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### Report on visual culture as an agent of social change: most pronounced cases

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## Executive summary

The third deliverable in the course of the research (June – October 2019) within WP4 (Troubled Past in Arts and Culture) is the *Report on visual culture as an agent of social change: most pronounced cases*. The aim at the last stage of the research in this WP was to explore strategies and tools employed by artists, curators, critics, cultural managers etc. and position them along previously analysed public responses to selected artistic works and events, in the context of discussions of art and culture agency in the public sphere and in relation to collective memory.

The first deliverable in WP4 (D4.1 *A database of collected data of artistic and cultural artefacts related to troubled pasts in the eight case studies*) included the collection of the most pronounced, discussed, controversial i.e. pivotal cases of artistic events and artefacts from each country. The database included a diversified (in terms of media, genre, strategy and initially recorded response) set of cases: each had an index card assigned with specific data gathered at subsequent stages of the research. We have detected and described numerous forms in which cultural artefacts respond to troubled pasts. There has emerged a plethora of micro-archives of both artistic approaches and political sentiments towards troubled pasts.

In the course of work on the second deliverable (D4.2 *Report on arts and culture in conflict instigation and resolution*), the cases were grouped in clusters and marked with specific tags (referring to recurrent themes or problems) which became a point of departure for comparative, cross-country analysis of public reactions (including critics', professionals' and public debates) toward selected artworks, artistic events and cultural projects. The analysis concentrated on understanding in what way art and culture create moments of rupture of the social consensus, whereby societies revise and transform their attitudes towards difficult aspects of their collective identity and address the repressions of unwelcome contents and emotions (such as guilt, shame, repulsion).

The current deliverable (D4.3 *Report on visual culture as an agent of social change: most pronounced cases*) addresses the potential for visual arts, and visual culture more generally, as agent of social change which is not measured by what the public think / feel about it, but rather by an informed and multidimensional analysis of what it offers in terms of experimental forms of thinking, feeling and intervening within collective memory, shaping and transforming collective opinions and consciousness, as well as what it can offer in the future based on what possibilities it

opens up for thinking-feeling about past conflicts and traumas. Most pronounced cases have been selected and elaborated in the report one next to the other. The possibilities offered by the material turned out to be multiple and very promising and they kept expanding with time and the more uses these artefacts have been put to.

This report firstly justifies the choice of visual culture and stresses its unavoidably global character, which goes beyond the local and extends to a transnational and multidirectional approach to the memory of the past conflicts. This global perspective is not only justified by the rapid development of the media and technologies of communication (and transmission of memory) but also by the current challenges faced by the so-called migration crisis in Europe. Then it reveals the research questions and methods (including concepts worked out in the course of the research), as well as offers several close-ups on most pronounced examples of how interventions in visual culture and the sphere of public memory offer occasions for social change, provide tools for members of the public to affectively process, critically assess and intervene with the multiple politics of memory they are objects of. The conclusion brings an overview of the multiple findings in the course of the research not only at this stage but in the *Work Package 4: Troubled Pasts in Arts and Culture* as a whole.

## 1. Introduction

The main objective in the course of this stage of research in Work Package 4 was to explore strategies and tools employed by artists, curators, critics, cultural managers etc. and position them along previously analysed public responses – both emotional, ethical and political responses – to selected artefacts. We have been looking at the most pronounced instances where an artistic intervention into the sphere of public memory gains its momentum and becomes a possible trigger for crucial transformations of the individual and collective image of the past conflicts. While preparing for the analysis we looked into the historical period of the emergence of certain theories of visual culture, the production and circulation of images as well as their projected social and political resonance. We have combined these reflections with the developments in political theory and memory studies which allowed us to conceptualise art's and culture's agency in the public sphere and in relation to collective memory. In the subsequent parts of the report we will reveal theoretical framework that emerged including research questions, applied methods and concepts; we will also present the most pronounced cases and their possible – even if not immediately observable – contribution to the transformation of approaches to troubled pasts and their present resonances not only in the contexts of local conflicts (the eight countries of interest in RePAST) but in the translocal perspective which is concerned with mutual influences, inspirations and interrelations.

### *Why visual studies?*

As Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros, authors of the volume entitled *Visual Culture*<sup>1</sup> rightly observed, there is a close and a very entwined connection between conflict (political and historical) and visual culture. Long before photography was employed to document historical events, it was the painters who were commissioned to depict the victors (commissioned by victors); so following what Walter Benjamin remarked<sup>2</sup>, history was not only written by victors, it was also depicted by them; its image was produced, distributed, often manipulated. Later these works of art, initially rather limited in their scope and influence, became copied for mass circulation and distribution (as illustrations in history books). Particular images were invested with specific affective and political content and were being recognized as iconic depictions of the events. The authors of *Visual Culture* suggest that certain groups of people share these images as immediate signs of what was – “we can probably all ‘replay’ such images in our minds as we read this” (p. 4). The referent for the “we,” however, is not as obvious and immediate as they seem to be assuming. I will therefore take up the issue of global visual culture below.

It was in the 1990s, first with the Gulf War of 1991 and then with the Kosovo crisis of 1999, that two parallel battles were being fought: the political-military ones and the image-aesthetic ones; the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Howells, Joaquim Negreiros, *Visual Culture*, Polity, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, in his: *Selected Writings, 4: 1938–1940*, eds Howard Eiland Michael W. Jennings, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. 2006, 389-400.

battles were over international public feelings and opinions (p. 4). Howells and Negreiros recall an episode related to the latter conflict (Kosovo) where media and the public demanded images of Serbian atrocities in order to believe or confirm the news. “Visual culture (...) had reached such a phase that the word of NATO official was no longer good enough for the British media. The media wanted proof; the media wanted pictures” (p. 5).

This context proved necessary for us in the planning and implementation of research within *Work Package 4: Troubled Past in Art and Culture*: on the one hand the cases we were gathering and analysing originate from 1993 onwards; on the other hand, a visual studies perspective has allowed us to frame and reframe these cases according to the time of their production and reception, as well as their resurfacing. Visual culture and aesthetics are simply an indispensable way of experiencing the everyday, the ordinary as well as the historical. Their role should be neither diminished nor ignored. We have analysed artistic interventions in the visual public sphere which gave us a sense of particular cultures of memory as they have been shaped and reshaped, the impact of the troubled, traumatic, conflicting elements of the past across different national environments and differently empowered artistic as well as non-artistic subjects.

As Susan Buck-Morss, scholar of political theory and devoted deconstructionist of historical knowledge, wrote in her by now classical essay *Visual Studies and Global Imagination*<sup>3</sup>, visual studies is “a science of the sensible” taking as its object global imagination and the “thin membrane of images” as well as art practices committed to “stretching that membrane, providing depth of field, slowing the tempo of perception, and allowing images to expose a space of common political action.”<sup>4</sup>It is in the study of the visual and in visual studies that Buck-Morss sees the “opportunity to engage in transformation of thought” (unlearning) and “the epistemological resiliency necessary to confront a present transformation in existing structures of knowledge”. Images have the capacity to generate, not only transmit, meaning. And this potential of “generation” can be a call and a demand to everyone.

And when it comes to the possibilities of comparative transnational analysis of agency of art practices and visual culture, visual studies as a transdisciplinary space offers many tools and positions which allow for what Buck-Morss calls a “decisive intervention”, aimed at promoting democratic transformation of knowledge. Although she does not explicitly talk about the knowledge of the past (historical knowledge), we found her ideas helpful and productive for our research. An important context she is stressing and which needs to be taken into consideration when thinking about the agency of visual culture is that of possibilities offered by new media: “Images circle the globe today in de-centred patterns that allow unprecedented access, sliding almost without friction

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *Visual studies and global imagination*, in: *The Politics of Imagination*, eds. Chiara Bottici, Benoît Challand, London: Birkbeck Law Press, 2011, pp. 214-233. The chapter was presented as a talk at the Tate Modern in London on June 3, 2004 (in the framework of the Surrealism Centre's Papers of Surrealism). <http://susanbuckmorss.info/text/visual-studies-and-global-imagination/>, see also: <https://artmuseum.pl/en/doc/video-globalne-widzenie-i-wyobraznia-z-marginesu2>; see also: Chiara Bottici, ed. *Imaginal politics: images beyond imagination and the imaginary*, Columbia University Press 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. (online).



past language barriers and national frontiers. This basic fact, as self-evident as it is profound, guarantees the democratic potential of image-production and distribution”<sup>5</sup>. This is the benign side of globalization, as she argues, acknowledging at the same time its dark sides, related among other things to economic and military motivations and interests behind technical development, or corporate patronage: structures of financing.

TJ Demos makes an observation that provides an important context to our thinking about the relationship of the memory of the troubled pasts and art practices in post-1993 Europe:

Whereas global mobility follows from the transition to a world of newly opened borders—with its most potent symbol being the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the construction of a borderless EU—it also results from the desperation of multitudes to overcome the increasingly militarized divisions of economic and political power between Europe and Africa, and North America and its southern neighbours. Globalization, according to this view, is less a smooth space of the free flow of people, as many utopian narratives of the 1990s wished to see it, than a fractured geography of borders and archipelagos that divides the uninterrupted transmissions of goods and capital from the controlled movements of people<sup>6</sup>.

This important context proved necessary for much of our discussion on the meaning and resonances of some of the cases studied.

The crucial question Buck-Morss (2014) addresses is that of the relationship between the images as outcome of individual practice and their possible social-political effect: what the conditions of shareability of these individual creations are if not through the potent “image-culture which [in turn and paradoxically so] threatens to overwhelm our individual imaginations.” Her idea is to give up the framing of art images solely as expressions of the artistic individual sharing his/her world (of experience, feeling, meaning), and rather see them as elements of “collectively accessible assemblage of images”. In this assemblage the accessibility<sup>7</sup> and reproducibility seem boundless, and so does reappropriation, all of which allow for the de-formation and trans-formation of the image-world and along with it for new, alternative, potentially emancipatory forms not only of image but also of knowledge production. So, “as tools of thought, their [images] value-producing potential demands their creative use.” Every act of assembling the images can in itself be an act of meaning production and of countering the dominant “sense” and “sensitivity”, hegemonies of form and content alike.

Moreover, we should thus look at the images available in the assemblage not as mere copies of the originals which are stored somewhere. Attribution seems irrelevant (as much as it is still relevant for art historical knowledge and expertise) if the perspective is as Buck-Morss claims: images are used to think. In the context of our research, we can and should add: to feel and to remember. In the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> T.J. Demos, *Migrant Image. The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis*, Duke University Press, 2013, xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Buck-Morss writes: “Granted, there are set-up costs that may be ongoing, but digital archives, web pages, and data banks are socialized resources almost by definition.” (ibid)

perspective offered by Buck-Morss, the images are mediators and facilitators “between things and thought, between the mental and the non-mental” that enable connection and connectivity.

When it comes to the question of how visual culture can become an agent of social change, what one first needs to recognize is what Buck-Morss calls a “close fit” between image and narrative code produced and circulated by those in power in which, as she rightly observes, meanings are not negotiated but imposed thus causing the “collective autism of television news” or in other words the “blinded way of seeing”. Those in charge of the “close fit” seem to be little tolerant of the complexity of meaning or its collective authorship.<sup>8</sup> And yet the close fit turns out to be porous and thus the leaks emerge whereby images flow freely outside of the seemingly fixed narratives into the creative field (potentially creative for all users of the visual public sphere) and are available for re-appropriation, or to use Giorgio Agamben’s term, “profanation,” whereby they are returned to be used by the people beyond the accepted, dominant or simply ordinary ways of use<sup>9</sup>. The example of such “leaks” Buck-Morss works with is that of images of abuse from Abu Ghraib, which were named by a representative of American authorities “radioactive.” The power of these images was not only to challenge the dominant, official narrative but indeed cause a major crisis in self-representation due to an unquestionable compromise of the powerful myth of the “good and just war”.

Adopting Buck-Morss’s concluding remarks for our research we observe that once we agree that the image-world is what we have in common, at a global level, and can be treated as “the surface of globalization”, our task both as participants of visual and memory culture and analysts of it, is not “to get behind the image surface but to stretch it, enrich it, give it definition, give it time.” In this perspective, “the great experimental laboratories of the image” (visual media, old and new) are sites where new forms of experience, engagement and criticism are being worked out. The researcher’s task is the shared responsibility in the laboratory and not outside of it. Construction and reconstruction take place not only within the object of our study but in the study itself. At least, such is the potential in the framework of visual studies. Our concern in the following text trails the footsteps of Benedict Anderson and his seminal idea about how the imagined community of the nation was made possible by mass availability of newspapers and fiction books in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>10</sup>. What then would be the trans-national imagined community of shared images? How is it becoming? What are we hoping for? To what extent are we already consciously co-creating it?

Having grounded our choice of critical visual studies as the general methodological approach to the role of artistic interventions for shaping of public memory, we will now move on to more specific research questions and approaches we have worked with and developed.

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, “A Global Public Sphere?” *Situation Analysis*, Issue 1 October 2002: 13.

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, transl. Jeff Fort, Zone Books, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso 2016 (revised edition).

## 2. Research questions and methods

An important problem tackled by many scholars of visual culture is that of *visual literacy* i.e. the ability to “read” visual texts, to understand them and be empowered rather than disempowered by them. As recipients of contemporary visual messages (in their countless forms and formats) we all seem to be practiced and experienced; however, the crucial question is what is this experience grounded in: is it in habit or in critical analysis? In common sense or in informed education? As has been often highlighted, the public can be passive and accepting as much as active and suspicious as to what these messages convey and how, also due to the ceaseless stream of images. In our research in RePAST we were not interested in or concerned with the content or subject matter of visual texts; with their grammar or symbolism (iconology). Instead, we are interested in what they potentially or possibly do (in other words, in their performance). Or let us do or make (perform). The assumption behind this stance is the dialectical relationship between art and memory politics (or more broadly between image production and memory production) – these are not only interwoven but, more importantly, constitutive of one another.

As has already been stated on several occasions in the course of RePAST Work Package 4 research, the focus has been on negotiating between the two: artistic and social relevance<sup>11</sup>. The *Report on role of arts and culture in conflict resolution and instigation* (Deliverable D4.2) summed up the stage of research concentrated on the analysis of *public responses* to how artistic and cultural artefacts *react to a crisis related to troubled past* in the selected case studies and how artistic and cultural artefacts *instigate crisis in the present* in relation to troubled pasts.

At this stage of research (June-October 2019) we have concentrated predominantly on the possible *agency* of artistic interventions in the visual culture. In looking at the many cases of artistic contributions to the visual public sphere (in the scope of RePAST i.e. in relation to troubled pasts and past conflicts, as well as conflicts over the role of the past in the present), we have worked with the research questions from previous stages of the research, adding some new which emerged in the course of work. These have been the following:

- How does memory function in the visual public sphere?
- What motivates – referring to cultural, social and political conditions rather than individual reasons – the way artists (and other visual culture producers) respond to conflict?

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<sup>11</sup> We addressed this in two previous deliverables (D4.1 and D4.2) as well as in several conference and seminar presentations, including *Art that hurts memory? The limits of critical intervention* (Lisbon 2018, Katarzyna Bojarska); *Art that interacts with memory: the painful in-betweenness and the possibilities of self-criticism* (Chicago 2019, KB); *Terribly Close – possible conflict of memory?* (Kraków – collaboration with H2020 TRACES); at Memory Studies Conference in Madrid 2019 (Katarzyna Bojarska and Dimitra Milioni & Andria Christofidou); *Divided we Stand or the Revolutionary Love in the Making* (Zurich 2019, Katarzyna Bojarska). This relationship has also been addressed in articles prepared for publication and in the syllabus for a graduate seminar devoted to memory of past conflicts in arts and culture.

- How does conflict emerge, is re-enacted, worked through and commented upon by means of visual and performing arts?
- What mnemonic and commemorative practices are being performed by the arts e.g. what is past (gone), what is present (pressing), and where does the past not let go?
- What can art really do as “an effective mediator of change or resistance to hegemonic power” (Jean Fisher)?
- What does its agency consist of, who can participate in it, share it and profit from it (in symbolic rather than economic sense)?
- How do artists engage visual tools in order to question and reshape existing forms of expression and engagement?
- How do artists locate themselves: what role do they actually play in the complex political and aesthetic field?
- How can their “local” intervention be related to global developments (with “local” and “global” being treated as fluid rather than fixed categories)?
- What is the relationship between the image’s political-effect and its knowledge-effect?

At this stage of research we have also followed the cluster-based arrangement of the collected data as presented in D4.2 according to strategies, scopes, issues, media, and forms of address:

- Site-responsive art
- Female memory of the conflict
- Biographies in the aftermath of conflict
- Body and conflict
- Exhibitions and artistic events as sites for and of conflict
- Moving images / moved audiences.

As much as this ordering proved useful then, we did not restrict the analysis in rigid boundaries; instead, we have given ourselves the liberty to wander through the material and expect the many possibilities for intersectionality and cross-analysis. In order to address the visual culture and memory of the troubled past in the most exhaustive and multidimensional manner, the researchers returned to the archive of the recorded responses to particular artefacts and readdressed it with the above questions. The WP leader provided the researchers with the research guidelines, stressing the visual studies perspective with the concepts and hypotheses (as presented below) to be considered as potentially useful framework. Hence, in analysing the material we were looking for:

- forms of engagement in the formation or deconstruction of respective (national) memory cultures;

- forms of engagement offered for the members of the public;
- conditions of engagement of the members of the public;
- strategies employed to relate to the troubled pasts and conflicts and to what extent these could become shared as possible common tools for intervention into the visual public sphere;
- subject positions assumed by the artists;
- subject positions offered to the public;
- forms of collectivity or sociality offered by these art interventions;
- relationships between members of the public (conflicting sides);
- how these works targeted dominant memory discourses and included minoritarian memory discourses or practices;
- how they addressed questions of gender;
- how, by referring to particular troubled pasts, they responded to current political and social problems;
- how they established or questioned the relationship between past and present;
- how they established or questioned the relationship between the local memory perspective (national) and that beyond the local (European, global, planetary).

### 2.1 Object-based approach

The approach to the materials at this stage of research was informed by the possible interchanges and analogies, and concentrated on the possible political, social and artistic impact – the imagined possibilities at the intersection of the critics’ and artists’ expectations as well as public needs. We were looking for situations and occasions when artistic practices step in and assume their truly radical role: they imagine and offer alternatives otherwise unavailable for contemplation, they unleash forces (both affective and intellectual) that may produce material effects, lead to formation of memory cultures, social phenomena and political action. We have returned to the question to what extent and in what form art interventions provide the audience with aesthetic and/or critical (discursive) tools that can serve not only to better understand the structure of collective memory but also to consciously shape and reshape it. For the above study the researchers have employed a multidisciplinary toolbox and have pursued the analysis from a studied object towards structural or theoretical statements, rather than merely looked for illustrations or confirmations of previously adopted frameworks.

By the end of the research nearly 200 cases of artistic interventions were gathered from Bosnia and Hercegovina, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Kosovo, Poland, Spain. They emerged in the last 26 years (from 1993 onwards). 150 of them are included in the database D4.1 and classified as follows:

- monuments and commemorative sites
- individual and group artistic exhibitions

- performances, dance performances and theatre plays
- fiction and nonfiction writing
- feature and documentary films as well as TV documentaries and series
- political graffiti and murals as well as iconoclastic acts in public space.

We identified these cases based on:

- exploration of digital libraries of research and academic institutions involved in the project or collaborating with it, paid and freely-available electronic journals and books, databases of the most important publishers;
- searching the web (general search engines using local languages, websites of museums, galleries, festivals as well as press)
- contacting curators, critics, artists themselves, researchers who have already worked on similar issues for consultation and guidance (the WP leader provided an initial list of contacts)
- visiting major galleries', museums', festivals' archives where the documentation and press clips of the events are stored.

We gathered works that explicitly address troubled pasts, respond to collective memory crisis or specific historical-political decisions concerning the shape of collective memory. We included cases which caused public distress, public debate about the troubled past, some of which were considered scandalous or unacceptable (and as such were rejected or even censored).

The conviction behind the object-based approach throughout the research has been that only by looking closely and each time accommodating one's look to a particular case as an object of interest (thus responding to and acknowledging their situatedness, site- and context-specificity as well as one's own) one reaches the complexity of meaning which can then be disentangled rather than simplified or tamed. As much as we have been respectful of many differences and local specificities, we had been looking at possible global resonances. We have tested the idea of expanding the "collective" of collective memory, or the "public" of the public memory, allowing for imagining the memory alliances over competitions; allowing for imagining resonances between events and experiences from different contexts, times, cultures, etc. These have been suggested to us by the art works or interventions themselves and encouraged us to "unlearn" the rules and accept the boundaries of academic experimental thinking. As the editors of *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics* claimed,

aesthetic practices – and artists – are subject to multiple cultural, political and economic constraints. And yet aesthetic practices often gain their force precisely through their contestation of constraint and

the assertion of a certain freedom of movement. Aesthetic freedom is linked to human agency, to the power to create the (multi-) cultural habitats in which we live.<sup>12</sup>

We adopted this dictum as self-referential: academic practices – as much as artistic, for they also are aesthetic! – respond to and struggle with the constraints. Academics appropriate tools and forms of expression from artists in order to broaden the scope of their own resonance.

Some of us are active art and cultural critics, translators, editors, collaborators in art-related projects. An example is prof. Kenneth Andresen's – member of the RePAST team – project "Daily Kosovo Postcard" (<https://www.instagram.com/dailykosovopostcard/>), which was pursued very much in line with such artistic projects as these of Zoe Leonard, Mikołaj Długosz, Gerhard Richter or Ariella Azoulay and in the spirit of what art critic Hal Foster called an "archival impulse"<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. Concepts we worked with and frameworks employed

Below is the list of concepts which have recurred at this stage of the research and which we have found specifically productive in discussing artistic interventions in the realm of public memory, its shaping of memory culture, its critical potential and its role as political and historical agent. For the sake of clarity these have been grouped in three sets: images, memory, and politics (some belong to more than one set):

#### Images

*Appropriation*

*Relationality of art*

*Protesting images*

*Agonistic visual publics* (Chantal Mouffe)

*Community of sensations*

*Social bond of art* (Jacques Ranciere)

*Emancipated spectator* (Jacques Ranciere)

*Unlearning 1 – transfer of historical knowledge*

*Unlearning 2 – transfer of historical affect*

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<sup>12</sup> Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord *Introduction: Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art-making* in: *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics. Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art-making* eds. Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord, Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam – New York, NY 2007, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse", *October* Vol. 110 (Autumn, 2004): 3-22.

## **Memory**

*Solidarity*

*Resistance-Resilience*

*Participation*

*Relationality and multidirectionality of memory* (Michael Rothberg)

*Artist as witness*

*Creative forms of witnessing*

*Citizens of memory*

*Implicated subjects* (Michael Rothberg)

*Communities of implication* (Erica Lehrer)

## **Politics**

*Participation*

*Solidarity*

*Civil imagination*

*Civil contract of photography* (Ariella Azoulay)

*Visual citizenship* (Ariella Azoulay)

*Civil disobedience*

*Artist as citizen*

*Witness as citizen*

*Creative forms of citizenship*

*Citizens of memory*

*Implicated subjects* (Michael Rothberg)

*Unlearning 1 – transfer of historical knowledge*

*Unlearning 2 – transfer of historical affect*

*Emphatic unsettlement* (Dominick LaCapra)

The above concepts will recur in the subsequent parts of the report in discussions of the art works and art-related practices as agents in the public sphere, co-producers of public memory, participants in struggles over the shape of collective identities and promoters of social change (in relation to troubled pasts and their afterlives). They have also been employed to point to the role artistic practices play in past-related knowledge production and transmission, as well as its contestation.



Last but not least, they allowed for establishing correspondences between different cultural contexts on the one hand and different historical times and experiences on the other.

Below are the frameworks constructed in relation to the cases selected and in turn employed in the analysis of the public, mnemonic and social agency of artistic interventions.

### 3.1 Citizens of memory

In using the concept of “citizens of memory” we are following specifically Silvia R. Tandeciarz, the author of *Citizens of Memory: Affect, Representation, and Human Rights in Postdictatorship Argentina*<sup>14</sup> and Michael Rothberg’s and Yasemin Yildiz’s *Memory Citizenship*<sup>15</sup>. As has already been written, artists and other art-workers can teach creative forms of citizenship (who is included, who is implicated, who is responsible and who is interpellated) and participatory action, and provide tools, treating visual and memorial space alike as a common good, a necessarily shareable space, a platform of and for action. It needs to be stressed that this space is shareable not only locally but also translocally (Europe) and globally (Aleppo). As utopian as it may seem, it is not necessarily unrealistic – it actually seems to be working in some of cases under inspection in RePAST.

Following Tandeciarz we observe new forms of civic engagement. She is referring to collaborative, community-driven (both non-governmentally as well as state-funded) forms of engagement – transformations in the **performance of citizenship**; the latter can be either facilitated or blocked by art and culture – blocked when art confirms the hegemonic symbolic and affective structures.

As democratic state institutions often respond inadequately or belatedly to problems related to traumatic memory or conflicting memories of troubled pasts, arts step in with a response that is not necessarily more adequate or timely, but in its ambiguity it opens up a space for tackling the numerous problems and complications without the necessity for closure, i.e. providing immediate solutions. The work on memory done by artistic interventions rests on “dense significations, figures and scenes that establish **points of condensation and anchorage** with respect to the past and forge exemplary values, which are not given once and for all but require constant reworking and reinforcement from present”<sup>16</sup> (emphasis added).

Tandeciarz describes the process of the emergence of new historical actors (which in all the different case studies emerge according to different rhythms, modes, etc.) who are responsible for “**driving the work of memory into the public sphere**”. This also includes “art collectives turning the city streets into their canvas, reinvigorating not only the work of memory through their art actions but also that of cultural studies practitioners” (152).

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<sup>14</sup> Book published by Bucknell University Press in 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz, “Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance in Contemporary Germany”, *parallax*, 2011, vol. 17, no. 4, 32–48.

<sup>16</sup> Hugo Vezetti, “Scenes from the Crisis” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 11 (2002): 166, quoted after Tandeciarz (152).

In this perspective the idea of citizenship emerges out of the nation-state model, while memory shifts from that of particular events to that of particular bonds, affects, etc. which go beyond the local, the particular, and can be shared. As tentative as it may seem, the idea of European or planetary citizens of memory is worth thinking about: memory not bound to big events (which would provide identitarian models for specific historical subjects) – like world wars – but to more particular events which however produce public feelings and affects that are negotiable and shareable.

### 3.2 Public (visual) memory

In most cases when artworks and cultural artefacts are addressed and discussed in relation to the memory of the troubled pasts, traumatic events and past conflicts, it is in the framework of cultural memory. In our research we have suspended that framework and instead concentrated on the possibility of working with the concept of public memory and the role of the visual culture in shaping, negotiating and resisting it. In his introduction to *Framing public memory* Kendall R. Phillips<sup>17</sup> stresses the rhetorical nature of memorial processes: “the ways memories attain meaning, compel others to accept them, and are themselves contested, subverted, and supplanted by other memories” (2). Today this rhetoric can, or even predominantly is, visual.

Public memories “both constitute our **sense of collectivity** and are constituted by our **togetherness**” and as such are, Phillips argues, very much orchestrated by the affective forces aimed to achieve specific result: **form of the commons**. Public memory (after Edward Casey), unlike collective or social memory, is one which exists “in the open, in front of and with others,” it is an object of negotiation, interaction and dispute. It is less an object of study than a matter of everyday life and struggle which, besides the so-called ordinary people (citizens), engages also artists and academics (also as citizens). All of the subjects (subject positions) can partake in creating a public. And if public memory becomes an **arena for collective action** (or acting), it is a creative space per se, or rather the space of the creative. In pursuing this line of thinking about public memory, we tend to concentrate more on the forms in which it emerges and takes place rather than on its contents.

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<sup>17</sup>*Framing public memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips, The University of Alabama Press, 2004. Phillips – crucially for our research – distances his conceptualization of public memory from Jürgen Habermas’s idea of the public sphere and expresses his skepticism towards his “modernist logic” [see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1989)]. He is aware – which is again very important from our perspective – of the emergence of various competing publics and counterpublics, thus following Nancy Fraser in her “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (MIT Press, 1992), 109–42. (13-14). See also Kendall R. Phillips, “Spaces of Public Dissension: Reconsidering the Public Sphere,” *Communication Monographs* 63 (1996): 231–48.

Phillips suggests that we should look at public memory as it exists simultaneously in two frames: that of **“the memory of publics<sup>18</sup>”** (“certain groups of individuals remembering together”) and that of **“the publicness of memory”** (“memories appearing before or perhaps simultaneously with those groups”) (4, 10). He complicates the issue even further by pointing to the factors operating in both frames. Thus, the memory of publics is mobilized by “remembrance/forgetting, authority/resistance, responsibility/absolution” while the publicness of memory by “appearance/ loss, repetition/mutation, hegemony/instability”. Yet, these are not separated but rather intermingle and are mutually dependent. If one wishes to consider public memory in one frame, one needs to be aware of the complexities and problems induced by the other.

As one attends to the horizon of remembrance and forgetfulness, one must be mindful that these remembrances are the appearances of memories, inherently transitory and receding. As one examines the mutability of repeated memories, one must also be mindful of the underlying struggles by various groups to maintain or resist memories. As we speak of cultural responsibility and/or absolution, we should also be mindful of the hegemonic tendencies that want to inscribe memories—of triumphs or tragedies—in stone and fix them in seeming immutability. (10)

An interesting contribution to the discussion of the role of visual culture, or images more specifically, in shaping public memory can be found in Barbie Zelizer’s reflection on the **“subjunctive voice of images in public memory”** i.e. a conviction that images might give birth to the possibilities, reinterpretations and uncertainties of events from the past<sup>19</sup>.

There is more to images in memory than just their indicative or symbolic capacity, Zelizer rightly argues. She pays attention to recurring visual tropes in formations of public memory, tropes which travel over temporalities and topographies, activating potential analogies in historical experience and between historical protagonists. She also acknowledges that a typical, since modernity, trend to “freeze, replay, and store visual memories for large numbers of people – facilitated by museums, art galleries, television archives, and other visual data banks – has enhanced our ability to make the past work for present aims.” (161) It might be contended that the rule governing the function and dynamic of images in public memory is that of montage, i.e. images act through contingency;

[their] meaning settles not at the image’s original point of display but over time in new contexts that are always altered, sometimes playful, and often contradictory. By playing to the contingent aspect of a depicted event or issue, the image’s capacity to speak for the past changes in its relation to the events it depicts. And when dealing with events of a tragic nature, contingency may be the best interpretive stance for which we can hope. (162)

Here again we seem to be dealing precisely with the creative or even artistic aspects of public memory.

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<sup>18</sup> “(...) to speak of public memory as the memory of publics is to speak of more than many individuals remembering the same thing. It is to speak of a remembrance together, indeed, of remembrance together as a crucial aspect of our togetherness, our existence as a public.” (4).

<sup>19</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *The Voice of the Visual in Memory in Framing public memory*. In *Framing Public Memory*, ed. In K. R. Phillips, University of Alabama 2004, 157-186.

This openness of **public memory**, its being “in front of and with others” (Edwards) allows us to think about it as an agonistic space, where through visual means senses and sensibilities are being an object of an affectively charged struggle of various, at times even clashing, interests and claims. Thus, Chantal Mouffe’s idea of the **agonistic public sphere** comes to mind, along with its lure for the art world ever since its inception, i.e. since the 1990s<sup>20</sup>. Working with Mouffe’s idea proved very inspiring in thinking in comparative terms about how images of troubled and traumatic pasts and the memory of conflicts are being created and renegotiated in the public spheres and about what their role and possibilities are. By including the reflection on power relations and hegemony into thinking about the agency of art and visual culture in the realm of public memory, we can better frame their potential contribution to social change. If we agree that politics shape the image of the past (the so-called historical politics), art-related practices step in to claim their right to the past and to political relevance as well. They might support or resist hegemony offering in turn alternative modes of referring to the past and imagining the future. Mouffe thinks and writes in favour of the so-called **critical art**, or even **artivism** (which has its obvious activist goals). In her thinking about critical artistic practices she stresses the need for going beyond denunciation, in search of truly subversive and radically reconfiguring modes of artistic engagement into the ways we see the world. She has expressed her scepticism towards commemorative art, which in her opinion has little to do with the agonistic (i.e. socially and politically creative) practice: “To create an agonistic public sphere is to create other forms of consciousness, not simply lift false consciousness by denunciation.” At the same time, Mouffe speaks in favour of a plurality of artistic interventions when it comes to countering hegemonic structures of historical knowledge or even memory politics as well as neoliberalism, which is adept at appropriating visual means for its own benefit. Only such plurality can respond to the plurality of historical experiences and introduce or inspire change in collective consciousness.

And yet when speaking about public memory of troubled pasts, and the many conflicting memories that come to play (if not clash), we might also want to keep in mind the question of care, or even the ethics of care, in relation to the visual public culture of memory. In this, we follow Charles E. Scott’s powerful observations:

To speak of culture and memory is to speak of care. Care is a disturbing word. In its history of meaning it suggests loss and grief—it derives from the Old High German word *kara*, which means “lament.” Blended into its meaning are experiences of uncertainty, apprehension, and responsibility. “Care” contains a suggestion of anxiety and watchful attention. To have a care is to look out for danger and adversity. To be careful is to be solicitous of things that can suffer damage and loss. To feel care is to feel concern and uncertainty<sup>21</sup>.

It is the care for the lost ones but also those who remained, for past and present alike, for individuals (and their specific experience) as much as for what is common and worth sharing. Care

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<sup>20</sup> See: *The Art of Critical Art. Chantal Mouffe in conversation with Sébastien Hendrickx and Wouter Hillaert*, <http://18.197.1.103/artikel/art-critical-art>. See also Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony, Radical Democracy, and the Political*, Routledge 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Charles E. Scott, *The Appearance of Public Memory*, in *Framing Public Memory*, 150.

becomes the **necessary attunement** – both affective and ethical – when public memory is discussed, for due to its incompleteness and porosity it always seems to hold some elements outside as **not yet** or **already no longer**, and it is precisely for these elements we need to care and scrutinize the dynamics that regulate the boundaries of public memory. Art-related practices, the sphere of culture, play a crucial role in this process.

### 3.3 Visual citizenship

Photography theorist and philosopher Ariella Azoulay offers a definition of **visual citizenship** that foregrounds its potential as a political practice. Distinguishing it from the model of citizenship inherited from the French and American precedents, which treat citizenship as a property that can be distributed and define it as an act of subordination to power, visual citizenship, or “the citizenry of photography” as she describes it in her work, allows us to rethink citizenship beyond our relationship to sovereign power: “**It starts with the act of spectatorship**,” she asserts<sup>22</sup>. The global perspective gives us another form of spectatorship and relatedness: “we look at the photograph of disaster as something that concerns us. Concerns us not because we have to identify with the victim, but because we are governed by the same regime that produced this disaster.” Azoulay proposes to counter the language that participates in producing these disasters – the “old” terminology and political tradition of citizenship – with the **new visual language of citizenship**.

Azoulay did historical research on what she calls “**the civil contract of photography**”, whereby she has studied the relationship between photography, photographic image, and the idea and performance of citizenship. She calls her finding an “invention supported by historical material”. The participants of the contract are a photographer, the photographed and a spectator; thus a photograph can never be claimed or possessed by any of the participants. Rather, it is a shared and common experience and a concern. Nobody can claim **sovereignty** over the photographic image as nobody can claim sovereignty in citizenship, according to Azoulay. Citizenship is to be conceived as a **contract of the governed population**, “not as a product or property distributed by the state, but as that which takes into account the entire population, both the possessed and the dispossessed alike”. The previous, deformed notion of citizenship needs to be rejected and replaced, and the language we use to talk about our civic obligations needs to be transformed. The idea the Western world inherited from the 18<sup>th</sup> century always only concerns a part of the population and is based on subordination to power. Azoulay calls our times the era of regime-made disasters – the (democratic) regimes that made those disasters are the same powers that make us not see the disaster as it is happening. The control of visibility, the production of it<sup>23</sup> has to be countered and one has to

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<sup>22</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *What is Visual Citizenship? From Spectatorship, Race, and Citizenship*: “As part of a 2011 conference on visual citizenship at the Institute for Public Knowledge at NYU, and documented through a special issue of the journal *Humanity*, photography theorist and philosopher Ariella Azoulay offers a definition of visual citizenship that foregrounds its potential as a political practice”, <https://www.artandeducation.net/classroom/video/153804/arielle-azoulay-what-is-visual-citizenship>.

<sup>23</sup> See: Nicholas Mirzoeff, “On Visuality”, *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol 5, issue 1, 2006: 53-79; also his *The Right to Look. A Counterhistory of Visuality*, Duke University Press, 2011.

recognize oneself in the image of the disaster not via an act of empathy, or identification with the victim, but in being implicated<sup>24</sup>, in realizing we are governed by the same power which instruments this disaster and blinds us. Our task as citizens is, according to Azoulay, to “acknowledge that those frames are porous and capture only partial truths about the violation, to understand that violations are organized within and not outside of democratic processes requires of the viewer a depth of field that extends to seeing the regime that made the disaster (and its imagery) in the first place. “Visual citizenship is thought of as a relationship among various protagonists not necessarily mediated by or identified with the sovereign power<sup>25</sup>. As **visual citizens**, Azoulay convincingly argues, we must work to not sacrifice history, politics, and agency to the reductive forms of representation.

A lot of inspiration in conceptualizing this notion came from the issue of *Humanity Journal* devoted to visual citizenship, which, as the editors stress, “is an active force in political life, an important civic skill, a way that people are represented by and to government.”<sup>26</sup>This issue focused on the various practices in the visual field which are enabling or mediating social and political action and thus allow for rethinking the frameworks and categories we use for the analysis of citizenry – “beyond legal properties or pre-given juridical frames” – as well as for conceptualizing our attitude towards it – as researchers interested in question of memory, conflict and visual culture. Visual citizenship is an organizing concept that relates to what is at stake in representations of the relations between citizens and non-citizens as well as the very conditions of gaining or losing this status:

It proposes one way to mark, trace, capture, and embody the assumptions, the logics, and the curious idiosyncrasies about the fact that people are situated differently as participants and observers in political struggles, seen and heard, or not. It also raises questions about how to assign roles, rules, and modes of participation in political life that correspond with various forms of perception, or what is apprehended by the senses<sup>27</sup>.

What art practices offer to the idea of visual citizenship are heterogeneous forms of communities of spectators (in theatre, in cinema, at the exhibition, in the museum, in public space), various moments of togetherness where memory can surface and be transformed.

In contemporary visual culture, it is as much a question of instant spectatorship and equally instant possibility to record (document) reality as it unfolds as it is of new forms of connection (communication). People who have access to smartphones and other “smart” devices which keep them connected to the internet, can immediately share, send their visual messages to many and in

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<sup>24</sup> See Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, Stanford University Press, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> See Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, MIT Press, 2008; *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, Verso 2012, as well as her “Potential History: thinking through violence”, *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Spring 2013), pp. 548-574.

<sup>26</sup> <http://humanityjournal.org/issue4-3/preface-what-is-visual-citizenship/>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



many forms (also forms of manipulation, or “editing” of this image)<sup>28</sup>. This cannot but affect citizenship and the form of togetherness. As Fred Ritchin, scholar of photography and curator, observes:

Out of these hybrid existences we have to construct new ways of recognizing each other, of forming structures that reflect our existence outside of conventional boundaries, so that we can actually move forward in powerful ways. If there is an emergency, if there is something that has to be dealt with, we have to figure out how to deal with it as a group (ibid).

### 3.4 Emancipated spectators

In his *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière deconstructs the divide between the “(seemingly) **passive spectator** and the **knowing performer**” and reformulates a pedagogical logic based on two distinct positions: that of knowledge and that of ignorance, and offers a recognition of what he calls the “**knowledge of ignorance**” – a position taken by both spectator and performer at different moments in the exchange. And thus, the goal of **emancipating the spectator** is not to provide an adequate transfer of knowledge<sup>29</sup>. The spectator is supposed to become a critical subject who via an artwork is responding to the reality which was made available to him/her and questions the very logic of image production. Rancière is advocating for opening every situation in each encounter “from the inside” (49) i.e. for leaving behind “the emancipatory logic of capacity” and “the critical logic of collective inveiglement” (48) alike. Thus, the sensible is reshaped so that the transfer of sensation offers a possibility for **establishing through the social bond of art a “community of sensation”** where “the individuality of artwork” meets with “the commonality and multiplicity of life” (57). When it comes to the actual political effect of an image created and introduced in the sensible, in the common space of memory and politics, one needs to acknowledge the necessary gap between anticipation and agency. Rancière seems to be suggesting that this effect cannot be anticipated in order for the image to have a truly political dimension: in other words, this cannot be planned from within the available forms of engagement.

In realizing how we approach and witness images and reality and how the very act of witnessing is confirmed by the authority of the image within the sensible, one can understand one’s own connection to history and the role of memory. Seeing things historically might be a step to making history. How is then a spectator moving from a position of not or never acting to the position of finding forms of acting as response to the implication in the image provided by a work of art? This shift is enabled, Rancière seems to be saying, by yet another shift, that from “the intolerable in the image to the intolerable of the image.” (84) It is a movement from the content to the form, from something that is represented to something that we tend to be participating in. The realization of being part of something, of being implicated opens up the space for action, or for claiming one’s right to act.

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<sup>28</sup> See: *Notes from the Field: An Interview with Fred Ritchin*, <http://humanityjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/4.3-Notes-from-the-Field.pdf>. See also his *After Photography*, Norton, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, 2009.

Art practices we were looking at in RePAST undoubtedly hold the potential to transform the realm of visibility in which the channels of visual communication used by governmental politics and mass media are challenged and the traditional conventions for communicating the truth in the image are questioned. These innovative strategies tend to be devoted to investigating what would be art's agency in the production of knowledge (of the past) and in providing a platform for exchange of public feelings related to troubled pasts. It seems that in negotiating forms of presence (in the public sphere) and interventions (in the public memory), artistic practices test visibility and distribute it among people and problems too often shadowed and silenced by fixed narratives of the past. For the scholar of affect and visual culture, Jill Bennett, visual art's affective power enables it to go beyond pure documentation of the afterlives and afterimages of horrific events of the past. And its form provides elliptical means of understanding, at the same time more and less than understanding as we have known it.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. Most pronounced cases

As has been stated above, the basis for the current selection of cases was D4.1 *Database collected data of artistic and cultural artefacts*. As stated in the introduction to the *Database*, initially we concentrated on practices in the visual sphere and later expanded the scope. In the third and last phase of the research in Work Package 4 we have returned to that initial framework (visual culture) but expanded slightly the "collection" of cases (especially as some of them emerged while we were pursuing our research tasks – more about this below). Early into the third stage of work in WP4 we realised that in some of the countries there is a very intense "conversation" in the visual culture (not limited to art practices) between works and interventions that address the troubled pasts. The stakes behind these exchanges have had to do with the wish to interfere in the current political, social or cultural situation, locally or transnationally. We have observed in some of the countries under analysis the use or appropriation, in fact "hacking", of some of the artefacts (which referred to an episode from the collective's history) for the purposes of undertaking social or political action (such as protest or commemoration). The most pronounced examples of this phenomenon will be discussed below. We have selected them to extract and highlight the most dominant aspects of art's agency: its developments and permeations. We were especially intrigued to find out how artists, whose work might be associated with one specific cultural context (and problems specific for this context's past), were involved in art-critical and agonistic practices elsewhere and contributed to expanding the "publics" of the public memory of troubled pasts. In some of the cases the events happening during the course of research proved to be confirming our hypothesis and will be discussed below. In some of the cases the authors come from outside of the artworld to make their artistic interventions and thus make a statement and a claim on public memory. Some of the cases below could be considered well-known or even successful and internationally recognized; others became known only locally.

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<sup>30</sup> Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision. Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Stanford University Press 2005, 7-10.



#### 4.1 A citizen of memory

Spanish artist **Santiago Sierra** (born Madrid 1966), who was included in our research for his quite recent interventions in public memory in Spain, turns out to be exhibiting his works and making his interventions in nearly all countries under research in RePAST: Poland, Greece, Bosnia, Kosovo, Germany, Ireland, and of course Spain. Sierra is mostly devoted to various kinds of performance, known for what Claire Bishop termed “delegated performance”<sup>31</sup> in which he collaborated with untrained performers, so-called “ordinary people”, to carry out banal, exploitative activities on his behalf. He is interested in what critics called “the exploitative transactions of everyday life”<sup>32</sup>; Sierra combines a reflection on and a criticism of economical-political issues with the legacy of troubled pasts and how the latter play out in the current structures of exploitation, abuse and ethical blindness. Most of the time, he implicates his participants, spectators, and art institutions in a painful and problematic manner, offering no comfort but rather disorientation, which however seems to be a necessary condition for any kind of reworking of the status quo. The dilemmas Sierra exposes are not there to be looked at or even reflected upon; rather, they involve the spectators in ways that may be difficult for them to accept.

In 2012, Sierra presented his project entitled *Veterans of Wars in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq Facing the Corner* within the exhibition entitled *30 Künstler – 30 Räume*, at the Neues Museum Nürnberg - Staatliches Museum für Kunst und Design, Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Institut für Moderne Kunst Nürnberg, Kunstverein Nürnberg – Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft<sup>33</sup>. The project was inaugurated a year earlier in Berlin with an intervention entitled *Veteran of the Iraq war facing the wall* and has been an ongoing project or work in progress over the course of several years. It includes black and white photographic images of former soldiers standing with their back to the audience and facing the wall (corner) as if in an act of (self)punishment. In 2016, in Galeria Helga de Alvear in Madrid, Sierra presented a photographic installation entitled *25 Veterans, 2.205 State Crimes* (since then the exhibition toured the USA, the UK, Australia, Colombia, Ukraine, Switzerland, Spain, Mexico and Israel). In Northern Ireland in 2013 the artist exhibited *Veterans and Psychophonies* in which he addresses the legacies of the conflict in Northern Ireland. In this site-specific intervention Sierra

engaged with demilitarised sites and former military workers. Employing flying drones, video, sound recordings and posterings, he engages in existing dialogues about the past in Northern Ireland, redrawing the boundaries of confrontation and struggle, and offering a chilling reflection on contemporary war cultures.<sup>34</sup>

There seems to be no one way of interpreting the work, and it surely is truly “site-specific”, depending on where and when it is shown; each time anew. On the one hand, it was received as a

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<sup>31</sup> Claire Bishop, “Delegated Performance. Outsourcing Authenticity,” *October* Vol. 140 (Spring 2012): 91-112.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.derryvoid.com/exhibitions/santiago-sierra.php>.

<sup>33</sup> See also: <https://dailyartfair.com/exhibition/1747/santiago-sierra-team-gallery-inc->.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.derryvoid.com/exhibitions/santiago-sierra.php>. See also [https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201308\\_1024.php?key=14](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201308_1024.php?key=14).

criticism of the armed conflict as motivated by current imperial politics and “hegemony through violence”<sup>35</sup>, and yet this hegemony is experienced differently depending on who the public is, and what their troubled pasts are. It is also this kind of artistic project which by its incompleteness and porosity points to the very troubling ongoing-ness of military conflict and urgency of the question: who is to be blamed or hold responsible for? Where is this war? Are we also fighting it? Sierra seems to be letting us look at the regime-made war and disaster Azoulay addressed in her theoretical interventions. The work is simple (almost too simple) in its form, therefore it seems accessible to everyone (especially when presented in the form of posters in public space), yet it provokes a variety of responses, both emotionally and politically ambiguous, expression of confusion or irritation. As much as most agree with the anti-war message, the troubling image of a punished individual, turned with his back to the public puts forth questions of responsibility and culpability whose directness tends to feel very discomfoting. The way the artist sees his “vocation” is the following:

I think we shouldn’t push the envelope like that, and each one of us should be useful to society doing his or her work, and not become a problem to society. We as artists have to find the way we confront the state and capitalism, and the same should be valid with an architect, a doctor, and so on.<sup>36</sup>

In Greece, and in relation to Greece, Sierra realized two projects: one in 2015 entitled *The Athenian Dogs (in memoriam Kanelos and Lukanikos)*<sup>37</sup>, within Kapathos Athens Art Residency where 30 dogs running the streets of Athens were made to wear a t-shirt with inscription “I have no money”; in 2016 for Charlie Steins’s project *Some Demonstrations*<sup>38</sup> Sierra offered instructions for κλέπτης (*Thieves*)<sup>39</sup>. The idea behind *Some Demonstrations* was to tackle parallels between a demonstration and a performance in the public sphere<sup>40</sup>.

In Poland, besides *The History of the Foksal Gallery Taught to an Unemployed Ukrainian* (2002) –an art project which provided and institutional and meta-critical commentary<sup>41</sup> – and his collaborations with artist Artur Żmijewski, Sierra also drove his truck with a work entitled *NO* (within the Global Tour project), a three-tone wooden sculpture which stood for several days in public space (Katowice, Silesia). The artist declared: “People who actively fight against the system need images

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<sup>35</sup>[http://helgadealvear.com/prensa/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/16\\_dossier\\_SANTIAGO-SIERRA-eng2.pdf](http://helgadealvear.com/prensa/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/16_dossier_SANTIAGO-SIERRA-eng2.pdf).

<sup>36</sup><http://artpulsemagazine.com/interview-with-santiago-sierra>.

<sup>37</sup>[https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201507\\_1024.php?key=129](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201507_1024.php?key=129).

<sup>38</sup> The performance was part of a project entitled *Manifestina*, initiated by Maurizio Cattelan and Christian Jankowski, featuring unconventional artistic projects of young artists in Zurich.

<sup>39</sup>[https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201606\\_1024.php?key=129](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201606_1024.php?key=129).

<sup>40</sup> For more details and instructions see: <https://charliestein.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/some-demonstrations-manifestina-artist-overview-charlie-stein-pressrelease.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup>[https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200203\\_1024.php?key=6](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200203_1024.php?key=6).

and we, the artists, must provide them. *NO* was created for all those who have had enough of injustice, domination, censorship and oppression.”<sup>42</sup>

In Germany, Sierra realized multiple projects and interventions. One of the most interesting from the perspective of the *RePAST* research is *245m3* (Stommeln Synagogue, Pulheim, 2006)<sup>43</sup>, an exhibition commissioned by the City Council which each year invites artists to work with the troubling heritage of National Socialism and the Holocaust. Sierra filled the former synagogue with carbon monoxide produced by engines of several cars whose exhaust pipes were connected to rubber tubes. The members of the public were allowed to enter the building only wearing gas masks, accompanied by a firefighter and for no longer than 5 minutes (the amount of the toxin could kill a human being in 30 minutes). The work sparked huge media outrage, as the project was considered offensive to the memory of the Jewish victims and ultimately censored. Sierra himself made it clear in the introductory text at the entrance to the building that he wished to honour the memory of the Jews, killed in the Holocaust, and dedicated his work to “the victims of State and Capital” but also expressed the fact that we should be aware of the close relationship between mass extermination and technological innovations, which did not end with the end of World War II.

In 2006, in *The Punished*, he worked with a group of German citizens born before 1939 who were asked to “perform” by standing and facing the wall in 18 different locations in Frankfurt for a timespan of 4 hours a day, standing in one place for 30 minutes and taking turns<sup>44</sup>. The same year in Munich he exhibited *Doorplate* strictly forbidding entrance to different kinds and groups of people including “untidy and smelly,” “people undergoing treatment for mental illness” and “forgers, liars, jokers and cynics” thus playing with multiple historical resonances and associations<sup>45</sup>. In 2009 Sierra made a sound installation entitled *Europe Long Play*<sup>46</sup>, which consists of an LP whose “A side is a recording of the national anthems of all 27 states of the European Union being played simultaneously, while on the B side the European Union’s anthem, Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, is played backwards.” As the description of the projects has it, “for both recordings, Sierra uses pieces of music restricted by their nationalist connotations and limited associations in order to dissolve and further develop them in the playback, so that something new can emerge. If Europe should have a future, it would have to sound something like this.”<sup>47</sup> In 2012 Sierra provocatively responded to the idea put forth in 2007 by the German parliament to build monuments to re-unification in Berlin and Leipzig. While the decision was made concerning the commemoration in Berlin, at the time the question what to do in Leipzig remained unsolved. Sierra submitted a proposal for an anarchist

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<sup>42</sup><https://mronline.org/2010/11/06/santiago-sierra-says-no/>

<sup>43</sup>[https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200603\\_1024.php?key=2.](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200603_1024.php?key=2.)

<sup>44</sup>[https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200605\\_1024.php?key=2.](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200605_1024.php?key=2.)

<sup>45</sup>[https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200607\\_1024.php?key=2.](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200607_1024.php?key=2.)

<sup>46</sup>[https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200920\\_1024.php?key=2.](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/200920_1024.php?key=2.)

<sup>47</sup><https://www.berliner-herbstsalon.de/en/dritter-berliner-herbstsalon/kuenstlerinnen/santiago-sierra.>

utopia that is to “extra-territorialise Wilhelm Leuschner Platz and make it available to the people of Leipzig, free of any state power. The project never became reality.”<sup>48</sup>

This has not been the only “monumental” intervention on Sierra’s part. One of his most discussed projects so far was the *Monument to Civic Disobedience* (2012), which he realised as a 3-hour performance in front of the Icelandic Parliament in Reykjavik commemorating civil protests from 2009, as well as in Madrid<sup>49</sup>. Both cities got their “monuments” with an inscription from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen: “When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people and for each portion of the people the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties”. Civil disobedience marked by this “monumental” object (commemorating previous acts and encouraging future ones) is thought of as a corrective communal action, expression of refusal to conform and consent on permanent basis; it is a sign of civic awareness commenting on the fact that society is participating in power rather than being subjugated to power.

The many projects by Santiago Sierra discussed above not only give a sense of his devotion to engaged artistic practice, to utopian projects and a vocation to question dominant discourses, but also show how in a globalised context an intervention into one realm needs to be reframed by another, how sensibilities “trained” in one memory culture (as well as political and historical culture) – in his case that of Spain – contribute to the way he looks at the world and to the role he assigns to himself. This also, of course, has to do with the international artistic tradition, mostly that of the historical avant-gardes and the developments in performance art from 1970s onwards.

A context for his practice was provided by other cases considered by RePAST researchers such as Femen’s – an “international women’s movement of brave topless female activists painted with the slogans and crowned with flowers”<sup>50</sup> – intervention *Legal Fascism, National Shame* (2018) in Madrid<sup>51</sup> with direct political action taken up by performers in public space by means of exposing the vulnerable, naked female bodies.

German artist’s Gerhard Richter’s persistent engagement with the memory of past events is evident in his *Atlas*, fully available online<sup>52</sup>, *18 Oktober 1977* painterly series on events related to RAF activities and his paintings related to the legacy of National Socialism in Germany, as well as his engagement with the ongoing war and crisis – such as his painting devoted to 9/11 or the war in Iraq. Last but not least is the engagement of artist as citizen by the Polish artist (painter and filmmaker) Wilhelm Sasnal<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Documentation of the proposal: see [https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201209\\_1024.php?key=2](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201209_1024.php?key=2).

<sup>49</sup> [https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201704\\_1024.php?key=1](https://www.santiago-sierra.com/201704_1024.php?key=1).

<sup>50</sup> <https://femen.org/about-us/>.

<sup>51</sup> <https://femen.org/legal-fascism-national-shame/>.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.gerhard-richter.com/en/art/atlas>.

<sup>53</sup> See: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/wilhelm-sasnal-7553/wilhelm-sasnal-artists-have-be-active-citizens>.

## 4.2 Hospitable public

In **Dresden** and in **Berlin** the bus-barricade sculptural work by Syrian-German artist **Manaf Halbouni** (who as a child had to flee his homeland) was mounted, inspired by how the inhabitants of Aleppo tried to protect themselves from sniper fire. It was entitled *Monument*; an intervention considered by right-wing politicians to be a devastation of the historic old town of Dresden and its monuments, and an abuse of artistic freedom (“is this even art?”). The rusty “tower”, by its associations with war and destruction, brought with itself the unwanted after-images to the reconstructed city of Dresden, and with it, potentially the discomfiting questions of guilt, of witnessing the others’ struggles and suffering, of indifference and violence. This “monument” served as a reminder and a call for action (even if this action is empathy). Halbouni on the one hand presents a participatory approach, powerfully based on the experience of his spectators, on the other he appropriated (as media) ordinary objects and materials; real-life elements which, once removed from one context (context on a conflict), serve as instigators of another kind of conflict somewhere else. Halbouni’s *Monument* was erected in Dresden, in front of Frauenkirche, a week before the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Allied air raids of 1945, events that devastated the city and killed over 20,000 civilians<sup>54</sup>. This historical echo resonated with the very current political struggles – the project was seen as an attempt at countering the protests organised by the anti-Islam movement, Pegida, which gathered on the Neumarkt square. The unveiling of the *Monument* was met with violent protests, verbal abuse as well as threats directed at the artist. Some of the accusations aimed at Halbouni talked of his diminishing the suffering of the Germans or of shaming them<sup>55</sup>. And yet, this intervention could be seen as an occasion for relating the past to the present and the experience of one war to the experience of another as well as mutual responsibilities and the possibilities for one public (of memory – German) to host the memory of another public (Syrian) and reconsider attachments and feelings at play in relation to the heritage of World War II.

In this context a crucial question emerges, one I would like to bring to the fore after Greek curator and critic Marina Fokidis:

What are “historical monuments” if not vivid proofs of and memorials to human struggles for a fair manner of living? Why we are exclusively interested — even if this is also extremely important — in which nation they belong to? The passionate focus on repatriation overshadows other parallel histories and unintentionally strengthens nationalist causes<sup>56</sup>.

In **Kassel**, **Olu Oguibe**’s *Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument* (Monument for strangers and refugees), an obelisk made of concrete with inscription from the Book of Matthew written in

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<sup>54</sup> Problems with commemoration of these events in Germany or even the German amnesia was powerfully addressed by W.G. Sebald in his *On the Natural History of Destruction (Luftkrieg und Literatur)* trans. Anthea Bell, Penguin, 2004. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/feb/22/highereducation.history>.

<sup>55</sup> See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/07/dresdens-bitter-divide-over-aleppo-inspired-bus-barricade-sculpture>.

<sup>56</sup> Marina Fokidis, “All in all is all we are,” *Flash Art*, issue 325, April-may 2019, <https://flash---art.com/article/all-in-all-is-all-we-are-marina-fokidis/>.

Turkish, Arabic, German, and English (“I was a stranger and you took me in”) and placed during *Documenta 14* on Königsplatz, was later dismantled and rebuilt on a nearby square<sup>57</sup>. The artist’s sensitivity was formed by his experience as child in Biafra during the Nigerian Civil War in the late 1960s, and he is an artist and public intellectual. According to the artist, many residents of Kassel have interacted with the work; deeply identified with it, they expressed a “sense of ownership” of the obelisk rather than rejected it as an “egregious intrusion in their space.”<sup>58</sup> Oguibe’s concept was equally speaking to the present public experience as well as to the history of the city. Meticulous historical research led him to uncover a long and complicated relationship between Kassel and the subject of flight and refuge. Taking about the inscription the artist said:

What I found particularly poignant about that quoted passage is that it’s also a parable about gratitude. Not only must we extend hospitality to strangers, as a universal principle that is unconditional, we should also acknowledge hospitality. I consider that both essential and powerful<sup>59</sup>.

But Oguibe’s idea was not only to insert yet another monument in the public space; he wanted to contribute to creating a communal space, a “meeting point” that would be accessible and accepted by the local community. This seems to have worked, as two separate surveys confirm that the majority of residents wanted the sculpture to remain in Kassel after the end of *Documenta*<sup>60</sup>.

Fokidis recalls Oguibe’s reflections from early 1990s, which she wishes to introduce to the urgent debates of the second decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century:

The current avalanche of pluralist awareness suggests that many societies are perhaps too preoccupied with the daunting project of self-interrogation and re-narration within their own borders to extend this critical disposition to debates on internationalism. (...) This is the fundamental problem of emergent debates, namely that by failing to question a given internationalism and yet predicating themselves on it, they implicitly share in the dismissal of longstanding traditions of internationalist exchange between peoples and cultures outside the West.<sup>61</sup>

And she follows with her examination of Oguibe’s obelisk in Kassel and its turbulent history after the exhibition:

the work was politicized by Kassel’s City Council under pressure from the right-wing anti-immigrant party Alternative for Germany (AfD). The term ‘degenerate art,’ attributed to the work, was once

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<sup>57</sup> <https://monumentlab.com/news/2019/3/26/as-strangers-and-refugees-olu-oguibes-performing-monument>.

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.revistaatlantica.com/en/contribution/la-parabola-del-tiempo/>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> See: <https://documentaforum.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Olu-Oguibe-Press-Statement.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Rasheed Araeen and Jean Fisher, *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, Third Text Publications, 1994. After Fokidis.



again heard during meetings held in the same city where the very first destructive acts of Kristallnacht took place. (...) the monument was removed on Germany's national holiday commemorating reunification. This was a violent and authoritative symbolic gesture<sup>62</sup>.

Fokidis argues, and rightly so, that despite the fact that the artist could not have planned or predicted this, his work (finally reinstalled in another central location in Kassel) and message spread worldwide as both the news of hospitality and the news of the failure of certain memory politics, of the working through of the perpetrators' guilt and shame, of certain humanist consensus and exposed political hypocrisy. Yet, there is hope after the turbulence, the critic asserts, and one should recognize this possibility: the work might also

push the boundaries further for a better future when we are eager to host strangers and expect the Western hegemony to learn its history lesson whereby it sees itself as just one perspective, a point of view among many others, an orientation to be chosen or rejected<sup>63</sup>.

An interesting context for thinking about both of the above projects was provided by several works of Cypriot visual and performative artist, **Socratis Socratous**, who is devoted to poetic and political engagement with memory of the troubled pasts and crisis<sup>64</sup>. The artist's work speaks to the history and landscape of both Greece and Cyprus, both of which he "visually explores and critically dissects". He has repeatedly returned to the questions of "immigration and rootlessness, identity and fear of the 'other'." His work *Rumours* (2009) was discussed at previous stages of the RePAST research, yet later works of Socratous proved exceptionally helpful in conceptualizing art's involvement in public memory and its attempts at reshaping the imagery around it: *Blue Beret Camp* (2011) – a series of photographs from Nicosia's buffer zone depicting the everyday life of UN soldiers – and *A Cave in Dhahiriya* (2012), an outcome of his travels to contested territories of Palestine, in which he addressed the entangled relations between individual affects related to conflict and collective narratives about it. The artist expresses his interest in the present which is full of conflicts. Some of them reach far back to the past and memory, others deal with more current economic and political issues.

### 4.3 Exercises of citizenship

Considering "the extreme proximity and tactility that characterizes what **Public Movement** calls 'the procession'" the theorist and critic of performance, André Lepecki, shares his two reflections about how the artists-researchers' actions – including *Spring in Warsaw* (2009)<sup>65</sup>, a participatory reenactment of official educational Israeli "ritual", which related to Polish and Jewish (Israeli) attachments to the sites of memory in Warsaw (former Warsaw ghetto), analysed in RePAST – make

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<sup>62</sup>Fokidis, *ibid*.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>64</sup><http://thebreedersystem.com/artists/socratis-socratous-artist-page/>.

<sup>65</sup><http://www.publicmovement.org/old/spring-in-warsaw/>; see also <http://www.publicmovement.org/old/exercise-in-citizenship/>.

their spectators and participants realize the convoluted relationship between a citizen and a state. Both of them have provided a useful framework for thinking about how *Spring in Warsaw* influences thinking about public memory in Poland (and Israel), obligations towards the lost others (Jews in Poland) as well as about the conditions for staging public commemorations and how these implicate our bodies and mobilize out affects. Here are Lepecki's thoughts, which are worth quoting in length:

1. it is not so much the nation-state is an ideological apparatus, a bureaucratic system, or an abstract machine for asserting governance; maybe the nation-state hides, under the abstraction of its name, the extremely concrete modes of direct body-to-body physical contact, which calibrate the whole field of social affects. Affective tactile calibration that is enacted by more or less violent, more or less obscene, more or less cruel, more or less invasive, more or less deadly, more or less lewd, more or less indelible, more or less paternalistic, more or less caring, yet always prodding and probing, touches;
2. it is not so much that the nation-state divides us, distributes us, puts us under surveillance; rather it is that the nation-state is a hollow name for the aggregate of hands belonging to those whose primary disposition is to enact divisions, enact surveillance, enact oppressions, enact suppressions, enact all those productions and acts that, in the end, allow for the reproduction of the state's violently caring – the caringly violent state of affairs as being the only affair the state is supposed to have with its citizens. This is the state's most foundational touching trick: It is all about the handlers' actions and the affective states they create<sup>66</sup>.

The staged commemorative action in Warsaw by a group of non-Polish people with the participation of the Polish public, the multiple shifting of narratives and gestures, provided an occasion for performative reworking of narratives and finding connections; not so much for fighting oblivion as for fighting exclusive and exclusionary memories and memory practices; for facing conflict past and present. Beside numerous choreographies designed for citizens' bodies in public space, the procession in Warsaw had also some powerful and confusing narrative intrusions, songs, speeches, chants. Some of them addressed memorial and ethical issues explicitly, calling for solidarities beyond nations and national memories, other expressed protest and resistance<sup>67</sup>.

A procession or a walk as a form of artistic intervention and public engagement was also used within the programme of "The Parliament of Bodies" during *Documenta 14* in Athens (2017, Greece). *Exercise of Freedom 111* was a collective walk through the city of Athens, exploring the historical traces of oppression, violence, and the quest for freedom during the military dictatorship of 1967–1974; a collective marking of the city space, and experiencing one's bodily presence in space charged with historical and current crisis.

As much as the performances of Cypriot choreographers and dancers **Arianna Economou**, **Andromachi Dimitriadou-Lindahl**, **Lia Haraki**, or of the artist **Christodoulos Panayiotou** rarely include dancing or participation of the public (see D4.2), it is doubtless the bodily memory of the

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<sup>66</sup>André Lepecki, <http://www.publicmovementrecord.org/two-reflections-on-the-corporeality-of-power/>.

<sup>67</sup> See: Daphna Ben-Shaul, *Critically Civic: Public Movement's Performative Activism in Performance Studies in Motion. International Perspectives and Practices in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Atay Citron, Sharon Aronson-Lehavi, David Zerbib, Bloomsbury 2014, pp. 118-130.



past that they address. The very way in which they create affectively charged communal space for revisiting troubled pasts and create crisis situations in the present, directly implicates the bodies of the spectators and thus might offer a platform for public memory to be restaged and the exercise of citizenship to be enacted. In a situation of polarized narratives, political and ethical stances, going beyond the intelligible towards another kind of communication might be a way out and a way into a new form of solidarity in the face of ongoing conflict.

#### 4.4 Communities of implication

Ever since “installing” her “nomadic monument” to the 8,372 victims of the Srebrenica genocide for the first time in 2006 in Sarajevo, the artist **Aida Šehović** (Bosnia) has been organizing an annual “installation” in different parts of the world, including Switzerland, Turkey, Canada and others, in collaboration with **Bosnian** diaspora communities. It has been collectively assembled and disassembled by people – not only those closely related to the events in Srebrenica, but those who felt emotionally or ethically interpellated to participate. Thus, each year small porcelain cups are filled with black coffee on 11<sup>th</sup> of July and the title question “ŠTO TE NEMA” (why are you not here) inclusively asks for commemoration of these and other victims, for resistance against the genocidal politics and for a form of togetherness that does not include any speeches, political representatives etc. As this report is being written, Šehović is participating in *Artivism: The Atrocity Prevention Pavilion* in the framework of the Venice Biennial 2019, whose rationale is as follows:

Across these many cases of identity-based violence, however, groups of individuals inevitably emerge to respond to the politics of destruction with a politics of hope. Time and again, activist collectives have used their voices, bodies, and creativity to counter the divisiveness of genocidal regimes, often turning to the arts as a key tool in their struggle for social transformation. In these cases, the visual and performing arts are a means for generating public support for the cause of equal rights and recognition<sup>68</sup>.

Šehović intervenes immediately whenever she feels her voice needs to be heard, as happened just recently in the occasion of the Nobel prize in literature for 2019 being awarded to the Austrian writer Peter Handke. She published an *Open Letter to The Swedish Academy Committee for Nobel Prize in Literature*<sup>69</sup> on her website, expressing her “shock and disbelief”, sharing her rage and disappointment, the pain she feels and the assault she experiences. She speaks on behalf of the community she feels entitled to represent, as a citizen, an artist and a woman. And as she states in the *Letter*, this Nobel triggered her trauma and caused the outrage also because it comes at a time when she has been preparing the 2020 “installation” of ŠTO TE NEMA in Belgrade, Serbia.

<sup>68</sup><https://www.artivism2019.com/>.

<sup>69</sup>[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5506d90fe4b014e3fd04dd70/t/5daa2160a6195b73ec25f7df/1571430753411/OpenLetter to SwedishAcademy by AidaSehovic.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5506d90fe4b014e3fd04dd70/t/5daa2160a6195b73ec25f7df/1571430753411/OpenLetter+to+SwedishAcademy+by+AidaSehovic.pdf).

It is worth mentioning that on the occasion of the Venetian *Artivism: The Atrocity Prevention Pavilion* the South African *Intuthuko Embroidery Project*<sup>70</sup> is presented; a women's community empowerment collective, artists who use embroidery as a means of sharing their communities' stories of life during and after Apartheid, and strengthening community bonds. It brings to mind another embroidery project included in the RePAST research, namely Bosnian artist's Adela Jušić's *Illegalke* (illegal) 2015 embroidery, which "depicts women in resistance and underground movements, whose activities are quintessential in all political struggles."<sup>71</sup> Jušić points to the private, intimate spaces, traditionally associated with women's sociality as occasions for subversive action – formulating and transferring political messages and memories thus opposing patriarchal customs, traditions and power. The project "re-imagines and recreates histories of women's 4."<sup>72</sup>

The context for the nomadic monument of Šehović is provided by analogous memorial interventions discussed in the framework of RePAST such as **Joanna Rajkowska's**<sup>73</sup> works (Poland), or those of **Alketa Xhafa-Mripa's**<sup>74</sup> (Kosovo), both of which continue their engagement not only with historical traumas and erasures but also with current urgent political and social issues which concern not only their national communities. During her second *Refugees Welcome Here* March in London on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2016, Alketa Xhafa-Mripa said:

Art may not be a solution for the millions of people in the world who have lost their homes. But I believe that art can make the issue of refugees visible, in a way that is understood by all, regardless of faith, nationality or language. Where language fails, art can break through. People have known about the use of rape as a weapon of war in Kosovo for a long time, but when I hung 5000 dresses in a football stadium there last year, they couldn't look away. They were faced with the reality!<sup>75</sup>

The intervention into the seen reality may be visually powerful and persuasive as in many projects discussed in RePAST as well as subtle and fugitive. The latter is a response to a certain fatigue with the so-called engaged or critical arts as much as it is an outcome of a ceaseless search for alternative forms of expression and communication when it comes to transmission of the memory of the troubled pasts. Two Polish artists of a younger generation (born in 1980s) provide interesting counter-perspectives. On the one hand there is **Łukasz Surowiec** and his *Berlin-Birkenau* project, which consisted in bringing a few hundred young birches from the area of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp (in Poland) to Berlin (German) and planting them there. Remnants and carriers of genocide, the living archive of the dead, will be planted in Berlin public parks. Despite the plagues informing on the trees' provenance, they will not be instantly recognizable or readable<sup>76</sup>. On the

<sup>70</sup><https://www.artivism2019.com/intuthuko-embroidery-project.html>.

<sup>71</sup><https://adelajusic.wordpress.com/illegal/>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup><http://www.rajkowska.com/en/category/projekty/>.

<sup>74</sup><https://www.alketaxhafamripa.com/bio>. See also the artist's talk entitled *Art as the catalyst for social change*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLTBzvHBK4s>.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup><https://artmuseum.pl/en/archiwum/archiwum-7-berlin-biennale/2034?read=all>.

other hand, the female artist **Karolina Grzywnowicz** in her *Weeds*<sup>77</sup> examines plants as “a unique kinds of record of political and social history”, plants that carry the histories and memories of the people who let the sites and left no visible, material or cultural signs of their presence or life. Sensibility which combines a critical artistic approach with looking beyond the anthropocentric perspective offers some new forms of engagement with the troubled past as well as opening up possibilities for ecological reflection.

The fact that visual culture and art make it difficult to “look away” or not face the reality of conflict or trauma has been often the reason why many people reach for and invite “the visual” into creating the narratives of their experience. This was the case with the powerful work by **Saranda Bogujevci** (together with her siblings, Fatos and Jehona) who survived as a 13-year-girl a massacre of Albanians by Serbian police forces where 14 of her family members were killed in 1999 in Podujevo, Kosovo. In 2013 an exhibition entitled *The Bogujevci – a Visual History* opened at the Podroom gallery of the Belgrade Cultural Center (funded by the Open Society and the Swiss Embassy in Serbia), where the authors presented the reconstructed living room of the Bogujevci family, the hospital room where the survivors recovered after the massacre, the court room where they testified about the event and the family tree of their murdered relatives. The opening was attended by the Prime minister of Serbia while the exhibition was accompanied with demonstrations of Serbian nationalists. The Bogujevci siblings used the form of the exhibition, the “writing” of their “visual history” as a form of testimony, a form of becoming seen in public and for the public. Appropriation of artistic means of expression and forms of communication allowed for reaching out to the community and establishing the position of survivor as witness in the realm of cultural and public memory<sup>78</sup>.

This report has already addressed the question of how identities and sensitivities shaped in the context of conflict or the living memory of the troubled past respond to urgent political and social issues whose historical resonances become both problematic and productive. Two cases mentioned and briefly discussed below provide exceptionally interesting material for analysis not only for what they refer to (the content of the work) but especially for how they do it (the form of the works). It is not about direct analogies or references but rather in what can be established in the critical reading, an analysis which goes beyond the mere interpretation of the artwork but reaches for the historical and cultural context of its production.

British artist **Steve McQueen’s** *Hunger* (2009) recounts the last weeks of the life of Bobby Sands, the Irish nationalist imprisoned in infamous Maze in Belfast, who died in 1981, after 66 days of hunger strike. Rather than the history of the Troubles the movie concentrates on recreating the brutal conditions in which that decision on hunger strike was made, and the bodily decline that followed. *Hunger* can be read as a meditation of the body as a site of history where torture, resistance and protest take place. The film is set almost exclusively in prison, showing what Giorgio Agamben called

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<sup>77</sup><http://chwasty.com/o-projekcie/?ln=en> EN.

<sup>78</sup> This has not been the only public activity of Saranda Bogujevci who has testified in court, has given her oral testimony for oral history Kosovo project (<https://oralhistorykosovo.org/saranda-bogujevci-2/>) and is an outspoken member of parliament for the Kosovo opposition party Vetevendosje (Self-Determination).

“state of exception as a rule”<sup>79</sup>, where violence, both physical and psychological, organizes the bodies of guards and prisoners alike. There is very little visual documentation of the actual historical events, yet McQueen offers an extremely intense, almost painful visual experience, a sense memory of sorts. The director imagines the interior of the prison and the emotional states of his protagonists. The question one could rightfully ask is why, 28 years after the events, it still seems necessary to return to them with such intensity. One of the answers that come to mind is that such return offers an echo to the current situation, to the history in the making, i.e. to the so-called war on terror, prison brutality and humiliation of the male bodies as revealed by the images which leaked from Abu Ghraib. Despite the fact that *Hunger* is neither a film aimed at historical revision nor a visual political protest against the “war on terror”, and as such it did not cause any specific controversies, it entered the public visual sphere at a very vulnerable time and offered a relevant trigger and point of reference for the memory of the troubled past and the becoming memory of the traumatic present.

The Irish photographer **Richard Mosse** has been visiting the sites of conflict and catastrophe and documenting them in artistically provocative and disquieting ways<sup>80</sup>. Here is how he speaks about his approach:

I am concerned not with conscience, but with consciousness. Rather than advocating causes (...) my objective was not to explicate the conflict [in Kongo, K.B.] in the style of an analyst or essayist, but to confront this opacity, to situate the point at which representation itself has failed the people of Congo.<sup>81</sup>

Mosse photographed Kosovo, Congo, Gaza, Pakistan and Haiti and Iraq, among others, every time being devoted to “a radical rethinking of how to depict a conflict”. In Congo in order to visually render complexities of the ongoing war but also to target photography as a culpable medium, the artist used a type of color infrared film called Kodak Aerochrome. “Originally developed for military reconnaissance it registers an invisible spectrum of infrared light, rendering the green landscape in vivid hues of lavender, crimson, and hot pink”<sup>82</sup>. In his most recent, widely discussed project *The Incoming* Mosse tracked the drama of refugees on seas with the use of military camera able to detect thermal radiation, including body heat, from a distance of over 30km and thus register the image invisible for the human eye. The result is a series of disorienting, both familiar and ghostly images and a visual comment of the medium itself: its uses and abuses, as well as on the position of a witness to the tragedy of the refugees and of a subject implicated in their fate by pure fact of pertaining in public memory.

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<sup>79</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen Stanford University Press, 1998.

<sup>80</sup><http://www.richardmosse.com/projects/artist-statement#home>.

<sup>81</sup><https://www.dinheagney.com/elusive-enclaves/>.

<sup>82</sup><http://enclavereview.org/richard-mosses-infra-conflict-art-and-the-regime-of-the-documentary-image/>.

One last example of the powerful and artistically resonant depiction of conflict and violence, which this time comes from Ireland and relates to the Troubles, is a 1989 short film entitled *Elephant*<sup>83</sup>, directed by **Alan Clarke** (produced by Danny Boyle), which in a cold, casual way with no plot, no dialogues, no music depicts 18 scenes of murder. The spectators know nothing about those who shot or those who are being shot: the victims are shown for several seconds in a static shot of the corpse, so that the spectators can take a look at the corpse. Clarke's film soon became a crucial point of reference for numerous films on conflict and violence, including Gus van Sant's *Elephant* (2003), a feature film on the school shooting in Columbine.

To conclude this report, which elaborates the ways and potentialities for visual culture to promote social change, to enable social actors and create forms of memory that would be inclusive and multidirectional rather than competitive, transnational or even global rather than local (national), critical and self-critical as well as civic and emotive, I would like to mention two more projects. The first is Greek artist's **Zafos Xagoraris'** work entitled *The Concession*<sup>84</sup> (2019), an installation which follows the "archival impulse" and travels back to 1948. This is a year when, on the one hand, due to the civil war Greece did not participate in international art exhibitions, and on the other hand civilians and soldiers were forced to make copies of ancient Greek temples on the island of Makronisos, at the concentration camp. Xagoraris' project consists of archival material and a reconstructed gate of the Makronisos camp, attached in the entrance of the Greek pavilion in Giardini in Venice. In quite a powerful way it points to the complicated relationship between power, violence and visual arts, whose various dimensions (repressed, troubling, controversial) have not only become our heritage but also constitute our present moment, not only locally, but globally.

The second is based on more extensive archival research and speaks to the history of troubled pasts in Poland, Israel and German, raising the question of loss and return. **Yael Bartana's** *And Europe Will Be Stunned* (2011)<sup>85</sup>, a video trilogy which, according to its official description,

charts the ideologies and activities of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP), a political group that calls for the return of Jews to the land of their forefathers. The fictitious narrative weaves together different references and ideological positions from the socialist roots of Zionism, European anti-Semitism and Israel's past and present settlement programmes.

The work reaches for conflicting histories in order to shuffle them, question, rewrite and exercise historical imagination: imagine a different future. The visual work is accompanied by *Cookbook for Political Imagination* – an anthology of various "recipes" which might help us "cook" the future. Yet the artist did not stop at the recipes, and in 2012 in the framework of the Berlin Biennial (curated by Artur Żmijewski) she organized the first congress of The Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP), which brought together representatives of different international institutions (artistic and non-artistic) to collectively address the questions posed by the videos: not only in the context of the two involved nation-states, Poland and Israel, but in much broader scope: that of European Union

<sup>83</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OzEbS-ukyk>.

<sup>84</sup><http://zafosxagoraris.net/>.

<sup>85</sup><http://yaelbartana.com/projects>.

and its migration politics, the idea of European togetherness and its limitations, the ongoing crisis in the Middle-East, the regime-made disasters and the agency of art and artists. The confusion which Bartana caused as to whether this was “art” or “political action”, whether the movement was “real” or just conceptual or imaginative, pushed the many debates in numerous productive directions – none of them solved or accepted a closure.

## 5. Conclusion

As much as the current report sums up not only the last months of research in Work Package 4 of RePAST but the work-package as a whole, it does not provide definitive answers to the research questions posed at the onset of our research work. We have gathered an extensive archive of artefacts, strategies, interventions and events in the realm of art and culture. We have studied their reception and their potential impact both on the arts and culture themselves as well as on the social and political world. In the course of our work we have encountered and analysed the plethora of documentation, critical and theoretical texts, visual documentation and we have talked to people directly or indirectly involved in the events. Any attempts at concluding this research in a few paragraphs would always be limiting and simplifying. And yet some important findings deserve highlighting here:

### In general

- art and culture in all countries under analysis in RePAST from 1990s onward vividly “react” to troubled pasts. They have approached them with commemorative intentions, aims at bringing from oblivion people, objects, sites and experiences and grants them visibility/ gives them voice – as such it has emancipatory potential and serves to do justice in the present to the past injustices;
- art dealing with troubled pasts very often has a meta-dimension, becoming a statement about artmaking in the times of trauma, violence and depravation;
- art has a unique ability to make past things present and point to analogies and resonances of the past and the present which are impossible to make in any other form of discourse;
- artistic and cultural productions dealing with troubled pasts serve as criticism of the political and social status quo – as such they become agents in the struggle over hegemony in the realm of collective memory;
- many of the analysed cases are public works of art or interventions in that they are not limited to art institutions but rather claim their right to the public space, they approach their viewers and engage them immediately (without mediation);
- thinking about art and culture in the context of troubled pasts is much more effective in the framework of public memory than cultural or social memory;
- revisiting the troubled past in the arts often offers an occasion for addressing urgent political or social problems (both on local and translocal level);

### public response

- artistic and cultural interventions are often disrupting and disquieting as they bring to the fore issues which have been repressed or erased and force the public to face the troubling episodes of its past;
- by working with shock, provocation, scandal and transgression these artefacts often cause extreme responses, and it is in the course of those upheavals that the public has an occasion for self-analysis (at times painful);
- for many of these artefacts the initial response of the public is rejection, disgust, offense or contrarily – indifference - as the public (like individuals) employs numerous defence mechanisms aimed at protecting the consensus over the past;
- art and cultural interventions provide occasions for critical analysis of the forms of attachment the public holds to the image and narrative of the past (art can be a form of “unlearning”);
- art and cultural intervention might cause conflict in the present over the shape of the past, offer an agonistic, even violent space where various opinions, emotions and narratives can emerge (and clash): such conflict might be very productive or even necessary;

### visual arts’ role and agency

- artistic and cultural predictions very often introduce new languages into the public debate, languages (forms of address, forms of expression, etc.) which might be appropriated by the public to express their stakes in the struggle over the shape of the past and the course of the present (political, social);
- seen as forms of civic engagement artistic interventions offer unique approaches to citizenship and collectivity at times of crisis and in relation to troubled pasts;
- many of the artists analysed in RePAST declare feeling obligation or even vocation to deal with the troubled pasts and critically engage in the political and social present;
- artistic practices and works offer new modes of thinking about and practicing (performing) memory both individually and collectively;
- visual culture and visual studies offer unique approach to the question of memory of the troubled pasts and past conflicts which concentrates on spectatorship (those who look and are being looked at) and circulation of images (including images of the past).

In the two reports delivered in Work Package 4 of the RePAST we have shown how works of art as interventions in and elements of visual culture participate in the formation and de-formation of various discourses which are used in relation to troubled pasts and conflicts, to what extent they “speak” to us and how they “speak” at different times – pointing to the importance of these



transnational and a-temporal or anachronistic “conversations”. The articles written and planned to follow the reports are and will be dealing with the issues raised in the reports in greater detail and with focus on specific cases and their correspondences.

The last crucial dimension of visual culture which was not directly addressed by this research yet but has been in the background all the time is the rapid development of new media (including social media) and the internet. In the introduction to this report, following Susan Buck-Morss, we referred to images freeing themselves from their origins and authors, artworks becoming digital source material for thinking and feeling about the past and present. While not romanticising the digital world or ignoring its drawbacks, the free use, accessibility, possibilities of circulation and transmission of images beyond the boundaries of cultural and economic capital, class divisions, national boundaries or even continents was welcomed here as working for the benefit of new alliances and solidarities in public memory of troubled pasts.





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