touched, read through, and admired. This beautiful and unusual presentation of the past Jewish heritage of the region showcases it in its very complexity.

The curators decided to present the synagogues' stories without their endings. The information provided does not go beyond the 1920s or 1930s. The visitors will not learn about the fates of the buildings in later years; they might not even realise that most of them do not exist anymore. This issue is addressed in subsequent sections of the exhibition. However, only some of the buildings from the spectacular beginning are mentioned in the war section. The curators decided to add what looks like a last-minute improvisation to the final part of the exhibition: a small home-printed binder listing all the Silesian synagogues, recounting the circumstances of their destruction or their current state. The contrast between the spectacular presentation of the former splendour of the Upper Silesian synagogues and the modest depiction of their contemporary absence is striking.[32] The fact that the

[32] Analysis concerns the permanent exhibition as of 2020. In the meantime, the Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance has published a comprehensive catalogue on the synagogues of Upper Silesia, covering their entire histories. The catalogue supplemented the permanent exhibition: Bożena Kubit, Przemysław Nadolski, and Jerzy Krzysztof Kos, *Synagogi na Górnym Śląsku* (Gliwice, 2021). Available online: https://skarbnica.muzeum.gliwice.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Synagogi-na-Gornym-Slasku-3.pdf [Accessed: 20 Nov. 2023]

inhabitants of present-day Silesia live in the space-after-synagogues is a riveting visualisation of implication.[33] Most of these synagogues were burnt down by the Germans, and their contemporary users either do not know or conveniently refuse to think about it.

The pre-war part of the exhibition deploys some more conventional tropes of the violence to come. In the exhibition room presenting the private and social life of the Jews in nineteenth-century Silesia, a unique photographic collection is shown: 126 posed portraits of the region's Jewish inhabitants from the era. The photos were mainly taken by a German photographer from Gleiwitz, Wilhelm von Blandowski. They are displayed in succession on a screen situated at the dead-end of a small corridor. As a result, visitors have to directly face the portraits and look in the eyes of the sitters. The portraits make a ghostly impression, the figures fading and overlapping. This easily recognizable cosmopolitan visual imagery of the Holocaust evokes an atmosphere of nostalgic contemplation and mourning, exposing the void left by those who return as spectres. This pattern produces a universalizing effect. The dead are denied their individuality, and their history of suffering does not call for any effort to identify with them on the part of the visitors; instead, it provokes a well-known and well-trained affective practice that can be performed quite easily.

The exhibition then moves to the escalating story of the persecution of the Jews in the German part of Silesia in the 1930s. Interestingly, several written documents created by the Polish observers of the events are quoted and presented. They recount the Kristallnacht and the 1938 expulsion of the Jews who were Polish citizens from the Third Reich. Written originally in Polish, the texts were quickly and directly accessible to the public. Their tone is generally neutral or official; their authors present themselves as testimony givers who share their rare knowledge, their surprise, upset, or compassion. The exhibition makes only a passing mention of a Jewish person who was not permitted to enter Poland. In general, Polish people are presented in a favourable light and contrasted with the Germans, whose reports (also quoted) reveal vicious satisfaction and hatred. That said, the exhibition is quite removed from the mainstream narrative about

[33] A pioneering analysis of this issue can be found in a photographic art-based study by Wojciech Wilczyk. See Wojciech Wilczyk, *Niewinne oko nie istnieje = There's no such thing as an innocent eye*, transl. S. Gauger (Kraków, 2009).

Poles saving Jews, or Poles as powerless bystanders. The authors of the reports may be among the figures who are easiest to identify with for a predominantly Polish public.

The House of Remembrance recognises the German past of the region and provides a state-of-the-art presentation of the history of the Silesian Jewish community and its tragic ending. When necessary, it accurately describes the position of the Polish population, albeit without trying to put it in the centre of the story or cast in the role of flawless heroes or victims; it provides a decent description of Poles discriminating against Jews, up to the state-sponsored anti-Semitic campaign of 1968. The Jewish past is presented here to be acknowledged, appreciated, and admired.

That said, the position occupied by this Polish museum and prepared for its visitors needs to be carefully unpacked. Overly direct questions about them being implicated in the story seem to be avoided or marginalised. The contemporary use of post-synagogal space is mentioned, yet ever so inconspicuously. The imagined community of the Poles can engage in the nostalgic mourning of the pre-Holocaust world. However, they do not feel involved in its rapid catastrophe; they assume only negligible and mostly positive or at least decent roles.

The story is framed to place the Polish community in a relatively comfortable position as the contemporary host of the land, one generally not responsible for its past. It must be noted that the Gliwice exhibition, albeit tentatively, goes against the grain of the established patterns of Polish museum culture. The elimination of the celebration of the national Polish 'we' seems to entail the elimination – or at least a significant weakening – of any possible 'us'. Ultimately, the museum proves to be a balancing act between the strategy of 'othering' both Germans and Jews and that of establishing multidirectional bonds with their histories. This type of 'distant acknowledgement' may both signalise and alleviate implication. As such, the House of Remembrance is a striking example of the ongoing struggle with being implicated.

Conclusion: From Creeping Conflicts to Transformative Frictions

The four museum exhibitions in distinct geographical and cultural spaces, which we have defined as peripheral to the established framework of Polishness, show the deployment of different memory patterns.

The three variants of negotiating room for unorthodox forms of identity and memory show how these forms slip out of the Polish master narrative. While each of the institutions has as its central concept the prevailing (contemporary, martyrological) 'national form', it is also possible to observe differences in the intensity of its presence. The Dialogue Centre Upheavals in Szczecin offers the most unifying narrative subordinated to central patterns. The loosening of these patterns through the introduction of a civilian, everyday framework can be seen in Wrocław's Depot History Centre (civilisational and cultural achievements) and the Silesian Museum in Katowice (work ethos). The Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance in Gliwice exemplifies the most complicated process of incorporating otherness (Germanness, Jewishness) into memory while preserving both the strong and 'safe' local and Polish identity frameworks. These differences derive from infrastructural possibilities and the visions of the exhibitions' authors. In our opinion, they are also reflections of their cultural capitals and the extent to which local communities have stabilised their local identities.

The museums in question operate in a network of central-peripheral relations and aptly reveal the potential fields of conflict between the dominant narrative and local experiences. However, these clashes do not escalate, and each of the institutions fulfils its social tasks, including those in the field of the locality. In conclusion, we propose to describe the situation in these four museums as memory frictions. Arguably, the term frictions – albeit proposed by Lowenhaupt Tsing for the study of contemporary environmental ethnography – proves useful as it does not imply simple conflict; instead, it hints at tensions resulting from the interaction of different social actors representing diverse social and cultural interests.[34] Tsing notes: "Cultures are continually co-produced in the interactions I call 'friction': the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference […]. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power".[35] Friction-based relationships assume an uneven power balance (global and local) with regard to norms and universals, yet remain

[34] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton–Oxford, 2005).

[35] *Ibid.,* 4–5.

Fig. 1. Section presenting the December 1970 protests in Szczecin; the permanent exhibition, Dialogue Centre Upheavals.

Photo by Maria Kobielska, August 2022, courtesy of Dialogue Centre Upheavals.

Fig. 2. Room of 'Polish' and 'German' items in 'A Foreign City' section; the permanent exhibition, Depot History Centre in Wrocław.

Photo by Maria Kobielska, May 2021, courtesy of Depot History Center.

Fig. 3. Installation presenting Upper Silesian synagogues; the permanent exhibition, Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance in Gliwice.

Photo by Maria Kobielska, September 2020, courtesy of Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance.

equally useful for the powerful and the powerless, for the elite and the marginalised. Finally, frictions undeniably reveal their creative and generative qualities that can potentially transform established social and cultural practices. We regard the 'non-central' new historical museums as working precisely in the logic of frictions, pursuing the interests of pluralistic Polishnesses as far as actual conditions would allow. Consequently, we hope that this perspective ultimately is more expressive of 'creeping transformations' than of 'creeping conflicts'.

proofreading Krzysztof Heymer

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