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SUMMARIES

ART IN PUBLIC SPACE: COLLECTIVE MEMORY – INDIVIDUAL MEMORY

Edited by Łukasz GUZEK

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The year 2025 has been declared by the Polish Parliament the "Year of Franciszek Duszeńko," an artist and educator associated with the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk. This event provides an opportunity to reflect on the artist's work. The conference **Art in Public Space: Collective Memory – Individual Memory** accompanied the exhibition *Memory Formation – A Space of Rift. Franciszek Duszeńko's Students*. These two events served to summarize Professor Duszeńko's contribution to the development of art in Poland: as an artist, he created an innovative concept for a monument linked to *in situ* space, and as an educator, he shaped the artistic attitudes of several generations of students who graduated from his studio. This demonstrates his decades-long influence on the way art is thought about among Gdańsk sculptors in terms of both the individual form of their works and the ethical stance the artist takes towards the world in which they create. The articles collected in this thematic section address a key aspect of Duszeńko's art: the shaping of social space through artistic means to capture historical, often traumatic, events that need to be saved from oblivion, as they are part of our collective identity and must be actualized in the living present. It turns out that this model of thinking about the role of art and the artist finds numerous reference points in situations where a work of art is intended to address a contextual issue of significant social or political importance.

The unique way that Duszeńko perpetuated in his artistic practice the memory of historical events involved creating a space in which individual viewers could construct their own reflections. Unlike traditional monumental sculpture, which aims to perpetuate a single, government-imposed vision of history within the consciousness of successive generations, Duszeńko shapes a space of presence in which viewers across generations can draw their own conclusions from

history. One could say that this is a dynamic, or rather performative, way of leaving a mark on the consciousness of generations, shaping social and individual thinking. It is a kind of social pedagogy, stemming from the pedagogy of a university professor who had to deal with the diverse personalities of his art students. In his art, he conveyed the experience of war and the Holocaust, which were part of his own experiences – ones he knew could not be allowed to disappear from collective and individual memory. He also conveyed the experience of trauma that shaped the idea of a united Europe as a guarantor of democracy, which he understood as rooted in freedom, equality, and solidarity.

As a sculptor, Duszeńko was able to translate the drama of war and the Holocaust the had unfolded before his eyes when he was a young man, into the form of art in public space. Psychologically, speaking out about extreme experiences is therapeutic. When we talk about something, we simultaneously heal the wounds left by trauma. This may seem like a simplification, but that is how the verbalization of feelings works. Especially words spoken in front of someone, or to someone. Duszeńko spoke to everyone, to the entire Polish nation, in the work he created officially on behalf of the Polish government. Duszeńko's personal relationship with art, the motivations for creating such therapeutic, "speaking" works are hidden beneath a form typical of the art of the time. In figurative art, he used a simplification of figures, which served to give them monumentality, as if he were assembling them from geometric shapes. This is how Pablo Picasso and Ferdinand Leger painted, reducing the visible world to basic shapes, spheres, cylinders, and cones. At the same time, he was interested in abstraction, the geometry of abstract forms. Duszeńko combined these two trends – figuration and abstraction – in site-specific art, a type of land art that shapes the space of a given location.

The issues addressed in the articles published in this thematic section fall under three frameworks. The categorization presented below is general in nature and applies to a wide range of artistic expressions using both traditional and new media. Examples of such works are discussed in the articles published here.

1. Relationships between history and the present

Works of art created in public spaces act as a conveyor belt, carrying the memory of historical events into the present. Along with the processes of historicization, paradigms of thinking and interpreting facts shift. Changes in the interpretation of historical narratives reveal the process of shaping memory and embedding events and people in the present.

2. Commemoration and Remembrance

Art in public spaces has the ability to commemorate, preserve, and perpetuate historical events and the people associated with them in collective and individual memory. It also has the ability to recall, that is, to extract from recent and more distant historical events and people whose memory has been erased or are the subject of controversy. Contemporary artistic expression enables the revitalization of memory and symbolic reconstruction as a way to restore it.

3. Placing in History

Monuments erected in public spaces are permanent, creating permanent places of remembrance. But public space is dynamic and full of life. Therefore, ephemeral artistic forms, temporary and changing, as well as interactive and immersive, allow for the construction of dialogical spaces, or rather discursive spaces, ensuring participation in history through its active creation.

The thematic section on Art in Public Space: Collective Memory – Individual Memory opens with an article by **Grzegorz KLAMAN, "Antimonument: Theoretical Assumptions."** The author is a professor working professionally as an educator at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk. His individual artistic path and academic career are closely linked to Franciszek Duszeńko. He was his student and continues his

thought. In this article, he presents his concept of the antimonument, which is based on Duszeńko's creative approach to monumental public spaces, intended to commemorate events such as the Holocaust – a history that cannot be contained within a classic monumental form, as it is too weak to convey something that is difficult to grasp with the imagination and connect with familiar categories of thought. Klaman's projects, implemented in the context of the workers' Solidarity movement and the Gdańsk Shipyard, and the post-1989 economic and socio-political transformation in Poland and Central Europe, were such solutions. Klaman's unique antimonument, titled *Political Anatomy of the Body* (1995), is a series of three objects-pedestals made of sheet metal, shaped in the form of a Greek cross, a square, and a rectangle. These objects held inside the transparent plexiglas cases containing specimens of human intestines preserved in formalin. This unique work of art, probably the only one of its kind in the world, which used real human remains as artistic material, was a commentary on the costs of economic and social transformation in Poland and commemorated this historical period in an anti-heroic form. However, history does not end there, and the formula of the antimonument will continue to be needed in the face of events such as the ongoing war in Ukraine.

In her article **"Reviving the Monument Immersed in Trauma. An Analysis of Krzysztof Wodiczko's Work *Emancipations. Projection onto the Monument of Tadeusz Kościuszko at Freedom Square in Łódź*,"** Eliza GAUST describes the behind-the-scenes collaboration with Krzysztof Wodiczko during the preparation of the show as part of the Łódź of Many Cultures Festival. The themes explored by the artist in this and other socially relevant projections intersect with her own professional practice as an activist working for issues related to equal treatment and human rights. This is an example of an antimonument realized through new media, intended to draw attention to those who find themselves on the margins of social life.

In her article **"*Il Grande Cretto* by Alberto Burri – Monument on the Ruins of the City,"** Joanna SZYMULA-GRYGIEL presents an example of commemorating the tragedy of the town of Gibellina in Sicily, which was completely destroyed by an earthquake. Alberto Burri, a renowned artist from the Arte Povera movement, created a monumental installation there, covering the site where the town once stood. The author traces the ongoing process of commemorating this tragedy, as subsequent artists refer to it, and the site itself has transformed into a significant cultural center. Burri's project is also antimonumental, meaning it is a non-traditional form of commemorating a traumatic history.

In her article **"Commemoration and Postmemory: Contemporary Art Practices Within the Space of Historical Exhibitions,"** Agnieszka REJNIAK-MAJEWSKA presents examples of attempts to keep history alive by placing contemporary works in the immediate context of historical exhibitions. In such cases, the concept of antimonument refers to exhibition solutions that combine historical artifacts with modern forms of artwork, which seems crucial for capturing the relationship of continuity between history and the present and for re-actualizing it.

Anna REMISZEWSKA, curator and staff member at the Treblinka Museum, presented her article "**Analysis of the Symbolic Content of the Treblinka Memorial Site."** One element of this concept is Duszeńko's work, which encoded complex and strongly emotionally charged messages related to the Holocaust in art forms. The article provides a detailed description, taking into account all the elements of the extensive, spatial monument complex.

In her article **"Memory / Reaction to the Holocaust. Forms of Commemorating the Holocaust in the Art of Polish-Jewish Artists from 1945 to 1950"** Magdalena TARNOWSKA presents the post-Holocaust work of Jewish artists. Their primary theme is

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a more or less direct reference to the tragic fate of Jews during the war. The researcher conducted a meticulous analysis of archives containing traces of this immediate postwar history of Jewish art, a very demanding task. It is no exaggeration to say that the results of her research constitute an antimonument composed of works that bear witness to the Holocaust.

The collected articles, along with the analyses and interpretations contained within them, demonstrate the broad potential of applying the concept of the art-monument to the study of art realized in public spaces, in the context of its historical and contemporary content. Klaman developed the concept and practice of the antimonument, but its roots, as he himself points out, lie in the art and pedagogy of his professor, Franciszek Duszeńko. It represents a significant contribution to Polish and world art, developed at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, as evidenced by the articles presented here and the works displayed in the exhibition *Memory Formation – A Space of Rift. Franciszek Duszeńko's Students*.

Grzegorz KLAMAN

ANTIMONUMENT. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Franciszek Duszeńko was my professor. I owe it to him that I developed my art into sculpture. By the time we worked together at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, he was already a very well-known artist. He had created monuments at such places as Treblinka and Westerplatte. He experienced World War II first-hand. It was a tragedy, a trauma, for him and his generation.

He was able to combine these experiences with pioneering methods of spatial arrangement. He divided the landscape into fragments, fields, and marked corridors between them. This geometric approach was used to design the site of the Treblinka former Nazi concentration camp. Later, his assistant and collaborator Zdzisław Pidek would employ a similar approach in the spatial arrangement of Bełżec and Katyń (the first is a Nazi concentration camp, the second is the site of Stalin's mass executions of Polish officers). Geometry in spatial design lends it monumentality, as it contradicts nature. It also provides a powerful way to express abstraction, the inexpressible, such as the tragedy associated with these places and the Holocaust.

It was these spatial arrangements by Duszeńko that inspired me to develop the concept of the antimonument. The issue here is not the monument itself, but about the connection between its form and the place and the context of the history that unfolded within it. Traditional monumental forms must be challenged to convey to the viewer the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, events beyond the grasp of the rational mind.

As an artist, in the early 1990s I experienced the political transformations in Central Europe, in Poland, and at the Gdańsk Shipyard. To express this historical moment, I created a series of installations and actions with a social and political message. The largest are the *Gates*, one of which is the historic Shipyard Gate, known from

documentation. I added two more in a row – one in the form of a rusty ship's prow, the other a stylized monument to the *Third International* by Tatlin, as a symbol of the fallen system from which the workers' strikes led by Lech Wałęsa liberated us.

The series of objects, titled *Political Anatomy of the Body* (1995), addresses the costs of economic and social transformation. Three sheet-metal objects, constructed in the form of a Greek cross, a square, and a rectangle, contained transparent plexiglas cases containing specimens of human intestines, preserved in a solution of alcohol and formalin. The viewer does not contemplate the figure on the pedestal but looks inside the pedestal and sees these remnants of the human digestive system. This installation provides a critical way of commemorating the transformation in Poland.

I presented the theoretical foundations of the antimonument concept at the conference Art in Public Space: Collective Memory – Individual Memory. It accompanied the exhibition *Memory Formation – A Space of Rift. Franciszek Duszeńko's Students,* where I displayed photographic documentation and models of the *Gates*. The exhibition also included documentary photographs of works – antimonuments – such as Julita Wójcik's *Rainbow*, which speaks to recurring aggression against minorities, and a shipyard gate destroyed by a tank, reconstructed from a photograph by Dorota Nieznalska. These are examples of art that continue the idea of the antimonument, seeking ways to express tragedies beyond imagination.

The idea of the antimonument, born from studies in Dushenka's studio and later from working with him, proves remarkably universal. The world is full of such traumatic events. There is a power that does not respect individual or minority rights. It is the antimonument, with its spatial and contextual form, which is capable of expressing such phenomena. The contemporary world provides such stories, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the atrocities committed there by the Russians.

Eliza GAUST

REVIVING THE MONUMENT IMMERSED IN TRAUMA. ANALYSIS OF KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO'S WORK *EMANCIPATIONS. PROJECTION ONTO THE MONUMENT OF TADEUSZ KOŚCIUSZKO AT FREEDOM SQUARE IN ŁÓDŹ*

The article "Reviving the Monument Immersed in Trauma. Analysis of Krzysztof Wodiczko's Work *EMANCIPATIONS. Projection onto the Monument of Tadeusz Kościuszko at Freedom Square in Łódź*" analyses Krzysztof Wodiczko's most recent public projection in Poland – *EMANCIPATIONS* – onto the monument of Tadeusz Kościuszko at Freedom Square in Łódź (2024). The author, who collaborated on the project as a producer and local consultant, explores the process of creation as an example of participatory public art that combines historical reflection with contemporary experiences of exclusion, trauma, and symbolic violence. The text is a case study of how a monument – traditionally a bearer of national memory – can become a tool of social transformation, empathy, and dialogue.

The author introduces the concept of "reviving the monument" as both an artistic and therapeutic gesture. In *EMANCIPATIONS*, the voices of contemporary residents of Łódź – people with experiences of migration, homelessness, disability, violence, psychological crisis, or marginalisation based on identity or origin – are projected onto the figure of Kościuszko. Through this gesture, the monument speaks in their words, lending its symbolic authority to those who are usually unheard or unseen. As a result, the monument regains its sense of purpose and transforms from a relic of the past into an active participant in the social life of the present.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of *parrhesia* – fearless speech – and Judith Herman's trauma theory, the author interprets the project as a form of working through trauma. Participants, by publicly voicing their stories, become "living monuments" of their own experience, and the act of speaking aloud becomes an empowering and healing practice. Wodiczko's method, marked by attentiveness and respect, avoids scripting or guiding the speakers' narratives; instead, it allows them to reclaim their agency through language. Each story becomes a microhistory of emancipation, contributing to a polyphonic portrait of contemporary urban life.

The choice of Tadeusz Kościuszko's monument is crucial for the entire project. Kościuszko's biography – linking the struggle for national independence with advocacy for social justice – makes him a symbol of universal emancipation. His historical gestures, such as his opposition to slavery and defence of the peasantry, resonate with the stories told by the participants. In Wodiczko's work, Kościuszko's statue is reinterpreted not as a static symbol of patriotic heroism but as a medium that connects past and present, history and everyday life, the privileged and the marginalised.

The article situates *EMANCIPATIONS* within the broader history of Łódź's Freedom Square, a space marked by multiple layers of political and artistic intervention – from Ewa Partum's *The Legality of Space* (1971) to numerous social protests and demonstrations. By staging the projection in this location and as part of the Festival Łódź of Many Cultures, Wodiczko creates an event that both belongs to and interrupts the festive context. Instead of entertainment, the audience encounters a confrontation with trauma, exclusion, and resilience – an intervention that demands empathy and reflection rather than consumption.

In conclusion, the article argues that Wodiczko's projections represent a democratisation of memory. His artistic practice redefines monuments as dynamic sites of dialogue rather than static vehicles of power. By giving voice to those excluded from mainstream narratives, *EMANCIPATIONS* transforms the monument from an object into a subject – a living interlocutor between the past and the present.

Through its participatory, trauma-informed approach, the project demonstrates that public art can be both emancipatory and therapeutic, enabling processes of remembrance, healing, and social change. In Wodiczko's vision, to revive a monument is to awaken society itself – to unfreeze what has been silenced, to listen to those who remain unseen, and to open public space to empathy, courage, and transformation.

Joanna SZYMULA-GRYGIEL

IL GRANDE CRETTO BY ALBERTO BURRI – MONUMENT ON THE RUINS OF THE CITY

Il Grande Cretto (The Great Crack) is Alberto Burri's monumental project in Sicily, evoking the history and memory of a community virtually wiped out in a tragic cataclysm. The monument has been built on the ruins of Gibellina, a village destroyed by an earthquake that struck the Belice River Valley in western Sicily on the night of January 14–15, 1968. Burri's spatial arrangement, remarkable in its form and expression, is the greatest work of land art, unique and incomparable to any similar realization.

The effects of the disaster were catastrophic. The earthquake left in its wake massive destruction, whole towns were completely devastated, and over 100.000 people were left homeless, with the death toll reaching approximately 370. The crisis was exacerbated due to the administrative authorities' lack of preparedness to deal with a tragic event of such scale, from the initial rescue and assistance operations to the years-long reconstruction

that followed. Many residents left, while those remaining were provided with temporary housing in which they faced extremely difficult conditions. This rebuilding process continued for 10 years.

It was recognized that rebuilding Gibellina, which had been hit hardest by the natural disaster, would be impossible, and it was decided to build a new city 18 kilometers away, named Gibellina Nuova. The bold vision of creating and reinventing the city, with the participation of distinguished artists, was spearheaded by Mayor Ludovico Corrao, a charismatic lawyer and visionary politician who believed that the best prospect for the crisis-stricken region lay in culture. Gibellina Nuova was conceived as one of the most daring urban projects of the 20th century, as a city-museum of art in an open space.

Alberto Burri, invited to participate in the project, sought inspiration at the site of the disaster. Moved by the sight of the ruins of the abandoned town, he ultimately decided to create a work that would capture the scale of the tragedy and permanently commemorate the event. His concept of covering the town's ruins with a concrete shell, resembling a vast white blanket crisscrossed by crevices, received the mayor's approval, but the project faced numerous challenges. Work began in 1984, but after 80% completion, the project was halted in 1989. It was not resumed until 2010, with the entire project finally being completed on the centenary of the artist's birth in 2015.

This extraordinary monument, covering nearly 12 hectares, immortalized the grid of Gibellina's former streets and buildings in concrete blocks. Formally, the work is a continuation of the artist's earlier explorations and discoveries, begun in a series of compositions called *Cretti*. This series of relief paintings, covered with a network of cracks on the painting's surface, led him to create his largest spatial work – *Il Grande Cretto* in Gibellina. A great crack, a great fissure. A great tragedy that caused a tear, a wound.

This unique monument blends seamlessly into the surrounding natural terrain. Deep, 2-3-meter-wide crevices allow for movement within *Il Cretto* structure, following the paths used by the Ghibellineans until 1968. It appears as a vast shroud of white cement covering the hillside. This gigantic spatial composition is imbued with a sense of the site's history. Traces of the life that once unfolded here, annihilated by the tragic event, have been marked, preserved, and preserved in memory. After the catastrophe, the site changed its identity – its shape and character were transformed. Capturing the past through the medium of art offers hope for new life, reborn elsewhere.

Alberto Burri's work evokes a wide range of emotions and is moving in every aspect. Because it touches upon the tragic history of the local community, both metaphorically and literally, it evoked particularly strong feelings. Some survivors and residents felt that the project literally buried their personal history, covering the ruins rather than preserving or restoring them, as was the case in other cities affected by the earthquake. The negative reception from some in the local community was a source of sadness for the artist. He created *Il Grande Cretto* primarily for the survivors of the cataclysm, with the intention of soothing the pain of loss but also of activating the local community. The need to provide for the monument's conservation was considered early on, and Burri envisioned this role being filled by the locals. However, they needed time to cope with the trauma of the tragedy and to become familiar with the work, which dominated the local landscape. They appreciated its value and decided to fight for the restoration of the composition, respecting the design of the artist, who did not live to see its completion (he died in 1995).

Il Grande Cretto and its history prompt reflection: what form should a work of monumental art take to appropriately commemorate tragic or momentous events?

Gibellina has become a symbol evoking the memory of a destroyed city, but also a symbol

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of reborn life. Art has played a crucial role in the process of revitalizing the site. The importance of art for the region is demonstrated by the designation of Gibellina as the Italian Capital of Contemporary Art in 2026.

Agnieszka REJNIAK-MAJEWSKA

COMMEMORATION AND POSTMEMORY: CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES WITHIN THE SPACE OF HISTORICAL EXHIBITIONS

Incorporating contemporary art into historical exhibitions is not a common or frequently adopted practice. Whereas in historical museums, it is widely accepted to include art pieces that can serve as documents of the past, illustrate the events in question, or exemplify the social attitudes and habits of a respective period of time, contemporary art lacks this kind of historical alibi. Making contemporary artworks part of a larger, historical exhibition is a gesture that connects the historical narrative with the present or poses questions about our relation with the past. In this article, selected examples of temporary and permanent exhibitions in which contemporary art interventions play a significant role are discussed. All the exhibitions mentioned refer to the events of the Second World War and the Holocaust, so they concern a past that has already been extensively researched, but is not very distant, and remains open to debate. In the course of analysis, both the spatial conditions and thematic contexts of given artistic undertakings, as well as the results they produce for viewers, are considered. In each case, the specificity of a particular museum space and exhibition narrative needs to be addressed, as these are always context-specific and often site-specific interventions.

The text consists of three parts. The first one is dedicated to theoretical arguments, made by historians and museum professionals, for and against the inclusion of contemporary art in historical exhibitions. One of the points made against such an inclusion is that it might undermine the exhibition's documentary value and authenticity. As Jeshajahu Weinberg, the founding director of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, has argued, the 'raw truth' of the original objects and documents, arranged to provide a clear and emotionally moving narrative, should not be obscured by any additional interpretive commentaries. According to historians who are primarily concerned with the truthfulness and professionalism of an exhibition's message, additional artistic elements might carry the risk of manipulation, both on an informational and emotional level. 'Documentary rightfulness' is therefore identified as the primary value, but often without distinguishing between the documentary value of the specific material exhibited and the historical accuracy of the narrative as a whole. Meanwhile, the problem of possible manipulation usually lies in the way the documentary material is used and arranged to shape the message. The defenders of historical objectivism tend to overlook the fact that the vision of history the exhibition proposes is always a construct, rather than a transparent rendering of the facts. An alternative approach, voiced by, among others, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, assumes that an exhibition is not just a representation of past events, but 'a theatre of history' in which the presented material remains open to visitors' interpretation. Viewers' engagement and affective response strengthen the power of the exhibition narrative, and the narrative need not be homogeneous nor linear – it can comprise a multiplicity of voices, even contradictory ones, and thus offer more space for reflection and exploration. The point is to stage the past in a way that is historically sound, reliable, and authoritative without

being authoritarian. In such exhibition spaces, contemporary artworks may add another layer of meaning, bridging the exhibition's topic to contemporary sensibilities or moving it to a more universal level.

In the second part, selected examples of contemporary artworks inserted into historical museums and historical exhibitions are discussed. Firstly, artworks conceived as supplements to museums' architectural spaces are discussed. In memorial museums (e.g., the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington) and other historical museums that deal with a traumatic and difficult past, artworks – often distinguished by their minimalist and abstract forms – tend to serve a meditative and commemorative function. Far from being a simple accessory or decoration, sculptural or pictorial installations complement the museum's architecture and the exhibited narrative. Through a discussion of cases from the Jewish Museum Berlin and Jewish Museum Frankfurt, it is shown how site-specific art installations create a space in-between, connecting the exhibition space with its architectural surroundings. Such installations question typical museum viewing habits that assign primacy to the exhibition object and the ways it is viewed. Instead, they draw attention to more basic facts concerning the museum encounter, the accessibility of the objects, and the meanings that escape direct, objective presentation.

The third part of the text is dedicated to an analysis of three thematic exhibitions prepared by curators and researchers in collaboration with the artists: *Illusions of Omnipotence: Architecture and Daily Life under German Occupation at the Zamek Culture Center in Poznań (2024/25), Around Us a Sea of Fire at the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw (2023/24), and Fashion System. Clothes in Strategies of Violence and Survival Tactics in the Łódź Ghetto at the Central Textile Museum in Łódź (2025/26)*. By looking closely into the structure of these exhibitions, the challenges posed by their topics and their documentary material, the role of respective artworks complementing the shows is discussed. As it has shown, art pieces transform the experience of exhibition spaces and influence the perception of other objects and documents exhibited. Sometimes, they also introduce new cognitive frames of reference for them. They deepen and expand the message of the exhibition from within, highlighting aspects and details that otherwise might escape the viewer's attention. In the cases analysed here, connections to the past are based mostly on the attention the artists pay to readings of the material remnants and testimonies of the past. In their imaginative investment into those traces, they follow the path of creative recalling and affective reinterpretation, which Marianne Hirsch has labelled 'postmemory.' The artworks come into dialogue with the documentary materials on display, and offer "a more visceral understanding of the past" (Huyssen). At the same time, the exhibition spaces these pieces co-create differ from immersive historical exhibitions that have become a new standard today: instead of a seamless, immersive narrative, they offer a complex arrangement of elements that preserve both their distinct status as historical material and the artistic commentary, on the other.

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Anna REMISZEWSKA

ANALYSIS OF THE SYMBOLIC CONTENT OF THE TREBLINKA MEMORIAL SITE

Historical Background

During the Second World War, near the village of Treblinka in north-eastern Poland, the Germans established two camps with different purposes and functions. The names of both German Nazi camps in Treblinka derived from the nearby railway station. The first to be created was *Arbeitslager Treblinka* – the Treblinka I Labour Camp. It operated from the summer of 1941 until the beginning of August 1944. It is estimated that some 20.000 prisoners – Poles, Jews, and Roma – were held there, of whom approximately 10.000 were murdered or died as a result of disease and forced labour. During the liquidation of the camp, its staff destroyed documentation about the camp's operations in an attempt to erase traces of their crimes. Nearby the camp was an area referred to in camp documents as a cemetery, but this site also served as a place of execution. Today, this area is known as the *Execution Site*.

In mid-1942, near Treblinka I, the Germans established *SS-Sonderkommando Treblinka* – the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, as part of *Aktion Reinhardt*, the operation aimed at the total extermination of the Jewish people. The camp was staffed by Germans and Austrians, who were supported by guards, mainly of Ukrainian origin. The first transport arrived from Warsaw on 23 July 1942. Victims were murdered in gas chambers using diesel exhaust fumes, and their bodies were thrown into pre-prepared pits. In the spring of 1943, the Germans began cremating the bodies of Treblinka II victims to obliterate evidence of the crimes that took place at the camp. On 2 August 1943, the camp prisoners organised an uprising. Between 800.000 and 900.000 Jews from Poland and other European countries were murdered in the camp. In November 1943, Treblinka II was completely dismantled; the site was ploughed over and sown with lupine, and a Ukrainian family was settled there to give the appearance of running a farm and 'taking care' of the land. When the Red Army arrived in 1944, the supposed farmers fled.

Organisation and Commemoration

The first inspection of the post-camp area at Treblinka took place in 1944 with the arrival of the Red Army. Subsequent investigations uncovered human remains and abandoned objects, while the site was repeatedly desecrated by those searching for valuables. The first plan for commemorating Treblinka was never realised. The period between the liquidation of the camps and their commemoration – from 1944 to 1964 – is referred to as "the period of oblivion and desecration."

In 1955, another competition was announced for the commemoration of Treblinka; it was won by a team led by Professors Franciszek Duszeńko and Adam Haupt. Initially, the project envisaged only a monument-mausoleum, but after visiting the site, the authors decided to commemorate the entire area, to protect the remains from further desecration, and to create a space expressing the drama, sorrow, and remembrance of the place through simple means. The official unveiling of the Mausoleum of Struggle and Martyrdom took place on 10 May 1964.

Analysis of Symbolic Content

In 1964, Duszeńko, Haupt, and Strynkiewicz received the State Award, First Class, in the field of art for the spatial and sculptural commemoration of Treblinka.

The central monument at Treblinka was the most symbolic element. Duszeńko emphasised that its creation held a deeply personal meaning for him, linking his wartime and camp experiences. The monument consists of two interrelated parts: the lower section, made of granite, is embedded in the ground and narrows slightly upward. The stone blocks evoke the Western Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem, symbolising the Jewish identity of

the victims. The main body of the monument has been interpreted as a symbolic rupture: Irena Grzesiuk-Olszewska sees it as a sacrificial altar formed from a split granite mass; Justyna Gąsowska highlights that the rupture reminds us of the past and of responsibility for the future; while Edward Kopówka has noted that the front wall symbolises Jewish mourning.

The upper section of the monument is covered with a large, horizontal 'cap' decorated with austere reliefs. On the western side, these depict torn bodies and hands, symbolising cries for help. The hands also refer to the Jewish gesture of blessing. On the eastern side, a menorah – a symbol of Judaism – was placed. According to Duszeńko, each side of the 'cap' has a symbolic name: "Martyrdom" (West), "Women and Children" (South), "Struggle" (North), and "Survival" (East). In front of the monument lies a granite slab inscribed with the words "Never Again" in several languages – a message of protest and a testament from the murdered to the living.

The artistic commemoration of Treblinka refers to the burning of victims' bodies on pyres made from railway rails, represented by a rectangular hollow of black basalt. On three concrete fields stand 17.000 shattered stones, symbolising *macevot* (Jewish tombstones) and mass graves. Most of the stones are anonymous, but some two hundred bear the names of towns from which Jews were transported to their deaths. One stone commemorates Janusz Korczak and the children from his orphanage.

At the entrance to the camp's grounds stand the first commemorative elements: seven white sandstone plaques mounted on a concrete base. The first shows a schematic plan of the memorial, while the remaining six contain historical information in six languages: Polish, Yiddish, Russian, English, German, and French. Symbolic concrete sleepers form a railway siding, representing the victims' final journey to the camp.

On the 80th anniversary of the prisoners' uprising, on 2 August 2023, between the tracks, sculptures by Samuel Willenberg – a survivor of Treblinka – were unveiled, linking the memory of the site with historical testimony. The symbolic railway ramp, paved with stones and ending abruptly, runs along the *Path of Death*. On the right-hand side stand stones bearing the names of the victims' countries, while granite boulders mark the boundaries of the former camp. At the Execution Site stands the *Monument to the Victims of the Treblinka I Labour Camp* (1964), symbolising the suffering of those murdered there. In 2014, a monument dedicated to the Roma and Sinti victims was unveiled. In 2025, 49 victims discovered during archaeological research in 2019 were buried there, accompanied by a new commemorative monument.

The Treblinka memorial, recognised as one of the most significant works commemorating the Holocaust, unites art with the natural landscape, symbolically reflecting the camp's infrastructure. Drawing on their wartime experiences, the creators designed a space for reflection and contemplation through simple, austere forms. The memorial remains powerful and legible, and although historical and social changes have led to some additions, its universal message endures.

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MEMORY / REACTION TO THE HOLOCAUST. FORMS OF COMMEMORATING THE HOLOCAUST IN THE ART OF POLISH-JEWISH ARTISTS FROM 1945 TO 1950

The purpose of this article is to describe the forms of Shoah memory which is presented in their works.

Before the outbreak of World War II, the Jewish diaspora in Poland, numbering around 3.5 million people, was one of the largest in the world. This diverse community contributed to the multinational landscape of the country. The most important cultural centers of Polish Jews included Warsaw, which was an international hub, as well as Lviv, Kraków, Łódź (Lodz), and Vilnius. The artistic milieu numbered around 600 people – representatives of the older generation with established professional positions and young people starting their artistic careers or studying at local and foreign Academies of Fine Arts. Most of them were active in two cultural areas: Polish and Jewish. This activity was manifested primarily through participation in exhibitions, associations, and artistic groups. They participated in exhibitions organized by the Trade Union of Polish Artists (later the Association of Polish Artists), the Institute of Art Propaganda, the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, the Society of Friends of Fine Arts, the Jewish Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts, founded in 1923, and the Jewish Association of Visual Artists, active since the 1930s.

The Holocaust ended the Jewish community in Europe. Its revival seemed impossible due to the almost complete destruction of the population (only a few percent survived) and its spiritual and material heritage. However, between the years 1945 and 1950, Poland became the center for reconstruction of Jewish life. This period is one of the most interesting in the post-war history of Polish Jews. With the influx of repatriates from the USSR, returns from concentration camps, and people coming out of hiding, the Jewish population reached roughly 250.000. This process was coordinated from 1945 by the Central Committee of Polish Jews. The reconstruction of artistic life was the responsibility of its Culture Department and its provincial branches, the Jewish Cultural Society (founded in November 1947), and above all, the Jewish Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts, established in January 1947 in Warsaw. The Society worked on collecting the surviving cultural heritage for the future Jewish Museum and on organizing the artistic community, which at that time consisted of several dozen people active in Łódź, Wrocław, Katowice, Kraków, and Warsaw. It organized individual and collective exhibitions, art competitions, including a poster commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, promoted art through lectures and publications in the press, and provided material and financial support to artists. It should be noted that they also belonged to the Association of Polish Artists and actively participated in its activities. The process of rebuilding Jewish life was interrupted by the advent of the Stalinist era. At the turn of 1949 and 1950, all organizations, associations, publishing houses, press, and almost all institutions except for the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw were liquidated.

Due to the fact that most of the artists active at that time left Poland in the 1950s and 1960s, taking their work with them, the main sources of information about their work are the few surviving works in museum collections, mainly private collections in Israel, and press and archival sources. It is thanks to them that we can learn about trends in the art of the Survivors at that time and the factors that determined them.

In the field of fine arts, the trauma of the Holocaust is depicted through the use of various means of expression. Their selection depends primarily on the attitude an individual

artist takes towards their personal experiences and the legacy of the Holocaust, as well as on their artistic attitude, which also includes the therapeutic function of art and its role as a carrier of universal content. In the works of Polish-Jewish artists of that time, one can find complex reactions to the shock caused by the Holocaust and its consequences: on the one hand, the desire to document the destruction of the material and spiritual world of the Jews, to preserve their experiences (as a form of therapy or a need to preserve the memory of the authors and victims of the Shoah), depicting the struggle; on the other hand, a turn towards life – creating images of survivors arriving from the USSR, their participation in building a new life – working on a kibbutz in Bielawa in Lower Silesia, Jewish workers in production cooperatives, events from the world of theater, as well as showing family life and the beauty of nature.

Among the most interesting artists active in the years 1945–1950 are: depicting the Holocaust – Mojżesz Bromberg (Moshe Bar-Am, 1920–1982) and Rafał Mandelzweig (1908–1956); depicting the armed resistance against the Nazis – Natan Rapoport (1908–1956), Alexander Bogen (1916–2010); artists whose work reflected a metamorphosis from representation of the emptiness left after the Holocaust to an affirmation of life materializing in the depiction of survivors, their activities, and the world around them – Rafael Chwoles (1913–2002), Mojżesz Boruszek (1894–1972) and Henryk Hechtkopf (1910–2004).

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