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Forward into the Past!, or a Progressive Aspect of What Has Gone Away

Referring somewhat subversively to the main idea of this publication expressed in the question “What IS THE PULSE OF THE PRESENT (#now) and what IS COMING”, I would like to focus here on the past, and more specifically, to consider how much what has gone by determines the current pulse of what is coming. I assume that in human experience, both that of individuals and communities, including the experience of art both from the perspective of its creators and recipients, the past, present, future and eternity are inseparably intertwined and determine the uniqueness of human being-in-the-world. Nevertheless, both individuals and cultures can valorize particular dimensions of temporality differently, which means that we can distinguish four temporal orientations: retrospective, presentistic, prospective, and eternistic. These orientations may not only be different for different individuals (or cultures), but also in the life of the same individual (culture), different temporal attitudes may prevail over others. “Politicizing” reflection on these orientations, I would like to consider whether the adoption of a retrospective orientation (also in the field of art) is inevitably linked with a conservative and traditionalist attitude prevailing today, or whether it can convey a counter-hegemonic subversive, emancipatory and progressive potential.

The Past is a Foreign Country is the title of a well-known book by an American historian and geographer David Lowenthal.¹ You do not need much insight to notice that with increasing intensity we are visited by phantoms coming from this foreign country - haunted in our late modernity by ghosts, or boats full of refugees arriving on the beaches of today’s Europe.

A comparison of the spirits of the past with children of a lesser God, escaping war, violence, persecution, and poverty, from a generally postco-

» 1 In Polish, its fragment was published as: D. Lowenthal, *Przeszłość to obcy kraj*, transl. I. Grudzińska-Gross and M. Tański, “Respublica Nowa” 10 (200) / 2010, p. 142-151.

lonial perspective, although seemingly justified in many respects, seems to fail on one count: although one would want to return the latter guests to where they set sail from as soon as possible (at least this is the dominant opinion on this “lonely island of freedom and tolerance”,² as some influential figures of the socio-political life call this “beloved, best, unique country of ours, Poland”), the former, i.e. the ghosts of the past (though not all, of course) are welcome.

It is not difficult to provide evidence of this opening up to the past, even after a cursory glance. One would have to be completely deaf not to hear everywhere the voices whispering into our ears: heritage, tradition, legacy, history, memory... We live, as the French historian and researcher Pierre Nora says, in the “commemoration era”,³ as evidenced by the proliferation of various commemorative practices. These include e.g. numerous celebrations of events important for a given community, the erection of monuments, the organization of historical re-enactments, or the musealization of cultural landscape. We should also point out the passionate dedication of individuals and families to the search for their roots or the establishment of the so-called home museums as well as the research on memory, in particular collective memory, which seems to have reached its critical mass in the contemporary humanities. It is also worth noting that the mass media are the principal conduit of manifesting this vogue of the past and they are also one of its key creators.

One cannot overlook the fact, especially in the context of the main issues raised by me in the further parts of the article, that this increased interest in the past is also reflected in the raised temperature of discussions around so-called historical politics, or, broadly speaking, the instrumental use of a specific image of the past in order to legitimize and stabilize the hegemony of those in power, but also of all forces opposing the dominant discourses of power, which in turn seek in the past the support of their counter-hegemonic practices. Slavoj Žižek is therefore right when he observes that “In today’s era, which proclaims itself postideological, ideology is thus more than ever a field of struggle—among other things, the struggle for appropriating past traditions”.⁴

This struggle also takes place in the field of art. As Izabela Kowalczyk writes, art seen like history as the study of the past, “constructs images of the past and at the same time subjects them to critical reflection”.⁵ Many

» 2 In this way Jarosław Kaczyński defined Poland during the 89th Smolensk monthly anniversary on 10 September 2017.

» 3 See *Epoka upamiętniania. Rozmowa z Pierrem Nora*, [in:] J. Żakowski, *Rewanż pamięci*, Warszawa 2002, p. 59-68.

» 4 S. Žižek, *From Democracy to Divine Violence*, [in:] G. Agamben et al., *Democracy in What State?*, transl. W. McCuaig, New York 2011, p. 100.

» 5 I. Kowalczyk, *Sztuka*, [in:] *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, ed. M. Saryusz-

contemporary artists explicitly refer to the past in their works, exploring, often critically, the topics skipped, forgotten or repressed from official historical narratives and popular representations of the past, because of their being uncomfortable, embarrassing or traumatic. These artists, then, engage in something like Foucault's discourse of counterhistory or, as it is often said today, the discourse of counter-memory.⁶ In a word, it seems that late-modern culture took to heart the motto of the eccentric Eldon League: Forward into the past!

If we ask ourselves an important question about the reasons for this return to the past, we must immediately state that there are no simple answers. Looking from the psychoanalytic perspective, one could probably say that this urge to look back into what has gone away, is caused by e.g. the desire to adequately work through or mourn the traumatic experiences of millions last century, i.e. two world wars, the enslavement of totalitarian regimes of the Nazi and Stalinist type, ethnic cleansing and other acts of genocide, starting from those carried out on the largest scale by Nazi Germany in relation to Jews, Roma and Sinti, through the (chronologically earlier) slaughter of Armenians by the Turks, up to the relatively recent genocide of the Tutsi by the Hutu in Rwanda.

Certainly, the important cause of the turn towards the past is also the whole wave of phenomena, which Nora calls the "democratization" of history,⁷ by which he understands the emergence of various processes of "decolonization", widely understood not only as emancipation of the societies of former colonies, but also the liberation of Western religious, ethnic and sexual minorities as well as socially disadvantaged and provincial communities.

Nora also points out that the explanation of the increased focus on the past is to be found in the acceleration of civilization processes: "The dizzying pace of change makes the world unpredictable for us [...] And the uncertainty of the future makes us turn to the past".⁸ The shift towards the past of late modernity is somewhat compensatory in nature: it is an attempt (whose effectiveness is difficult to assess; after all the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the coming of the dusk) compensating for quite high modernization costs that appear in our societies of risk.⁹ Una-

Wolska, R. Traba, Warszawa 2014, p. 465.

» 6 See M. Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended". *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*, transl. D. Macey, New York 2003, p. 63-85.

» 7 See P. Nora, *Czas pamięci*, transl. W. Dłuski, „Res Publica Nova” 2001, No. 7 (154), 40-41 and *Epoka upamiętniania...*, p. 62-63. More on Nora's understanding of the concept of „democratization of history” see B. Korzeniewski, *Demokratyzacja pamięci wobec przewartościowań w pamięci Polaków po 1989 r.*, „Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość” 12/2 (22) / 2013, p. 58-60.

» 8 *Epoka upamiętniania...*, p. 61.

» 9 See P. Grad, *O pojęciu tradycji. Studium krytyczne kultury pamięci*, Warszawa 2017, p. 10, 19.

ble to find security, “the fetish of late modernity” as Tomasz Kozak calls it,¹⁰ in the present, let alone in an increasingly unpredictable future, we seek it in the past, vainly trying, both as individuals and as a community, to construct some relatively stable identity in the face of what has gone away, faced with what Herman Lübbe calls the “overwhelming experience felt today of losing the sense of cultural homeliness, caused by the pace of change”.¹¹

This uncertainty of the future resulting from the acceleration of modernization processes associated primarily with the development of science and technology, but also with changes in the socio-political sphere, also has its source in the meltdown of the idea of progress and in the attendant disappearance of utopia, which determines even as Enzo Traverso says, the “Zeitgeist of our present age”,¹² the extent of which we have not yet measured. The idea of progress since the Enlightenment was not only a widely shared belief that we are dealing with a continuous upgrading of human knowledge, correlated with moral improvement and development of social, economic and political institutions, enabling people to lead a better and happier life.¹³ It was moreover associated with the conviction that man can fully and rationally control and actively influence the directions of this development, through evolutionary or revolutionary changes (here, of course, there was controversy about the effectiveness of the preferred road). This, in turn, implied not only the conquest of nature, but also, and perhaps above all, the development and implementation of various forms of social engineering that would solve all the shortcomings of community life.

Apparently, we have been cured from the allegedly naïve belief in progress understood in this way. The twentieth century was like a cold shower for it. Only too well, if the word is at all appropriate here, did the humanity learn that the development of knowledge, and above all of science and the attendant technology, does not necessarily lead to the emancipation of man, increase the extent of human freedom and equality. Nor does it contribute to moral growth; on the contrary, it can lead to monstrous forms of enslavement, exploitation, exclusion, violence, and moral collapse. We are afraid that believing that “another world is possible” may lead us to “another world”, the one described by Herling-Grudziński and Tadeusz Borowski.

» 10 T. Kozak, *Wytępić te wszystkie bestie? Rozmowy i eseje*, Warszawa 2010, p. 224.

» 11 H. Lübbe, *Muzealizacja. O powiązaniu naszej teraźniejszości z przeszłością*, transl. E. Paczkowska-Łagowska, [in:] *Estetyka w świecie*, vol. 3, ed. M. Gołaszewska, Kraków 1991, p. 8.

» 12 E. Traverso, *Historia jako pole bitwy. Interpretacja przemocy w XX wieku*, transl. Ś.F. Nowicki, Warszawa 2014, p. 294.

» 13 See Z. Krasnodębski, *Upadek idei postępu*, Warszawa 1991, p. 9.

While Giorgio Agamben may be too pessimistic in his observation, put forward in the mid-1990s, that the camp is “the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West”,¹⁴ the fear of a new Gulag Archipelago or Auschwitz is responsible for the fact that bold-looking projects meant to repair the world are, especially since the fall of the so-called real socialism, regarded as suspicious. The spell cast by Francis Fukuyama, who proclaimed the end of history, fell on fertile ground: indeed, it seemed that liberal democracy in conjunction with free market economy was the only proven panacea for any ills of the post-utopian world. No more social experimentation, designing, cooking up, and implementing salvific visions. Although, of course, critics of this position, artists included, were heard early enough, until the attacks on the World Trade Center and the financial crisis of 2007 it had been fairly widely accepted that the current neo-liberal order, with a few more corrections, in particular concerning social security and minority rights, is actually the acme and fulfilment of the unfinished project of the Enlightenment, indicated by Jürgen Habermas in the early 1980s.¹⁵

Today, we more or less know that history is not over. We do not, however, accept it with relief and hope; on the contrary, we look towards the future with greater timidity and trepidation. If, then, we find relief neither in the present nor in the future, we can only turn towards the past, as evidenced by the above-mentioned phenomena, or towards “eternity”, which in turn is indicated by post-secular tendencies of late modernity. These are looked favourably upon by all kinds of conservatives, traditionalists and fundamentalists (these last not so much favourably as with malicious satisfaction). They are joined by many supporters of the above-mentioned unfinished Enlightenment project, with its main coryphaeus Habermas, who since his famous speech in the Church of Saint Paul in Frankfurt am Main on October 14, 2001 repeatedly pointed to the creative role of religion in democracy and deplored “an unfair exclusion of religions from the public sphere”.¹⁶ We must add something quite obvious, if of major importance, that one of the main features of modernity was the process of progressing secularization, Weber’s second disenchantment of the world. Today even those who distance themselves from Habermas’s project, considering it to be too little radical, ask themselves: “The doubt

» 14 G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, transl. D. Heller-Roazen, [1995], p. 117, [online] <http://www.opa-a2a.org/dissensus/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/agamben_giorgio_homo_sacer.pdf> [accessed: 15 August 2018].

» 15 See J. Habermas, *Modernity: An Unfinished Project*, [in:] *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. M. Passerin d’Entrèves and S. Benhabib, Cambridge (Mass.) 1997, p. 38-58.

» 16 J. Habermas, *Faith and Knowledge*, transl. H. Beister and M. Pensky, [in:] *idem, The Future of Human Nature*, Cambridge 2003, p. 109.

crept into the collective and individual mind: how secular are ‘we’ – feminists, anti-racists, post-colonialists, environmentalists, etc. – really?¹⁷ Even more convinced of the arrival of the post-secular era than the just quoted Rosi Braidotti, is Žižek, whose religious inclinations are hardly likely, after all. Well, this “old-fashioned avowed atheist (and even a dialectical materialist)”¹⁸ states that “Nobody escapes faith in our allegedly ungodly times” and that in fact “We all secretly believe”,¹⁹ feeling “this incredible need to believe”, to recall the title of Julia Kristeva’s book.

Changing the research perspective slightly, we can say, referring to the discourse on temporal orientation developed within the framework of sociology and philosophy of time,²⁰ that seemingly quite unexpectedly in late-modern culture, after a short phase of the dominance of the presentistic orientation, focused on the present, on the fleeting moment and on the ephemeral,²¹ we are increasingly dealing with a more and more marked supremacy of the retrospective orientation, with the eternalistic admixture in the post-secular version. Modernity, which from its early modern phase gradually shifted from the eternalistic orientation to the prospective one, thanks to “developing and elaborating in strictly worldly and secular terms the Judeo-Christian heritage”,²² gradually, as Gianni Vattimo rightly points out, abandoned a search for extra-terrestrial perfection in favour of an increasingly developing, universal, Catholic one would like to say, faith in worldly and intrinsic progress²³. The collapse of this faith, entailing a reversal from an uncertain and unpredictable future, first resulted in adopting an attitude focused on the present. I mentioned that it did not last too long, however. This is because focusing on now, living in the present moment, as the Toruń-based philosopher Marek Szulakiewicz says, requires “that the world become so appealing that it prevents any recourse to the future and the past, so that human beings may not succumb to the temptation of memory and expectation. ‘Being-here-and-

» 17 R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge 2013, p. 31.

» 18 S. Žižek, *O wierze*, transl. B. Baran, Warszawa 2008, p. 11.

» 19 *Ibidem*, p. 10.

» 20 Temporal orientations, or ways of perception of and relation to different areas of time, are discussed, among others, by E. Tarkowska, *Czas w społeczeństwie. Problemy, tradycje, kierunki badań*, Wrocław 1987, p. 141-157, M. Szulakiewicz, *Czas i to, co ludzkie. Szkice z chronozofii i kultury*, Toruń 2011, p. 33-51, J. Guitton, *Sens ludzkiego czasu*, transl. W. Sukiennicka, Warszawa 1989.

» 21 An example of such a presentist approach is the apology of the ephemeral presented by Monika Bakke in her article *Efemeryczne i przezroczyście*, [in:] *Rewizje i kontynuacje. Sztuka i estetyka w czasach transformacji*, ed. A. Jamrozikowa, Poznań 1996. The diagnosis and Bakke’s postulate were as follows: “Today, the ephemeral ceases to be a negative feature” (*ibidem*, p. 90).

» 22 G. Vattimo, *The End of Modernity. Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, transl. J.R. Snyder, Baltimore 1988, p. 4.

» 23 See *ibid.*, p. 7-8.

now' must suffice".²⁴ Although it is hard to disagree with Roman Kubicki, who claims that "Today, everyone (of course, almost everyone) wants to behave as if they were inseparably connected to the countless nipples of always full and sated mundane reality",²⁵ access to these milk glands is still limited for many. Secondly, even if someone sucks hard on them, sooner or later the milk will start to get sour. It was Schopenhauer who noticed that when a man quenches his desires, "a terrible void and ennui comes over [him], i.e., [his] being and existence itself becomes an unbearable burden to [him]".²⁶ Ennui, that is boredom, as Kierkegaard in turn says, "this eternity devoid of content, this salvation devoid of joy, this superficial profundity, this hungry glut"²⁷, should not be underestimated, because it is boredom that, to recall Schopenhauer again, "in the end it depicts on the countenance real despair".²⁸ On the one hand, the present misery of the excluded, oppressed, life-long losers, and on the other hand the spleen of prosperity afflicting the privileged, successful, culturally and economically dominant, make the focus on the current moment, *hic et nunc*, not as appealing as it might seem. This is also another reason to look back with nostalgia, forward with hope, or upward with piety.

Focusing on looking back, on the past, I would like to briefly consider whether it is possible to make this moving towards the past, both collectively and individually, not only nostalgic-conservative, a longing for the "good old days" (which, incidentally, we have never had since human beings left the gates of the mythical Paradise), a compensatory attempt to escape from the present, whether for fear of an unknown future, a disillusioned and pessimistic look which, as Benjamin's Angel of History, sees in the past "one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble"²⁹. Perhaps it could be subversive, emancipatory, and progressive.

It could be a search, scanning individual or collective historical memory as if with a spotlight, bringing out moments, events, situations, but also longer periods in which resistance against all forms of enslavement, subjection, exclusion, domination, exploitation, violence and class, racial and gender discrimination was born and continued. Resistance that allows us to still hope that, despite everything, "a better world is possible". Impor-

» 24 M. Szulakiewicz, *Czas i to, co ludzkie. Szkice z chronozofii i kultury*, Toruń 2011, p. 37.

» 25 R. Kubicki, *Życ tylko po to, aby żyć?* [in:] *Język, rozumienie, komunikacja*, ed. M. Domaradzki, E. Kulczycki, M. Wendland, Poznań 2011, p. 248.

» 26 A. Schopenhauer, *The World As Will And Idea*, vol. I, transl. R. B. Haldane, J. Kemp, London 1909, p. 401, [online] <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38427/38427-pdf.pdf>> [accessed: 15 August 2018].

» 27 S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, transl. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, Princeton 1992, p. 285.

» 28 A. Schopenhauer, *The World As Will...*, p. 403.

» 29 W. Benjamin, *On the Concept of History* [1940], transl. D. Redmond, [online] <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/Theses_on_History.PDF> [accessed: 15 August 2018].

tantly, what is at stake is not – to invoke the young Warsaw - based philosopher and cultural theorist Michał Pospiszyl commenting on Benjamin's critique of hegemonic historiography - "the rewriting of history in such a way as to replace barons, diplomats and manufacturers by new heroes, this time representatives of people's classes".³⁰ Rather, it is what Pospiszyl calls the methodological shift, "after which history, instead of creating other smooth stories, related to the current political line, would become a reservoir of tensions, contradictions and conflicts, capable of changing the way of not only seeing the past, but also current social relations".³¹

Of course, such a "methodological shift" is not just a domain of historiography. It seems that art is equally, or maybe even better, suited for this purpose. Art, a form of cultural resistance, "guerrilla' warfare in symbolic communication",³² as a critical and subversive practice both recalls an uncomfortable, embarrassing or traumatic past and – no less importantly – in a more affirmative way recalls past counter-hegemonic practices, alternative habitus, herstories, minority histories. In a word, it gives voice to those who have so far remained silent in History. I would like to emphasize this second aspect of exploration of the past through art, because it seems that it was dominated, or at least overpowered by narratives recalling traumatic events related to the suffering of innumerable victims of Atlantic slavery, totalitarian regimes, ethnic cleansing, or wars. Let me just mention here such artists as: Christian Boltanski, Olbram Zoubek, Rudolf Herz, Tom Sachs, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Elżbieta Janicka, Mirosław Bałka, Rafał Jakubowicz, Zbigniew Libera, and Krystiana Robb-Narbutt.

Such reworkings of traumas and a memory of victims are by all means needed. Nevertheless, at least in part, I also agree with the diagnosis of the afore-quoted Enzo Traverso, who accuses present-day discourse on the past of a one-sided approach to the victims. Although the figure of the victim has become, as the historian writes, the "focus of the picture" of the past, "everything takes place as if the memory of the victims could not coexist with the memory of their struggles, their achievements and failures [...] The memory of the Gulag blurred the memory of revolutions, the memory of the Shoah replaced the memory of anti-fascism, while the memory of slavery obscured the memory of anti-colonialism".³³ And although art, as far as my modest knowledge of it allows me to say, is the least guilty, nevertheless, feeling (rightly or not?, as Artur Żmijewski indicates in his famous text "Applied social sciences"), guilt and shame

» 30 M. Pospiszyl, *Zatrzymać historię. Walter Benjamin i mniejszościowy materializm*, Warszawa 2016, p. 15-16.

» 31 *Ibidem*, p. 16.

» 32 J. Zydorowicz, *Artystyczny wirus. Polska sztuka krytyczna wobec przemian kultury po 1989 roku*, Warszawa 2005, p. 10.

» 33 E. Traverso, *Historia jako pole bitwy...*, p. 303.

for earlier political commitment to the cause of the totalitarian regime,³⁴ which instead of the “brave new world” built Gulag and Auschwitz, it is more inclined to empathically remember the suffering of the victims than the resistance and fight of these victims and those who defended them.

I would like to be properly understood here. Someone could read my statement as an unequivocal call for art to adopt a more active form of socio-political engagement, to serve the “cause”, in this context to support a leftist or perhaps emancipationist historical policy by, for example, restoring the memory of revolutionary fights, anti-fascism, or anti-colonialism. I do not deny that broadly understood artistic activities addressing such topics are close to me, especially restoring the memory of peasants’ resistance, which can be considered a Polish version of anti-colonial struggle.³⁵

I think therefore that addressing such subjects by Polish art is important, if only in the context of denial of peasant roots by a large part of Polish society and marginalizing peasant history.³⁶ Nevertheless, firstly, I am far from imposing anything on artists: let them do what they want and how they want. Secondly, I realize that such art can be quickly relegated to the role of, as Kowalczyk rightly notes, “only a political tool with attendant interpretative simplifications”³⁷. Art, meanwhile, as observed by Jan Sowa, who cannot be accused of a lack of socio-political engagement and who cares a lot about revising Polish history,³⁸ is the “realm of am-

» 34 See A. Żmijewski, *Stosowane nauki społeczne*, „Krytyka Polityczna” 11-12/2007, p. 14-24. See also a critical commentary on Żmijewski’s hypotheses by I. Kowalczyk: *Podróż do przeszłości. Interpretacje najnowszej historii w polskiej sztuce krytycznej*, Warszawa 2010, p. 292-293.

» 35 A brief explanation: it’s worth realizing that, *mutatis mutandis*, the situation of the peasantry, both in Poland during the time of nobility and during the partitions, especially until the abolition of serfdom, was similar to that of the conquered population in the colonial countries. Likewise, later, in the Polish-Soviet period, between the world wars, and even in communist Poland, and in the Third Polish Republic, we can successfully describe the condition of the Polish peasantry as postcolonial or, more precisely, post-dependence.

» 36 In the field of art, one of the most interesting artists of the young generation addressing the question of peasant history is Daniel Rycharski. When Rycharski graduated in Krakow, he moved his studio to his native village of Kurówko in the north of Mazovia, where he undertakes a range of artistic activities / interventions (initially called rural street art), involving local residents. Out of many of his interesting projects, it is worth mentioning in the context of restoring peasant history *The Gate* for the 150th anniversary of the abolition of serfdom (2014) and a mobile installation *Monument to a Peasant* (2015), which Rycharski built in collaboration with a village critical artist and constructor Stanisław Garbarczuk, Dorota Hadrian and Łukasz Surowiec, referring to the design of Albert Dürer’s monument or rather anti-monument to commemorate the victory over the rebellious peasantry in the so-called peasant war in Germany (1524-1526). I write more about Rycharski in the article *Przeciw-pamięć jako praktyka kontrhegemoniczna w sztukach (audio)wizualnych. Odpominanie chłopskiego dziedzictwa we współczesnych działaniach artystycznych i kulturowych*, [in:] *Sztuki w kontekście społecznym*, ed. Ł. Guzek, Gdańsk 2016, p. 82-83.

» 37 I. Kowalczyk, *Powrót do przeszłości...*, p. 293.

» 38 I mean his attempt to rewrite the history of Poland in a new way and to describe its socio-cultural identity with the help of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the theory of world systems, postcolonial studies, and the theory of hegemony put forth in the book *Fantomowe ciało króla*.

biguity and interpretation [...] is like a pleated skirt – extracting from it the ultimate and unequivocal sense, and thus articulating a unified social or political message, is a gesture analogous to ironing such a skirt, and therefore means its destruction”.³⁹

Therefore, realizing the dangers that lurk for artists engaging in current socio-political disputes, also those concerning the memory of past events, I nevertheless think that artists’ voice in this matter, apart from of course other voices (of historians, sociologists, politicians, columnists, etc.), is extremely important, because they focus, as already mentioned, on topics that are overlooked, marginalized or uncomfortable. Artists should therefore be actively involved in the discourse concerning current historical policy. Although during a lecture at the Laboratory of Borderline Questions at Adam Mickiewicz University (April 2017), Sowa said that the answer to right-wing historical policy is not to be left-wing politics, but left-wing futurological policy, because in the field of history the left is unlikely to win, I will disagree with him at this point. It seems to me that giving the field of history to conservative and traditionalist forces equals giving them the future, too, because as the Party slogan from Orwell’s 1984 ran: “Who controls the past, controls the future”.⁴⁰ These forces have well internalised the Orwellian lesson. But who controls the past, if not the one who controls the present? This was actually the second sentence of the above slogan. We must fight here and now to win the future. It means that in the field of memory and history, we should conduct a kind of “positional war”, which Chantal Mouffe speaks of. The stake is not really to establish a new hegemony in this area, but to show that “There are always alternatives that have been excluded by the dominant hegemony and that can be actualized”.⁴¹ A similar idea can be found in Guy Debord, who in one of his films, created in the founding years for the Situationalist International, claimed that the past belongs to the realm of dreams, which in turn shows us dreams from the past that have not yet been realized and demand an answer.⁴² Let us be the ambassadors of these dreams. ●

Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą, Kraków 2011. The fragment of this book in English: The King’s Phantom Body. A Peripheral Struggle with Modern Form. Introduction (excerpts), transl. P. Wasilewski, is available online: <http://www.academia.edu/16521919/Introduction_to_The_King_s_Phantom_Body_A_Peripheral_Struggle_with_Modern_Form_> [accessed: 16 August 2018].

» 39 J. Sowa, *Widmo zaangażowania krąży po gazetach*, „Ha!art” 23/2006, p. 129-130.

» 40 G. Orwell, 1984, New York 1977, p. 248.

» 41 C. Mouffe, *Agonistics. Thinking the World Politically*, London – New York 2013 [e-book].

» 42 See P. Mościcki, *My też mamy już przeszłość. Guy Debord i historia jako pole bitwy*, Warszawa 2015, p. 54.

