The Language of Hysteria:

Pathos, Claustrophobia and Mass Memory

in the Writing of Dorota Masłowska

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I, Aleksandra Marta Rychlicka, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis examines the literary constructions of memory, history and suffering in the writing of an iconic Polish author of the new generation, Dorota Masłowska (b. 1983). I read Masłowska's work as an intervention to the way that Polish writers have been negotiating the past. No longer obliged to archive the collective memory, Masłowska's writing creates a literary language that most poignantly reflects the evolution of Polish collective remembrance. Marked by the 'suffering of surviving,' this experience has led to a memory model corresponding to hysteria: a distinct form of suffering which I conceptualise in opposition to the dominant model of trauma theory.

Drawing on the work of Polish psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński, I claim that it is neither any single traumatic event nor an accumulation of identifiable historical tragedies that torments the Polish nation, but rather the intangible mental suffering which results from being unable to specify the cause of pain. This thesis moves away from the symbolism of 'bloodlands', (Timothy Snyder's influential term for the region) to the symbolism of cultural 'graves', articulated in the writing of Masłowska.

The thesis then investigates the most vulnerable and revealing element of culture: its language. Masłowska's signature blend of official jargons, media noise, slang and slogans explodes with emotions but conveys no meaning. Her writing captures the sound of cultural hysteria, which I read in terms of aggression but also suffering, failed pathos and isolation. Masłowska's language of hysteria becomes an incubator for 'mass memory', my concept to describe collective memory in post-1989 Poland. Drawing on Kępiński's theory of information metabolism, the thesis explores how earlier symbols have lost their connection with the present and became 'empty signs,' unable either to inform or unite people.

Impact Statement

My thesis offers a new reading of the works of an acclaimed Polish writer, Dorota Masłowska. It aims to contribute to the literary research on Masłowska's writing, as well as to expand the interpretation and application of her works.

In my thesis, I examine Masłowska's texts against a wider cultural background of Polish culture. As such, my research offers a new approach to the concepts of memory and suffering. It argues that distinct histories of collective remembrance produce particular value systems that shape how groups perceive and articulate pain. Poland presents a privileged case of the dynamic I explore because, unlike Western European countries, it has never left the stage of memory development in which memory is identified with history. There are two distinct aspects of my research that have a broader relevance for a non-academic public.

Firstly, my project explores the changes in the structures of collective remembering that occur when a culture becomes uprooted and loses its former points of reference. The research examines how earlier symbols lose their connection with the present and thus become 'empty signs,' which neither inform nor have a power to bind a group. The research on how the past is negotiated in such conditions becomes particularly relevant in the light of the growing migration, which is predicted to become a defining experience of the twenty-first century. Traditionally, a variety of different groups that a person belonged to – nations, cultural institutions, religious communities – did most of those negotiations on our behalf. My thesis analyses how individuals, once they are uprooted from their past and lose their old points of reference, relate to collective remembrance.

Secondly, I research the correlation between the concepts of suffering and distinct value systems that groups develop. My project emphasises the socio-cultural relativity of both the experience and the recognition of suffering. It demonstrates the urgency of letting cultures define pain in their own language without fearing that their suffering will pass unrecognised. Drawing on the work of Polish psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński, I discuss how technological development heightens the significance of emotions in contemporary discourses. In a world of limitless access to information without stable points of reference, it is the emotional approach to one's environment that determines which information we select.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Poles without the Past?

The Struggle with Memory in the Works of

Dorota Masłowska

1.   Whose memory is it? Introduction

In the opening pages of his landmark work *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur explains that his phenomenology of memory revolves around two questions: "Of what are there memories?" and "Whose memory is it?"[1]. This basic distinction between "what" and "who" separates memories from their recollection – the passive nature of memories that pop into our mind from the active search for a particular memory[2].

It is this distinction that becomes crucial while analysing the work of the Polish writer Dorota Masłowska (b. 1983) and the ambivalent status of collective memory in her literary world. In Masłowska's writing, characters recall memories of events that they did not live through, but claim to remember. The distinction between 'of what are there memories' and 'whose memory is it' becomes more and more blurry.

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[1] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, London : University of Chicago Press , 2004), p. 3.
[2] ibid, p. 4.

In the period 2002 -2009 that my dissertation focuses on, the notion of memory undergoes a progression in Masłowska's body of work, gradually gaining more relevance. It begins on an implicit level, encoded in the broken language that carries unrecognizable traces of the past, such as in Masłowska's debut novel *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* [White and Red, 2000], and ends in a literal explosion in her second drama, *Między nami dobrze jest* [No Matter How Hard We Tried, 2008]. All of the works, however, explore a severe crisis of collective memory that Masłowska's characters suffer from in the literary world of her fiction.

The historical legacy of Poland cannot be changed, *no matter how hard we tried*. The way we approach the past, however, is a matter of on-going discussions carried from the position of the present and thus reflects the current situation more so than it describes the preceding events. The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who introduced the notion of collective memory, stressed its communicative nature within 'social frameworks', such as families, schools, nations, cultures etc. Participation in collective memory proceeds and preconditions the individual: 'it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection'[3]. Consequently, memory is never fixed. The values and claims held in the present determine how we negotiate the memory of the past. Halbwachs argued that 'in reality the past does not recur as such, that everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present'[4]. Another seminal figure of memory studies, the German literary scholar Aleida Assmann, responded to the confusion regarding

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[3] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 38.
[4] ibid, pp. 39–40.

broad use of the term 'collective memory' by stressing that 'institutions and larger social groups [...] do not "have" a memory – they make one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments'[5].

In Masłowska's writing, the struggle with such 'memory-making' that A. Assmann describes is not a matter of interest but urgency; a vital component of her signature language. The literary world that the writer creates is tainted with traces of the past. Tainted, because the historical traces in her fiction turn into relics that lose their communicative function. Instead of serving as bridges between the past and the present, these remnants become metaphorical bumps on the road, upon which one stumbles whenever trying to move towards the future.

2.   Floating figures of memory

While Halbwachs emphasised the ever-changing nature of collective memory, Jan Assmann discerned and explored 'cultural memory', focusing on elements of remembrance that allow communities form and retained their identity across generations. Drawing on the earlier works of Nietzsche, Halbwachs and the art historian Aby Warburg, J. Assmann argued that 'objectivized culture has the structure of memory'[6], facilitating transmission of its values and unique traits through cultural objects, texts and rituals. These 'figures of memory', as Assmann calls them, do not

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[5] Aleida Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory'. *Social Research* 1.75 (2008), pp. 49-72 (p. 55).
[6] Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,' trans. by John Czaplicka. *New German Critique* 65 (1995), pp. 125-133 (p. 128).

depend on the everyday and hence can be carried through time, becoming cultural 'fixed points'.

The historical conditions of Poland, however, particularly in the twentieth century, destabilised the cultural 'fixed points'. The Second World War, followed by the period of Soviet dominance from 1946 to 1989, produced a diversity of 'figures of memory' – often conflicting – that have been competing for the status of 'fixed points'. The Second Polish Republic (1918-1939) and the Polish People's Republic (1947-1989), not only had different borders but also altered street names, national holidays and national heroes. The memories concerning Holocaust and the war, such as those of the 1940 Katyn Massacre[7], were systematically suppressed in the Polish People's Republic, since 'the emerging communist regimes turned the subject into a quasi-taboo, both because they wanted to foreground the suffering of communists and the Russian folk, and because the traumas under Hitler resembled all too closely those under Stalin.'[8] Consequently, the Polish figures of memory could not been fixed, but remained floating, still dependent on various social frameworks rather than a part of objectified culture.

And yet these social frameworks of memory also remained distinctly affected by the swift political changes, which often broke the sequence of familial and generational legacy. In post-war Poland the political situation hindered the

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[7] Katyn Massacre was a mass execution of Polish military officers and intelligentsia by the Soviet Union in 1940. In 1943 the Germans announced they discovered mass graves in the Katyn forest. The Soviets denied the responsibility, shifting the blames on the Nazis. The memory of Katyn Massacre became a taboo during the period of communism. In 1992 the Russian government released documents proving that the Soviets were behind the mass execution in Katyn forest.
[8] John Neubauer, 'Introduction. Figures of Trauma', in *History of the literary cultures of East-Central Europe : junctures and disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries*, pp. 461-462, (p. 461).

communicative memory, which in its nature relies exclusively on everyday communication. The early communist regime, particularly during the Stalinist era of 1948-56, blurred the line between public and personal. The memory communicated at schools, workplaces and various social gatherings was closely surveyed by the state and often did not equate with one's personal experience of what happened during and after the Second World War. Consequently, this everyday informal memory, which in normal circumstances lasts from seventy five up to one hundred years[9] passing from one generation to another in oral form, was abruptly interrupted by the Communist regime. The experience of the Second World War was carefully filtered to fit the official policy of Politburo; communicative memory was to adhere to that policy, not personal experience. The manipulation around the processes of forgetting and remembering by those who hold power will be discussed in more detail in the later section of this chapter. I would like to stress, however, that the historical conditions of the twentieth century not only led to the lack of fixed points in Polish cultural memory, but the everyday communicative memory – 'a joke, a memory, a bit of gossip, or an experience'[10] – also lost its credibility as a source of information about the past.

Memory abuse

Silences, as well as imposed memories, constitute instances of what Paul Ricoeur notably defined as 'memory abuses'. An abuse of memory is directly linked to

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[9] J. Assmann, p. 127.
[10] ibid

how memory is '*exercised*'[11], since the possibility of exploitation is embodied in the very nature of remembering: 'the fundamental vulnerability of memory, which results from the relation between the absence of the thing remembered and its presence in the mode of representation'[12]. This vulnerability is frequently used to contradict past experience on the factual level, but can also refer to subtler violation through imposed commemorations or reinforcement of debt allegedly owed to the past. The latter is frequently present in discussions on cultural heritage and legacy, 'in the sense of an appeal to conscience that proclaims itself to be speaking for the victims' demand for justice.'[13]

In my dissertation, memory abuse – in reference to Ricoeur's theoretical framework – is understood as any intentional exercise of memory that aims at controlling the present. Such exploitation results in pathologizing the natural processes of remembering and forgetting, turning them from a support system into an impasse. Consequently, the present is in service to its past.

The impact of memory used instrumentally, to satisfy the demands of the present – an instance of memory abuse, as discussed above – in constructing the world of Masłowska's writing will be explored throughout my dissertation. My research explores the particular strain that arises from culturally inheriting memories that are charged with the duty to remember but no longer resonate with the present experience, thus failing to bind a group. And it is this tension between the (omni)presence of collective memories in the public sphere and one's clashing

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[11] Paul Ricoeur, 'On Memory and Recollection,' in *Memory, History, Forgetting,* trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, London : University of Chicago Press , 2004), pp. 56-91 (p. 69).
[12] ibid, pp. 57-58.
[13] ibid, p. 89.

personal experience of the past, combined with destabilisation of cultural fixed points, that becomes central in the work of Dorota Masłowska.

Masłowska's writing brilliantly captures what happens to language in a world without steady points of reference in the past. Her writing discloses gradual disempowerment of language which leads to the breakage of linguistic code, disabling communication and ultimately identification with any given group. I read the characters' language of confusion in Masłowska's work as a desperate struggle for identity; the present of their literary world seems not only detached, but in opposition with the commemorated historical past. Words and concepts are used incorrectly and roam freely, since their ignored origins make them interchangeable. This seemingly random use of language mirrors the randomness of what is remembered and recollected.

The following chapter overviews the major developments in the history of memory in Polish culture to better position the literary world of Masłowska's writing; a world that struggles with its own past. While by no means exhaustive, my analysis highlights the historical conditions that most profoundly impacted the cultural system in which memory has become both a matter of survival and a source of torment.

3. The new founding myths

After the fall of communism in 1989, Poland's borders were unchanged, but its figures of memory – national holidays, commemorated historical events, street names or schools' required readings – once again changed. Since the early 1990s, the new

democracy has been ferociously renegotiating its past and creating new founding myths, such as that of the Polish trade union *Solidarność* (Solidarity), the 1944 Warsaw Uprising and the Polish resistance movement during the Second World War Armia Krajowa (Home Army). At the same time, the power of these historical events to become binding figures of memory for all Poles has remained questionable.

Dorota Masłowska's fourth fictional work, *Między nami dobrze jest* [No Matter How Hard We Tried, 2008] tackles precisely this matter, as the author openly laments 'the lack of platform, on which it all could meet and we could say 'we''[14]. The drama introduces a new form of engagement with the collective remembrance in Masłowska's body of work, for the first time directly confronting Polish history. While *No Matter How Hard We Tried* will be discussed at greater length in the Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I would like to stress here the lack of emotional link with the publicly commemorated past that Masłowska's play emphasises. Despite the omnipresence of war-related symbols and memories in present-day Poland, the new generation born in the 1980s struggles to recognise them as a part of their own heritage that would facilitate maintaining a cultural continuity between distinct historical periods.

One of the main reasons behind the disempowerment of collective memories is that the past in the postcommunist Poland has become highly politicised. The playwright Julia Holewińska (b. 1983), Dorota Masłowska's coeval, explains the historical focus of her work with wanting to counteract the situation, in which 'the

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[14] Dorota Masłowska, 'Polska to brzydka dziewczyna' [Poland is an ugly girl]. Interview by Justyna Soboloweska, *Dziennik*, 21 March 2009. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; 'Zderzyłam pokolenia: języki, sposoby myślenia, funkcjonowania, inne codzienności, żeby wydobyć ten zgrzyt, ten brak czegoś takiego jak "statystyczny Polak", brak platformy, na której to by się wszystko spotykało i moglibyśmy powiedzieć "my"'.

politicians were trying to impose official politics of history'[15]. Holewińska's critically acclaimed debut *Ciała obce* [Foreign Bodies, 2010], awarded the Gdynia Drama Award, challenges such reinforcement of a historical narrative. *Foreign Bodies* focuses on the transgender activist of *Solidarność*, Adam, who becomes Ewa Hołuszko years after the political transformation. In Holewińska's play, this personal decision negatively impacts the perception of the protagonist's former underground activity. When the present-day cultural system, which identifies the heroic actions of *Solidarność* with Catholic and conservative values, clashes with the factual evidence, it is the past that is forced to change; the history gets erased and re-written.

The spectacle of forced commemoration, in which the new figures of memory are imposed externally rather than emerge from an emotional need to honour the memory of previous generations, is the subject of Sylwia Chutnik's (b. 1979) short story 'Poor Children Look at Poor Adults' [Biedne dzieci patrzą na biednych dorosłych, 2009]. The action of Chutnik's story is set in a contemporary Polish classroom during a discussion on the tradition of uprisings. A female student stands up to confess her greatest dream: she wishes for her future son to become a soldier and to sew him a baby version of a military uniform. Another student delivers a brief anecdote of his sixteen-year-old grandmother raped by a partisan soldier, 'a wonderful, wonderful story of romantic love and conception in the name of peace'[16], as the teacher enthusiastically remarks. But Chutnik's short story is more than satire on

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[15] Julia Holewińska, 'Rewolucja 30-latków' [The revolution of the 30-year-olds]. Interview by Izabela Szymańska. *Gazeta.pl Warszawa*. Gazeta Stołeczna. Web. 22 November 2011. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; 'Może to też kwestia tego, że kilka lat temu politycy chcieli narzucić oficjalną politykę historyczną'.

[16] Sylwia Chutnik, 'Biedne dzieci patrzą na biednych dorosłych,' in *Nie pytaj o Polskę*, ed. by Sylwia Chutnik and Ewa Aksionek. (Budzyń : Wydawnictwo AMEA, 2009), p. 13. All the translations mine unless otherwise indicated.

commemorative practises in contemporary Poland – it juxtaposes the externally imposed versions of the past with the right of every individual to participate in the cultural legacy on their own terms. The story captures how the end of the official commemoration marks the beginning of private remembering. When the teacher thanks her students for a wonderful discussion, a boy who first ironized the question regarding joining a speculative uprising, now rises from his chair and quietly asks: 'I beg you, stop asking me about the uprising.'[17]. The student's plea is not a sign of boredom or indifference, but a call for a genuine tribute: 'I was born fifty years after the war, I saw nothing, I remember nothing. But I dream about it. Because this is mine'[18]. Chutnik's critique of commemorative practises in contemporary Poland does not try to abandon the memory of past tragedies, but to account for the blood that the tradition of martyrdom has authorised.

Significantly, the title of Chutnik's short story referrers to Jan Błoński's seminal essay 'The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto', published in *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 1987. In his text, Błoński calls the Polish culture to account for the bloodshed of Jews that they witnessed on Polish soil. The crucial notion that the essay discusses is that of passive 'looking', which attributes responsibility for the crimes committed. Błoński's argument highlights one of the most fundamental silences in Polish collective memory: Polish-Jewish relations during and after the war. While forgetting is both natural and necessary, and in fact constitutes a critical part of remembering, silencing the past violates those processes. Luciana Passerini stresses the active nature of memory as

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[17] ibid, p. 14.
[18] ibid

well as oblivion; both require a conscious decision[19]. Passerini then divides oblivion into externally imposed amnesias and self-chosen silences.

This distinction is crucial to understand the more nuanced changes to negotiating memory in Poland before and after the fall of communism in 1989. Just as the period of Soviet dominance notoriously suppressed memory of the events that were uncomfortable for the regime, the 1990s disclosed a number of lesser-known silences, voluntarily chosen by various communities. Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Sąsiedzi*: *Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* [Neighbours. The destruction of Jewish Community in Jedwabne, 2000] sparked an unprecedented national debate on the Polish-Jewish past, 'covered in the media every single day between autumn 2000 and autumn 2002.'[20]. Gross's work detailed the mass killing of Polish Jews by their Polish neighbors in Jedwabne on 10 July 1941, and resulted in 'a shift in social awareness regarding the atrocities of the past and their legacy for the future'[21].

The dangers of politicised history which aims at creating a homogenous narrative of the past, 'whose purpose is to establish true memory'[22] are stressed by the French historian Pierre Nora, who argues that such an approach necessarily 'runs the blade of a knife between the heartwood of memory and the bark of history'[23]. The three literary works by Masłowska, Holewińska and Chutnik poignantly capture this

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[19] Luciana Passerini, 'Memories between Silence and Oblivion', in *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts*, ed. by K. Hodgkin and S. Radstone (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003), pp. 238-254, (p. 240).
[20] Andrzej Kaczyńki, 'Jan Tomasz Gross – Neighbours.' culture.pl. 13 March 2011. Web. 12 September 2018.
[21] ibid
[22] Pierre Nora, 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History', in *Realms of memory: the construction of the French past*, ed. Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 1- 20 (p. 4).
[23] ibid

violation, offering both a critique and an alternative method of negotiating collective memory. In their writing, the authors re-visit seemingly sealed pages of history in order to establish a more personal relation with what happened before us. Ann Rigney, a literary scholar exploring the link between literature and memory, stresses that literature does not have to be limited to an act of remembrance in the literary canon, but can become its agent: "creative writers, precisely because of their imaginative power and powers of expression, can give voice to views of the past that have hitherto been neglected or obscured in more official and 'disciplined' forms of historical writing"[24].

Such creative agency, bringing to the frontline of public attention unique aspects of common history, constitutes a new possibility, and a new challenge, for Polish literature. Aleida Assmann explains the recent 'memory boom' as 'a general desire to reclaim the past as an important part of the present'[25] and proclaims the request for a more active role in constructing memories as 'a new status and right in the mediated democratic society'[26]. However, the situation of the new Polish writers who came to maturity after 1989 is more complex, shaped both by historical conditions and the unique role they have assigned to literature.

On the one hand, 'the past' that is negotiated in the present-day Poland is not theirs – not in the strict sense of a first-hand experience. They belong to the third-generation which, unlike those born in the late 1960s and 1970s, did not participate in the historical tragedies of the twentieth century. Their struggle is that of finding a

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[24] Ann Rigney, 'Memory,' in *Imagology. The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters*, ed. by M. Beller and J. Leerssen (Amsterdam – New York : Rodopi, 2007), p. 362
[25] A. Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory,' p. 54.
[26] ibid, p. 55.

deeply personal value in the experience of previous generations; the challenge that Dorota Masłowska's *No Matter How Hard We Tried* wrestles with. Such individual quests to find meaning in the past through looking at its personal side, however, clash with the well-established tradition of Polish literature obliged to pay tribute to those who gave their lives for freedom; the tradition of heroism and martyrdom that Holewińska's and Chutnik's texts confront.

The seminal poet from the post-war generation, Adam Zagajewski (b. 1945), argues in a deeply personal essay *Pisać po polsku* [Writing in Polish] that to write in Polish implies taking on one's shoulders the weight of the complex heritage of Polish history[27]. Zagajewski points out not only the partitions and uprisings in the nineteenth century, but also the more recent experiences of world wars and the Communist regime. The essay, listing the great literary achievements of the post-war writers – "Giants" as the poet calls them – functions as a reminder for the new generation. It points out that the aesthetics of contemporary Polish literature have roots in traumatic experiences of the past[28].

Zagajewski's voice, highlighting the ongoing relevance of Polish tragic history and the duties it entails for the new writers, is far from singular. Maria Janion (b. 1926), a leading scholar of Romanticism, stresses the unique link between those who are alive and their dead ancestors. Janion argues that this intimate relationship with the past constitutes the foundation of Polish culture, repeating the words of the artist and

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[27] Adam Zagajewski, 'Pisać po polsku,' in *W obronie żarliwości* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 2002).
[28] ibid.

critic Józef Czapski[29]: 'A Pole is someone who cannot forget the innocent sacrifice'[30].

It could be argued that Zagajewski's and Janion's claims to remain faithful to the cultural heritage have nothing specifically local or contextual to them and could as well be applied to any other nation. Ross Poole, who analyses the ethical side of the duties we have towards the past, points out that collective memory – understood as memory associated with social groups – is always normative. Alongside information, it also transmits responsibilities[31]. Consequently, any collective memory makes claims to the past and passes them to the present generation. How is the context of Poland any different?

The following sections provide an overview of the relationship between history, memory and literature in Polish culture. My aim is to draft a genealogy of a uniquely Polish tradition – a demand on literature to record and guard the past, turning it into the key archive of collective memory.

4.   'You will remember': literature and memory

Since the end of the eighteenth century in Poland, to forget was to perish. The

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[29] Józef Czapski (1986-1993), an artist, author and critic. An oficer in the Polish Army, Czapski surrvived the Katyń Massacre of 1940. In 2016, the National Museum of Krakow opened up the Joseph Czapski Pavillion.

[30] Maria Janion, *Do Europy tak, ale tylko z naszymi umarłymi* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2000), p. 6. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Polakiem jest ten, kto tych ofiar niewinnych nie może zapomnieć'.

[31] Ross Poole, 'Memory, history and the claims of the past'. *Memory Studies* 1.149 (2008), pp. 149-166.

Third Partition of Poland in the 1795[32] saw the country disappear from the map of Europe for 123 years. Its disintegration led to Poland becoming 'a virtual concept, an ideal nation without a state, carried in the hearts and idealism of its people rather than institutions.'[33]. As an idea-nation, its continuity relied solely on its people voluntarily transforming themselves into cultural archives - a defence that has become characteristic of Polish dealings with the past. The poet Czesław Miłosz described the ontological status of Poland under the Third Partition in following words: 'the *Respublica* disappeared from the map of Europe, but it survived in the minds of its inhabitants.'[34].

But to remember was to carry the pain. Ricoeur extracts this ambiguous power of memory and points out that 'the duty of memory constitutes, at one and the same time, the epitome of good use and of abuse in the exercise of memory'[35]. Thus exists a highly nuanced interrelation between Polish culture and memory, where the duty to remember altered from a source of strength into an impediment. As Miłosz observed in his introduction to Romanticism in Polish literature, a period defined by partitions and uprisings[36]: 'if the history of the country can be called "abnormal," its thought and literature were no less so.'[37]. The 'abnormality' of Polish literature was in the tangible power but also the duty it suddenly obtained as both the chief archive for collective

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[32] In the second half of eighteen century the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had undergone a series of three partitions, in 1772, 1793, 1795, conducted by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Habsburg Austria.

[33] Beller and Leersen, 'Poland,' in *Imagology…*, pp. 216-219 (p. 217).

[34] Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1983), p. 195.

[35] Ricoeur, p. 87.

[36] During the Third Partition of Poland the nation fought two battles for independence, November Uprising (1830-31) and January Uprising (1863), the failure of which significantly defined the literary tradition.

[37] Miłosz, p. 200.

memory and the symbolic locus of socio-political ideas.

Texts, and more specifically literature, have always been one of the most powerful memorial signs. Pierre Nora claims that 'Memory has known only two forms of legitimacy: historical and literary'[38]. These two, Nora argues, have developed separately without intersecting, at least until the boundary was blurred by the recent development of new history, *nouvelle histoire*, which rejected the old assumption of objectivity. In this newly rearranged space, literature is displaced by history as the latter 'has become a substitute for imagination'[39]. In the quest for vanishing memory, history takes the lead and literature only assists with past-oriented narratives.

The opposite could be said for Polish culture, in which the boundary between history and literature has traditionally been blurry. While in the countries such as France or England the nineteenth century marked the separation of these two; Poland experienced the opposite phenomenon. E.M. Forster famously depicted English novelists as 'seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum reading-room – all writing their novels simultaneously. They do not think "I live under Queen Victoria, I under Anne"'[40] but rather, they are fully consumed by creative processes and completely oblivious to the historical influences governing their work. Paraphrasing Forster's metaphor, nineteenth century Polish writers could be visualised as seated together in a classroom, all writing their final exams on the compulsory topics defined by history. Miłosz emphasised those roles by analogy to western Romanticism: 'though Shelley called the poet a lawgiver for humanity, few

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[38] Nora, p. 20.

[39] ibid

[40] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel.* (Edward Arnold & Co: London, 1927), pp. 18-19.

people in England, we may suspect, took that claim seriously. As a consequence of national misfortunes, the reading public in Poland gave literal acceptance to a similar claim on the part of their own poets.'[41]. Maria Janion argued that 'Our bards are to us what the prophets are to Jews'[42].

The escalation in both the power and status of literature that could be observed in Poland reflected the split between the public historic domain in the hands of great powers and the collective memory of common people. Andrew Baruch Wachtel even proposed a cultural definition of Eastern Europe as 'that part of the world where serious literature and those who produce it have traditionally been overvalued'[43]. His statement is provocative, serving as a point of departure to analyse the context that provided writers with such prominence and then investigate how their status changed in post-1989 conditions. Wachtel observes that in Eastern Europe literature 'far from being a reflection of reality, was frequently a creator of new identities and new social and political realities'[44]. Yet, in the light of the earlier analysis of the interplay between memory, history and literature, these statements merely demonstrate rather than explain the phenomenon of the unique status obtained by literature.

As early as 1882, in the classical work *What is a nation?*, Ernest Renan stressed that nation-building requires a shared past just as much as a common vision for the future. In order to be shared, however, the past needs to be stored in a place that is both reliable and provides relatively easy access for all group members. In the

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[41] Miłosz, p. 203.
[42] Janion, p. 6.
[43] Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Remaining relevant after communism: the role of the writer in Eastern Europe.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 4.
[44] ibid, p. 12.

countries such as France or England, these criteria were fulfilled by the professionalised discipline of history. Pierre Nora points out that in France 'history was holy, because the nation was holy'[45].

In the nineteenth-century, however, the Polish nation's past could not be expressed through the modern discipline of history. At that time countries such as England, France and Germany entered the phase of 'polarization between history and memory'[46]. The new critical historical scholarship that was distinguishing itself from collective memory required autonomy; history was to be independent not only from power, but also from the demands of various communities. A. Assmann observes in her account of the history of memory that 'by developing an ideal of disinterested objectivity, the old bond between history and identity was cut'[47].

The precarious political situation of the Polish nation, however, forced the nineteenth-century Polish history writing to remain in the premodern stage, in which 'the central function of the writing of history to preserve the memory of a dynasty, the church, or a state in order to legitimize such institutions and to ensure their continuity by providing for them an honourable past.'[48].

The strength of Polish history writing in the nineteenth century was then proportional to the strength of the ideological demands of the dispersed nation. Some of the most renowned historians of the time were also freedom-fighters: Joachim Lelewel fought in the November Uprising in 1830, and Józef Szulski the January

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[45] Nora, p. 5.
[46] A. Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory', p. 59.
[47] ibid
[48] ibid, p. 57.

Uprising in 1863. Their writing of history, aimed at preserving the Polish nation, was an example of premodern historiography, which 'at this stage was fully adapted to the demands of the present; it served specific functions for the state or community (...)'[49].

The main demand during the partitions of Poland was that of continuity and making sense of the historical misfortunates. These demands are, however, the domain of a narrative rather than facts. As Renan observed in the already mentioned speech 'What is a Nation?': 'progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for nationality'[50]. It is then not surprising that the Polish history writing in the nineteenth century was mutually intertwined with literature.

The Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz wrote in 1822 a poem entitled 'Do Joachima Lelewela' ['To Joachim Lelewel'], praising his former professor, who used to teach Mickiewicz at the Imperial University of Vilnius[51]. Later, the Polish playwright and artist Stanisław Wyspiański chose Lelewel as his title protagonist in the drama *Lelewel* (1899), one of Wyspiański's three plays concerned with the 1830 November Uprising. Lelewel himself is believed to have authored the legendary Polish slogan 'For our freedom and yours'[52]. Another prominent figure in nineteenth century Polish history writing, Józef Szujski[53], began his career as a poet, and continued his literary activity throughout his life, publishing poems and dramas alongside his work as an

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[49] ibid, 57.
[50] Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', in *What is a Nation? and Other Political Writing*, trans. and ed. by M.F.N. Giglioli (New York, Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 247- 263 (p. 251).
[51] Joachim Lelewel (1786-1861), Polish historian, politician and writer. A public figure and a renown lecturer at the Imperial University of Vilnius. After the failure of the 1830 November Uprising, in which he actively participated, Lelewel emigrated. He died in Paris in 1861.
[52] 'Za wolność waszą i naszą', a slogan created during a manifestation in Warsaw in the period of the 1830 November Uprising. It has since been frequently used during various fights for independence, gaining an iconic status.
[53] Józef Szujski (1835-1883), Polish historian, poet and playwright. A professor of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and a co-founder of the literary journal *Polish Review* (1866-1914).

historian.

The literary inclinations of both nineteenth-century historians were greatly dictated by the demands of the political conditions of the Polish nation in the nineteenth century, particularly its fight for independence. At the same time writers occupied themselves with history, creating works that could have a binding and formative power for the dispersed nation. Henryk Sienkiewicz, Nobel prize-winning Polish writer, whose monumental series of three novels *Trylogia* [The Trilogy, 1884-1888][54] dramatized famous historical events, famously ended his final volume stating the intention behind his work – 'to raise the spirits' [55] of Polish nation.

Thus, while in the sovereign European countries, such as famously discussed by Nora's nineteenth-century France, 'historians, speaking half as soldiers, half as priests, bore the burden of responsibility on behalf of nation'[56], Eastern European nations that were ruled by the empires 'thrust writers into positions of esteem and status that in other places in the world have been reserved for statesmen, philosophers, businessmen, or entertainers'[57]. Polish remembrance thus originated in memory's other legacy: literature. Paraphrasing Nora's argument, in Poland literature was not itself holy, but it performed a function for the holy memory, thus giving it, and writers, the uncommonly powerful status that Wachtel discusses.

The relevance of writers was not absolute, but in fact relative: what mattered

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[54] Sienkiewicz's *Trylogia* includes *Ogniem i mieczem* [With Fire and Sword, 1884], *Potop* [The Deluge, 1886] and *Pan Wołodyjowski* [Fire in the Steppe, 1888].
[55] Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Pan Wołodyjowski* (Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980), p. 482. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Na tym kończy się ten szereg książek pisanych w ciągu kilku lat i w niemałym trudzie – dla pokrzepienia serc'.
[56] Nora, p. 5.
[57] Wachtel, p. 12.

was not their profession, but their function. As writers they could perform certain services – such as commemoration of shared past – that the occupied nation required and struggled to obtain elsewhere. Maria Janion notes that Poland 'is the only country in Europe, where literature to that degree shaped lives, that is our behaviours – the romantic literature'[58].

Yet it is at least debatable whether 'relevance' defined in such terms could be considered a privilege or whether it constitutes an implicit constraint to artistic freedom of expression. What is more certain, however, is that Polish literature formed a symbiotic bond with the society, becoming more receptive, but also more vulnerable to historical processes that govern the nation.

During the nineteenth and twentieth century struggles for independence – whether during the period of Partitions, the Second World War or the Communist regime - literary texts were often the only testimonies, granted with incomparable binding power. But writers who accept the role of annalists, submit themselves to the ultimate command of memory: 'Thou shalt not forget' - since, as Paul Ricoeur noted: 'To say: you will remember, is also to say: you will not forget'[59]. It is precisely this transformation from permitting a community to remember to not allowing it to forget that converted use of memory into an abuse.

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[58] Maria Janion, 'Logo "Polonia"', in *Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi*, pp. 35-51 (p. 36).
[59] Ricoeur, p. 87.

5. Thou shalt not forget: memory abuses

The burden of the past that lingers relentlessly, blocking access to the present, is neither a recent nor exclusively Polish, or Eastern European phenomenon. In fact, Ricoeur stresses that the majority of collective remembering oscillates between a good use and abuse of memory since the duty to remember - that of preserving the past but also being indebted to it - is imbedded in the very nature of memory.

Ricoeur applies Friedrich Nietzsche's thought on history into the realm of collective memory to examine how a certain approach to remembering can result in an abuse of memory. Nietzsche examined the ultimate inertia that results from the burden of the past, demonstrating that if the past does not fade away, the present will. The paradox of memory is that of a double-edged sword: the faculty of remembering prevents the past from perishing, but inability to forget precludes forward movement, thus transforming memory into a severe impediment:

> Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic. A man who wanted to feel historically through and through would be like one forcibly deprived of sleep, or an animal that had to live only by rumination and ever repeated rumination. Thus: it is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting.[60]

What Ricoeur discusses as both abnormal and harmful exercise of memory– hence the term 'abuse' – becomes the prevailing state in Polish culture, whilst its catastrophic byproduct – inability to forget and move forward – the dominant function of collective memory. Thus, I propose to look at the history of memory in Polish culture through the lens of memory abuses. I mark the chronology of such memory/history

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[60] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the uses and disadvantages of history for life'. *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 59-123 (p. 62).

relation with the three distinct types of memory abuses, as theorised by Ricoeur. Each distinguishes a different level on which the violation of natural memory happens: Blocked, or wounded memory, refers to the pathological level; manipulated memory results from the practises of ideologies and regimes that instrumentalise remembering; and obligated memory examines the subtle ethico-political dimension, which, in the name of the past, imposes duties onto the present. These abuses have shaped, I suggest, and continue to influence, the concept of memory, the culture of remembering, but also the perception of suffering, which will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.

Stage 1: Blocked Memory

In Ricoeur's scrutiny, blocked memory designates the first, pathological-therapeutic level on which the abuse of the work of memory takes place. In the broadest sense blocked memory is a 'sick historic memory,'[61] one that hurts due to the violent experience of history, and it is this meaning of Ricoeur's first type of memory abuse that I relate to nineteenth century Poland.

The psychoanalytical category of 'trauma' and 'wound' that Ricoeur transfers from the personal to the collective dealings with the past need to be treated with caution when applied to the history of memory abuses. Studying Poland's experience of the Partitions without considering the twentieth century becomes highly misleading when the abuse at the pathological level is superimposed on the manipulated memory of Communism and obligated memory of the post-1989 new democracy. Chapter 2

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[61] Ricoeur, p. 79.

examines in detail the nuanced but fundamental difference between suffering as articulated by trauma theory and one that results from history of memory abuses. At this point of the discussion, however, I merely would like to stress that Ricoeur's concept of memory that hurts due to tangible historical losses offers both powerful and productive framework for the state of remembering in the partitioned, nineteenth-century Poland. Ricoeur argues that in the case of collective memory 'the notion of the lost object finds a direct application in the "losses" that affect the power, territory, and populations that constitute the substance of a state'[62]. It is difficult to dismiss how concrete that notion of the lost object becomes in regard to a state that literally disappeared from the map of Europe for 123 years after the Third Partition in 1795.

Maria Janion noted that the loss of independence not only permanently scarred the post-partition generations, but that injury took a particular form 'which cannot be forgotten and through which constantly infiltrates – bitter and virulent – truth about reality.'[63]. The strain to Poland's collective memory, triggered by the inability to forget the national disgrace of losing its political sovereignty as well as its territory, was intensified by the two unsuccessful uprisings: the November Uprising in 1830 and the January Uprising in 1863. Both insurrections aimed at restoring Poland's independence and were fought primarily against the Russian Empire[64]. The failure of

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[62] ibid, p. 78.

[63] Maria Janion, *Romantyzm i Historia*. (Warszawa : Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978), p. 57. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Upadek niepodległości Polski naznaczył trwałym piętnem kolejne generacje porozbiorowe. Był dla nich czymś w rodzaju traumatyzmu, urazu, o którym nigdy nie można zapomnieć i przez który przesącza się bez przerwy - gorzka i zapiekła - prawda o rzeczywistości.'.

[64] The November Uprising is also known as the Polish-Russian War 1830-31. The uprising began in Warsaw on 29 November 1830. At the time of the November Uprising Warsaw was the capital of the political entity known as the Kingdom of Poland. Established in 1815, the Kingdom of Poland was granted certain autonomies but it was formally ruled by the Russian Emperors. The January Uprising aimed at restoring Poland's complete sovereignty as the pre-partitioned Poland-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

the uprisings led to severe repercussions not only for the insurgents, who were either executed or exiled to Siberia, but for the entire nation. After the January Uprising was crushed in 1864, the Kingdom of Poland lost its separate status and became directly incorporated into the Russian Empire.

The legacy of the uprisings resonated across literature and arts, amplifying the initial loss of Poland's sovereignty through the new experiences of violence and indignity. Poland's blocked memory continued hurting, and the painful remembrance of the crushed uprisings became a theme of countless literary works in the nineteenth century. Adam Mickiewicz famously depicted the heroic fighting during the November Uprising in his poem *Reduta Ordona* [Ordon's Redoubt, 1832]. Mickiewicz's further reflections upon the uprising and its failure can be found in his canonical monologue 'Wielka Improwizacja' in *Dziady, część III* [Forefather's Eve, Part III, 'The Great Improvisation', 1832].

The November Uprising also impacted the work of another major figure of Polish Romanticism, the poet Julisz Słowacki[65], who together with Adam Mickiewicz is considered the great national bard. One of Słowacki's most famous works and a foundational text in the Polish literary canon, the romantic drama *Kordian* (1834), not only scrutinises the uprising but questions the Messianism philosophy that Mickiewicz's *Dziady* professed. Over half a century later, the legacy of the November Uprising continued haunting the literary works, inspiring Stanisław Wyspiański's three historial plays: *Warszawianka* [1898], the already mentioned *Lelewel* [1899] and the

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[65] Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), poet and playwright, a major figure of Polish Romanticism. His most famous works include the dramas *Kordian* (1834) and *Balladyna* (1839). Słowacki died in Paris in 1849.

most acclaimed of the three, *November Night* [Noc listopadowa, 1904]. The bitter aftermath of the January Uprising, on the other hand, reverberates in the major epic novels in Polish literature: Bolesław Prus's *The Doll* [Lalka, 1890], Eliza Orzeszkowa's *On the Banks of the Niemen* [Nad Niemnem, 1888] and Maria Dąbrowska's *Nights and Days* [Noce i dnie, 1931-1934].

In many literary works of the nineteenth century the memory of shame and humiliation replaced the Freudian compulsion to repeat, instead resulting in construction of a particular 'pseudologia phantastica'[66] - the emergence of the Messianism philosophy[67] - according to which Poland was the Christ of nations.

The phase of pathological injury to collective memory – the 'blocked memory' – caused by the loss of independence, ended in 1918. However, the recovery of the natural functions of the work of memory, which could in turn enable the capacity to forget and recuperate the culture, was abruptly halted by the outbreak of Second World War and the Soviet occupation. Thus, the work of collective memory in post-war Poland endured simultaneously an abuse on two distinct levels: the pathological-therapeutic, in the form of blocked memory, and the practical, as manipulated memory.

Stage 2: Manipulated Memory

The second abuse, 'manipulated memory' is defined as 'resulting from a

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[66] See Antoni Kępiński, 'Typ histeryczny'. *Psychopatie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), pp. 55-89 (p. 62). All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[67] A doctrine popular among Polish Romantics that believed Poland to assume the role of 'the Christ of Nations', in an attempt to compensate for historic suffering.

concerted manipulation of memory and of forgetting by those who hold power'[68]. It is the 'institutionalisation of the memory', and was at the core of the Communist politics of memory. In Ricoeur's typology, 'wounded memory' is pathological-therapeutic while 'manipulated memory' is practical[69]: whereas blocked memory is a wound, a humiliation endured due to historical events that injure the collective's sense of self, the manipulated memory operates within the process of remembering and forgetting, which tailors the past to fit the present through a deliberate process of commemorations and omissions.

The founding myth of the Polish People Republic – that of the Polish-Soviet friendship – constitutes a prime example of manipulated memory, which set the course for the remembrance practices during Communism. The Soviet invasion of Poland that began on 17 September 1939 was denied by the official policy of Politburo, together with the existence of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Stalin and Hitler. Instead, the public memory in the Polish People's Republic, which aimed to control and dictate the collective memory, commemorated the arrival of the Soviet army in January 1944 as a part of the liberation campaign.

This imposed memory quickly took a concrete, spatial form: the Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science dominated over the ruins of the post-war Warsaw. Designed by the Soviet architect Lev Rudnev and completed in 1955, the controversial high-rise remains as the tallest building in Poland. Inside the main hall of the Palace of Culture and Science a three-meter bronze statue was installed, portraying a

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[68] Ricoeur, p. 80.
[69] ibid

brotherly embrace between two males, tellingly titled *Przyjaźń* [Friendship][70]. The building and the statue were an attempt to counterfeit a *lieu de mémoire*, that is a site where 'memory crystalises and secrets itself'[71]. Pierre Nora, who introduced the term and explored the phenomenon of 'memory sites', argued that they 'originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally.'[72].

Manipulated memory in the Polish People's Republic used analogical strategies to create commemorative practices around these 'figures of memory' that were selected as the historical fabric of a given Soviet satellite state. In Poland, aside from reshaping the space, changes in the national calendar followed accordingly to the new policy of memory. The new public holidays included Victory Day[73], the National Day of the Rebirth of Poland[74] and the Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution[75]. Since the manipulated memory controls both the process of remembering and forgetting, the commemoration of the newly introduced events went hand in hand with the omissions of the former anniversaries. Among the public holidays abolished in the Polish People's Republic were civil holidays such as 3 May

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[70] The statue was designed in 1953 by an acclaimed Polish sculptor Alina Szapocznikow (1926-1973). It was created as a part of a competition in celebration of Polish-Soviet friendship.

[71] Pierre Nora, p. 1.

[72] ibid

[73] *Dzień Zwycięstwa* (May 9), established in 1945, commemorated the surrender of Nazis in 1945.

[74] *Narodowe Święto Odrodzenia Polski* (July 22), established in 1945, commemorated the day of the PKWN signing in 1944.

[75] *Rocznica Rewolucji Październikowej* (November 7), established in 1945, commemorated the anniversary of the Great October Revolution in 1917.

Constitution Day[76] and National Independence Day[77].

The abuse of forgetting is crucial in Ricoeur's analysis of manipulated memory as it was a vital and necessary element of implementing the totalitarian reign of the Communist ideology in the Soviet Union. The abuse of forgetting operates through imposed silences that go beyond the public space and infiltrate into the individual work of memory, dictating what and how to recollect. Ricoeur notes that the specificity of manipulated memory 'lies in the intersection of the problematics of memory and of identity, collective as well as personal'[78]. Totalitarian regimes, such as Communism, operated by scrutinising and exploiting the connection between individual and collective memory. Manipulated memory thus fractured not only the official space, but also one's sense of self.

If manipulated memory requires exploitation of the link between the individual and the collective, literature constitutes the prototypical medium for the task. Ricoeur points out that the story and those who tell it hold the key to the construction of ideology that establishes itself through manipulated memory: 'the selective function of the narrative (..) opens to manipulation the opportunity and the means of clever strategy, consisting from the outset in a strategy of forgetting as much as in a strategy of remembering.'[79].

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[76] *Rocznica Konstytucji 3 maja* (May 3), established in 1919, commemorates the declaration of the Constitution 3 May 1791. 3 May Constitution Day as a public holiday was abolished in 1951 and restored in 1990.

[77] *Narodowe Święto Niepodległości* (November 11), established in 1920, commemorates the anniversary of Poland regaining its sovereignty in 1918. In 1945 the National Independence Day was replaced by the National Day of the Rebirth of Poland. The National Independence Day was restored in 1989.

[78] ibid

[79] ibid, p. 85.

As Maurice Friedberg noted, ideological tendencies in literature were not a Soviet invention, and yet 'this emphasis on purposeful literature has been carried to the extreme under the Soviet regime'[80]. Stalin in his speech to Soviet writers on 26 October 1932 famously declared that they were 'the engineers of the human soul', and as such they remained under the continuous surveillance of the Party. As Ricoeur stated, 'even the tyrant needs a rhetorician, a sophist, to broadcast his enterprise of seduction and intimidation in the form of words.'[81].

Stage 3: Obligated Memory

After the fall of Communism in 1989 there was supposed to be no more silencing in Central and Eastern Europe since democracy created the conditions in which one could openly recollect previously repressed memories. Yet what at first seemed like an option - one *can* recollect the past - quickly transformed into an obligation – one *must* recollect the past. In the post-1989 memory discourse, the Western demand for Eastern European memories of Communism paradoxically quickly found its counterpart in the domestic politics of history.

The former, that is the pressure to perform remembering Communism to satisfy the curiosity of foreign audiences, is brilliantly captured in Dorota Masłowska's critical

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[80] Maurice Friedberg, 'Soviet Literature and Retro-active Truth'. *The dead hand: communism and culture* (London: The United States Information Service, 1954), pp. 46-53 (p. 46).
[81] Ricoeur, p. 85.

essay "Faraway, So Gross"[82]. The text, which I will examine in more detail in Chapter 3 of the thesis, assumes a form of mock memoir, as the author obliges her audience and recounts a darkly comical tale of her childhood during Communism. After listing all the clichés of Communist horror as her 'memories', Masłowska admits that she in fact remembers very little of that period. Moreover, the experiences she could genuinely recollect do not seem to fit the foreign expectations of suffering during Communism, leading to disappointment and confusion.

Similarly, the memories of an ordinary life in the Polish People's Republic have struggled to find a framework within the collective remembrance of post-1989 Poland that would allow one to communicate and share them. Occupying a grey area between the public memory of anti-communist movements and the capitalistic ambitions of the new democracy, these memories seemed threatening to both, the construction of the present and of the past. An attempt to fill this memory void was made by the journalists, Izabela Meyza and Witold Szabłowski, who recreated the world and the life in the Polish People's Republic. In July 2011, the journalists, together with their daughter, moved back to 1981, temporarily resigning from the comforts of the twenty first century, such as internet or mobile phones. Meyza and Szabłowski recounted their journey into the past in the book *Nasz mały PRL. Pół roku w M-3 z trwałą, wąsami i maluchem* [Our Little Polish People's Republic. Half a Year in M-3 with Perm, Moustache and Fiat 126p, 2012]. Paradoxically, while the experiment aimed at obtaining first-hand experience of this period in history so rarely recollected by the previous generation, the encounter with Meyza's and Szabłowski's reconstructed past

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[82] Dorota Masłowska, 'Faraway, So Gross', trans. by Benjamin Paloff. In *The Wall in my My Head : Words and Images from the Fall of the Iron Curtain : a Words without Borders Anthology* (Rochester, NY : Open Letter, 2009), pp. 160-165.

triggered the sharing of memories in their milieu. Szabłowski noted that their experiment 'proved that there is a huge willingness to talk about the Polish People's Republic, that to many those were the beautiful times of their youth'[83].

And yet, in the democratic Republic of Poland the pre-1989 public 'oblivions' and self-imposed duty of remembering were replaced by distinct, and yet strikingly similar constraints: publicly imposed remembering and self-chosen oblivions. And thus Polish culture entered the third phase of memory abuse, obligated memory, which Ricoeur defines as an abuse of memory that occurs on the ethico-political level where an externally imposed duty to remember denies one's right to forget.[84]

In Ricoeur's concept of obligated memory, the duty to remember is closely linked to the notions of debt and heritage. Ricoeur emphasizes the dual nature of memory, noting that 'the idea of debt is inseparable from the notion of heritage.'[85] Far from disregarding the symbolic arrears we have to the past, Ricoeur underlines that 'we are indebted to those who have gone before us for part of what we are.'[86] How then does the work of memory slip here from use into abuse? The answer could be found in the processes of commemoration. A celebration of the tragic past that demands manifestation of the same values of sacrifice, externally defined as patriotic, constitutes an annexation of the silent legacy of the victims who can no longer speak.

In the independent Poland the notion of debt towards those who fought for the

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[83] Witold Szabłowski, 'Mój własny, mały PRL' [My Own, Little Polish People's Republic]. Interview by Waldemar Sulisz, *dziennikwschodni.pl*, 27 January 2012. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; ' Okazało się, że jest w ludziach ogromna chęć opowiadania o PRL, dla wielu były to piękne czasy młodości.'
[84] Ricoeur, p. 87.
[85] ibid, p. 89.
[86] ibid

nation's freedom has proved as pertinent as in the periods of foreign dominance, becoming a focus of many critical and literary inquiries. In fact, the phase of obligated memory in post-1989 Polish culture emerged as a derivative of the earlier abuses to the processes of remembering and forgetting: blocked memory and manipulated memory. Maria Janion observed in her essay on Józef Czapski that Polish literature over the centuries has developed an intimate bond with the dead, producing a model of 'speaking 'for' and 'in the name of''[87]. In light of Ricoeur's analysis, it is precisely this tendency to dispose the legacy of those who can no longer speak which creates the danger of forming a memory that excludes and divides rather than binds a nation. Thus, Janion's reference to Czapski's famous claim, discussed earlier in the chapter as defining a Pole as 'someone who cannot forget the innocent sacrifice'[88] constitutes an exact demonstration of a memory abuse, as it denies one's right to forget.

7. The (over)resonant past: to engage or not to engage

'What to write about?' was one of the most debated questions in post-1989 Polish literary criticism[89]. What at first might appear as somewhat naïve, or even amateur dilemma, implied a number of more complex cultural and historical issues in

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[87] Maria Janion, 'Artysta przemienienia' [The Artist of Transfiguration]. *Teksty Drugie : teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja* 1/2. 7/8 (1991), pp. 58-80 (p. 70). All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; 'Literatura polska rozporządza wzorem podobnego mówienia "za" i "w imieniu"'.

[88] Janion, *Do Europy tak, ale tylko z naszymi umarłymi*, p. 6.

[89] See Przemysław Czapliński, *Ślady przełomu. O prozie polskie 1976-1996.* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997); Jerzy Jarzębski, *Apetyt na Przemianę. Notatki o prozie współczesnej.* (Kraków: Znak, 1997); Jan Galant, 'Nieobecna (nie)usprawiedliwiona'. *Literatura Polska 1900-2000. Tom 2;* Tomasz Bocheński, ''Nowa krytyka' ocenia 'nową prozę''. *Literatura Polska 1900-2000. Tom 2;* Paulina Kierzek, 'Którędy do kanonu'. *Poza kanonem, czyli szkice o literaturze najnowszej* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2008).

the context of Polish literature in the 1990s. The query could be unfolded into several more specific ones.

First, it was a question on creative freedom: what to write about *now,* when there are no requirements on what to write. Second, it was an investigation into the role that literature was to assume in the new democratic society: what is *worth* writing about. Third, there was the anxiety of newness, an insecurity about the needs and interests of a rapidly changing readership: what is *interesting* enough to be written about.

The socio-political changes after 1989, as briefly discussed in the Introduction, resulted in a fundamental revision of the national discourse on history, memory and literature. One of the major changes that occurred in Polish literature in the 1990s concerned realizing that "the notion of Polishness was not a sufficient criterion upon which one could build individual identity"[90]. Instead of a much anticipated breakthrough, however, the discovery resulted in a crisis of Polish literature of the 1990s.

The two leading critics of different generations, Jerzy Jarzębski (br. 1947) and Przemysław Czapliński (br. 1962), both stressed that the post-1989 literature lost its capacity to negotiate with the legacy of the past. Czapliński pointed out that 'The nineties have not created any new and respected representation of national identity'[91]. While the tradition suddenly started losing its currency, the critic argued, the new

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[90] Przemysław Czapliński, Paweł Śliwiński, *Literatura polska 1976–1998* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999), p. 258. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[91] Przemysław Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany: późna nowoczesność i nasze wielkie narracje* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2009), p. 22. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Polish literature 'yields extensively from the past in order to emphasise its own "literariness", and not in order to reinterpret the past'[92]. Jarzębski described the predicament as 'multisided crisis, which the prose at this starting point of historical changes, was experiencing'[93]. He also speculated that the literary malaise might not be short-lived: 'this collapse of culture and literature brought about by the complicated political situation of the last years probably will have to be treated longer'[94].

While 'longing for the still unreachable masterpiece constituted a particular *leitmotiv* of many critical statements'[95], the literature of the nineties found itself in retreat from historically and socially engaged subjects. Instead, two alternative directions emerged: the local, closely linking identity with concrete places, and the uprooted, manifesting independence from one's origins. Przemysław Czapliński and Paweł Śliwiński name such writers as Jerzy Pilch, Andrzej Stasiuk, Olga Tokarczuk and Paweł Huelle as central owners of these "little homelands", while the in-between reality is inhabited by the characters of Manuela Gretkowska, Izabela Filipiak or Natasza Goerke[96]. Seemingly opposed, both trends were in their nature thoroughly anti-historical.

The departure from history, however, proved temporary, and many of the new writers debuting in the beginning of the twenty first century re-engaged with the past.

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[92] Przemysław Czapliński, 'Mickiewicz albo proza najnowsza wobec tradycji', in *Świat podrobiony: krytyka i literatura wobec nowej rzeczywistości* (Kraków: Towarzystwi Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych, 2003), pp. 40-79 (p. 44). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[93] Jerzy Jarzębski, *Apetyt na Przemianę. Notatki o prozie współczesnej* (Kraków : Znak, 1997) p. 12. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[94] ibid, p. 11.
[95] Joanna Orska, 'Mistrzowie odchodzą. O pojęciach mistrza, kanonu i arcydzieła w świadomości krytyki po 1989 roku', in *Dwadzieścia lat literatry polskiej 1989 – 2009. Tom 1, część 1*, ed. by Dariusz Nowacki and Krzysztof Uniłowski, (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2010), pp. 27-42 (p. 27). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[96] Czapliński, Śliwiński, pp. 258-259.

Holewińska's second drama, *Rewolucja Balonowa* [The Baloon Revolution, 2010] depicted the socio-political transformation in the 1990s through the eyes of a little girl. Mikołaj Łoziński (b. 1980) in both of his novels, *Reisefieber* (2006) and *Książka* (2011) makes remembrance one of the central notions of the literary worlds he creates. *Reisefieber* could be seen almost as a study on the universal nature of memory and recollection, while the latter takes a more tangible form, inscribing a very private story of the family into a larger historical narrative. Jacek Dehnel (b. 1980), a coeval of Łoziński, starting from his debut novel *Lala* (2006) seems to be fascinated with the past to the extent of turning his back on the present. *Lala*, often described as a tale of the world that no longer exists, is a narrative based on the life story of the narrator's grandmother, set against the historical turmoil of the twentieth century. Dehnel remains under the spell of the past also in his next works, *Rynek w Smyrnie* (2007), a collection of short stories, and *Fotoplastikon* (2009), which consists of author's commentaries to old photographs found in various antique stores and flea markets. Even in his latest novel, *Saturn. Czarne obrazy z życia mężczyzn z rodziny Goya* (2011), which focuses on the complex relations between three generations of the famous Spanish family, Dehnel still explores the private and personal in the historical.

Nearly two decades after the fall of Communism, Michał Witkowski (b. 1975), an author of the internationally acclaimed *Lubiewo* [Lovetown, 2005], speculated about the return of 'new engagement'[97] in future literary texts, arguing that writing will become more ideologically influenced. While expressing on behalf of his generation an exhaustion with demands that literature must engage with socio-historical notions,

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[97] Michał Witkowski, 'Recycling', in *Literatura polska 1989-2009. Przewodnik*, ed. by Piotr Marecki (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010) p. 47.

he stressed that the young writers retreat not from more serious themes as such, but from critical expectations and conventional approaches towards the past. The work of Dorota Masłowska, but also the writing of Sylwia Chutnik, Julia Holewińska, Mikołaj Łoziński or Jacek Dehnel seem to support the thesis that the negotiations with the past – the relentless 'memory-making' of a culture – remain a matter of great urgency in the new Polish writing. When Holewińska was asked explicitly about her particular interest in the history of Poland, the playwright replied: "I have a feeling this is an issue that my generation and I can cope with"[98].

8. The Little Metal Girl: Dorota Masłowska

Among the heated debates on the state of Polish literature, quests for a masterpiece, and demands for socially relevant works that would resonate with the historical momentum, debuted Dorota Masłowska. An 18-year-old high school student when she wrote her first novel, *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* (White and Red, 2002), Masłowska became an instant sensation, dividing critics and readers. The gruesome, injured language of her writing was unlike anything else in Polish literature; it was, at last, the sound of the new.

The novel attracted a remarkable degree of attention from the media and sold in over 120,000 copies, becoming one of the greatest bestsellers of the post-1989 literature. And yet, although *Wojna polsko-ruska* had swiftly achieved a cult status, it was only the second novel, *Paw Królowej* [Queen's Spew, 2005], that earned

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[98] Holewińska, 'Rewolucja 30-latków'; 'Mam poczucie, że to jest zagadnienie, które ja i nasze pokolenie możemy podjąć.'

Masłowska a position of 'a serious writer'. Written in a form of a hip-hop song, *Paw Królowej* received the 2006 Nike Award, the most prestigious literary distinction in Poland. After the success of her two novels, Masłowska turned to theatre. Her first drama, *Dwoje biednych Rumunów mówiących po polsku* [A Couple of Poor, Polish-Speaking Romanians 2006], was performed in Poland as well as London, New York and Sydney. Her next play, *Między nami dobrze jest* [No Matter How Hard We Tried, 2008], was nominated to 2008 Nike Award and received the award of Polish Minister of Culture.

The combination of Masłowska's writing – hypersensitive to every idiosyncrasy of the languages spoken in the post-1989 Poland – combined with the writer's young age, resulted in the media labelling Masłowska as the voice of the post-communist generation. The writer confronted this Gombrowiczesque '*gęba*'[99] in two critical essays, 'Przyszkoleni do jedzenia'[100] [Trained to Eat, 2002] and 'Faraway, So Gross'[101]. The former, written in the beginning of Masłowska's career, addressed specifically the Polish audience. The latter, however, published seven years later and exclusively in English translation as a part of international anthology *The Wall in my My Head : Words and Images from the Fall of the Iron Curtain* that celebrated twenty years of the fall of Berlin wall, targeted foreign readers. And yet both essays examined the same matter – the contrast between the demands of collective memory and the personal memory of the writer. The time distance between the two texts allows to

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[99] A symbolic phrase in Polish culture, taken from Witold Gombrowicz's writing and referring to a socially imposed mask.
[100] Dorota Masłowska, 'Przyszkoleni do jedzenia' [Trained to Eat]. *Gazeta Wyborcza* (233), 5 October 2002, p. 13. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[101] Masłowska, Dorota. 'Faraway, So Gross'. Trans.by Benjamin Paloff. *The Wall in my My Head : Words and Images from the Fall of the Iron Curtain : a Words without Borders Anthology* (Rochester, NY : Open Letter, 2009), pp. 160-165.

examine the changes in Masłowska's approach to Polish collective memory as well as her reluctant participation as an iconic author in the process of memory-making in the post-1989 Poland.

Behind, around, forward: the strategies of dealing with the past

In the same year when *Paw Królowej* earned Masłowska 2006 Nike Award, acknowledging her status in Polish contemporary literature, two other writers from the post-1989 generation, Jacek Dehnel and Jakub Żulczyk (b. 1983), published their first novels. Dehnel, mentioned in the earlier section, was already an acclaimed young poet, whose volume of poetry *Żywoty Równoległe* [Parallel Lives, 2004] received The Kościelski Award 2005, when he authored a fictionalized account of his grandmother's life. *Lala* (2006), a familial tale imbedded in the literary tradition of Polish inter-war period, strikingly contrasted the literary world of Masłowska's fiction. Dehnel's novel targeted the audience that longed not only for more classical narratives, but more comforting vision of Polish tradition. Yet another direction was set by Żulczyk's *Zrób mi jakąś krzywdę, czyli wszystkie gry video są o miłości* (2006). Żulczyk's novel, designed as a road trip love-story that takes the characters across post-communist Poland, openly embraced the accomplishments of pop culture in an attempt to incorporate the western world into the local literary landscape.

Looking at the works of Dehnel, Masłowska and Żulczyk three different strategies of coping with imposed collective memory could be discerned: 'behind' – understanding the present by studying the past, 'around' – tracking traces of the past in contemporary reality, and 'forward' – testing the influence of the past on future

development. 'Writing behind' refers to the works such as Jacek Dehnel's *Lala*, in which the answers to what is happening now are left behind, in the world that has passed and thus demands to be re-visited. 'Writing around', characteristic for the works of Dorota Masłowska, focuses on the present conditions. Here the space that we currently inhabit is filled with unfinished history and neglected memories, which first need to be deciphered and re-experienced. Only then the past has a potential to facilitate communication in the contemporary word. In 'writing forward', which could be ascribed to Żulczyk's fiction, the desire to move ahead filters out what should be remembered and what forgotten.

These three strategies – 'behind', 'around' and 'forward' – could also be seen as spatial metaphors that define different directions for post-1989 literature. If the transition, or the post-communist condition, was considered as the starting point, then these three literary strategies would constitute different answers to the dilemma as to where the new writing should be heading next. 'Moving behind' would imply a return to the pre-communist order and the literary tradition of Polish modernism, 'moving around' a further exploration of the present, the in-between condition, whereas 'moving forward' an attempt to cast aside the past and step towards the newly accessed, western culture.

In her writing Dorota Masłowska did not look back into tragedies of the past, or forward into the promise of the new world, to find her stories. When asked in an interview how long had she been looking for a story for her second novel *Paw Królowej* [Queen's Spew, 2005], the writer in a one-sentence response dismissed the 'what to write about' debate, confessing: 'I don't really know, but the story probably is not

something that one looks for, the story grows everywhere as commonly as a nettle.'[102].

She looked around, or rather listened, as one could close their eyes listening to Masłowska's language yet still learn more about memory and suffering than if reading history books. Instead of trying to form a diagnosis of transformation, she examined the most sensitive, receptive and revealing element of the culture - its language. And it was all there: the pain, the self-hatred, the shame, but also the collapse of cultural memory, merged with the uncertainty of both the future and the past.

It is therefore the language of Masłowska's writing that I place at the core of my critical enquiry into the post-1989 Polish struggles with the past. Aside from Paul Ricoeur's study in memory uses and abuses, the dissertation relies heavily on the theoretical work developed by the Polish iconic psychiatrist, Antoni Kępiński.

Chapter 2 acknowledges that distinct histories of memory produce distinct value systems, which then determine what constitutes suffering and how it is articulated. In Poland, the repetitive abuses to collective memory have resulted in cultural hysteria, which the Chapter defines in terms of suffering, referencing Kępiński's analysis and classification of mental pain. I propose that hysteria constitutes an alternative model of suffering to the one conceptualised by trauma theory. After establishing the theoretical background, Chapter 3 moves to a close reading of Masłowska's critical essays, 'Przyszkoleni do jedzenia' [Trained to Eat, 2002], which addresses the Polish public, and 'Faraway, So Gross' (2009), which is intended for foreign audiences and has never been published in Polish. Emphasising

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[102] Dorota Masłowska, 'Dorota Masłowska - rozmowa o nowej książce "Paw Królowej"'. Interview by Wojciech Staszewski. *www.wysokieobcasy.pl*. Gazeta Wyborcza. 21 May 2005. Web. 17 March 2014. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; 'Ja się nie znam, ale tematu się chyba nie szuka, temat rośnie wszędzie z powszechnością pokrzywy (...)'.

the symbolism and resonance of her language, Chapter 3 extracts the terms that resonate with wider cultural maladies and map the post-1989 dealings with the past.

Chapter 4 turns to study Masłowska's language in the writer's novels *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* [White and Red, 2000] and *Paw Królowej* [Queen's Spew, 2005]. Chapter 4 is an analysis of transformation from a linguistic, not socio-political, angle: it examines how the Polish language has changed, becoming a language of hysteria. Finally, Chapter 5 conceptualises the new form of memory, *mass memory*, that Masłowska's characters are equipped with. The focus of Chapter 5 constitutes Masłowska's last drama, *No Matter How Hard We Tried* [Między nami dobrze jest, 2008].

Chapter 2

Not All Wounds Bleed: Pathos versus Trauma

1.   Hysteria as suffering: introduction

One of the first uses of the word 'trauma' in relation to mental suffering was directly linked to the study of hysteria. The philosopher and psychologist William James used the phrase of 'psychic traumata'[1] in regard to the psychoanalytical examinations of hysteria. In his review of Pierre Janet's two volume study[2], James reported that in the arranged circumstances 'hysterics will reveal obsessive memories'[3]. Moreover, the father of modern psychology emphasises the link between the phenomenon of hysteria and distortions in the process of remembering, stressing the definition of hysteria as 'a disease of the memory.'[4]. James further explains: 'Certain reminiscences of the shock fall into the subliminal consciousness, where they can be discovered in 'hypnoid' states. If left there, they act as permanent 'psychic traumata', thorns in the spirit, so to speak.'[5]

Drawing on the notion of hysteria as 'disease of memory' I suggest a relation

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[1] William James, Review of Pierre Janet's État mental des hystériques : les stigmates mentaux ; État mental des hystériques : les accidents mentaux. (1892, 1894). The Psychological Review I (1898), pp. 195-197 (p. 196).
[2] ibid
[3] William James, Review of J. Breuer and S. Freud Ueber den psychischen Mechanismus hysterischer Phänomene.Vorläufige Mittheilung. The Psychological Review I (1898), p. 197.
[4] ibid
[5] ibid

between such understood hysteria and the experience of repetitive violations to collective processes of remembering and forgetting as discussed in Chapter 1. The groups and cultures that experience a loss of sovereignty, power or territory, and whose past becomes instrumentalised to serve the political interests of the present, suffer not only from the historical tragedies, but also from the damage to their cultural heritage and collective remembrance. The instability of their past results in the collapse of 'fixed points'[6], that would otherwise bridge the past and the present. In light of the alternative history of memory in Polish culture that I proposed in Chapter 1, I argue that the 'memory abuses' - wounded, manipulated and obligated memory, as found in Paul Ricoeur's study[7] - have resulted in a cultural hysteria. Thus I propose to view hysteria as a collective malady, that a group or culture suffers when unable to derive its unity and continuity from a shared memory of the past.

The concept of hysteria as a 'disease of memory' will be examined through a theoretical framework developed by the Polish psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński (1918-1972) and read in terms of suffering. A concentration camp inmate in Hungary and Spain during the Second World War and an iconic cultural figure in the post-war Poland, Kępiński propagated a humanistic rather than clinical approach to mental suffering. In reference to the conceptual framework developed in his study 'The Hysterical Type'[8] (1977), this chapter proposes that the experience of cultural hysteria should be considered as a

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[6] See Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,' trans. by John Czaplicka. *New German Critique* 65 (1995), pp. 125-133 (p. 128)

[7] See Paul Ricoeur. 'The Exercise of Memory: Uses and Abuses'. *Memory, History, Forgetting.* Trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, London : University of Chicago Press , 2004), pp. 56-92.

[8] Antoni Kępiński, 'Typ histeryczny'. *Psychopatie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), pp. 55-89. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

separate form of suffering that does not correspond conceptually with trauma theory. Instead, I suggest that it is the ancient notion of 'pathos' - which Kępiński highlights as the core element of all types of psychopathies, including hysteria - that offers an alternative to the symbolism of the wound, dominating trauma theory. It is in fact the highest stake of this chapter to propose a model of suffering that would not require translating one's pain into another conceptual language, but rather allow it to resound in its own voice. The experience of cultural hysteria, I further propose, most accurately captures the pain and confusion in the literary world of Dorota Masłowska's writing. Thus, Chapter 2 serves as a conceptual backbone for the rest of the dissertation, allowing for a more nuanced reading of the writer's constructions of memory, history and suffering.

Maintaining that the concept of hysteria, as defined by Kępiński, helps to theorise the experiences of pain and suffering, I also would like to suggest that the above distinction provides new insights into trauma theory, particularly in its recent attempts towards decolonizing and globalisation. Aside from stressing the necessity of acknowledging non-organic pain as genuine suffering, it highlights the role of the subjective feelings of 'doctors' - that is any party involved in the assessment of suffering - in recognising the presence of pain in others. Kępiński notes that 'the scientific objectivity of classifying systems in regard to types of personality and types of psychopathy is a rather problematic issue and it cannot be taken apart from the needs and personality type of the researcher, as well as the social conditions, in which one lives.'[9] In a similar way,

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[9] Antoni Kępiński, 'Pojęcie psychopatii a system wartości'. *Psychopatie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), pp. 5-54 (p. 15). All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; '(...)naukowa obiektywność systemów klasyfikacyjnych typów osobowości i typów psychopatii jest sprawą raczej

there is a strong correlation between the concept of suffering, which emphasises the socio-cultural relativity of what can cause pain, but also of what is considered as damaging and painful by the groups we live in.

This chapter proposes a double shift in the debate on pain, suffering and loss. First, despite the recent critique of the 'Eurocentric trauma paradigm'[10], it proposes to go back to the region and focus once again on European suffering. The reason for this return, however, is distinct from the Western approach of trauma theory that seeks blood and wounds. Instead, this second shift proposes to look at the region through its experience of non-organic, intangible pain, one that seemingly has no specific cause and yet torments the culture no less than historical tragedies of wars and mass murders.

The first part of the chapter discusses the relation between hysteria and suffering in the context of the work developed by Antoni Kępiński. I then briefly recount the recent debate about the relevance and future of trauma theory in the twenty first century. It is important to note that many of the reservations listed in this chapter have been shared and acutely discussed by the leading scholars of Memory Studies, trauma theory and postcolonial studies. Taking into account the ongoing process of 'decolonizing' trauma theory, I argue that even in its broadened and inclusive form, trauma theory remains an inadequate critical tool to recognise the suffering of what I propose to call the 'Second

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problematyczną i nie można oderwać jej potrzeb i typu osobowości badającego, jak też od warunków społecznych, w których on żyje'.

[10] Sonya Andermarh, 'Introduction'. Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism. MDPI AG - Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute. A reprint of the Special Issue that appeared in the online open access journal, Humanities 4(4), 2015-2016 (available at: http://www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special_issues/TraumaPostcolonialism), pp. 1-6 (p. 1).

World'. Despite my project dealing specifically with Polish culture against the backdrop of wider postsocialist studies, I would like to propose the use of the Cold War term 'Second World', instead of 'Eastern Europe'. It is my conviction that such symbolic division designating different spheres of influence - as well as specific rank in the memory and trauma discourse - instead of definition in terms of geographic location, contributes towards a more productive debate in the current context of memory politics. The specificity for this decision will be explained in detail in the later part of the chapter, but the basic argument relies on a principle that cultural hysteria is neither a national phenomenon nor a geographically fixed injury, but rather a result of a series of external factors that change the cultural value system, making the recognition of one's surroundings a requirement of survival. Thus, given the ever changing global conditions, I believe that a similar experience will be shared by other cultures that geographically would not be included as 'Eastern Europe'.

2. From Freud to Kępiński

The role of Freud in trauma theory has been as extensive as it has been disputed. Cathy Caruth famously argued for the common platform between literature and psychoanalysis in the reading of trauma: 'If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex

relation between knowing and not knowing.'[11]. Over a decade later, however, the first attempts at a decolonizing trauma project saw Michael Rothberg criticising postcolonial scholars for following 'the individualist framework that lies behind this famous example– Freud's reading of literary characters as if they were "real" analysands on his couch'[12]. Instead, Rothberg proposes that 'if postcolonial literary studies wants to engage trauma studies' it should turn to the work of Lacan that would 'emphasize social structure to a greater degree than Freudian models'.[13]

The shift from one psychoanalytical framework to another one, however, appears problematic in regard to suffering hysteria. Kępiński, who was introduced to psychoanalysis while training in the London Institute of Psychiatry in 1958/59, warned that it offers a 'convincing and charming way of explanation of human being and his/her problems, quite often congruent in terms of theory, but closer to inner problems of therapists than his/her patient.'[14] The application of psychoanalytical theory is particularly dangerous, Kępiński noted, in the treatment of hysteria. The hysterical type often earnestly adopts the values and theories of his or her doctors and such eagerness to accept the diagnosis feeds the narcissism of their therapists. He pointed out that 'psychoanalysts had most passionate proponents of their theories exactly among their

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[11] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: trauma, narrative, and history*. (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 3.
[12] Michael Rothberg, 'Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response'. *Studies in the Novel* 40.1/2 (2008), pp. 224-234 (p. 231).
[13] ibid
[14] Jacek Bomba. 'Heritage of Antoni Kepinski'. Archives of psychiatry and psychotherapy. 9.2 (2007), pp. 69-72 (p. 70).

own patients; this in fact strengthened their belief in the validity of these theories'[15]. Yet, there are two crucial factors in the condition of hysteria that make psychoanalytical theory unsuited to soothe the suffering. Firstly, the patients as eagerly change the psychiatric diagnosis as they initially accepted it. Secondly, gaining a better awareness of the self does not have a therapeutical effect on hysterical types but rather 'brings sadness and resignation'[16]. The psychoanalytical model of trauma then, used in literary criticism to emphasise the cultural and social structures of a culture that suffers hysteria, might at first meet with an enthusiastic response from such culture that would willingly produce testimonies confirming such diagnosis. Over a longer period of time, however, the same culture adopts a number of other theories, all seemingly fitting and yet bringing neither catharsis of knowing its problems nor relief to its torment nor satisfaction with the recognition it receives for diagnosed suffering.

Instead of the psychoanalytical approach then, Kępiński stresses, what a hysteric craves and needs most is affirmation, despite the indignation that one's behaviour provokes. Only the human encounter that makes him or her feel safe and recognised can initiate the slow, gradual process of accepting the truth about themselves and the world they live in. It is also that '"encounter" with another human'[17] that constitutes the centre of Kępiński's approach both in the practical aspect of his therapy as well as his theoretical

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[15] Kępiński, 'Typ histeryczny,' p. 85; 'Psychoanalitycy mieli najgorętszych zwolenników swych teorii właśnie wśród własnych pacjentów; to zresztą umacniało ich wiarę w słuszność tych teorii'.

[16] ibid; 'I często właśnie z ich ust słyszy się zdanie, że poznanie siebie w końcu nic człowiekowi nie pomaga, przynosi tylko smutek i rezygnację'.

[17] Maria Orwid. 'Antoni Kępiński - w trzydziestolecie śmierci'. *Psychiatria Polska*. 36.3 (2003), pp. 365-371 (p. 366). All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Ogromną wagę przywiązywał Kępiński do "spotkania" z drugim człowiekiem, wyprzedzającego zawsze wszelkie następne działania psychiatry'.

work. Since the objective of my study is not to engage trauma theory but rather to examine the nature of suffering in Polish culture on its own terms, I will turn to Antoni Kępiński's humanistic theory of human behaviour. His critical thought, informed by his lifelong experience of encounters with various patients in the post-War, Communist Poland, was described as the first 'Polish philosophy on humanity'[18], as it approached individual life in the context of rapidly changing environment. One of the most prominent intellectuals of post-1989 Poland, philosopher and priest Józef Tischner emphases the impact that suffering has had on the formation of specifically 'Polish philosophy': 'In the past philosophy was born of the admiration of the world around us (Aristotle). Later also from doubt (Descartes). And now, on our soil, it is born of pain.'[19]. The foundational premise of Kępiński's work stressed that in the uncertainty of life it is one's attitude to their surroundings that has the greatest impact on their behaviour. Seconding the recognition 'of the need for a new model for understanding and interpreting trauma to enable more differentiated and more culturally and historically specific notions'[20], I also would like to emphasise that models of pain other than trauma could be in certain cultures more productive in enabling such notions. Veena Das, who specialises in anthropology of violence and suffering, points out that 'Even the idea that we should recover the narratives of violence becomes problematic when we realise that such narratives cannot be told

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[18] Józef Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*. (Kraków : Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 1982), p. 12. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'W moim przekonaniu to pierwsza po polsku odczuta, po polsku napisana, z polskiej dobroci płynąca, a zarazem uniwersalnie mądra, polska filozofia człowieka'.

[19] ibid, p. 13; 'Kiedyś filozofia rodziła się z podziwu wobec otaczającego nas świata (Arystoteles). A potem także z wątpienia (Kartezjusz). A teraz, na naszej ziemi, rodzi się ona z bólu'.

[20] Irene Vissler, 'Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospects and Prospects'. *Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism*. pp. 7-23 (p. 9).

unless we see the relation between pain and language that a culture has evolved.'[21].

It is hard to find a more culturally and historically informed work on suffering than that of Kępiński. The historical background, which included personal experience of concentration camps across Europe as well as years of therapy with patients who endured atrocities of the Second World War, gave Kępiński's thought a distinct angle. He abstained from theory constructed in separation from experience, stressing the vital role the environment has on one's decisions and behaviour. Emphasising that the core of psychic pain is not a matter of how one is, but rather how one interacts with one's surroundings, his classification of psychopathies is 'about the fundamental attitude towards the world'[22]. Kępiński pointed out that in our observations of other humans 'we attempt to immobilise the object of observation'[23] but in reality the person continuously changes, depending on the situation they find themselves in and the emotional filter with which the onlooker studies them[24]. Kępiński writes: 'Already in our first encounter we define the person by means of various kinds of scales of values: pretty - ugly, clever - stupid, good - evil, pleasant - unpleasant, gentle - violent, etc. as though the same man could not be once pretty, and once ugly, depending on the state of his emotions and how the other looks at him; once clever, and once stupid, depending on the degree of difficulty

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[21] Veena Das, 'Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain'. *Daedalus*. 125.1 (1996), pp. 67-91 (p. 88).

[22] Kępiński, 'Pojęcie psychopatii a system wartości,' p. 54; 'Podkreślono już, że w tym podziale chodzi o zasadniczą postawę wobec otaczającego świata'.

[23] ibid, p. 7; 'W obserwacjach naszych bliźnich - a one stanowią główną treść naszego życia psychicznego, gdyż naszym środowiskiem jest przede wszystkim środowisko społeczne - staramy się też unieruchomić nasz przedmiot obserwacji'.

[24] ibid

in a situation that he found himself; once good and once evil, etc.'[25]. This argument is linked to Kępiński's personal experience and that of his patients as concentration camps inmates, which led to his reflection that it is the ordinary people who commit the greatest crimes, once a powerful ideology enters their lives. The psychiatrist Jacek Bomba, on the other hand, points to the connection between ideology, hierarchy of values, and human identity as some of the most currently relevant aspects of Kępiński's heritage. In Kępiński's view an 'everyman' is susceptible to absorb and identify with an abstract idea that in turn replaces individual identity. At the same time Kępiński remains aware of the bifold nature of any strong emotion a person experiences: 'For if we hate someone then our hatred is also inevitably directed towards ourselves. If we do something wrong to someone else then we also do it to ourselves.'[26]. This 'double intentionality'[27] of any strong emotion - one directed externally, to the world, and the other internally, to the self - has far-reaching consequences 'for both moral psychology and ethics'[28].

Kępiński remains an iconic figure in Polish culture. His texts posthumously became a part of public discourse, peaking in popularity in the 1970s, when they outsold popular literature. From nurses to patients to catholic bishops to economists, Kępińki's works were debated all across Poland: 'the demand for his books (...) reached a zenith; the editions

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[25] ibid; 'Już przy pierwszym zetknięciu określamy go z pomocą różnego rodzaju skali wartości: ładny - brzydki, mądry - głupi, dobry - zły, sympatyczny - niesympatyczny, łagodny - gwałtowny itp., jakby ten sam człowiek nie mógł być raz ładny, a raz brzydki, zależnie od stanu swych uczuć i od tego, z jakim uczuciem ktoś na niego patrzy; raz mądry, a raz głupi, zależnie od trudności sytuacji, w jakiej się znalazł; raz dobry, raz zły itp'.
[26] M Pyka, 'On Emotion and Self-Determination in Max Scheler and Antoni Kepinski'. *Analecta husserliana. The yearbook of phenomenological research.* Ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Vol I (Gdańsk: Kluwer Academic; 2000), pp. 143-152 (p. 148).
[27] ibid
[28] ibid, p. 149.

were sold under the counter(...). The bookstores were assaulted, i.e. the medical in Warsaw' while a popular magazine advised its readers 'Borrow, steal, but read it. You will be surprised that after the reading you'll be a little different.'[29]. Józef Tischner saw the power and influence of Kępiński's work in 'some extraordinary method to save a man from the world and from oneself'[30]. His body of work, written hurriedly towards the end of his life while terminally ill, aimed at gathering and sharing his lifelong experience of dialogue with his patients. While grounded in Polish culture and historical experience, Tischner stressed that Kępiński's work emanates 'universal wisdom' as the psychiatrist 'knew more about the human than Freud, Heidegger, Levinas'[31]. Kępiński's ground-breaking contribution to psychiatry has been recently emphasised in *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, which spotlights his theories and pronounces him a 'pioneer of post-traumatic stress disorder'[32]. A close associate of Kępiński, professor of psychiatry Maria Orwid - herself a Holocaust survivor as a child[33] and an author of works on trauma - points out that every aspect of Kępiński's work preceded his times: 'If one was to look at the completeness of his thought from today's perspective, all the current problems are there to be found - either in the form of finished, developed concepts, or at least as a signal

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[29] See Jan Masłowski, 'Człowiek'. *Antoni Kępiński - człowiek i dzieło.* (Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1981), pp. 19-207 (p. 197-198). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Zapotrzebowanie na jego książki (...) doszło do zenitu; wydania sprzedawano spod lady(...). Szturmowano księgarnie, np. medyczną w Warszawie,' p. 197; 'nawet "Szpilki włączyły się w tę akcję: "Pożycz, ukradnij, ale przeczytaj. Sam się zdziwisz, że po tej lekturze będziesz trochę inny,"' p. 198.
[30] Tischner, p. 12; 'Zarazem jakiś niezwykły sposób ratowania człowieka przed światem i przed samym sobą'.
[31] ibid; 'Ten wie o człowieku więcej niż Freud, Heidegger, Levinas'.
[32] Maximilian Schochow, Florian Steger. 'Antoni Kępiński (1918–1972), pioneer of post-traumatic stress disorder – psychiatry in history'. *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 208(2016), p. 590.
[33] See Maria Orwid. *Przeżyć... I co dalej?* Interviewed by Katarzyna Zimmer and Krzysztof Szwajca, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006).

indicating that he paid attention to the given issue.'[34]. What remains of crucial value for this thesis is Kępiński's emphasis on one's attitude towards the surroundings and its multifaceted impact on people's lives both as individuals and as collectives. The authors of the spotlight in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* point to the link in Kępiński's theory between the individual value system, the connection with the milieu and the psychopathologies, understood in terms of suffering. It is the value system that acts as a filter in processing the information: 'If the hierarchy of values loses its equilibrium, then this can lead to psychological disorder.'[35]. This statement constitutes my core argument in this chapter, namely that the repetitive abuse to the processes of remembering and forgetting in the history of Polish collective memory distorted the hierarchy of values leading to the cultural hysteria that is to be understood in terms of suffering.

3. Models of Suffering: Pathos, Trauma, Psychopathia

The very nuanced interplay between a cause, experience and perception of suffering in reference to a particular value system could be found already at the core of trauma theory - not only in the symbolism of a wound, but also the theoretical framework concerned with the notion of injury. In the Western event-based model of trauma, pain is caused by a repetitive damage, the now canonical 'wound' inflicted upon the mind. Caruth

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[34] Orwid. 'Antoni Kępiński - w trzydziestolecie śmierci,' p. 365; 'Jeśli spojreć na całość jego poglądów z dzisiejszej perspektywy, to znajdzie się w nich właściwie wszystkie aktualne problemy - albo w postaci gotowych, rozwiniętych koncepcji, albo przynajmniej w postaci sygnału wskazującego, że zwrócił na niego uwagę'.
[35] 'Antoni Kępiński (1918–1972), pioneer of post-traumatic stress disorder – psychiatry in history', p. 590.

reads Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' exactly with an emphasis on his application of the structures of physical injury into the realm of the psychic. Caruth stresses the etymology of trauma and points out that the 'original meaning of trauma itself (in both English and German), the Greek *trauma*, or "wound,"' refers 'to an injury inflicted on the body.'[36] The difference between the physical and the mental wound, Caruth suggests after Freud, is in the recovery process - mental trauma 'is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event'. It remains an event nonetheless, a single event that 'imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor'[37]. The emphasis of the injury as an ultimate criterion of pain, I would like to suggest, is strongly interlinked with Western value system that holds health and 'intactness' in the highest esteem. A similar observation was made by Roger Luckhurst, who, outlining the history of the term 'trauma', emphasised its fundamental roots in 'a bodily injury by an external agent'[38]. Luckhurst notes: 'Trauma, however, still refers to bodily injury in medicine and, as Steven Connor observes, the focus on the boundary of the skin in ritual piercing, cutting or scarification continues to play with powerful taboos in many cultures. Trauma culture has emerged whilst the skin has been 'the visible object of many different forms of imaginary or actual assault' in the modern world (Connor 2004: 65).'[39]. Thus trauma - a wound that does not heal - came to symbolise the ultimate suffering, constituting a threat to a value system founded on the premise of recovery. It is Caruth's reading of Freud that transforms this powerful symbolism of incurable bodily

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[36] Caruth, p. 3.
[37] ibid, p. 4.
[38] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question.* (London : Routledge, 2008), p. 2.
[39] ibid

injury into a mental experience that then goes beyond any other forms of suffering.

'What the parable of the wound and the voice thus tells us, and what is at the heart of Freud's writing on trauma, both in what it says and in the stories it unwittingly tells, is that trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked o nly to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.'[40]

In his study of mental pain Kępiński, however, goes back to a Greek origin of a different term - an obsolete meaning of *pathos*, here understood as suffering[41]. Kępiński's turn to *pathos* is an attempt to move from the limiting connotations of 'psychopathy' as merely a mental disorder, and to instead enhance a more compassionate approach since 'the word *psychopathia* designates mental suffering'[42]. It should be noted, however, that in its ancient meaning, as defined in Aristotle's *Poetics,* pathos designates physical suffering, 'that is, a painful or fatal incident, such as death onstage, maiming or extreme torment.'[43]. It is a passive experience, inflicted upon a person who is unable to escape his or her own tragic fate. Such definition could suggest that Aristotelean pathos is in fact closer to the model of trauma than that of hysteria, since it emphasises the need for an actual cause of suffering rather than recognising the non-organic pain. And yet, to Aristotle *pathos* displays a paradoxical function that separates it distinctly from the model of trauma. Pathos constitutes one of the three key elements of plot, along with reversal

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[40] Caruth, p. 4.
[41] Kępiński, 'Pojęcie psychopatii a system warotści', p. 10; '*pathos* - cierpienie'.
[42] ibid; 'Słowo *psychopatia* oznacza cierpienie psychiczne'.
[43] Aristotle, *Poetics*. Trans. by Kenneth McLeish, (London : Nick Hern, 1999), p. 16.

and discovery[44], but one 'of minor importance (53b 18) and even, in the ideal, dispensable'[45]. This contradiction is strictly linked to the dramatic function of pathos, which to Aristotle depends on the potentiality of suffering taking place but not on the actuality of it happening. The mere indication of such 'painful or fatal incident' is enough to evoke powerful emotions in the audience: 'The precision of Aristotle's emotional psychology has the paradoxical result that it focuses tragic pity and fear on a movement towards misfortune, but does not require that movement, the metabasis of the plot, to be irreversible; pity or fear, so the theory posits, can be successfully aroused by a clear glimpse of 'incurable' suffering.'[46]. The broadest definition of Aristotelean pathos then, would be that of a passive threat of physical suffering that becomes 'incurable'. It is such understood pathos, I propose, that could be seen as an umbrella term for both models, that of trauma and that of hysteria, allowing one to see more clearly how these two models of suffering diverge, evoking contrasting impact.

While pathos operates in the realm of the approaching catastrophe, trauma tackles the suffering after the catastrophe already occurred. The possibility of that fatal incident becoming 'incurable' - 'an apt word in Greek for the ultimates of suffering and evil'[47] - transforms into the actuality of trauma theory. Emerging from the experience of atrocities in the twentieth century, the model of trauma carries a strikingly different emotional impact than the ancient notion of pathos. As Aristotle aptly observed, the possibility of having

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[44] ibid
[45] Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 223f.
[46] ibid, p. 182.
[47] ibid, p. 227.

one's fortune unexpectedly threatened by a fatal incident is both improbable and yet imaginable to the audience, as it resonates with the common, collective fears of a sudden disaster entering one's ordinary life. Surviving such an incident and the suffering that this survival entails, remains, however, beyond one's imagination. Thus, 'if the requisite emotions of pity and fear are to be aroused by undeserved misfortune, then while the prospect of such misfortune may successfully elicit them, as Aristotle's argument presupposes, it cannot do so in quite the same as the actuality.'[48]. The actuality of such misfortune implies its finality, erasing the possibility of ever restoring order or happiness, and once a person survives such event, their experience transcends the spectator's pity or fear. Pathos becomes not only insufficient but also inappropriate. Thus trauma theory operates with the aesthetics of unrepresentability, aporia, that appear the closest to communicate what cannot be represented.

Hysteria, on the other hand, shares with Aristotelean pathos the state of potentiality, as the danger is continuously anticipated and yet, unlike pathos, it fails to evoke the feelings of pity and fear. The ''incurable' suffering' in pathos designates a clear threat of physical torment that can be communicated onstage or in life. It is that vision of approaching catastrophe that provokes the emotional reaction in the spectators rather than the emotions displayed by the sufferer. The dread of such catastrophe, even in its potentiality, can be conveyed to the audience, who in turn responds with feelings of pity, fear and compassion. The contrary mechanism takes place in hysteria. Although hysterics relentlessly appeal to feelings of recognition and approval from their surroundings, their

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[48] ibid

attempts at pathos remain unsuccessful. The approaching ''incurable suffering', that could be seen as a bridge between the person suffering misfortune and her or his surroundings, in hysteria remains too elusive and thus cannot be effectively communicated. In the eyes of the audience there is a spectacle of emotions that appears both exaggerated and exhausting as it does not correspond to the scale of the potential threat. Kępiński refers to this phenomenon as 'bad theatre' or 'hysterical theatricality': 'a hysteric does everything for show, parades, everything is somewhat high-pitched'[49]. However, in Kępiński's notion of hysteria such display of extreme emotions derives from a particular value system built upon one fundamental question: 'How do others see me me?'[50]. Around this question, Kępiński observes, 'concentrates all their life effort, this question is prioritised in their value system.'[51]. The tragedy of hysteria, Kępiński notes, is that it performs pain in order to evoke pity and compassion, but it is precisely this performativity of pain that instead provokes feelings of distaste and indignation[52].

Both models of suffering, that of trauma and that of hysteria, violate the rules of Aristotle's Poetics, as they emerge from the collapse of the ancient notion of pathos. The model of trauma, however, constitutes the actualisation of the most dreaded scenario, that is the finality of ''incurable suffering', which is rooted in the physical, tangible realm. The model of hysteria, on the other hand, lacks an equally powerful point of reference

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[49] Kępiński, 'Typ histeryczny,' p. 57; 'histeryk robi wszystko jakby na pokaz, afiszuje się, wszystko u niego jest jakby o pół tonu wyżej'.
[50] ibid, p. 59; '"jak mnie widzą inni"'.
[51] ibid; 'Wokół tego pytania koncentruje się ich wysiłek życia, pytanie to zajmuje pierwsze miejsce w hierarchii wartości'.
[52] ibid, p. 89; 'Niestety, tragedią histeryka jest to, że jego marzenia się nie spełniają; chciałby bardzo być w pełni zaakceptowany przez otoczenie (...) ale niestety ludzie przeważnie mają go dosyć i od niego się odwracają.'

within the Western tradition of suffering. Hysteria emerges from a distinct historical context, in which the experience of the finality of ''incurable' physical misfortune spans over extended period of time, loosing its resonance as a signifier of 'the ultimates of suffering and evil'[53]. Kępiński emphases that hysteria 'appears particularly in the situations of difficulty, threat, in which a person feels helpless'[54] and sometimes 'encompasses whole social groups, i.e. during cataclysms, plagues, wars, revolutions.'[55]. The top priority is no longer the recognition of potential danger that allows one to avoid the catastrophe, or the recovery if the injury was already encountered, but the survival 'no matter what'[56]. The peculiarity of hysteria is that surviving is strictly linked with the already-mentioned value of greatest relevance that governs one's actions - external approval. Paradoxically, in hysteria 'for the applause of one's surroundings a person can sacrifice their own life'[57]. This contradiction becomes clearer when reflected upon with the initial definition of hysteria as 'disease of memory'[58]. Survival is no longer reduced to the literal dimension - as staying alive - but rather to 'keeping alive' the idealised version of the self. The life is sacrificed with a hope that the memory of courage will persevere.

Unfortunately for the hysterics, such extreme behaviours are simply not relatable. The 'suffering of surviving' - as I propose to call the condition rooted in a continuous anticipation of an undefined, approaching threat - is nearly impossible to communicate to

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[53] Halliwell, p. 227.

[54] Kępiński, p. 89; 'u człowieka pojawiający się szczególnie w sytuacjach trudnych, zagrożenia, w których człowiek czuje się bezradny (histeryzacja)'.

[55] ibid, p. 80; 'Niekiedy histeryzacja obejmuje całe grupy społeczne, np. w czasie kataklizmu, zarazy, wojen, rewolucji itp'.

[56] ibid, p. 89; 'W hierarchii wartościnajważniejsze staje się hasło: "przetrwać za wszelką cenę"'.

[57] ibid, p. 69; 'Dla aplauzu otoczenia gotów jest swe życie poświęcić'.

[58] James, p. 197.

the surroundings. For *psychopathia* - the suffering of one's psyche - to achieve the emotional impact of Aristotelean *pathos* and evoke feelings of pity and compassion, the audience to which the sufferer appeals would have to have a point of reference that allows for recognising non-organic, mental pain as equal in its severity to bodily injury. Such internal damage, however, lacks the tangible dimension required from the onstage tragedy and thus, when performed, is taken for a failed pathos, or 'bad theatre', as Kępiński defines hysteria. Literary language, however, with its ability to capture the internal cracks and produce emotional impact in the reader, can become an alternative platform to experience the non-organic, cultural injury.

Such experiential platform, I propose, is essential to expand conceptual points of reference that could be utilised when confronted with suffering that emerges from a distinct historical and cultural context and thus operates according to different principles of what constitutes the ultimate misfortune. The urgency of learning other languages of pain will be approached both in the context of the recent critique of trauma theory as well as the inadequacy of this model of suffering in the Polish contemporary culture.

4. Trauma Theory: Critique

Andreas Huyssen, reflecting on the state of memory discourse at the beginning of the twenty first century and its continuously increasing preoccupation with trauma theory, posed a question: 'What is at stake when we consider, as seems to happen ever more

frequently, the whole history of this century under the sign of trauma, with the Holocaust increasingly functioning as the ultimate cipher of unspeakability or unrepresentability?'[59]. Huyssen - one of the most prominent scholars investigating the post-1945 obsession with remembering - warns that such an approach 'does not help much to understand the various layers of contemporary discourse, although it may represent one of its major articulations.'[60]

Huyssen's warning about the expansion of trauma theory within the field of memory studies quoted at the beginning of this chapter opens up a larger volume of articles re- evaluating the discourse on suffering, *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (Bennet and Kennedy, 2003). From today's perspective, which over the past decade witnessed severe criticism of the Western, event-based model of trauma that then led to profound changes in the field, the volume is considered 'a path-breaking work'[61], where Huyssen's words of caution could be seen as rather prophetic. Although Bennet and Kennedy did 'contend that the work of trauma studies to date constitutes the seeds of an enduring and important field of study'[62], they also postulated fundamental changes that must happen for trauma theory 'to inform the study of culture in the postcolonial future in a much broader sense.'[63]. The editors listed the need to 'examine and redefine its own

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[59] Andreas Huyssen, 'Trauma and Memory,' in *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (eds), (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 17.
[60] Huyssen, p. 18.
[61] Sonya Andermarh, 'Introduction'. *Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism*. p. 1.
[62] Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy, 'Introduction'. In *World Memory. Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, ed. by Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 4.
[63] ibid

parameters'[64] and 'move beyond its focus on Euro-American events and experiences'[65],

whilst other disciplines 'such as postcolonial studies'[66], should 'engage with trauma theory

in order to develop more complex frameworks for the study of memory.'[67]

This call for action at the beginning of the twenty-first century has resonated widely

within the field. Over the next decade scholars such as Stef Craps, Michael Rothberg and

Roger Luthurst have voiced their reservations. As a result, trauma theory has undergone

a minor revolution in attempt to meet the challenges of the global memory discourse. A

recap of all the most fundamental criticisms, challenges and transformations within the

field - as well as the proposals for its future directions - has been gathered in the Special

Issue in *Humanities*, 'Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism' (2015-

2016). The project explores 'relationship between trauma studies and postcolonial

criticism,'[68] in an attempt to 'create a decolonized trauma theory that attends to and

accounts for the suffering of minority groups and non-Western cultures, broadly defined

as cultures beyond Western Europe and North America'[69].

Of particular relevance to my study of cultural hysteria as a form of suffering, is the

essay that opens the Special Issue, Irene Vissler's 'Decolonizing Trauma Theory:

Retrospects and Prospects'. Vissler notes the failure of trauma theory to meaningfully

approach different belief systems, instead disregarding any non-secular traditions as

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[64] ibid
[65] ibid, p. 5.
[66] ibid
[67] ibid
[68] Andermarh, p. 1.
[69] ibid

inferior. She observes that 'The dominant influence of secular rational thinking has often been compared to that of colonialism'[70] and suggests 'that the recognition that a respectful and nuanced conceptualisation of religious and spiritual modes of addressing trauma is needed would constitute a necessary and major step forward towards a fully decolonized trauma theory'[71]. My argument is that a parallel mechanism to the one analysed by Vissler takes place also in regard to differences in value systems. Trauma theory might seek diversity within the narratives of violence, but the idea of what constitutes violence is fixed, and adheres to rational principles. In this light, cultural hysteria that operates with emotions that do not seem to correspond with factual events, but often contradict them, is disregarded as a counterfeit of pain that can be linked to specific histories of violence. This argument will be further elaborated on later in the chapter, as it relates to Kępiński's argument of the 'error of the judge'[72], but it is worth noting the demand for conceptualisation of non-rational belief and value systems.

Stef Craps, whose already mentioned work *Postcolonial Witnessing* (2013) is among the seminal texts that have inspired the program of transforming trauma theory, also confronts the field of trauma about its shortcomings both on the ethical as well as conceptual level. He emphasises that trauma theory excludes the suffering of non-Western and minority groups, whereas the existing paradigm is far from universal:

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[70] Irene Vissler, 'Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospects and Prospects'. *Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism*. pp. 7-23 (p. 17).

[71] ibid

[72] Antoni Kępiński argued that an encounter with another person is often hindered through three types of errors: error of the attitude, error of of the mask and error of the judge. The error of the judge designates one's inclination to quickly arrive to a moral judgement of the other and label them as such, rather that remain open to the changeability of human behaviour.

'Though widely considered a single, uniform, timeless, and universal phenomenon, the concept of psychological trauma is a Western artefact determined by its origins in a variety of late- nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century medical and psychological discourses dealing with Euro-American experiences of industrialisation, gender relations, and modern warfare.'[73].

Significantly, Craps also points out the resistance of trauma theory to consider other than event-based models of trauma whilst its own attempts to clarify the existing paradigm further the distance between Western and non-Western suffering. As an example Craps mentions the work of Dominick LaCapra, whose key distinction 'between loss (...) and absence (...) is found to obscure the kind of long-term, cumulative trauma suffered by victims of racism or other forms of structural oppression, which fits neither category.'[74] Expanding the example of racism, Craps argues that it is both 'historically specific' and 'not related to a particular event', thus the application of the single-event model would in fact 'obscure the fact that it continues to case damage in the present.'[75]

The notion of "decolonizing trauma studies" dates earlier than Stef Craps's groundbreaking work, and it was first introduced by Michael Rothberg in his response to the Special Issue of *Studies in the Novel* (2008). The volume, edited by Stef Craps and Gert Buelnes, aimed at exactly the same target as one defined by Bennet and Kennedy five years earlier, that is to engage postcolonial studies in rethinking of trauma theory,

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[73] Stef Craps, *Postcolonial witnessing: trauma out of bounds*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 3.
[74] ibid, p. 4.
[75] ibid, p. 32.

allowing the reassessment of its own critical framework and a move beyond Eurocentric experiences. 2008 was also the year of another pioneering work in transforming trauma theory, Roger Luckhurst's *The Trauma Question*, which closely examined the limits of trauma theory. In his conclusion Luckhurst observed that the outburst of trauma is linked to its unexpected role as a tool of self-measurement that allows to keep our societies in check: 'It is a cusp term, both a product of modernity and a description of what occur when modern systems fail. The need to circulate so many traumatic stories, finally, suggests that this has become a means to articulate some of the psychic costs of capitalist modernity.'[76] Rothberg's essay 'Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response', that has come to be viewed as 'foundational'[77] mentioned earlier, aside from acutely capturing the many reservations that the authors raised in regard to bridging postcolonial studies and trauma theory, offered arguments for how to proceed further. Although Rothberg refers to the included essays as 'interventions'[78] that 'accomplish much necessary and overdue work'[79] he also cautions: 'As we proceed in the project of rethinking trauma studies, we need to be careful about repeating the dead ends of earlier debates and reproducing the terms and frameworks that we set out to disable.'[80]. One of such 'dead ends' Rothberg sees in the very notion of the 'West', a concept that he describes as 'ideological', 'Eurocentric' and 'highly elusive'[81]. It reinforces the 'racialized framework'[82], implying a unity and homogeneity that is in fact mythical. In the light of its

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[76] Luckhurst, p. 214.
[77] Vissler, 'Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospects and Prospects', p. 8.
[78] Rothberg, 'Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response', p. 226.
[79] ibid
[80] ibid
[81] ibid, p. 227.
[82] ibid

shortcomings, Rothberg then postulates that while the concept 'may seem to serve as practical shorthand for unequal power relations, we should resist using it and seek other terms'[83]. The way to do it, Rothberg further argues, would be through demonstrating 'the integral heterogeneity of Europe, North America, and Australia'[84]. This line of thinking seems to correspond to Rothberg's larger argument about multidirectional memory. Rather than framing collective memory in terms of competition, he proposes that 'we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not private.'[85].

Although following Rothberg's proposal might not require similar historical memories, I suggest that it presupposes a certain like-mindedness of attitudes of those involved in 'this interaction of different historical memories.'[86]. My argument is that such 'like-mindedness' results from a shared approach to the present as the 'aftermath' - such as in case of postmodernism, postcolonialism, postsocialism or postmemory, to name just a few. This 'aftermath approach' facilitates a common platform in our dealings with the past, but it might not be any less mythical than than the concept of the 'West' that Rothberg challenges.

In the case of Poland, which remains at the core of this analysis, defining its memory discourse in terms of postsocialism would be both false and dangerous. False, as it would imply that the gateway to understanding the present memory dynamics is

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[83] ibid, p. 228.
[84] ibid
[85] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional memory: remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonization.* (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3.
[86] ibid

rooted in the experience of socialism, while neglecting the earlier distortions in collective memory discussed in Chapter 1 during the phase of blocked memory that I suggest began with the First Partition of Poland in 1772. In the nineteenth century, the initial loss of power and territory was later amplified by the losses in population, as the nation attempted to restore its sovereignty during the two failed uprisings, the November Uprising in 1830 and the January Uprising in 1863. The legacy of sacrifice that developed during this period remained crucial in resisting the phase of manipulated memory during Communism and continues to affect the twenty first century Polish negotiations with the past.

Reducing the present-day collective remembrance to postsocialism is then dangerous, since the 'aftermath approach' introduces a fictionalised normalisation of the present and shifts the attention away from today's memory abuses. Thus, although the idea of the so-called "post-dependency studies"[87] that emerged in response to the application of foreign theories - such as postcolonial or postsocialist studies - to take into account the specifics of the regional context is correct, following the model of 'posts' contradicts its very own premise. Drawing on the model of 'post', I suggest, obscures the current suffering, which has taken a pathological form of hysteria. Far from being in the "post-dependency" phase, the current phase of obligated memory remains in the state of cultural dependency - both to its own past as well as to external politics of recognition.

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[87] Post-dependence Studies Centre (Centrum Badań Dyskursów Postzależnościowych) is an inter-university research network established in 2009, with a headquarter at the Faculty of Polish Philology, Warsaw University. Its main objective, as stated at the Centre's website, is to 'investigate the condition of post-dependence underlying the contemporary Polish society and culture specifically, and, in a broader perspective, defining the difference of Central-Eastern Europe from its Western counterpart.' www.cbdp.polon.uw.edu.pl. Web. 10 October 2016.

Distinct histories of memory, as I have argued in the earlier parts of this study, have brought various cultures to distinct stages of how the relation between history and memory is viewed, and not all of them allow for the interaction of different historical memories. In case of Poland, its third, current stage remains an example of memory abuse demonstrated as 'obligated memory' rather than a period of interactive dynamics between history and memory. At this subtle level of exploitation, the sacrifices from the past demand a sacrifice from the present, and it takes the form of a faithful testimony. The outcome of 'multidirectional memory' that Rothberg suggests - 'the borders of memory and identity are jagged'[88] - seems to embody the obligated memory's worst nightmare.

In the next part of the chapter I will look more closely at the differences in histories of memory and their consequences for the experience of suffering and the perception of it. Irene Vissler observed that 'trauma itself instigates a strong need for narrative in order to come to terms with the aftermath of colonial wounding.'[89] This chapter attempts to demonstrate that both "before" and "after" the 'socialist wounding', to paraphrase Vissler, the memory dynamics in Polish culture had been and have remained pathological. This cultural injury, which I argue constitutes a form of symbolic violence, would be more adequately conceptualised in reference to hysteria as defined by Kępiński and derived from Masłowska's writing, rather than trauma theory which deals with the 'consequences'

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[88] Rothberg, *Multidirectional memory,* p. 5.
[89] Vissler, p. 14.

and the state of the 'aftermath'.

5. Different histories, different models of suffering

To speak of trauma in regard to Polish culture inevitably provokes multiple reservations. It is not the injury itself that appears problematic: historically, ever since the country disappeared from the map of Europe for 123 years, it has undergone a series of devastating uprisings, was severely damaged by both World Wars and foreign occupations, and in the aftermath of the Second World War again lost its sovereignty, ending up as the People's Republic of Poland, a Soviet satellite state, from 1945 to 1989. Thus, the reservations do not disregard the claim that the culture is historically wounded, where a wound would be understood here as a history of external violence that results in a great deal of physical and mental suffering. The expression of this suffering and its self-perceived causes, however, appear problematic within the critical framework of both, the western concept of the singular event-based trauma, but also its revised postcolonial model of 'repetitive strain injury when stress endues overtime [which] overwhelms the subjects capacities to recover.'[90]

The first objection, and a fundamental one, I suggest, concerns the structure. Trauma theory, as developed in the West and then revised by the postcolonial scholars, establishes what happened and then explores how it affects the subject. It is the 'how'

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[90] Dirk Moses, 'Terrorized Histories and Cosmopolitan Futures: Decolonizing Histories in Global Context,' Genealogies of Memory (Conference), Warsaw, 28 November 2012.

that drives the study of trauma, both in terms of the effects as well as ways of dealing with

trauma. This structure, however, presupposes the possibility of establishing the 'what'-

that is the wound, the cause of suffering. In order to study trauma it is necessary to know

its past. Cathy Caruth's notion of the double telling illustrates exactly such interaction

between trauma and history, 'between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and

the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.'[91] This point of view presupposes the

possibility of sourcing such story, of retracing the event that caused the trauma. It is the

point of view that mirrors the western 'history of memory', which in its last, contemporary

phase, refers to the interactive dynamics between history and memory. Aleida Assmann

explains the current approach to the past as following:

'The third (let's call it the postmodern) stage can be characterised by a new interest in the *interactions between memory and history*. After the long period of polarisation, they are now considered as complementary, each one adding something that the other cannot supply. A new awareness of the interactions between history and memory as triggered by the profound political changes of the 1980s and 1990s, when new memories emerged and old ones were seen in a different light. After 1989, with the thawing of frozen memories and the opening of archives, both memory and history took on a new force that carried them into the center of the public arena.'[92]

Parallel structure to such perceived 'history of memory', I maintain, could be found

in the Western model of trauma. Here a single dramatic event - the realm of history - leads

to an emotional response of inexpressible suffering - the realm of memory: '(...) it is the

inextricability of the story of one's life from the story of a death, an impossible and

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[91] Caruth, p. 8.
[92] Aleida Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory'. *Social Research*. 1.75 (2008), 49-72 (p. 61).

necessary double telling, that constitutes their historical witness.'[93] The factual not only 'interacts' with the emotional, but they mutually validate each other. The scale of the tragedy is measured by the traumatic response, whilst trauma is considered in relation to the actual event that proceeded and led to such traumatic reaction.

The bifold, interactive model of trauma, however, has caused certain uneasiness if not controversy when applied to Eastern Europe. To assume that a single dramatic event - the realm of history - leads to an emotional response of inexpressible suffering - the realm of memory - would require selecting such singular event. The attempts towards such selection, however, have led to the so-called 'division of traumas' in the Western memory discourse. Certain groups and cultures have been attributed specific tragedies or historical experiences of structural violence – Holocaust, Gulag, colonialism, communism, apartheid – through which they were to be defined, which were to function as the gateways to their past and their culture. Just like geography uses cartography to map the world, trauma theory has began using these events to map the past. Although the lines were invisible, and customary rather than official, playing with them appeared not much different from crossing or moving the physical borders.

Thus, to adapt the singular-event model, in which an injury results in incurable suffering, would require one to discern a concrete historical event that triggered Polish trauma. Such inflexibility of the Euro-American model of trauma has been criticised by scholars working on the experiences of pain and suffering in other regions of the world. Stef Craps argues that 'the current trauma discourse has difficulty recognising that it is

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[93] Caruth, p. 8.

not just the singular and extraordinary events but also "normal" everyday humiliations and abuses that can act as traumatic stressors.'[94] Craps stresses that the problem goes beyond today's wide usage of the concept of trauma, but originates from 'the founding texts of the field'[95] which 'tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity'[96]. The critique relates to my earlier argument, which emphasises the challenge for cultural hysteria to be viewed as a form of suffering. Since the expression of cultural hysteria often cannot be linked with factual events, and might even contradict them, the torment that results from hysteria fails to receive the recognition that's intended for pain resulting from 'the singular and extraordinary events'[97]. Any attempts, however, to distinguish a specific historical tragedy as a cornerstone of regional trauma, in Poland and other countries of the former Soviet Bloc, provokes heated debates.

To assume that the Second World War has been the major tragedy of the twentieth century, shared by all European nations and creating in each of them a wound, opens a Pandora's box of ethical questions that memory scholars have been dealing with for the last few decades. In the context of Poland the most striking ones relate to the division between victims, perpetrators and bystanders. That division, developed by western memory scholars, has been introduced to the startled Eastern European countries in the 1990s. The clash between the national and the global discourses on the Second World War has been continuously and repetitively causing outbursts of panic in the Polish

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[94] Craps, *Postcolonial witnessing: trauma out of bounds*, p. 45.
[95] ibid, p. 2.
[96] ibid
[97] ibid, p. 45.

society, as in case of Jan T. Gross's publication *Neighbours* (2001), Władysław Pasikowski's film *Pokłosie* or most recent Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida* (2013), which contended the pre-1989 collective memory of Poles as exclusively victims of the Second World War and never perpetrators. At the same time the response to tragic historical memories in Eastern Europe contrasts with the model of suffering developed within the Euro-American trauma theory, precisely through its readiness to exhibit one's own suffering, a display that seems close to fetishising memories of loss and pain. According to Aleida Assmann these differences between Western Europe and Eastern Europe in communicating experiences of suffering, which resurfaced after 1989, result from distinct relationships with national myths. Assmann writes: 'While the Western European nations increasingly brought their national constructions of the past into line with the standards of historical scholarship, the nations that emerged from the Eastern bloc did not necessarily undertake similar reconstructions.'[98] She offers the example of Poland and its tradition of martylogy which reinforces a sense of victimization. Assmann argues that 'In light of this deeply entrenched cultural pattern of experience, it is virtually impossible to acknowledge the status of other victims'[99].

This difference in expressing pain and experiencing non-physical injuries is not merely cultural, I would suggest, but a structural one. Whilst one of the most fundamental attributes of trauma theory constitutes its inexpressibility, those regional reactions to tragedies - unlike the Western response of 'aporia' - has been far removed from 'representation inability'. The editors of *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe* (2012)

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[98] Aleida Assmann, 'Europe: A Community of Memory?', *GHI Bulletin* 40 (2007), pp.11-25 (p. 16).
[99] ibid, p. 17.

observed that 'It is not the traumatic misrepresentation that characterises many developments of postwar, postsocialist, and postcatastrophic memories, but rather recurrent, even somewhat obsessive remembrances of the loss.'[100] Thus, Blacker and Etkind point to the works that theorise these processes of loss and suffering through the Freudian concept of mourning.

Work of memory and work of mourning, however, lack one essential element that I would argue defines the memory dynamics in Poland - the imperative character. The 'duty of memory', as Paul Ricoeur demonstrated transforms the command 'you will remember' into 'you will not forget'[101]. Ricoeur points out that it is the 'extent to which the proclamation of the duty of memory remains captive to the symptom of obsession [that] makes it waver continually between use and abuse.'[102] Thus, the emphasised 'obsessive remembrance' in the Eastern European work of memory is an integral part of the imposed duty to remember, through which use slips into abuse. These differences in histories of memory, I claim, lead also to the differences in the Western and Eastern European models of what constitutes suffering and how it is expressed.

As mentioned above, the last stage of Western 'history of memory,' which A. Assmann calls 'postmodern'[103], designates an interactive, self-reflexive dynamics between history and memory. A. Assmann perceives this third stage as a result of the political changes in the 1980s and 1990s, which brought to the surface a multiplicity of

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[100] Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind, 'Introduction' to *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, 1-22 (p. 9).
[101] Ricoeur, 'The Exercise of Memory: Uses and Abuses,' p. 87.
[102] Ricoeur, p. 90.
[103] A. Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory', p. 61.

previously unheard voices that destabilised the former constructions of the past. A. Assmann explains the transformation that took place in the memory/history dynamics as following: 'In such situations both history and memory become self-reflexive; a sense is developed of their constructedness by discovering that memory has a history and that history is itself a form of memory.'[104].

It is such understood structure that determines the contemporary approach to the past. Yet, as argued in Chapter 1, the postsocialist Polish culture entered into an alternative stage of 'history of memory' - that is the one of 'obligated memory'. Here, the abuse to the processes of remembering and forgetting have turned memory into a project, imposing a bifold duty onto the future 'To say: You will remember, is also to say: you will not forget'[105]. This obligated memory does not interact with history - understood as an attempt of objectified account of the past - but perseveres its duty 'to commemorate now and always'[106] despite or even 'against vaster and more critical aim of history.'[107]. A transference of this dynamics into the realm of trauma discloses that the emotional response - the realm of memory - needs not to be directly linked to an organic cause - realm of history.

Thus, suffering is linked not to a singular tragedy - an event, but to the conditions that demand relentless remembering and ban forgetting, distorting the dynamics between history and memory. It is neither memory of suffering nor mourning of a loss. Rather,

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[104] ibid, p. 62.
[105] Ricoeur, p. 88.
[106] ibid
[107] ibid

remembering is the insufferable suffering, since it causes pain and yet cannot be abandoned. It stretches from Józef Czapski's command to remain faithful to the legacy of sacrifice[108], to the school boy from Sylwia Chutnik's short story born fifty years after the war, who confesses 'I saw nothing, I remember nothing. But I dream about it. Because this is mine'[109]. It is precisely in this repetitive imposition - of structures of remembering, not of past events - that the duty of memory on the one hand echoes the key premise of trauma theory, but on the other lacks its two essential symptoms: the specificity of wound that causes pain and the unrepresentability of pain.

The distinct development of the relation between history and memory in modern Polish culture – through the abuses to the work of memory rather than the stages of identity, polarization and interaction[110] - determines not only one's relation to the past, but heavily impacts on the experience of the present and the possibilities for future. Within a culture with strained memory, forgetting cannot take its natural course, as lifting the burden of the past becomes a form of treason.

7. Decolonizing Trauma Project and the Question of Eastern Europe

The project to decolonize trauma theory has left Eastern Europe in a position that

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[108] Józef Czapski: 'A Pole is someone who cannot forget the innocent sacrifice'. See Maria Janion, *Do Europy tak, ale tylko z naszymi umarłymi* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2000), p. 6. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Polakiem jest ten, kto tych ofiar niewinnych nie może zapomnieć'.
[109] Sylwia Chutnik, 'Biedne dzieci patrzą na biednych dorosłych,' in *Nie pytaj o Polskę*, ed. by Sylwia Chutnik and Ewa Aksionek. (Budzyń : Wydawnictwo AMEA, 2009), p. 14. All the translations mine unless otherwise indicated.
[110] A. Assmann, p. 57.

is not much less awkward than the previous attempts to understand its suffering through the Western, singular event-based model. The first difficulty would be already in the conceptual framework within which the project of rethinking trauma operates. For one, among the aspects of trauma theory that the postcolonial scholars most criticise is its Eurocentrism. Eastern Europe, however, in both its historical experience and cultural aspirations is thoroughly Eurocentric. I would go as far as to suggest that the project to decolonize trauma theory from an Eastern European perspective would begin with dropping the concept of 'Eastern' and considering the regional experience simply as a part of European suffering. The major difficulty here, however, is that the current debate on the future of trauma in the global world has been moving beyond cultural divisions and any particular group's 'ownership' of historical memories.

Rothberg proposes a model of 'multidirectional memory', which encourages the fluidity of what is perceived as 'mine' and what as 'the other's' historical memory. He further explains: 'Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory - as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources - I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not private.'[111].

This discrepancy of perceptions is probably best illustrated in the one essay concerning Eastern Europe included in the already discussed Special Issue *Decolonizing Trauma* - Dovile Budryte's 'Decolonization of Trauma and Memory Politics: Insights from

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[111] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 3.

Eastern Europe'. Budryte begins his line of arguments with listing 'multiple challenges associated with the proposed recognition of the traumas experienced by "non-Western" or minority groups on their own terms.'[112] The reservations that he lists do not differ much from the ones already raised by other scholars, and point to the power structures between those who seek and those who grant recognition, as well as to the dangers of competitive memories and an emphasis on victimhood. Thus, it appears that the application of trauma theory to Eastern Europe reflects the struggles already encountered by postcolonial studies. Budryte maintains that Eastern Europe is 'a suitable region for discussion' since it 'experienced some of the worst political violence in human history during the previous century, including the Holocaust, the two World Wars, widespread repression of human rights, mass deportations, and ethnic cleansing.'[113]. Such portrayal of Eastern Europe - defined by the author as 'the "Other Europe", the former Soviet sphere of influence, or postcommunist Europe'[114] - appears to me as a particular type of offering, in which the tragedies and suffering are presented as raw material for a better understanding of trauma. My argument here is that the very participation of Eastern Europe in the project of decolonizing trauma resembles a symbolic trade off - due to the lack of conceptualisation that would derive from the region itself, the participants go on a quest to find within the region such events and historical memories that could be translated into already recognisable languages of trauma theory or postcolonial studies. The recognition craved here is not as much for the pain experienced by the sufferers, but for the relevance

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[112] Dovile Budryte 'Decolonization of Trauma and Memory Politics: Insights from Eastern Europe'. *Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism*, pp. 153-168 (p. 153).
[113] ibid, p. 154.
[114] ibid

of their pain in the global scale. It is therefore no surprise, I suggest, that the proliferation of possible traumas in Eastern Europe and granting them due recognition seems to neither satiate the craving for recognition nor facilitate a better understanding of the suffering in the region.

Another fundamental problem, I suggest, is in the Eastern European approaches to the study of trauma. These approaches, to repeat after Burydyte who references works of Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Aleksievich and political philosopher Jasmina Husanovic 'embody a search for the ways to belong to both the "West" and "non-West" at the same time.'[115]. The first and fundamental problem here, I suggest, is the isolation and futility of these attempts within a debate that aims to abandon the very concept of the West.

Michael Rothberg in the opening of his essay 'From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory' recounts Jay Winter's 2010 keynote lecture at the inaugural event at Cambridge University's "Memory at War" research project, in which the historian observed 'that the turn toward the east is the key move in scholarly work' and postulated to 'shift the centre of gravity of Europe from Paris to Warsaw'[116]. If such move was to be constructive, however, and involve more than just a change of scenery, I suggest it requires letting the conceptual framework emerge from the region itself, rather than replanting the already developed theories. Otherwise, the answer to Rothberg's question at the end of the very same essay - 'What happens when different histories of extreme violence confront each other in the public sphere?'- would be that they do not stand an

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[115] Budryte, p. 155.
[116] Michael Rothberg, 'From Gaza to Warsaw'. *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe,* p. 81.

equal chance to have their suffering be recognised on its own terms. Rather, the confrontation happens in the language developed and owned by only one of these histories. The other one is left with one of the three options: to remain silent; to speak in its own non-conceptualised language and risk its pain to be unrecognised; or to fabricate/ tailor it historical memory as to fit the existing framework and be granted due recognition. This very struggle, I believe, demands conceptualisation that does not make trauma theory its point of reference. My argument is that an attempt to bring 'insights from Eastern Europe' into the 'Decolonizing Trauma' project obscures the regional suffering while at the same time adds little to the debate itself. There is a certain awkwardness in the very presence of Burydyte's essay in the Special Issue on the 'Decolonizing Trauma' project, as there is awkwardness in the essay itself that lists unimaginable tragedies to make a case for the region's adequacy to join the debate. At the same time, I suggest, the outcomes of this vibrant intellectual discussion between trauma theory and postcolonial studies resulted is some astute findings that could serve as a point of departure for the conceptualisation of suffering other than trauma. In fact, the chapter draws on two points made by Michael Rothberg. Firstly, I take up his challenge to restrain from using the concept of 'the West', and propose to use the terms of the First, Second and Third world. Then, I second his 2014 observation on the future of trauma that 'not all violence and suffering are best described by trauma - even if something we can recognise as trauma often accompanies those other forms of violence and suffering'[117]. In the light of this argument, I propose to look at the suffering of the Second World outside the framework

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[117] Michael Rothberg, 'Preface'. *Future of trauma theory: contemporary literary and cultural criticism*. (London ; New York : Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), p. xvii.

of trauma their and instead through the conceptualisation derived from Dorota Masłowska's critical essays in relation to Antoni Kępiński's theoretical study of hysteria.

8. Second World

The postulate to reconsider the concepts of the First, Second and Third Worlds originates from a conviction that the Cold World terminology has not lost its currency, but in fact provides unexpected insights in the debate on trauma, suffering and memory after 1989. This division - if regarded as symbolic and taken outside its specific historical context - rather than geographical territories, describes spheres of influence and power structures that govern the global debate on suffering and recognition. The definition of each of these spheres would be based on their value systems which in turn determine their attitude towards oneself and its surroundings. The Second World that remains the subject of this analysis I define in terms of the hierarchy of values that, according to Kępiński, governs the hysterical type. It is a hierarchy that grows out of a state of self-perceived threat, be it real or delusional. Thus, its core principle constitutes a slogan "to survive no matter what"[118]. This governing value is, however, continuously questioned by a hysteric, since all the opposing values do not disappear but exist in one's consciousness, permanently contradicting any action. This instability of the value system, Kępiński suggests, results in such severe dependency on others' recognition: "'what

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[118] Kępiński, 'Typ histeryczny,' p. 89; "'przetrwać za wszelką cenę"'.

others will think" - becomes a gnawing question'[119]. The extent of such reliance on others'

approval is probably best demonstrated in the most extreme circumstances: 'For the

applause of the surroundings one is ready to sacrifice one's life; bravado in the face of

death is a trait not infrequently encountered in the hysterics.'[120]. This contradiction, in

which the governing principle 'to survive no matter what' results in one giving away life in

exchange for recognition, I suggest demonstrates quite powerfully the symbolic

dimension of the concept of survival. To survive does not equate to keeping one's life, but

one's reputation in the eyes of others. In less liminal situations a popular survival strategy

focuses on obtaining sympathy and admiration through an escalation of one's own merits

and accomplishments. A hysteric performs both - the suffering and victories - in the hope

of receiving the anticipated dues. The tragedy of this type of hysterical behaviour,

Kępiński argues, is that usually 'people are fed up with it and turn away'[121]. Likewise, the

tragedy of the Second World, I suggest, is precisely in its performative mode of existence

that pushes away what it most craves - the sense of belonging. Its suffering is tightly

linked to the discrepancy between a self-perceived relevance and its actual position of

power. The repressed suspicion of such discrepancy results in outburst of aggressive

behaviour that in extreme situations can lead to violence. This is not a 'suffering of the

surviver' - that is someone who has already survived a tragedy, as in the case of trauma

- but a relentless 'suffering of surviving'. The Second World, although it exists in the same

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[119] ibid, p. 69; "'co o mnie ludzie pomyślą" - staje się jego nękającym pytaniem'.
[120] ibid; 'Dla aplauzu otoczenia gotów jest swe życie poświęcić; brawurowa odwaga w obliczu śmierci jest cechą nierzadko u histeryków spotykaną'.
[121] ibid, 89; 'ludzie przeważnie mają go dosyć i od niego się odwracają'.

historical time as the First and the Third World, undergoes a different historical phase -

not of an aftermath, but of an on-going illness. Its cultural hysteria is a type of psychopathy

that results in its own and others' suffering.

The Second World in my project designates Poland - which remains the centre of

this analysis - but could come to conceptualise other countries in the world undergoing

similar socio-political processes. It is the shift from geography to experience - or, to use

Kępiński's terminology, from geography to 'attitude towards one's surroundings' - that I

believe makes the concept of the First, Second and Third Worlds productive for memory

dynamics in the global age. The Second World, as mentioned above, is founded on the

principle of survival, thus relentlessly guarding itself against a self-perceived threat. Yet,

if 'progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for nationality'[122], to recall

Ernest Renan's argument, then the countries with the most fragile status would not only

have the experience of resisting interferences to their collective remembrance, but also

become most susceptible to using memory instrumentally. The Second World then filters

out the past to suit the interests of the present, even if these interests – defined in terms

of survival – appear both honourable and necessary.

Consequently, such an approach impedes an international dialogue with parts of

the world that find themselves at different stages of memory/history dynamics. The secure

status of the First World not only allows for, but demands reconstructing national myths

that had previously formed it, while the Second World desperately adheres to these myths

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[122] Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', in *What is a Nation? and Other Political Writing*, trans. and ed. by M.F.N. Giglioli (New York, Columbia University, 2018), pp. 247- 263 (p. 251).

in its struggle to survive. At the same time the national struggles of the Second World lack the urgency of singular, extraordinary events that torment the Third World. The Second World, operating with instrumentalized memory during shared negotiations with the past, finds itself alienated and unable to receive the recognition it craves, which in turn strengthens its cultural hysteria.

The division I propose is not a fixed but one that remains in flux. Countries and cultures move between these three spheres, depending on their socio-historical context at a given period. Changes in the political systems and wars that lead to the territorial losses or discoveries of natural resources are among the factors that can affect the status of a nation. Affecting their processes of remembering and forgetting, they resulting in an altered attitude towards their surroundings.

In the light of this division I suggest that the project of decolonizing trauma is an urgent and productive debate, but a debate between the First and the Third World. The postcolonial theory implanted into Polish context, I suggest, is instead an excellent example of one of the symptoms of cultural hysteria, namely "pseudologia phantastica". To recall Kępiński's definition of this phenomenon, which will be discussed in the next chapter in more detail, "pseudologia phantastica" is a 'distortion of reality'[123] that is both more probable and 'better installed'[124] than a mere lie or delusion. Its strength derives from the hysterical type believing in the reality "pseudologia phantastica" creates and thus its temporary ability to convince the environment. Stanley Bill has examined the paradox

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[123] ibid, p. 62; 'zniekształcenie obrazu rzeczywistości'.
[124] ibid; 'lepiej wmontowane w obraz rzeczywistości'.

of conservative Polish thinkers adapting a theory which 'in its canonical forms owes a great deal to Marxist, postmodernist and feminist theories'[125]. It is not surprising that, as Bill argues, 'the fundamental imaginative repertoires fuelling quite disparate visions of Poland's past and future may turn out to have a great deal in common'[126] since these visions are only two different facets - the ideal and the repressed - of the same malaise of cultural hysteria. The dominators that Bill suggests, "ethnicity" and "authentic culture"[127], are in fact fantasies covering up the uncertainty of its own inherently contradictory value system.

Thus, to consider the history of the twentieth century 'under the sign of trauma' - to return to Huyssen's urgent concern - would then mean to reduce the distinctive narratives of violence and pain to the vocabulary developed by trauma theory. The hegemony of trauma is, as result, not only restricted to privileging the specific, event-based model - acutely contested by postcolonial scholars - but also in its decolonized state to limiting the discussion on pain, loss and suffering to one theoretical language. Insisting on such common denominator as trauma theory to capture the complexity of historical memories of violence would come at a price of either obscuring those memories or neglecting them. An example of such situation would be the Eastern European response to tragic events in the form of 'recurrent, even somewhat obsessive remembrances of the loss'[128] that has been described as far removed from the

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[125] Stanley Bill, 'Seeking the Authentic: Polish Culture and the Nature of Postcolonial Theory'. *nonsite.org. Online Journal in the Humanities.*12 (August 2014). Web. 27 October 2016.
[126] ibid
[127] ibid
[128] Blacker, Etkind, p. 9.

'representational inability'[129], an essential aspect of the Western model of trauma, and as such treated with extra caution.

I point out, however, that in the alternative format proposed in the chapter, it is neither 'the loss' - a single event, nor 'strain injury' but the 'obsessive remembrance' - a product of the repetitive abuse of the past, that constitutes the insufferable experience. Although the 'obsessive remembrance' encompasses a multiplicity of responses to the past traumas, the source of its pain comes from the negotiations with the present, not with the past. It emerges at the interface between relentlessly guarding the legacy of sacrifice and repetitively failing to have that suffering recognised, due to an inability to specify the source of pain.

Thus, 'obsessive remembrance' becomes a self-defeating strategy, in which remembrance dominates the present but fails to advance it. Injury to a culture understood in this way cannot manifest itself through 'representational inability', but rather 'representational incomprehensibility', as strikingly captured in Masłowska's writing and discussed in the following Chapters.

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[129] ibid

Chapter 3

Claustrophobia: Masłowska's Essays

1.   Introduction

'Jesus, let there be at last some war, let everything at last explode. Let there be something to live for'[1] ('Jezu, niech wreszcie przyjdzie jakaś wojna, niech to wszystko wreszcie wybuchnie. Niech będzie po co żyć.' para. 20) this desperate cry for any external intervention that would fill the terrible void unexpectedly roars from Dorota Masłowska's first critical essay 'Przyszkoleni do jedzenia' [Trained to Eat, 2002]. The shocking confession, according to the writer, designates the collective fantasy of the first generation of Poles who grew up in the free country. After establishing a theoretical context in the earlier parts of the dissertation, Chapter 3 offers a close reading of Masłowska's critical essays in order to examine the damages that trauma theory inflicts on a culture which has suffered a history of memory abuses. Seconding the view that 'literary texts (...) addressing questions of traumatic memory, regional experience and the way these have affected several generations of Poles are ahead of scholarly historical works in this

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[1] Dorota Masłowska, 'Przyszkoleni do jedzenia' [Trained to Eat]. *Gazeta Wyborcza* (233), 5 October 2002, p. 13. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

respect'[2], here I conceptualise Masłowska's language to argue that it is the notion of hysteria, rather than the Freudian concept of the wound, that allows theorising, as William James originally put it, 'the thorns in the spirit'[3] of the Second World.

The need for an alternative model of suffering that allows an articulation and recognition of non-organic pain, discussed from a theoretical angle in Chapter 2, I further support with the two critical essays that Dorota Masłowska published in response to the reception of her literary work. The first, 'Trained to Eat,' appeared in one of the most popular dailies, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, several weeks after the release of her debut novel *White and Red* [Wojna polsko ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną, 2002], which caused an uproar in Polish media and the literary world. The second essay, 'Faraway, So Gross' [2009] was commissioned by Deutsches Haus at NYU with support from the Polish Book Institute and the Polish Cultural Institute. Significantly, the essay never appeared in Polish and was first published in German translation in *Signale aus der Bleecker Street 3* (2008), and then included in the 'Words without Borders' anthology *The Wall in my Head* (2009), translated by Benjamin Paloff. These two essays - one written for a Polish audience at the beginning of Masłowska's career and the other addressing foreign readers after the writer's considerable international success - make for a fascinating argument to conceptualise cultural suffering that slips through the existing structures of trauma theory. Whilst 'Trained to Eat' speaks of a cultural 'grave' ('grób,' para. 22) that Masłowska's

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[2] Ursula Phillips, 'Introduction'. *Polish literature in transformation*. Ed. by Ursula Phillips with the assistance of Knut Andreas Grimstad and Kris Van Heuckelom. (London: University College London, 2013), pp. 3-24 (p. 15).
[3] William James, Review of J. Breuer and S. Freud *Ueber den psychischen Mechanismus hysterischer Phänomene. Vorläufige Mittheilung*. In *The Psychological Review* I (1898), p. 197.

generation inherited, 'Faraway, So Gross' illustrates that such suffering appears both incomprehensible and disappointing within the trauma discourse. The lack of theoretical framework that could serve as a platform to communicate this pain provokes fabrications of more recognisable forms of suffering for the sake of external recognition.

Thus, where Chapter 2 proposed a double shift in the debate on pain, suffering and loss, Chapter 3 introduces a third. The earlier theoretical section argued for the urgency of returning to European suffering, despite the criticism of Eurocentric bias, yet it put forward a distinct approach from that of trauma theory, focusing on suffering that seemingly has no organic cause, instead of historical tragedies. In the third shift, this Chapter moves away from the symbolism of 'bloodlands', as the region was famously defined by Timothy Snyder[4], to the symbolism of cultural 'graves', as found in Masłowska's essay 'Trained to Eat' and explored in the language of her writing. This final shift is not a matter of semantics, but a crucial change of perspectives, from the external perception of the region to the internal one. Snyder defines his concept of the bloodlands as following: 'The bloodlands were no political territory, real or imagined; they are simply where Europe's most murderous regimes did their most murderous work.'[5]. The shift I propose - from bloodlands to graveyards - moves away from the passive, objectifying perspective of 'what happened to the region' and moves towards an active, subject-driven approach of 'what happens in the region'. It is also a turn from the past to the present, as Masłowska laments the cultural injury but also provocatively declares: 'I will make a home

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[4] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands*. (London : Bodley Head, 2010).
[5] ibid, p. xviii.

of this grave' ('zrobię z tego grobu dom,' para. 22), claiming the injured language and making it her own characteristic instrument of artistic expression.

2. 'Trained to Eat'

'Trained to Eat', published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* shortly after the release of Masłowska's sensational debut novel *White and Red*, is both a generational and an artistic manifesto. On one hand, Masłowska explicitly addresses and describes her peers, referencing an earlier essay that appeared in the same daily - Kuba Wandachowicz's 'Generation Nothing'[6]('Generacja nic'). Masłowska supports Wandachowicz's thesis about a mass sell out of intellectual and ethical principles in exchange for a variety of goods and argues that a generation born a decade later, to which she belongs, shares the same malaise: 'It is not the world we got for our usage, but a large, common dining hall.'('Nie dostaliśmy w użytkowanie świata, dostaliśmy wielką, powszechną jadłodajnię,' para. 20).

She admits that her 'definition of 'generation nothing' does not differ much from the definition by Kuba Wandachowicz' ('Moja definicja "generacji nic" nie różni się dużo od definicji Kuby Wandachowicza,'para. 20). If not a new generational definition then, what is at stake in Masłowska's fervent rant about her milieu? I argue that Masłowska creates a conceptual language to speak about her peers and on behalf of them, a group she sees

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[6] Kuba Wandachowicz, 'Generacja nic' [Generation Nothing]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 September 2002.

as suffering from a profound cultural injury. That language, however, resonates beyond a generational discussion, as it captures gnawing, structural problems within the culture that has developed in the context of memory abuses and suffering of hysteria.

The torment that Masłowska describes is of a different kind than that resulting from the history of violence - wars, mass killings or political regimes - that have come to define Poland within the framework of trauma theory. Paradoxically, it is not the symbolic wounds from the past but the absolute lack of connection with anything that happened before one's lifetime that both causes pain and invalidates the present. Masłowska provocatively describes the new status of the historical tragedies, shaped by commercialisation: 'War, Holocaust and death are titles of computer games, slogans on t-shirts, foreign language whims of TV presenters.' ('Wojna, Holocaust i śmierć to tytuły gier komputerowych, napisy na koszulkach, obcojęzyczne fanaberie spikerów telewizyjnych,' para. 20). The abstractness of the past horrors goes hand-in-hand with a sense of entitlement to the current democratic privileges: 'This peace flying around the world in the costume of a white dove showed to us through the window in the kindergarden is obvious and reserved in the prospect.' ('Ten pokój fruwający po świecie w przebraniu białego gołębia pokazywany nam przez okno w przedszkolu jest oczywisty i zastrzeżony w prospekcie,' para. 20). Violent history did not leave wounds, I suggest, but rather a vast crater that is now filled with with obsessive consumption: 'The point is that equally nothing comes out of it. That we are the generation of absence, incredible void, which must be experienced by a bulimic after an ecstatic swallow up of contents of the fridge.' ('Chodzi o to, że w równym stopniu nic z tego nie wynika. Że jesteśmy

pokoleniem braku, niesamowitej pustki, jakiej musi doznawać bulimik po ekstatycznym wchłonięciu zawartości lodówki,' para. 19).

Masłowska's essay analyses the havoc caused by consumption, but not of the kind that grows within a society but one that is rapidly injected into a culture that is cut off from its own past: 'everything that was hitherto behind the curtain, the whole world of flashy colours and disposable packaging exploded, overflowing the border, behind which we stood intimidated, fertilised with images from beautiful, glossy TV series, and undercut us.' (para. 13). Masłowska speaks of being defeated not by famine but by abundance: 'I see it a bit as though we were the first generation with a purchased summer camp in paradise. ('Jesteśmy pierwszym pokoleniem, któremu wykupiono kolonie w raju,' para. 20). Instead of eternal bliss, however, there was a life stripped of any meaning: 'We were trained to eat. That is how we live. For nothing.' ('Zostaliśmy przyszkoleni do jedzenia. Tak właśnie żyjemy. "Po nic",' para. 14).

At first glance Masłowska's essay might appear as a voice of youthful dissent against the conformism and consumerism of the older generations. Without taking into account the wider historical and cultural context, the text can easily share the same fate as *White and Red* - appearing to the foreign audience as an early post-socialist reaction to the commodified culture, whereas to Polish readers it is a description of social margins. The obsessive consumption that Masłowska describes, however, is only a coating for the terrible cultural desolation that the twentieth century has turned Poland into, the central theme of both the essay and the debut novel: 'I wrote a book, in which on every page appear photographs of void in all its takes. It's a bit as though I threw a bullet into the

world of cardboard and plywood, and one sews a tail to it and makes it into a comet' ('Napisałam książkę, w której na każdej stronie pojawiają się fotografie pustki we wszystkich ujęciach. Jest trochę tak, jakbym rzuciła pocisk w świat tektury i dykty, a doszywa się mu ogon i przerabia go na kometę,' para. 22). The description of that collective 'big feast' that takes place in post-1989 Poland as in Masłowska's fictional works, captures the phenomenon through speaking about it in its own language: 'I use such comparisons intentionally, in the context of this generation they are most adequate: we were grown on an aesthetic but not very fertile soil of plastic.' ('Celowo używam takich porównań, w kontekście tego pokolenia one są najtrafniejsze: zostaliśmy wyhodowani na estetycznym, ale mało żyznym podłożu plastikowym,' para. 13). It is that 'soil of plastic' from which the generation springs that I will use as the focus for my reading of 'Trained to Eat'. The intentionality of Masłowska's language, the deliberateness of the words and comparisons she uses are my starting point for conceptualising a different type of cultural suffering than that examined by trauma theory. Thus, I extract from the essay five concepts - 'claustrophobia,' 'prosthesis,' 'transformation,' 'new language' and 'graveyard' - to sketch a typology of suffering characteristic of the new culture of post-1989 Poland. Each of these terms, despite the wide variety of issues they refer to, tackles an elusive nature of non-organic pain that cannot be pinned down to any specific historical tragedy, but rather emerges from a particular history of memory that transformed the culture.

Claustrophobia

It is the description of severe confinement that opens up the writer's first critical essay, 'Trained to Eat'. Masłowska recounts her friends' daily routine that pivots on soft

drugs and alcohol, which are 'not a subsection of their definition but its very centre' ('To nie jest podpunkt ich autodefinicji, to jest samo jej centrum,' para. 4). The momentary escape that substances provide constitutes their only coping mechanism with the unreality of the present. The uncertain status of the 'here and now' in contemporary Poland that Masłowska's essay explores is linked to the change of political systems after the fall of Communism in 1989. The new democracy exists in isolation from the past, since the former socialist experience fails to inform and comfort the present conditions of capitalism. Masłowska's essay emphasises, however, that this uprooted present also becomes isolated from the future, since without the ability to look back, one then fails to look forward: 'When I think about the future, I know that there will be nothing, and when I smoke up, I'm able to not think about it.' ('Jak myślę o przyszłości, to wiem, że nic nie będzie, a jak palę trawę, to mogę o tym nie myśleć,' para. 4).

The chorus of their day is always the same and cries out with the desperate wish to run away: 'I need to leave, leave from here, because no, I can no longer take it' ('"trzeba wyjechać, trzeba stąd wyjechać, bo nie, już dłużej tu nie wytrzymam(...)"' para. 3). And yet, this obsessive desire to escape the suffocating present is triggered precisely by the fear that one will never find a way out of the confinement. Thus, the desire to "run away" could be seen as a symptom of claustrophobia, in which the metaphorically constricted space of the present, isolated from the past, triggers the anxiety of being unable to get out.

There is an inherent paradox in this attitude that originates from the urge to escape

but pushes one into the "blind alley"[7] ('zamknięty w ślepej uliczce') in which a man goes around in circles, to use Kępiński's phrase from his study of anxiety. Masłowska recounts her peers' confession: 'I must leave, and you know, sometimes I am under the impression that I will soon cut all these cables, computer, telephone, and I will stop pulling up the blinds, cut aerials, everyday I am under the impression that I will not wake up' ('muszę stąd wyjechać, a wiesz, czasami mam wrażenie, że zaraz poobcinam te kable, komputer i telefon i przestanę podnosić rolety, obetnę antenki, mam codziennie wrażenie, że nie wstanę,' para. 3). The indefinite confinement that seems to have no end and provides no option of getting out resembles a mental prison that turns every single day into a form of psychological torture. The results are highly destructive. On the one hand, there is the overwhelming helplessness, passivity: 'The void takes ever more liminal values, because as recently it still appeared to me that 'we were to run away somewhere' ('Pustka przyjmuje wartości coraz bardziej graniczne, bo o ile jeszcze niedawno zdawało mi się, że "mieliśmy gdzieś uciec",' para. 21), it now turns out that 'nothing will come out of it' ('"nic z tego nie będzie",' para. 21). This feeling of despair, the direct outcome of claustrophobia, is the central theme of Masłowska's critical text, as I see this isolated present turns into an incubator of various psychopathies. This mental suffering, which in contemporary Poland takes a form of cultural hysteria, is an indirect result of the state of confinement from both the past and the present, and constitutes the backbone of Masłowska's literary language. The condition of complete isolation of the present results from the history of memory abuses, in which both the road behind and the road ahead

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[7] Antoni Kępiński, *Lęk.*(Warszawa: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictwo Lekarskich, 1977), p. 21. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

appear closed. The injured, claustrophobic culture produces what I have termed a language of hysteria, which will be studied in reference to Masłowska's fiction in later Chapters of this dissertation.

Prosthesis

The next concept that 'Trained to Eat' introduces is that of 'prosthesis'. Masłowska elaborates on the definition of her milieu and argues: 'we are the generation of void filled with prosthesis, ersatz.' ('jesteśmy pokoleniem wpychanej w tę pustkę protezy, erzacu,' para. 19). The concept of 'prosthesis' is established in particular terms - not as an implant that facilitates activity, but a filler of void. Nothing is filled with something, and this something serves no other function and has no other value than to fill and thus erase the 'nothing'.

The choice of such definition of 'prothesis' - as a filler rather than implant - is far from obvious and in fact appears to contradict both the political and the cultural context. Politically, the premise of the change of political systems in 1989 was for democracy to facilitate the proper functioning of the state, after the failure of socialism. Culturally, the country was far from newly formed, and had centuries of artistic, intellectual and historical tradition. And yet, Masłowska insists that the prosthesis is placed in 'helplessly bare gum' ('W bezbronnie nagie dziąsło,' para. 5). Regardless of all the seemingly positive developments that the 1990s brought, 'only improvements, only new and better exams, languages ever more foreign, progress' ('same ulepszenia, same nowe i lepsze matury, języki coraz bardziej obce, postęp,' para. 18), the writer argues that 'equally nothing

comes out of it' ('w równym stopniu nic z tego nie wynika,' para. 19) and 'we are the generation of absence, incredible void' ('jesteśmy pokoleniem braku, niesamowitej pustki,' para. 19). Consumption is not an addition to life but a replacement of it, it is both the aim and the main activity, there is nothing else it needs to dominate or compete with. In the context of the post-1989 Poland, however, I propose that the 'void' that Masłowska describes was not the outcome of the political changes but a decision triggered by cultural hysteria. It is in hysteria that a person 'unable to reconcile internal contradictions, one would like to destroy the self, cross out (...) previous history and begin anew.'[8]. The opposing value systems of the socialist and the democratic worlds transcended political differences, as Czesław Miłosz pointed in December 1989, just few weeks after the fall of Berlin Wall: 'For many decades the two blocs followed different cultural paths: the Western open, the Eastern clandestine. Fulfilling Friedrich Nietzsche's prophecy about European nihilism' Western thought and art, did not offer us, in the East, much nourishment'[9]. The 1990s, however, saw fierce attempts to erase the differences between these two cultural paths. Alike the extreme cases of hysterical self-destruction, in which 'people forget their past, even the last name and the address and begin new life as though they were born again'[10], the post-1989 Polish culture, separating itself from the past with the 'thick-line policy', did not look back.

Yet cutting itself from the 'clandestine' culture seemed to also cut itself from the

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[8] Antoni Kępiński, *Psychopatie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), p. 69. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Nie mogąc pogodzić wewnętrznych sprzeczności, chciałby nieraz zniszczyć siebie, przekreślić (...) dotychczasową historię życia i zacząć na nowo'.
[9] Czesław Miłosz, *Granta 30: New Europe!* 29(1990), p. 165.
[10] Kępiński, p. 70.

source of nourishment. Thus, the generation born in the 1980s, about and on behalf of which Masłowska writes, despite being brought up in a large 'dining hall' ('jadłodajnia,' para. 20) where they are 'trained to eat' ('przyszkoleni do jedzenia,' para. 14), continues to fill this insatiable void. The prosthesis of consumption that they receive is not only unfulfilling but brings about suffering; Masłowska uses a metaphor of a 'helpless bare gum' ('bezbronnie nagie dziąsło,' para. 5) that symbolises vulnerability and pain. The writer returns to the drastic symbolism of infertility that characterises the new culture, that "soil of plastic" that cannot produce life. The culture is barren and the prosthesis of consumption is placed 'in a helpless bare gum, of which either at some point something irreversibly fell off, or in which from the beginning were no germs of anything and from which nothing will ever grow.' ('W bezbronnie nagie dziąsło, z którego albo w którymś momencie coś bezpowrotnie wypadło, albo w którym od początku nie było zawiązków niczego i z którego nic już nie wyrośnie,' para. 5).

Transformation

The concept of transformation that Masłowska introduces is very much like the suffering she describes which is not directly linked with wars, repressions or violence but takes place on a more subtle, abstract level. The socio-political change that happens in the 1990s seems to be mostly linked to the aesthetics: 'It was a little as though a suggestive commercial video, two flash cards: before and after, "before' designates ugly, grey and behind the fog, "after" wildly colourful landscape of a hypermarket.' ('o było trochę jak sugestywny film reklamowy, dwie plansze: przed i po, "przed" oznacza brzydko, szaro i za mgłą, "po" opętańczo kolorowy krajobraz hipermarketu.' para. 13).

104

This rapid change of decorations not only happens on the surface but is also introduced externally, as it does not grow from within the culture which in its core is dead and cannot hope for rebirth. Redesigned space, however, demands constant signs of approval of how distinct it is from everything that happened before: 'It connotes to a violently put under one's nose colouring book, a set of two illustrations with a command enthusiastically written in capital letters: "find 10 details differentiating these images".' ('"znajdź 10 szczegółów różniących obrazki",' para. 11). Another dictate of transformation is that of 'newness', 'breakthrough' that hungrily expects something which has not been there before, 'We were to come and bring with us some new thought. Undermine something, dig out and plant something new, still unknown plants that we would ourselves invent, and imprint on the surface the invisible hand.' ('mieliśmy przyjść i przynieść ze sobą jakąś nową myśl. Coś podważyć, wykopać i zasadzić nowe, nieznane jeszcze rośliny, które sami wymyśliliśmy, i odcisnąć na powierzchni niewidzialną rękę.' para. 6).

New language

The state of confinement, with its freshly installed prosthesis of obsessive consumption, finds its own means of expression. "The wildly colourful hypermarket' ('opętańczo kolorowy krajobraz hipermarketu,' para. 13), the 'giant common dining hall' ('wielką, powszechną jadłodajnię,' para. 20) is a world that creates a 'new language' ('nowy język,' para. 3). It is a language of pain, but one that admits too readily to its own suffering, 'twists only in bad, hurts, bad' ('zwija się tylko w źle, boli, źle,' para. 3). It laments but is unable to point to the source of its torment other than 'I can't take it here anymore' ('już dłużej tu nie wytrzymam,' para. 3). This new language has a double-edged thorn,

one that wants its pain to be felt by others, to hurt someone or something just as much as it hurts oneself: 'Maybe I will get myself a dog and I will close it in my room for a few days, don't open the door or windows, let it shit.' ('Może załatwić sobie jakiegoś psa i zamknąć się z nim w pokoju na kilka dni,' para. 3). The example that Masłowska provides is excellent in its simplicity, as rather than explaining the pain, it illustrates it through the cruel fantasy that mirrors exactly the state of confinement that the writer's interlocutors find themselves in. Following the mechanism of double-intentionality as explained by Kępiński, in which every emotion directed to others is at the same time felt internally, the aggression towards the dog is instantly linked to self-imposed harm. While the dog remains locked, 'I will make myself a dinner, something I hate the most, maybe herring, plenty of herring, and I will puke on myself.' ('zrobię sobie obiad, coś, czego najbardziej nienawidzę, może śledzie, mnóstwo śledzi i zrzygam się na siebie,' para. 3).

This new language of pain and hatred, of failed pathos and isolation, is the basis of my language of hysteria, which is further examined in Chapter 4, in regard to Masłowska's literary texts. In this critical essay, however, the writer provides a masterful, succinct definition of this emerging linguistic code: 'it tangles up with itself, it kisses with itself and it bites down on itself ('sam się ze sobą plącze, sam się ze sobą całuje i sam się zagryza,' para. 3). The new language 'tangles up with itself' because it fails to communicate; with nothing behind and nothing ahead, it is a language cut from any certain points of reference, unable to define who it addresses and why. This language also 'kisses with itself' since the suffering of hysteria prevents it from seeing the reality for what it is and instead concentrates all effort to maintain the idealised image. Finally, the

106

language of hysteria 'bites itself down', since the self-adoration remains mixed with self-hatred, the idealised image with the loathed, repressed one.

Grave

One of the most powerful concepts Masłowska saves for the very end of the essay, constituting both a conclusion and an artistic manifesto. When touching upon the subject of history and politics, she provocatively declares 'the only thing that I have got to say in this regard is that "I will not move from here, I will make a home out of this grave"' ('"że się stąd nie ruszam, zrobię z tego grobu dom",' para. 22). The use of the term 'grave' is far from unusual in the context of Poland, and yet Masłowska twists its meaning and uses it in an entirely unconventional way. She does not refer to the millions of victims buried in the Polish ground, the vision of Poland alike Timothy Snyder's notion of the 'Bloodlands'. Snyder constructs his notion of the region as a setting for the actions of 'Europe's most murderous regimes'[11]; bloodlands 'are simply where'[12] those regimes 'did their most murderous work'[13]. Bloodlands, then, are *where* something happened, and this something - 'most murderous work' - is counted in numbers - millions killed, and years that the murderous machinery stretched over. The cultural grave that Masłowska describes, on the other hand, refers to the state of the world that survived the 'murderous regimes'.

Masłowska's concept of 'grave' designates the post-1989 Polish culture which in

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[11] Snyder, xviii.
[12] ibid
[13] ibid

its core is dead and the contemporary incarnation, despite claims of a breakthrough, is a thoroughly artificial creature. In the context of Masłowska's creative manifesto, the metaphorical 'death' of Polish culture at the beginning of the twenty first century results from adopting the comforts of capitalism whilst eliminating the past where it doesn't fit these new conditions. This initial error wreaks havoc, triggered by the sudden influx of previously inaccessible goods that led to an infatuation with materialism, and produces a vicious cycle. The all-encompassing void that Masłowska describes as 'assuming more and more liminal space' ('Pustka przyjmuje wartości coraz bardziej graniczne' para. 21) constitutes the result of replacing an awkward past with new objects, as well as the reason behind the culture's incapacity to create anything profound and original.

While Snyder's 'bloodlands' are defined in terms of lives that were taken away, Masłowska's metaphor of 'grave' is about taking away the reason to live. Her declaration 'I will make a home out of this grave' (para. 22) could be read as an artistic program for her writing that will not reject the ugliness and despair of the world from which it grows, but fully employ them as creative tools. Masłowska notes: 'If we build something new, then from rubbish, shards, plastic, because on that we have bred.' ('Jeśli zbudujemy coś nowego, to ze śmieci, odłamków, plastiku, bo na tym zostaliśmy wyhodowani,' para. 22).

Unlike critics and readers who would rather push the terrifying reality of Masłowska's writing to the safe box of 'the other Poland', in 'Trained to Eat' the writer situates herself centrally to the world she brutally scrutinises. She also uses herself as an example of the profound infiltration of that new language and new aesthetics: 'In our consciousness we have a tattooed quiz show, commercial, computer game. I know this

because as an eight-year-old I knew all the copies of all the commercials, which I recited with television, driving my parents mad. I don't believe I have fully forgotten them.' ('W naszej świadomości wytatuowany jest teleturniej, reklama, gra komputerowa. Wiem to, bo jako ośmiolatka znałam na pamięć teksty wszystkich reklam, które recytowałam z telewizorem, doprowadzając rodziców do szału. Nie wierzę, że do końca je zapomniałam.' para. 16). Instead of rejection or self-denial of the void that she so brutally reveals, Masłowska decides to identify with it and not just as a person, but as a writer. Although she argues that she remains outside the socio-political context, her declaration is thoroughly political, in the more general sense of the term - she makes a specific claim for her writing, which is to source from that cultural graveyard that Poland has become, to feed on its waste and to conceptualise it. She ends her essay with a pronouncement that reads as a challenge to those who wanted to box-in or strike-off her milieu: 'The lost generation, bred on little fertile soil of artificial materials, will shoot flowers ostentatiously plastic.' ('Pokolenie stracone, wyhodowane na mało żyznym podłożu z tworzyw sztucznych, wypuści kwiaty ostentacyjnie plastikowe.' para. 22).

2.   'Faraway, So Gross'

'In search of transcultural memory' (ISTME) was the name of the new Action, a four year interdisciplinary project, initiated in 2012 and founded by COST, an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation in Science and Technology. Transculturality here is understood as going 'beyond the nationally oriented memory

studies'[14] and instead exploring 'the tension between attempts to create a common European memory, or a unitary memory ethics, on the one hand and numerous memory conflicts stemming from Europe's fragmentation into countless memory communities on the other.'[15] That tension is particularly striking in the context of memory transmission between Western and Eastern Europe. In fact, Aleida Assmann's anecdote of a Polish mathematician who chooses to position himself in contra to his father's 'imbued in history'[16] generation, is recounted as to illustrate the divisions within European memory. The referenced father, born right after the Second World War, 'would never think of travelling to Germany and is a staunch opponent of the European Union, which he perceives as just another variation of German imperialism.'[17] Both attitudes – of the resentful father and oblivious son – gain in Assmann's argument a generic dimension, symbolizing unresolved tension in the historical account of the twentieth century. To Assmann the pair demonstrates 'the way in which European memory is still divided'[18] and thus she focuses on the impasse of securing memories of Stalinism within European memory dominated by the commemoration of the Holocaust. However, Dorota Masłowska's essay 'Faraway, So Gross' reveals that the tension around a common European memory goes beyond what is remembered, rather emerging from the common practices of how memory is exercised. In Masłowska's text the very dynamics of intercultural dialogue about the past seem to obstruct rather than enable the transmission

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[14] In Search of Transcultural Memory (ISTME) < http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/isch/Actions/IS1203> [Accessed 10 April 2014]
[15] ISTME.
[16] Aleida Assmann, 'Europe's Divided Memory', in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Uilleam Blacker.; Aleksandr Ėtkind; Julie Fedor, pp. 25-41 (p.27).
[17] ibid
[18] ibid

of memories, widening the gap between what is remembered and what is recollected, between the expectations and the experience of the past.

Remembering 'on-Demand'

The spectacle of performing remembrance takes a particular form when one recollects events that fall outside the range of biographical memories. Masłowska was born in 1983 and hence was a little over six when the Berlin Wall fell, and yet it is the memory of Communism that evokes most curiosity and defines her cultural context in the eyes of a foreign audience. 'Faraway, So Gross' opens up with a satirical account of the writer's foreign voyages that followed her literary success. Masłowska writes:

A year before I was born my folks got a place in a high-rise by the woods. Since then I've been abroad about a thousand times and given about as many interviews, and it always pops up, the same question, cleverly calculated from my date of birth, about Communism, whether I remember the food lines, the vinegar on store shelves, the fall of the Wall and all the other blood curdling stuff they didn't have over on the other side.'[19]

Whether I remember' takes a form of a question. However, it functions as a purely rhetorical device, employed to initiate a specific game in listing the elements that would reassure the interlocutors in their vision of the past, founded on a division of stories that one can claim and tell. The story ascribed by the Western audience to those born in the former Soviet Union is the experience of Communism, and the voice in Masłowska's twisted 'memoir' is well-aware of the rules of playing in transcultural memory. Thus, whenever she encounters the 'whether I remember' game, her ready answer is 'Of course

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[19] Masłowska, Dorota. 'Faraway, So Gross'. Trans.by Benjamin Paloff. *The Wall in my My Head : Words and Images from the Fall of the Iron Curtain : a Words without Borders Anthology* (Rochester, NY : Open Letter, 2009), pp. 160-165, (p. 160).

I do'[20] and further explains 'Yes, my dears, I was there, back when you had no idea about anything: when you were scarfing down those dainties in tissue-cups, I was fighting on the front lines of childhood!'[21] .

The grotesque enthusiasm in assuming the role of a post-communist survivor, the eagerness to flash 'scars from drinking the vinegar straight from the shelf'[22] quickly undermines the credibility of the narrator's account of the past. By the end of the first paragraph it becomes transparent that these 'memories' ridicule rather than reinforce the stereotypical visions and divisions of remembering. However, the audacious opening is more than a mockery of the already much-debated concept of exoticising the other. Rather, it is a bitter critique of the existing inter-cultural dialogue about the past, which transforms memories into exchangeable goods. The rhetorical questions 'Do I remember Communism? But I have to remember something, right?' that come right after the introductory paragraph of Masłowska's text, expose the implicit command embodied in the foreign interrogations about the Communist past. This imperative is to produce memories, to perform remembrance 'on-demand'.

However, it is a different kind of duty than the imperative notably discussed by Pierre Nora in his analysis of the split between memory-history. Nora observed that the separation between memory and history leads to an increased demand for individual histories and thus 'an order is given to remember, but the responsibility is mine and it is I

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[20] 'Faraway, So Gross,' p. 160.
[21] ibid
[22] ibid

who must remember.'[23] However, the dynamics described by Masłowska demand not memory – the relentless process of remembering, but memories – transmittable and coherent depictions of the past. Masłowska's definition of the imperative to remember in the context of cross-cultural dialogue is: 'Drag some nugget out of the swirling muck of memory, strip it of superfluous detail, snap a shot of a heroes' face and let them march across the table(...)'[24].

The command to remember - that is the duty of memory - according to Paul Ricoeur, 'constitutes, at one and the same time, the epitome of good use and of abuse in the exercise of memory.'[25] The abuse occurs when memory becomes 'a task to be accomplished'[26]. Ricoeur defines the imperative element that the abused memory assumes in terms of 'the twofold aspect of duty, as imposing itself on desire from outside and as exerting a constraint experienced subjectively as obligation.'[27] Ricoeur's notion of 'obligated memory' is in fact at the core of Masłowska's literary scrutiny, in which the foreign expectations to receive memories of Communism impose recollections of that, which she in fact does not remember.

In the context of transcultural memory, however, the imperative to remember gains yet another dimension. Global memory requires expressible memories that can be

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[23] Pierre Nora, 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History', in *Realms of memory: the construction of the French past*, ed. Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 1- 20 (p. 15).

[24] 'Faraway, so gross,' p. 160.

[25] Paul Ricoeur. The Exercise of Memory: Uses and Abuses'. *Memory, History, Forgetting,* trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, London : University of Chicago Press , 2004), pp. 56-92 (p. 87).

[26] Ricoeur, p. 88.

[27] ibid

understood and classified. The outcome of this peculiar exchange of 'memories' is, according to Masłowska, 'a manufactured postcard believed by neither the sender, nor the recipient, but which is nevertheless nice to give and no less interesting to receive.'[28].

The Head Marinated in Greyness

Masłowska's satire of the common practices of discussing Communism with a foreign audience prepare the ground for two other, highly nuanced issues: what, then, is the memory of someone growing up in post-1989 Poland and how can these memories be mediated within the language of existing discourse.

Masłowska once again evades a straightforward response and instead confesses: 'I don't remember anything in particular from that time, barely any event at all, barely any feeling'[29]. All she can recall are objects and ordinary childhood experiences of playing outdoors or street watching through the window with her grandma, none of which would fall out of the everyday routine in a provincial, slow-paced town. And yet, the lack of notable incidents, this so-called 'memory void' that the writer persistently depicts, constitutes an essential framework for one singular image that defines her early memories of the end of Communism: 'greyness and nausea raised to the highest degree, such as it was almost the idea of greyness.'[30] These two notions, 'greyness' and 'nausea' are the keywords that sum up Masłowska's memory of the Communist twilight, the passwords to access not only her childhood experience but her cultural heritage which accompanies

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[28] 'Faraway, so gross,' p. 161.
[29] ibid p. 162.
[30] Faraway, so gross,' p. 161.

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her long after the fall of Communism.

At first these memories appear neutral and intentionally apolitical as the author admits to 'remember Communism exclusively as a style and an aesthetic category.'[31] Style and aesthetic category remain rather distant from the notion of tragic events that commonly fall into the concept of trauma. They are short of spectacular and leave no scars that can demonstrate the severity of damage. After all, casting aside discomfort and aesthetic preferences, how bad can 'greyness' and 'nausea' really be? Masłowska anticipates scepticism and offers a response, which her Western reader might hesitate to utter: 'None of this was really bad or particularly sad.'[32] .

However, it possessed a different attribute – that of ubiquity. The greyness and nausea described in the text dominated everything around, penetrating through every layer of Communist reality. Masłowska writes:

'(...)even the sunlight passing through the drapes had the color of urine. Even the food was grey. (...) Even the black wasn't black, but dark grey, which was logical, cohesive, and consistent, for only these paints allowed for realistic treatment and conscientious response to such themes as My City, My Courtyard, My School, My Country'[33]

However, the aesthetic tyranny determined more than the modes of expression – it defined the content. That micro universe from Masłowska's memories did not merely look grey, but was made of greyness: 'It was this very world that had produced these very means, deadly well suited to its reproduction'[34].

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[31] ibid, p. 162.
[32] ibid, p. 163.
[33] ibid
[34] ibid

And it is this greyness, rather than scars from 'the kiddie internment camp'[35] or those from 'drinking vinegar straight from the shelf',[36] that remains present long after the fall of Communism. In fact, it is this undefined and infinite greyness, rather than the almighty 'wall', as the title of the international anthology suggests, that is stuck in the head of a post-communist 'survivor'. This greyness appears immune to the time that passes and the invasion of colours that has accompanied the break out of capitalism. Even on the flight to New York, 'flipping through this magazine with glossy pictures'[37], with a 'stomach full of foiled, rainbow-colored food'[38] Masłowska confesses: 'I know I am bringing all that with me, my whole head tattooed with and marinated in greyness'.[39].

'Faraway, So Gross' ends with disillusionment as to whether their unexpected testimonies can be accepted or even understood within the current memorial practices. Masłowska ironically observes that having her head 'tattooed and marinated in greyness', she cannot hope for much sympathy in the West which currently celebrates these very same aesthetic categories:

Could it be that in a couple of years there won't be anything that *doesn't* make it into the glossiest superposh catalogues of design, fashion and beauty? Kate Moss a la East Germany 1985, head of hair like straw, her hydrochloric acid perm held for an hour, preferably done by her sister. (...) her children, in stylish tights pulled up to their armpits and slippers from H&M with the big toe worn out o f the factory (...)[40].

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[35] ibid, p. 160.
[36] ibid
[37] ibid, p. 164.
[38] ibid
[39] ibid
[40] 'Faraway, so gross,' p. 163.

Masłowska's translator, Benjamin Paloff, in an interview about her work noted in regard to 'Faraway, So Gross' that 'she actually makes things up, because people want a tale of woe'[41]. That desire to hear the accounts of recognisable suffering resonates with Kępiński's criticism of psychoanalytical therapy, which is fundamental in trauma theory. Kępiński observed that psychoanalysis could be dangerous since it offers a 'convincing and charming way of explanation of human being and his/her problems, quite often congruent in terms of theory, but closer to inner problems of therapists then his/her patient'[42]. Roger Luckhurst's argument that 'The need to circulate so many traumatic stories, finally, suggests that this has become a means to articulate some of the psychic costs of capitalist modernity'[43].

3.   Conclusion

The majority of criticism has focused on Masłowska's currency, on her 'of-the-moment' literature, assuming its mimetic character and complementing the writer's ear for spoken language. Somewhat characteristically for Polish culture - the Second World culture, as I suggested earlier - it was implicitly assumed that that monstrous language simply happened, arrived together with the new democratic system and the new colourful products. That it was imposed externally, alike the previous languages of imperial powers

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[41] Benjamin Paloff, 'Masłowska in NYC: Masłowska is real.' *www.biweekly.pl*. Narodowy Instytut Audiowizualny. February 2011. Web. 30 September 2016.
[42] Jacek Bomba. 'Heritage of Antoni Kepinski'. *Archives of psychiatry and psychotherapy*. 9.2 (2007), pp. 69-72 (p. 72).
[43] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question.* (London : Routledge, 2008), p. 214.

and totalitarian regimes. It was not until Masłowska took part in the debate that the true origin of this violent, monstrous language could no longer be avoided. Masłowska's language of hysteria, I suggest, has the strongest, most disturbing impact not because of its astute discerning qualities but because of its emotional impact. Benjamin Paloff notes: 'There's emotional play in language between these characters. That's what makes them reliable. We cannot just see, we can hear ourselves in them'[44]. I argue that this language of hysteria has not come from the outside but burst out from the very core of Polish culture that has suffered a profound injury from a prolonged history of memory abuses.

Stef Craps argues that trauma theory still has a lot to offer if expanded and enriched with the experience from around the world. This chapter maintains, however, that trauma theory, as *franca lingua* for the global suffering distorts rather than facilitates dialogue, since it produces artificial common denomination without a deeper understanding of local value systems. Rather than translating we need to learn each other's languages of pain since it is these culturally diverse value systems that define the perception of what causes pain and what constitutes loss. Consequently, the insufferable suffering that trauma theory examines need not be reduced to extraordinary events – as both of Masłowska's essays explore the everyday experience of pain related to helplessness and structural abuse – but can also assume different forms of expression specific for a given culture.

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[44] Paloff, 'Masłowska in NYC: Masłowska is real.'

Chapter 4

The Language of Hysteria:

Masłowska's Fiction

1.   Introduction

Several months after the release of Dorota Masłowska's debut novel *Wojna polsko- ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* [White and Red, 2002], the cultural magazine *ha!art* published a survey entitled 'Critics on *War*'[1]. Seven literary scholars were asked to answer a quiz on the phenomenon of Masłowska's writing. This rather unusual initiative aimed to counter-balance the media noise around the book and its author with a more informed view of *White and Red*'s content and literary merit. The creators of the questionnaire on the one hand labelled the work 'an event', but on the other emphasised the mechanism behind its resonance: '*White and Red* is not debated by critics and literary scholars, but mainly by journalists, columnists, celebrities, idols, who (often without reading it) thoughtlessly repeat the opinions of those recommending Masłowska (Paweł

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[1] 'Krytycy o Wojnie - ankieta o Masłowskiej'. Ha!art 14(2003). pp. 86-92. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Dunin- Wąsowicz, Marcin Świetlicki, Jerzy Pilch) and in this way contribute to its

success'[2]. Paradoxically, however, it was the critical survey that questioned the writer's

relevance, whereas the so-called media noise focused on the language in Masłowska's

novel. In the pre-survey reviews the poet Marcin Świetlicki called the writing 'a chunk of

slightly spoiled literary meat (...) worth living forty years to finally read something so

interesting'[3], whereas the writer Jerzy Pilch praised 'the gift of commanding the Polish

language, a gift to unravelling, of twisting inside out, of smashing the mush of it and

creating of that mush a peculiar language, often macabre and gruelling, but always

distinctly poetic'[4]. At the same time the survey questions intended for literary experts

concerned the sociology and marketing of literature. The representativeness of the reality

portrayed in the novel for contemporary Poland and of Masłowska's writing for the new

generation were among key issues, as well as the impact of mass media and non-literary

aspects, such as the writer's image and young age, on the book's success. Besides these

somewhat conventional questions, however, the editors also provocatively asked: 'Is

White and Red - as some critics want - the new *The Wedding*? A book that diagnoses the

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[2] ibid, p. 86; 'Wojny nie komentują krytycy literaccy i literaturoznawcy, lecz głównie dziennikarze, felietoniści, gwiazdorzy, idole, którzy (często nieprzeczytawszy książki) bezmyślnie powtarzają opinie osób "rekomendujących" Masłowską (Pawła Dunin-Wąsowicza, Marcina Świetlickiego, Jerzego Pilcha) i w ten sposób przyczyniają się do jej sukcesu'.

[3] Marcin Świetlicki, poet's recommendations on the book's cover. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Jest to kawał lekko nadpsutego, literackiego mięsa i zdaje się, że warto było żyć 40 lat, aby wreszcie coś tak interesującego przeczytać'.

[4] Jerzy Pilch, 'Martwy jak Przybyszewski', *Polityka* 1 (2003), pp. 104-105 (104). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; '(...) dar władanie polszczyzną, dar rozpruwania, nicowania, rozbijania na miazgę języka i tworzenia z tej miazgi języka swoistego, nieraz makabrycznego i karkołomnego, zawsze osobliwie poetyckiego'.

state of contemporary Poles and resurrects the so-called 'code of Polishness'?'[5].

The work that the editors referenced, comparing with Masłowska's *White and Red*, is Stanisław Wyspiański's 1901 canonical drama *Wesele* [Wedding]. The play portrays the Polish society in the nineteenth century, painfully contrasting the lofty aspirations of its characters with their futile deeds. The wedding of Krakow's poet and his peasant bride takes place against the historical background of Poland remaining under the foreign partitions after the two failed uprisings[6], have come to symbolise the national tendency to waste chances of freedom by getting carried away with petty, selfish urges. The final dance that ends the play, '*chocholi taniec*'[7], has since entered the Polish language as a phrase that denotes lethargy and resignation, a chaotic, trance-like movement in situations with neither a solution nor escape. And it is this *chocholi taniec,* a metaphorical response to the circumstances in which both the past and the future are closed, that resonates in Dorota Masłowska's debut. The state of claustrophobia constitutes a common thread between these two distinct texts written at the turn of two consecutive centuries and thus, as the *ha!art* editors propose, *White and Red* indeed 'resurrects the

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[5] 'Krytycy o wojnie', p. 86; 'Czy Wojna to - jak chcą niektórzy krytycy - nowe Wesele? Książka, która diagnozuje stan dzisiejszych Polaków i wskrzesza tzw. "kod polskości"?'.

[6] Poland had undergone three partitions, conducted by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Hapsburg Austria. The First Partitions took place on August 5, 1772, the Second Partition on January 23, 1793 and the Third Partition on October 24, 1795. After the Third Partition Poland disappeared from the map of Europe for 123 years, until 1918. In the nineteenth century there were two unsuccessful uprisings in attempt to regain independence: the November Uprising 1830-1831 and January Uprising 1863.

[7] *Chochoł* is a Polish name for a straw mulch stack. In Wyspiański's *Wesele, chochoł* becomes animated and arrives to the wedding as one of the guests in Act I. It is at his command that other spirits arrive to the celebration, revealing guests' fears and longings. In the final scene c*hochoł* begins playing music with wooden sticks, leading the guests in a lethrgic, trans-like dance.

so-called 'code of Polishness'[8].

The tragedy at the turn of the twenty-first century, however, is of a different kind than in Wyspiański's 1901 critical drama. In 2002, the year of Masłowska's debut, the country had enjoyed its freedom for over a decade and yet this newly acquired privilege did not erase the feeling of helplessness, but accentuated it. In post-1989 Poland, however, it is now a linguistic claustrophobia, producing in 'the hellish language (...) a sort of mixture of youth slang and the language of the media, contemporary politics, and even school textbooks.'[9]. Another critic pointed out that 'some read Masłowska out loud, as only then the language can be fully heard: blends from television, sentimental phrases as though from soap operas, commercials, official words and leftovers after the language of the Polish People's Republic'[10]. The masterly crafted, fiercely satirical blend of different languages in Masłowska's prose is, I emphasise, entirely unintended on behalf of her protagonists. For *White and Red*'s Andrzej 'Nails' Robakoski and his milieu, this language is not a pose and not a choice, but the only language they know and use. Moreover, in light of the writer's second novel *Queen's Spew* (2005), it becomes impossible to read Masłowska's literary language, first introduced through the character of the drug-taking Nails who lives in a provincial town, as belonging exclusively to any particular group. As Masłowska moves the action of her next book from the provinces to the capital, the

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[8] 'Krytycy o wojnie', p. 86; 'wskrzesza tzw. "kod polskości"'.
[9] Jerzy Jarzębski, 'The Conflict of Generations in Contemporary Polish Prose'. *Polish Literature in Transformation*, (Zurich/Berlin: University College London, 2013), p. 26.
[10] Justyna Sobolewska. 'Miasteczko biało-czerwone'. *Nowe Książki*. 11 (2002). p. 39. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Niektórzy czytają książkę Masłowskiej na głos, wtedy dopiero w pełni słychać język: jakieś zbitki z telewizji, sentymentalne frazesy rodem z seriali, z reklam, zwroty urzędowe i pozostałości po języki 'poeerelowskim'.

fragmentalised world views, aggressive re-affirmation of one's identity at the expense of others, diverse inconsistencies, and the floating, incoherent bits of information, constitute a signature style of the young and the old alike, the liberals and the conservatives, actors, academics and shopkeepers. This language is, I argue, the sound of cultural hysteria.

This Chapter proposes that Masłowska's debut is not only written in a distinctive literary language, but it is first and foremost about language, a language that testifies to the severe injury inflicted on the Polish culture through repetitive abuses to the processes of remembering and forgetting. The writer's signature linguistic fusion not only clashes all types of speech but echoes the post-1989 collapse of cultural points of reference from the past, transforming her writing into the 'language of hysteria', as I choose to call it. In reference to the conceptual framework developed by Antoni Kępiński in his study 'The Hysterical Type'[11] (1977) and discussed in Chapter 2 as an alternative model of suffering, Chapter 4 examines the relationship between pain, cultural injury and Masłowska's 'language of hysteria' in post-1989 Poland.

In light of my Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 argument on hysteria as a form of suffering emerging from a particular historical and cultural context distinct from the earlier models of pathos and trauma, in this Chapter I approach the injured language of Masłowska's writing as a language of pain. I further contend that the language of hysteria not only portrays xenophobia - as commonly argued in foreign reviews published in *The Polish*

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[11] Antoni Kępiński, 'Typ histeryczny,' in *Psychopatie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), pp. 55-89. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Review[12], *The Guardian*[13] or *The New York Times*[14] - but views it as a manifestation of severe *claustrophobia*. Antoni Kępiński stressed a strong co-dependence between an anxiety of seclusion, one's relationship to the past and hysteria: 'Sometimes one wants to run away from his or her past, begin life afresh (such feelings are frequent among the hysterics).'[15]. Kępiński explains that if one wants to run away from what already happened, the simplest direction is the future, which carries in itself the possibility of doing things differently, better. A similar principle applies when it is the future that terrifies us: we turn back to the past. However, if the past weighs too strongly while the future remains uncertain, 'a person finds himself or herself in the situation of seclusion. He or she wants to run away from the future into the past, and from the past into the future. In front of him and behind him the paths are closed.'[16] Kępiński concludes that as a result, a person who neither can retreat to the past nor hope for a better future "is closed in a blind alley'[17].

The language of hysteria, as captured in Masłowska's writing, points exactly to the feeling of such claustrophobia, rather than xenophobia, as is often emphasised in the critical readings discussed in this Chapter. Xenophobia would imply that the hatred is only one-directional, that it is directed towards the 'Others', the 'strangers' that are imagined

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[12] Barbara Tepa Lupack, Review of Dorota Masłowska. *Snow White and Russian Red*. Trans. Benjamin Paloff. *The Polish Review*. 1.3 (2005), pp. 381-382.

[13] Elena Seymenliyska, 'Rotten Russkies'. *The Guardian*, 7 May 2005

[14] Boris Fishman, 'Bloc Party'. *The New York Times*, 1 May 2005.

[15] Antoni Kępiński, *Lęk* (Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1977) p. 20-21. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Niekiedy chce się uciec od swej przeszłości, zacząć życie na nowo (przeżycia tego typu są dość częste u histeryków)'.

[16] ibid, p. 21; (...) człowiek znajduje się w sytuacji zamknięcia. Chce uciec przed przyszłością w przeszłość, a przed przeszłością w przyszłość. Przed nim i za nim droga jest zamknięta'.

[17] ibid; 'zamknięty w ślepej uliczce'.

to threaten one's territory. It is in the language of hysteria, however, that Kępiński's notion of 'double intentionality' fully resounds - for the pain to be recognised by the hysteric's surroundings, it has to be inflicted upon them. It is this double-edged thorn, hurting the self and the others, that distinguishes the language of hysteria - and my reading of Masłowska - from Maria Janion's notion of 'basic Polish'[18], Kinga Dunin's interpretation of Nails's 'jabber'[19] as a voice of dissent and finally Przemysław Czapliński's argument about the language of xenophobia inherent in the Polish canon[20]. The violence of Nails' language that all the three interpretations emphasise, in the other critics' interpretations is viewed as one-directional, aimed at 'the Others'. In the light of Kępiński's study of hysteria, however, I read Nails' hostility as a reflection of an internal damage that, undiagnosed and unhealed, infects everyone around. There are no 'Others' that Nails hates more than his own rejected self, seen as inferior to the powerful persona he attempts to project onto his surroundings.

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[18] Maria Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna*, (Kraków : Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006) p. 242-244. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; 'Masłowska odtworzyła-stworzyła język agresji jako elemntarny język polski, *basic polish*,' p. 242.

[19] Kinga Dunin, *Czytając Polskę: literatura polska po roku 1989 wobec dylematów rzeczywistości.* (Warszawa : Wydawn. W.A.B., 2004), pp. 234-244. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; 'Już lepszy jest jakokolwiek bełkot niż zadowolony z siebie tradycjonalizm, stawiający się ponad wszelkimi podziałami,' p. 244.

[20] Przemysław Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany: późna nowoczesność i nasze wielkie narracje*. (Warszawa : Wydawnictwo W.A.B, 2009), pp. 266-272. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; '(...) Silny przemawia zatem językiem frustracji, lecz składnię owych żalów i agresji porządkuje kanon. Polskość jako "anty-" (rosyjskość, kobiecość, homoseksualność, globalizacja) nie jest programem, lecz tożsamością zbiorową wyrażającą się w idiomatycznym języku,' p. 271.

2.   Untranslatable injury

'This book is untranslatable'[21], insisted Dorota Masłowska, referring to *White and Red*, in an interview with her publisher, the renowned literary critic Paweł Dunin-Wąsowicz. The argument was based on the international reception of her novel that put Masłowska's work into the frames of a socio-political commentary to the post-1989 Poland, insisting that the literary world she created was in fact a mimetic depiction of the everyday life of Polish youth. *White and Red*, a first-person narrative of Andrzej Robakoski - "Nails" ["Silny"][22], which unfolds over three days after his girlfriend Magda leaves him, was read as a generational work about the lost youth of the post-1989 reality. 'As Masłowska suggests, Nails is typical of the growing subculture of marginalised Eastern European youth, a generation caught between the strictures of Communism and the promise of European Union'[23], observed Barbara Tepa Lupack in her review of *White and Red*, which she described as a 'brutally comic and unflinchingly realistic portrait of xenophobia, hopelessness and political burnout'. Lupack cited an impressive number of foreign reviews that all seemed to agree with the generational, socio-political themes of *White and Red*, describing the book as a 'blood- and gall-splitting story of the Polish generation nothing' (De Morgen), a novel 'about the lost young generation' (Vrij

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[21] Paweł Dunin-Wąsowicz, *Rozmowy lampowe* (Warszawa: Lampa i Iskra Boża), p. 189. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[22] In Polish, the nickname of Andrzej Robakoski is 'Silny,' which literally translates as 'strong', 'strongman'. 'Nails' is an equivalent in the English translation, given to Masłowska's protagonist by the novel's translator, Benjamin Paloff. 'Nails' in American slang refers to someone 'hard,' gangster-like type who one would not dare to confront.

[23] Barbara Tepa Lupack, Review of Dorota Masłowska. *Snow White and Russian Red*. Trans. Benjamin Paloff. *The Polish Review*. 1.3 (2005), pp. 381-382 (381).

Nederland), 'of a generation in crisis' (Figaro) [24].

A first look at Masłowska's debut seems to support this reading of *White and Red*: the story features several younger characters, all suffering a crisis of identity in the world that lacks any fixed points, offering various intoxicating substances as the only remedy for void and uncertainty. Following the break-up with his girlfriend Magda, the protagonist Nails embarks on a series of bizarre conquests that includes an anorexic Goth Angela who vomits stones into a bathtub, a druggie Natasha who snorts powdered borscht instead of speed and an economics student Ala described as 'a girl of mother-hen variety'[25]. The somewhat uneventful plot is set against the backdrop of a provincial Polish town, absorbed mainly with a quest for drugs, preparations for the upcoming festival 'No Russkies Day' ('Dzień bez Ruska') and discussions on the mysterious 'Polish-Russki' war ('wojna polsko-ruska), of which everyone speaks but no one knows 'how they know that they know'[26] about it.

But contrary to Tepa Lupack's claim, Masłowska nowhere, in fact, suggested a political or generational reading of her novel. On the contrary, she recounted her experience with foreign journalists: 'they don't want to believe me that there are no Russkies, that politics to me are some sort of pathetic snapshots (...). To them *Wojna*

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[24] Tepa Lupack, p. 381.

[25] Dorota Masłowska, *White and Red* trans. by Benjamin Paloff (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), p. 162; 'Jest to dziewczyna typu kura'. *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* (Warszawa: Lampa i Iskra Boża, 2003), p. 121.

[26] ibid, p. 1, p. 15, p. 42; 'Ja mówię, że skąd wie, a ona, że słyszała,'; 'skąd ty to wiesz, że ty jesteś akurat przeciwko?'; 'skąd to wiesz, prozaik i poeta w jednym jesteś?,' *Wojna...*, p. 5; p. 15; p. 35.

remains a socio-political commentary, not literature.'[27] The international reception of Masłowska's novel equated the product of the writer's imagination with a mimetic description of the post-1989 Poland. The translated words of Masłowska's fiction seemed to carry the anger and the pace of the original writing and yet resulted in what I suggest to be a gross misinterpretation of its content. Categorised as a postmodern work about the lost youth of the post-socialist transition, the book was read in reference to the western classics, and thus charged with a lack of originality. Elena Seymenliyska of *The Guardian* contrasted Masłowska's novel with the bestselling thriller *Headcrushers* by the Latvian writers' duo Alexander Garros and Aleksei Evdokimo, creating an impressive list of similarities between the two novels, such as the young age of the writers, commercial success, slangy prose and nihilistic values. The review concluded with the author's regret 'that both borrow so heavily from the shock tactics of a certain western canon - think *American Psycho* and *Trainspotting*'[28]. The criticism on the other side of the Atlantic followed a similar line of arguments. To Boris Fishman of *The New York Times* 'the book's literary pedigree seems obvious.'[29] The critic listed J.D. Sallinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* and once again *Trainspotting*, but threw a Polish reference too - Witold Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke*. Although respectable, the suggested influences denied Masłowska's book the boldness and originality claimed in her native country. 'Though the translator, Benjamin Paloff, does his best, there are certain kinds of native exuberance that don't travel well' observed Fishman, suggesting

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[27] Dunin-Wąsowicz, *Rozmowy lampowe*, p. 189.
[28] Seymenliyska, 'Rotten Russkies'.
[29] Fishman, 'Bloc Party'.

that in America the book 'will seem both inaccessible and dated'[30].

One of the reasons behind the obstructions in travelling of 'certain kinds of native exuberance' is a lack of critical framework for the concepts that hide behind them and trigger their display. And it is this injury, manifested in the unique blend of uncertainty, ludicrousness and a sense of threat entrenched in Masłowska's twisted Polish, rather than her words and sentences that, I maintain, remain untranslatable into foreign languages. It is not to say, however, that the text is in itself untranslatable. In fact, in this Chapter I use citations from the excellent translation by Benjamin Paloff to support my reading of Masłowska's works. The essence of urgency in Masłowska's writing exists in the language of hysteria that signifies a broken cultural code. This linguistic collapse, I argue, constitutes a byproduct of the history of memory abuses and it is this cultural malady that gets lost within the existing conceptual framework of postmodernism and trauma theory. The remainder of this chapter attempts to examine the nature of this cultural injury and test the possibilities of expanding the critical notions of loss and pain, as to include suffering resulting from mnemonic violence.

3.   The Language of Hysteria

To speak of the language of hysteria in a conceptual way is to translate the psychic conditions of hysteria into a linguistic sphere. The main features of such language would

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[30] ibid

correspond with the defining elements of this type of psychopathy. The conceptual diagnosis of the language of hysteria, I propose, would then follow the three basic steps taken by Antoni Kępiński in order define the condition. The first acknowledges hysteria as a distortion, an abnormality to a healthy human behaviour. Thus, among the characteristics of the language of hysteria would be a malformed structure, including its grammar, syntax and phonetics. A quick glance at the writing of Masłowska exposes the reader to a unique literary language that follows its own rules while spectacularly violating all the linguistic conventions. *White and Red* is a stream of consciousness of the main protagonist, Nails, whose use of language is both instinctive and incorrect. Nails reaches for the language to help him make sense of his tormenting feelings, but the language he in turn produces makes little sense.

The novel opens with the news that his girlfriend, Magda, has dumped him, and Nails delivers a convoluted account of the events: 'The way I'd found out how it was, or rather, how it wasn't, it wasn't like she'd told me straight to my face, only it was just the other way around, she'd told me through Arleta.' (1)[31]. The relationship is described as 'we'd had it good, we'd had our share of nice times, a lot of nice words had been said, on my part as well as hers' (1)[32]. As the grammar and logic fail him, however, Nails quickly turns to the emotive power of language, producing abstract metaphors that appeal to

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[31] 'Jak dowiedziałem się, że tak już jest, chociaż raczej, że już nie ma, to nie było tak, żeby on a mi to powiedziała w szczere oczy, tylko stało się akurat na tyle inaczej, że ona mi to powiedziała poprzez właśnie Arletę.'. *Wojna...*, p. 5.

[32] 'Chociaż było nam dobrze, przeżyliśmy razem niemało miłych chwil, dużo miłych słów padło, z mojej strony jak również z niej'. *Wojna...*, p. 5.

imagination instead of logic. Felling 'sadder than ever' (2)[33] Nails turns his aggression to the messenger of bad news, Arleta: 'Leaning over the bar like some salesgirl over the counter. Like she wanted to sell me some crap, some chocolatey product. Arleta. Rusty water in her beer glass. Easter-egg dye.' (2)[34]. Nails' odd, metaphorical description of the girl and the bar setting in which the events take place mirrors the internal state of his emotions more than what happens in the outside world.

Yet this violation of linguistic conventions is neither a case of modernist estrangement nor a postmodern language game. To consider Masłowska's writing as a language of psychopathy - understood here in Kępiński's terms as mental suffering - is to acknowledge the underlying pain that both triggers it and at the same time hurts anyone who comes in contact with its user. To narrow this distorted language of pain down specifically to the language of hysteria requires looking closely at the connection between its construction, use and the impact it attempts to have on the surroundings.

The relationship between these three different elements demands recalling some of the points discussed earlier in Chapter 2, particularly the distinction between the language of hysteria and other languages of pain, such as pathos and trauma. Hysteria, to go back to Antoni Kępiński's definition, constitutes a type of suffering that has no organic cause. It hurts, but it is impossible to determine exactly what causes the torment. There is no single, particular 'event' - as in the case of trauma theory - that could be

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[33] '(...)czuję tylko smutek bardziej niż cokolwiek'. *Wojna...*, p. 5.
[34] 'Przechylając się przez bar niczym sprzedawczyni przez ladę. Jak gdyby zaraz miała sprzedać mi jakieś podróby, jakiś wyrób czekoladopodobny. Arleta. Żelazistą wodę w szklance od piwa. Barwnik od pisanek'. *Wojna...*, p. 6.

identified as a source of pain. Neither is there a tangible, 'approaching misfortunate,' that could be named, communicated and sympathised with, as in the case of Aristotelean pathos. The construction of the language of hysteria is then founded on an emotion that cannot be named. It is a language that fails already in its origin, since it does not know where it comes from. Thus, the language of hysteria - unlike the language of trauma which operates with the inexpressible - makes the expression of suffering its fundamental objective. The use of the language of hysteria emphases emotions over information, since it cannot be understood and thus must be felt by the environment. It aims not at clarifying but rather at obscuring the external situation. The language of hysteria obscures not to deceive, however, but to reflect its own, internal structures of pain - it is, after all, unable to state clearly what hurts and what constitutes the approaching threat that it continuously anticipates.

In *White and Red*, a symbolic role of such undefined danger plays the 'Polish-Russki war under a white-and-red flag', which is also the original Polish title of Masłowska's novel. It is the rumour about this mysterious battle that Nails receives first, before learning about the break-up. Having a choice to hear good or bad news first, he opts for the good and 'So she told me that in town it looks like there's a Polish-Russki war under a white-and-red flag.' (1)[35]. The phrase 'it looks like' instantly introduces the doubtful status of this bizarre threat, which everyone seems to anticipate and yet no one can either specify nor confirm. As the novel progresses, however, the rumour of the

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[35] 'To on a mi powiedziała, że w mieście jest podobno wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną.'.
Wojna..., p. 5.

'Polish-Russki war' is as wide-spread as it is unreliable. When Nails is about to confront his mate, Lefty, about his past dealings with Magda, Lefty tries to change the subject by mentioning 'that in town in recent days there's been this Polish-Russki war under a white-and-red flag'. Nails doesn't allow himself to get distracted, stating firmly: 'I know that, whether there is this war or there's no war, that you had her before Lolo' (6)[36]. A similar situation appears about ten pages later when a cab driver, verbally attacked by an enraged Nails, attempts to appease the situation by changing the subject: 'He says nothing for a moment, and then puts in that lately we're supposedly fighting the Russkies under a white-and-red flag.' (15)[37]. The Polish-Russki war then not only symbolises an approaching threat, but it also functions as a common platform to build a kind of solidarity based on fear. Nails again sees through the man's strategy and responds in an aloof manner: 'I say, Surely, though we're not so very radical on that issue.' (15)[38]. Yet, despite his intentions to distance himself from the rumours and appear skeptical, the threat of the 'Polish-Russki war' lingers in Nails' unconscious, becoming a symbol of an unexpected attack carried out when one's most vulnerable. When Nails wakes up to chaos in his apartment and cannot recall the events that led to it, he instinctively imagines the attack of Russkies: 'I wonder whether there happened to have been a war here in my absence, when I was sleeping, a decisive battle, the central command itself. While I was sleeping,

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[36] 'Wiem, że czy się toczy wojna, czy się nie toczy, to ją miałeś przed Lolem'. *Wojna*..., p. 8.

[37] On chwilę milczy, a potem zagaja, że podobno ostatnio walczymy pod flagą biało-czerwoną z Ruskimi.'. *Wojna*..., p. 15.

[38] 'Ja mówię, że owszem chociaż my raczej nie jesteśmy tak bardzo radykalni na tym tle'. *Wojna*..., p. 15.

the Russkies had come into the apartment, forced their way in.' (103)[39].

Who exactly the frightening Russkies are remains equally unspecified, but it is repeatedly stressed that they constitute the origin of all evil, dread and deceit. There are the cigarettes 'Bought from the Russkies. False, bogus' (2)[40], women 'Grubby-faced, dirty. Like the Russkies' girls' (5)[41], 'the ripped-off cars the Russkies brought in.' (105)[42]. The events of the novel culminate at the local festival that celebrates 'No Russkies Day', where the female characters compete for the title of 'Miss No Russkies Day' (144)[43]. The Russkies need not have a definitive identity to act both as a threat and a scapegoat for all evil. In fact, just as in the case of the speculative war, the ambiguous existence of the Russkies allows the language of hysteria a greater creative power in spreading fear and mistrust.

The language of hysteria then follows not the rules of logic but those of pathos, tailored to maximise the emotional impact. In denying clarity regarding the approaching misfortune, however, the language of hysteria remains faithful to its own suffering. As already mentioned, it is a torment that does not know where it comes from. In Nails' perception of the world the references to the approaching danger of the Polish-Russian war blend with his private romantic rapports, all against a wider socio-political context. He

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[39] 'Zastanawiam się, czy przypadkiem wojna już się nie stała pod moją nieobecność, kiedy spałem, decydująca bitwa, samo centrum dowodzenia. Gdy spałem, Ruski weszli do mieszkania, wdarli się'. *Wojna*..., p. 79.

[40] 'podrobione i fałszywe'. *Wojna*..., p. 6

[41] 'Bordowe, na pysku brudne. Również te od Ruskich'. *Wojna*..., p. 5.

[42] 'lewych samochodach od Ruskich sprowadzanych'. *Wojna*..., p. 81.

[43] 'Miss Dnia Bez Ruska'. *Wojna*..., p. 109.

recounts watching his ex-girlfriend Magda enter the bar: 'Her face on the right, black tears flowing from her eyes. Like she'd been fighting in the Polish-Russki war, like the whole Polish-Russki army had trampled her, running through the park. All my feelings come back to life within me. The whole situation. Social and economic in the country.' (9)[44]. Yet, the aesthetics of pathos applied to ordinary situations not only fail to accomplish the main objective of the language of hysteria - to evoke pity and receive recognition - but produce a grotesque, comical effect, as in this description of the morning after Nails unintentionally takes Angela's virginity: 'And then, like in one second, my whole scattered life comes to me, that postwar portrait with blood on the upholstery, with blood on my pants making up some map of disease, actually, some board game, all the pathos of dried blood lead unambiguously to the secret hell in my fly.' (107)[45].

The distorted function of conveying and receiving factual information attributes the language of hysteria with the feature of mistrust, both towards the world and the self. Upon receiving information on the 'Polish-Russki war' Nails instantly questions how Arleta knows (1)[46]. His suspicion towards the credibility of information might seem legitimate, but he remains equally wary of others' opinions and emotional reactions. When Magda states to the cab driver that she is against the Russkies, Nails reacts with fury: 'Now I get

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[44] 'Twarz na prawo, z jej oczu płyną czarne łzy. Jak gdyby walczyła na wojnie polsko-ruskiej, jakby podeptało ją całe wojsko polsko ruskie, idąc przez park. Odżywają we mnie wszystkie moje uczucia. Cała sytuacja. Społeczna i ekonomiczna kraju.' *Wojna*..., p. 11.

[45] 'I wtedy w jednej chwili dochodzi do mnie całe me życie rozesłane dookoła, ten pejzaż powojenny z krwią na tapicerce, z krwią na mych spodniach składającą się w jakąś mapę choroby dosłownie, w jakąś grę planszową, wszystkie ścieżki krwi zaschłej wiodą jednoznacznie do piekła skrytego w mym rozporku.'. Wojna..., pp. 82-82.

[46] 'Ja mówię, że skąd wie, a ona, że słyszała.'. Wojna..., p. 5.

pissed off, I say: And how do you know you're against them, exactly?' (15)[47]. He further elaborates on his emotional response, questioning her position: 'how does she know she really thinks that way and not some other way? (15)[48]. The same disconnection between a perceived effect and its possible cause Nails observes in non-verbal, emotional reactions: 'I hear Magda, who is most distinctly laughing at something. I puzzle over what's so funny about that. Not about that, but rather in general, what's so funny.' (21)[49]. This attitude of uncertainty and suspicion grows throughout the novel, and the status of everything that surrounds Nails becomes increasingly more doubtful. Nails explains this philosophy to Angela, 'so as to dissuade her a little from suicide': 'Death is unimportant, there is no death, you don't believe in death, since it's superstition. Infectious diseases - superstition; vehicular homicide - superstition; graves - superstition, misfortune - superstition. They're all ignoble inventions from the Russkies, which they spread about to terrify us existentially.' (98)[50]. When he is at it and the monologue of mistrust expands, he suddenly hypothesises that 'Maybe the Russkies themselves don't even exist, that remains to be seen.' (99)[51]. This unexpected speculation does not have a revelatory character and brings no change of awareness in Nails' perception of the world. It is the language of hysteria stretching its capacity of doubting any information it encounters,

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[47] 'Teraz się wkurwiam, mówię: a skąd ty to wiesz, że ty jesteś akurat przeciwko?'. Wojna..., p. 15.

[48] '(...)wielkie poglądy urządza, że skąd ona wie, że akurat tak sądzi, a nie właśnie inaczej.'. Wojna..., p. 15.

[49] '(...) słyszę Magdę, która najwyraźniej się śmieje z czegoś. Zastanawiam się, co jest w tym śmiesznego. Nie w tym, ale wręcz w ogóle, co jest śmiesznego'. Wojna..., p. 19.

[50] 'Śmierć jest nieważna, śmierci nie ma, chyba nie wierzysz we śmierć, przecież to jest zabobon, groby - zabobon, nieszczęście - zabobon. Są to wszystko niecne wynalazki Rusków, co je rozgłaszają, by nas straszyć egzystencjalnie.'. *Wojna...*, p. 76.

[51] 'Sami Ruscy może nie istnieją nawet, to się jeszcze zobaczy.'. *Wojna...*, p. 76.

even one that it professes.

Thus, it is no surprise that Nails questions himself and the accuracy of his own responses when demanded to take a 'psych test' that would provide a 'score' of how 'pro-Polish' he is (120)[52]. The test is requested by a couple of the city representatives who are 'painting the house white and red, because that's the mayor's ordinance for the whole district.' (116)[53]. Nails, in his typical suspicious, argumentative manner, responds to the new regulations with a scepticism: 'And what if I don't?' (116)[54]. The men explain that 'that's up to you, whether yes or no' (116)[55]. At the same time, they remind Nails that every decision has its consequences:

'It seems like nothing, but then it's everything. Now something of yours breaks, now all of a sudden your siding's gone, now your wife suddenly dies, even though she's never had a cold. Now something goes missing, like all of a sudden some documents with your first and last name show up not in the filing cabinet where they belong, only in just the one where they don't belong, so that all of a sudden you'll simply disappear from the world with your family, so you'll suddenly disappear from this town, and your house will be carried away piece by piece to the outskirts, soaked in gasoline, paint thinner, and set aflame just on principle.' (117)[56].

Nails, well-accustomed to the language of hysteria that operates with the ambiguity

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[52] 'propolski;. *Wojna*..., p. 92.

[53] '(...) dom malujemy na biało czerwono, bo takie zarządzenie burmistrza jest na cały powiat.'. *Wojna*..., p. 80.

[54] 'A co jak nie?'. *Wojna*..., p. 89.

[55] '(...)to już pana sprawa, czy tak czy nie'. *Wojna*..., p. 89.

[56] 'Niby nic, ale raptem wszystko. Tu się coś panu zepsuje, tu panu nagle siding odleci, tu panu żona umrze nagle, choć nawet kataru nigdy nie miała. Tu coś zginie, jakieś niby dokumenty raptem z pana nazwiskiem, z pana imieniem pojawią się w nie tej, co trzeba przegródce, tylko we właśnie odwrotnej, niż trzeba, że będzie tak, że nagle po prostu znikniesz pan z tego świata razem ze swoją rodziną, że nagle znikniecie z tego miasta, a wasz dom zostanie wyniesiony w część po części na obrzeże, zalany benzyną, rozpuszczalnikiem i podpalony z samej zasady.'. *Wojna*..., p. 89-90.

of misfortune, at once understands the severity of his situation. Yet, he looks with sorrow at the house 'siding newly installed, elegant, white, a Western look, though it's bought from the Russkies.' (117)[57]. After a brief consultation with Angela he orders the city representatives to stay away from the siding and instead to paint only the fence, as Nails cunningly declares that 'the fence around my home will symbolise the Poles' declaration of war against the Russkies.' (120)[58]. Such moderate response allows them to tick Nails' name as 'pro-Polish' but the city representatives need a psych test to additionally attest to the score of his Polishness. After correctly answering the questions about denouncing a friend who supports the Russkies and pulling down the enemy's red flag, Nails and Angela are confronted with the final, key dilemma:

'In recent days salinity of the Niemen River has risen by 15 percent. I emphasise: by 15 percent. The natural environment of this region has been ruined, and the water of the Niemen has taken on an ultramarine tinge. Are the Russkies responsible for this situation? A)Yes. B) I don't know. C) C ertainly.' (121)[59]

Significantly, the crucial third question lacks among its range of possible answers a simple 'No'. In the world of the novel the Russkies are never *not* to blame and the psych test only establishes the degree of their liability. Angela and Nails answer 'Certainly' and they finish the test with the score 'nine out of ten' (121)[60]. The problem with the language

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[57] 'Siding niedawno położony, elegancki, biały, zachodni wygląd, choć od Ruskich kupiony.'. *Wojna*..., p. 90.

[58] 'płot mego domu będzie symbolizował wypowiedź wojny przez polskich do Rusków'. *Wojna*..., p. 91.

[59] 'W ostatnich dniach zasolenie w rzece Niemen wzrosło o 15%. Podkreślam: o 15%. Środowisko naturalne tychże okolic zostało zdegradowane, a wody Niemna przybrały odcień ultramaryna. Czy za taki stan odpowiedzialni są Ruscy? A. Tak. B. Nie wiem. C. Z pewnością'. *Wojna*..., pp. 92-92.

[60] 'dziewięć na dziesięć punktów'. *Wojna*..., p. 93.

of hysteria, however, is that there are no certainties. The polling is suggestively called a 'psych test', as it examines one's intuition and hunches rather than knowledge or opinions. Thus, the third, most approved option 'certainly' is not an even answer but a lucky guess on behalf of Angela and Nails.

Proportional uncertainty regards one's own feelings. The inability to specify what hurts also makes the language of hysteria a language of frustration. Since lack of coherence and logic hinders the understanding of the language of hysteria, the expression of pain constitutes at once its main feature and the only possible tool to share the suffering with one's surroundings. But suffering reinforced by frustration breeds hatred. When Nails discovers that his beloved dog has died, he initially sulks in himself: 'That's it. Today my last bulb burned out. Today I'm dead, today I'm watching as earth is scattered on the lid of my casket, and I throw a handful of it at myself.' (114)[61]. His pain is, however, quickly interrupted by an idea that 'The Russkies poisoned Bitchy.' (114)[62]. Suddenly his feelings are redirected externally, and instead of pain it is rage that grows in Nails 'since it sinks in more and more' (114)[63]. Even though it remains unclear how and why the Russkies killed Bitchy, Nails is convinced that 'they poisoned her out of common spite, maybe they even starved her to death' (118)[64]. What actually happened is once again irrelevant, what matters instead is that the language of pain after the loss of the dog can now be coined into the language of aggression towards the invisible but omnipresent

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[61] 'To koniec. Dziś zgasła ostatnia ma żarówka. Dziś już nie żyję, dziś patrzę, jak ziemia sypie się na wieko trumny ze mną i sam również rzucam sobie grudkę.' *Wojna...*, p. 88.
[62] 'Ruski Sunię zatruli'. *Wojna...*, p. 88.
[63] 'coraz bardziej to do mnie dochodzi.'. *Wojna...*, p. 88.
[64] 'No otruli zwyczajnie po chamsku, może nawet zagłodzili na śmierć.'. *Wojna...*, p. 90.

enemy.

The double intentionality of hysteria shares its own torment by making others suffer too. One of the more brutal examples is Nails' physical and verbal attack on a random family at the festival 'No Russkies Day' ('Dzień bez Ruska'). After hearing the rumour that Magda exchanged sexual favours for the chance of winning the title of Miss 'No Russkies Day' ('Miss Dnia Bez Ruska'), he is unable to contain his emotions and violently pushes a stranger who is in the company of his two children. The father falls down in the mud but as he stands up and apologises, Nails now attacks him verbally: 'Why don't you watch where you're fucking going, and next time use contraception.' (152)[65]. This hurtful remark cannot be seen as a simple abuse, since the language of hysteria appeals to sympathy at all costs and on all occasions. Nails cannot accept his sudden explosion of violence, and instead desperately tries to maintain the appearances of his own idealised image as the one who is always right: 'By that I mean those kids, between the two of which one has it worse than the other. Because what's the point of that dickhead producing that crap on a massive scale, what's the point of him poisoning society with such garbage, so I have to work for the medical care of these two duds.' (152)[66].

Nails reaches for language to describe his suffering but demands pity and recognition only for the pain that confirms the unrealistic image of the 'Strongman', *Silny*,

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[65] '(...) uważaj sobie, kurwa, jak chodzisz, a następną razą używaj antykoncepcji'. *Wojna*..., p. 115.
[66] 'To odnośnie tych dzieci, z których co jedno, to gorszego gatunku. Bo niby po co taki palant produkuje to badziewie na masową skalę, po co zatruwa takimi bublami społeczeństwo, że ja mam pracować na opiekę medyczną dla takich dwóch ślepych naboi.'. *Wojna*..., p. 115.

as states his original Polish nickname. The pain that escapes this persona is masked with explosions of violence towards his surroundings. Despite the desperate, often grotesque attempts at *pathos,* the misfortune that is earnestly described in the obscure, ornamented Polish, remains hard to relate to. Frustrated, Nails flounces around in search of something, or someone, he can share his suffering with by the only means he possesses - inflicting it upon them. He tries to cover up his aggression with an appeal to reason and back it up with a multiplicity of arguments, but they only further reveal his violent, tormented nature.

Nails reaches for language as a tool to mold himself and his surroundings to fit a self- delusional vision, but it is the language of hysteria he produces that exposes him most strikingly.

4.   The Woman in Me

One of the most hateful rants in *White and Red* is delivered against women. Drugged, confused and hurt, Nails begins his monologue with a vulgar statement 'All women are a bunch of bitches.' (100)[67]. 'Bitches' refers here specifically to female dogs and Nails, in the elaborate manner of the language of hysteria, begins to unwrap his metaphor: 'They don't leave on their own, they wait, lurking.' (100)[68]. Right in the third sentence of his speech, however, it becomes clear that Nails describes not so much the

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[67] 'Wszystkie kobiety to jedne i te same suki'. *Wojna*..., p. 77.
[68] 'Same nie wyjdą, czekają przyczajone'. *Wojna*..., p. 77.

nature of women, but rather his own inability to handle the emotions that the very presence of women provokes in him. He wants them to leave, but they would not 'Until I fly into a rage and blow up, and I have to kick them out, pull away from them like a fly from flypaper.' (100)[69]. Nails describes his reactions as a state of helplessness, and just as in the earlier cases of his aggression, he again becomes defensive, explaining he *has to* attack as to save himself. The threat, typically for the language of hysteria, is as uncertain as it is catastrophic - Nails does not know, but he 'suspects' 'that it's possible that it's just one and the same bitch changing into different rags, she's constantly attacking me, coaxes me with pleasantness and then fucks up the whole apartment.' (100)[70]. The women, then, are imagined to bring disorder, both in the external world of the apartment, and the internal world of Nails' emotions. This chaos is perceived as threatening because it undermines the notion of control over oneself and one's surroundings. The helplessness in the face of self-perceived threat leads Nails straight to the situation of claustrophobia, with no solution and no escape. At first, there is the dreadful repetitiveness of the misfortune: 'Each day, each day she's new and still worse. I suspect that she lives somewhere here in the development. She knows I have weak nerves.' (100)[71]. There is an attempt to resist the danger by a counter-strike: 'She comes and fucks my shit up. And I kill her' (100)[72]. These are futile efforts, however, as the torment seems to have no end,

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[69] 'Aż się rozjuszę i wybuchnę, i muszę je wypychać, odganiać od nich jak lep na muchy'. *Wojna*..., p. 77.
[70] 'Podejrzewam, iż możliwe, że to jedna i ta sama suka przebierająca się w różne ciuchy, ona na mnie napada nieustannie, naciąga mnie na przyjemności, a potem robi syf w całym mieszkaniu'. *Wojna*..., p. 77.
[71] 'Codziennie, codziennie nowa i jeszcze gorsza. Podejrzewam, że mieszka gdzieś tu na osiedlu. Wie, że mam słabe nerwy.'. *Wojna*..., pp. 78-79.
[72] Przychodzi i mnie wkurwia. I ja ją zabijam.'. *Wojna*..., p. 79.

since 'she grows back out of dog spunk and is already tight and ready the next evening' (100)[73]. The above metaphorical description of Nails's never-ending torment, and his struggle to combat the invincible enemy, provokes a question as to who it is in fact that he so desperately tries to defeat. Who is that 'bitch' who comes every day and whom he kills just to watch her return, 'tight and ready next evening'(100)[74]? That feared and resentful, nearly mythological creature is a part of Nails, rejected as shameful and unfitting for his self-constructed image of the 'Strongman'. Within his idealised value system that unbiased reason, power and masculinity reign as superior, and he deludes himself to be a shining example of them. But it is precisely in the moments of unexpected emotions that he can no longer control himself: 'from my guts there suddenly arose a squeaky voice, I'd almost say: feminine.' (33)[75]. Since rage is a much simpler emotion than pain or helplessness, and at the same time more acceptable within Nails' patriarchal framework of thinking, he quickly explains his loss of control in terms of fury rather than fear: 'That's an effect of feeling the anger that all at once engulfed me like an ocean and cut me off from all rational impulses, from all rational messages.' (33)[76]. The suffering that Nails experiences, however, comes not from the Russkies, the women in his life, or any other mysterious entity that plots his demise, but from inside himself.

To see a woman inside Nails might appear as an unconventional reading of Masłowska's novel. Maria Janion, a leading Polish literary critic, sees femininity as a

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[73] 'A ona odrasta z psiego nasienia i już następnego wieczora siedzi zwarta i gotowa'. *Wojna*..., p. 79.
[74] 'już następnego wieczoru siedzi zwarta i gotowa'. *Wojna*..., p. 79.
[75] '(...) z moich trzewi dobywa się nagle głos piskliwy, prawie powiedziałbym: żeński'. *Wojna*..., p. 28.
[76] 'Jest to efekt uczucia gniewu, które zalało mnie raptownie jak ocean i przysłoniło mi wszelkie racjonalne pobudki, wszelkie racjonale przesłania'. *Wojna*..., p. 28.

binary opposition of Nails and the world of values he represents. Already in the subtitle to her critical section of *White and Red* Janion puts a dash between 'Russkies' and 'woman', equating the two - 'The Russkies is a woman', 'Rusek-kobietą'[77]. As such, Janion places these two notions - the Russkies and femininity - as opposed to Nails and his value system. The female element, however, though openly mocked and attacked by Nails, I argue is also admittedly part of his own world: 'White-red. From top to bottom. On top a Polish pill, on the bottom Polish menstruation. On top Polish snow imported from a Polish sky, on the bottom the Polish association of Polish butchers and pig-stickers.' (105)[78]. Janion points out that a woman's menstruation is threatening the Polish identity that Nails wants to maintain. She references a passage, in which Nails, under the influence of drugs, mixes these two - the Russkies and a woman - together:

'Maybe they're Russkies and they're just euphemistically called women. And we men are going to drive them out of here, from this town, where they perpetrate misfortunes, plagues, droughts, bad crops, debauchery. They ruin the upholstery with their blood, which flies out of them like nobody's business, soiling the whole world with permanent stains. A real River Menstruation. Angelica, a serious disease. The severe penalty for lacking maidenhead. When her mom finds out, she'll put it back.' (pp. 100-101)[79].

The 'hatred towards the Russkies is intertwined with repulsion towards female

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[77] Janion, p. 242.

[78] 'Biało-czerwone. Z góry na dół. Na górze polska amfa, na dole polska menstruacja. Na górze polski importowany z polskiego nieba śnieg, na dole polskie stowarzyszenie polskich rzeźników i wędliniarzy'. *Wojna*..., p. 81.

[79] 'Być może te Ruski, że tak się właśnie eufemistycznie wabią kobiety. A my mężczyźni je stąd wygnoimy, z tego miasta, co one sprowadzają nieszczęścia, zarazy, susze, zły urodzaj, rozpustę. Niszczą tapicerki swą krwią która leci z nich jak przez ręce, brukając cały świat niespieralnymi plamami. Wierna rzeka Menstruacja. Groźna choroba Andżelika. Surowa kara za brak błony dziewiczej. Jak się dowie jej matka, to jej wprawi z powrotem.'. *Wojna*..., p. 78.

physiology and magical fear of female blood'[80], the critic argues, and at the same time it becomes impossible to ignore those 'ties between Poland and a woman'[81]. Clearly, the motif of blood - Angela's virginal blood staining both Nails' mother's sofa-bed and his own pants, as well as the dreaded vision of menstrual blood flooding Poland - has explicit gender connotations. Yet I read it also as a terror of confronting what is underneath the controlled surface. Nails' response corresponds with his philosophy of violence, which includes self-aggression. His statement that 'The Russkies and female weakness and inferiority must be chased away from our cities'[82] is a declaration of war against that part of himself which erupts unexpectedly, that he cannot control and thus fears and resents.

I propose, then, to read the rejected femininity as an underground identity, the repressed part of the self that does not fit into the public image that Nails tries to maintain. As such, it is both denied and feared just like the Russkies and the symbolic woman.

There are several different factors that contribute to my suggestion that the concept of hysteria constitutes a productive framework for exploring Nails' repression. The first one relates to the impact of the alleged social expectations on the construction of Nails' underground personality. His outward persona is often as violent as his repressed side, and he has equally little control over either of them. And yet, Nails identifies with that part of the self – the 'Strongman' – which resembles most closely the ideal constructed by the society that he finds himself a part of. The critic Przemysław

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[80] Janion, p. 243; 'W brawurowym słowotoku nienawiść do Ruskich splata się ze wstrętem do kobiecej fizjologii i magicznym lękiem przed kobiecą krwią'.

[81] ibid; 'uwidocznia jednak związki Polski z kobietą'.

[82] ibid

Czapliński describes Nails' cultural affiliation in reference to the 'old canon' that merits dominance and strength, constructed and defined in opposition to 'the Others'' weakness[83]. In hysteria, as defined by Kępiński, the personality split is caused by an attempt to reduce oneself to an idealised image that the hysteric believes a society values and expects. The elements of personality that are judged as inferior are then denied and come to form the 'underground identity'. The impact of imagined social expectations on the formation of the dualistic personality is precisely what distinguishes hysteria from other forms of repressions that are often caused by one traumatic event.

Another aspect of hysteria that I propose offers a valuable insight into the interplay between Nails' outward persona and his underground self, the phenomenon of 'pseudologia phantastica'. This distortion of reality, as conceptualised by Kępiński, was earlier discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to the cultural hysteria that torments the Second World. Here, on the individual level, I suggest a similar delusion occurs: Nails' identification with his self-constructed image of the local 'Strongman' is precisely an example of such 'pseudologia phantastica'.

Since 'pseudologia phantastica' appears probable and is somewhat 'better installed into reality'[84], a hysterical type believes in the reality he creates. This particular structure disables the hysteric from seeing reality as it is, despite the facts and his surroundings proving otherwise. Thus, Nails constructs a nuanced self-delusion: in his

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[83] See Przemysław Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany: późna nowoczesność i nasze wielkie narracje*. (Warszawa : Wydawnictwo W.A.B, 2009), pp. 266-272.
[84] Kępiński, p. 62; 'lepiej wmontowana w obraz rzeczywistości'.

own eyes he exudes strength and reason, which turn into violence only in reaction to unpredictable, hostile situations. These outbursts of rage, however, do not contradict his value system that merits supremacy over weakness. No matter how savage and uncontrollable, Nails sees his aggression as justified and coherent with his view of the world. What he does not accept as his own is the yearning for intimacy and recognition, together with the pain that comes from having his feelings hurt and rejected. Thus, Nails remains in denial that the 'bitch' who attacks him and who never ceases to return, each day 'new and still worse' (100)[85] is in fact a part of himself.

5.   The Hysterical Type

The language of hysteria already manifests itself in the name that Masłowska chooses for her protagonist, Andrzej 'Nails' Robakoski. The surname contains a striking, obvious misspelling - it lacks the consonant 'w'. The correct form of a traditional Polish surname should be 'Robakowski', a derivative of 'robak', a Polish word for a 'worm'. In the sixteenth century many Polish surnames added the letter 'w' as a sign of nobility. Since the concept of surname is to provide information about one's origins, this particular 'degradation' of Masłowska's character here is telling, particularly in the post-socialist context. On the one hand, it points to a break in the generational passage. 'Surname', a synonym of 'family name', is passed from parents onto their children. Due to the

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[85] 'Codziennie, codziennie nowa i jeszcze gorsza'. *Wojna...*, pp. 78-79.

misspelling, however, Andrzej's name becomes untraceable.

On the other hand, in reference to the less than spectacular etymology of the correct form of the name - as mentioned above, a derivative of 'worm' [*robak*] - the misspelling points to the phenomenon of 'reinvention' that blossomed during the period of transformation. The symbolism of the 'thick line' policy of the 1990s resonated with the wider cultural climate that encouraged cutting off the past and starting anew. In the case of *White and Red* the denial of one's heritage is both less conscious and more complex. The main dilemma that the characters in Masłowska's debut are facing - a chorus of the novel, one could argue - is the question 'how do you know?' (1)[86]. And the answer - that the characters do not know how they know what they know - is as genuine as it is frightening, pointing to their inability to determine any credible sources of information with which they operate. Here, Nails' ignorance regarding the correct spelling of his own name equates to his oblivion as to where he comes from. It should be noted, however, that in the context of Andrzej 'Nails' Robakoski's sense of self-importance and pretence, the discovery that his real family name is derived from 'worm' [robak] might not be taken particularly well.

Another interpretation links to the fact that Robakoski is not alone in being given an erroneous name, and his creator suffers the very same fate. Masłowska's literary alter ego, who appears towards the end of the novel, is introduced as Dorota Masłoska, again missing the letter 'w'. As a literary character Andrzej 'Nails' Robakoski is a 'child' of its

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[86] 'skąd wiesz?'. *Wojna*..., p. 1.

author and thus inherits the error in her family name. Kinga Dunin, a prominent literary critic on Polish contemporary literature, stresses the incompleteness of both - the author and her protagonist. She points out that 'Masłoska' is not yet 'Masłowska'[87], just like her character, is only 'Robakoski' and not 'Robakowski'. Both are somehow unfinished, illusory, but Dunin reads this literary device as a metaphor on the seniority of post-1989 Poland. The critic provocatively asks: 'Does the narrator Masłoska (...) appearing from behind of Nails, really inform him about his textual status, or about the suspicious state of the whole system?'[88]. And yet it is not the protagonist's surname alone, I would argue, that alludes to the state of Polish culture in the times of transformation, but rather the sum of his name, nickname and surname. Nails is given the most traditional first name possible, 'Andrzej', one whose name day is celebrated across the country in the form of 'Andrzejki'. Highly popular in 1989 Poland, the name has been commonly associated with the iconic literary character of Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Potop*, Andrzej Kmicic, or the film director Andrzej Wajda. The language game goes further, as Andrzej Robakoski functions in his world under a nick name 'Nails' - 'Silny', which literally translates as 'Strongman'. In this clever language game with the socio-cultural references, Masłowska contrasts at once the tradition (Andrzej), the ignorance (Robakoski) and the pretence (Nails/Strongman) in the post-1989 world. The name of Andrzej 'Nails' Robakoski introduces a contradiction that is fundamental in a hysterical type as conceptualised by Antoni Kępińki - that between a self- delusional strength and an actual state of frailty,

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[87] Dunin, p. 235; 'Masłoska, a więc jeszcze nie Masłowska'.
[88] ibid; 'Czy rzeczywiście wyłaniająca się spoza Silnego narratorka Masłoska (...), informuje go o jego tekstowym statusie, czy o podejrzanym statusie całego systemu?'.

between the nobel intentions and the ugly deeds, the ideal and the real. Kępiński writes: 'The hysteric cannot reconcile with the border that exists between the dreams and reality, between the functional structure that is potential and the realised, the consciousness is somewhat too narrow to contain in it these two, often contradictory images of the world and the self.'[89].

In Masłowska's writing the battle between the two opposing forces, the virtuous and the monstrous, occurs in the language, often within one paragraph, or even one sentence. Nails constantly oscillates between vulgarism and formality, between aggression and sentiment. He attempts to use high-register, sophisticated phrases but fails without realising his choice of words has a tragicomic effect. The words burst out of him unexpectedly, uncontrollably. The virtuous Nails is a romantic, a poet and a philosopher, whereas the monstrous Nails could be seen as an aggressor, a druggie and a hooligan.

His tender side is most frequently expressed in his reflections concerning the women he encounters, in the moments he does ponder being hurt or threatened by them. Nails sees himself as a sensitive, tormented soul and chooses to use unusual metaphors - often an idiosyncratic blend of Polish proverbs and idioms - to illustrate his internal struggle. Of his dynamics with the ex-girlfriend Magda he says: 'she's sulky like she was at least the mistress of the manor of that little wall, and I were a hobo, an illegal immigrant

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[89] Kępiński, p. 63; 'Histeryk nie może jednak pogodzić się z granicą, która istnieje między marzeniem a rzeczywistością, między strukturą czynnościową potencjalną a zrealizowaną; świadomość jest jakby za ciasna, by zmieściły się w niej te dwa, nieraz przeciwstawne, obrazy świata i własnej osoby'.

here without a passport, without a visa to her, without anything.' (38)[90]. The new girl he encounters, Angela, is observed to be 'a different stripe from Magda. Different to the touch, different in general. Her style is more of that gloomy dark sort. (...) She's all nail polish, of the black variety. All smeared black, but evenly and carefully. Around her lips, as well as her eyes. From which there extend eyelashes glued to eternity.'[91] As a self-proclaimed romantic, Nails proudly describes his attempts to create a suitable atmosphere for romance: 'I set out Bird Milkies, I set out a vase of fake gerber, next to that cigarettes, total elegance, a voyage on the *Titanic,* pleasantry, the man symbolically extending his hand to the woman.' (97)[92].

It takes a split second, however, for Nails to turn into a brute. The discovery that his girlfriend has left is firstly mourned in a peaceful manner, as Nails reflects upon the possible reasons behind her decision: 'even though we'd had it good' (1)[93]. A few pages later, however, we find Nails confessing to being 'still a bit resentful' and thus threatening 'that if she's going to be that way, I'll fuck up the whole bar, all the glasses will go to the floor, she'll walk on glass, she'll snap her heels, she'll bash her elbows, she'll tear her dress and all the laces that went into it.' (4)[94].

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[90] '(...)ona jest nadąsana jakby była co najmniej panią na włościach tego murku, a ja bym był abnegatem, nielegalnym tu emigrantem bez paszportu, bez wizy do niej, bez niczego'. *Wojna*..., p. 32.

[91] '(...)innego typu niż Magda. Inna w dotyku, inna w ogóle. Jest w stylu bardziej takim mrocznym, ciemnym'. *Wojna*..., p. 46.

[92] 'Stawiam ptasie mleczko, stawiam wazonik ze sztucznym gerberem, obok papierosy, full elegancja, podróż promem Titanic, ugoda, symboliczne podanie rąk kobiecie przez mężczyznę.'. *Wojna*..., p. 75.

[93] 'Chociaż było nam dobrze'. *Wojna*..., p. 5.

[94] 'Mówię, że jak będzie taką, rozpierdolę cały bar, wszystkie szklanki pójdą na podłogę, będzie chodzić w szkle, będzie łamać sobie wszystkie swoje obcasy, potłucze sobie łokcie, podrze sobie kieckę i wszystkie w niej zwarte sznurki.'. *Wojna*..., p. 7.

A similar instability is demonstrated in the context of socio-political issues. The virtuous Andrzej Robakoski demonstrates a keen interest in politics and the welfare of his country:

'I light up a cigarette, since I have to stress that in recent years I've fallen into this unpleasant addiction. But it's my way of expressing my opposition, my way of expressing my defiance to the West, against American dieticians, American plastic surgeries, American crooks, who are suave but betray our country on the sly. I was saying this to Magda once already, in this conversation of a friendly nature, that when I go to America, I'm going to smoke cigs right on the street, despite the fact that they mostly look down on that there, since the entire West is cutting back on smoking.' (p. 29)[95].

However, the above peaceful act of dissent quickly transforms into a high-strung hostility towards 'the enemy':

'In a word, yes or no, Russki CD-bootleggers, Russkies who tunnel underneath our economy, Russkies who ill our dogs and yours, our children who cry because of the Russkies. Yes or no, Poland for the Russkies, or Poland for the Poles. Decide, sir, because here we're chit-chatting, and those motherfuckers are arming themselves.' (p. 118)[96].

The constant swing between his outbursts of affection and then aggression applies to anything that he encounters. This dualism of Nails, continuously struggling between his grandiose aspirations and the real, inferior self, is one of the core features that Antoni

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[95] 'Zapalam papierosa, gdyż muszę zaznaczyć, że ostatnimi laty wpadłem w ten nieprzyjemny nałóg. Lecz jest to mój wyraz sprzeciwu, mój wyraz oporu przeciwko Zachodowi, przeciwko amerykańskim dietetykom, amerykańskim operacjom plastycznym, amerykańskim złodziejom, którzy są uprzedzający, lecz cichaczem zdradzają nasz kraj. Kiedyś już to mówiłem Magdzie w takiej rozmowie o charakterze przyjacielskim, że gdy wyjadę do Ameryki, to będę palił fajki prosto na ulicy, mimo iż jest to tam w przeważnie złym tonie, ponieważ cały Zachód wycofuje się z palenia'. *Wojna*..., pp. 24-25.

[96] 'Jedno słowo, tak albo nie, Ruscy fałszerze kompaktów, Ruscy robiący podkop pod naszą gospodarką, Ruscy zabijający psy nasze i wasze, nasze dzieci płaczące przez Ruskich.Tak albo nie, Polska dla Rusków czy Polska dla Polaków. Decyduj się pan, bo my tu gadu gadu, a te ścierwa się zbroją.'. *Wojna*..., p. 90.

Kępiński identifies as symptoms of hysteria. The psychiatrist argues that such a split occurs when one's life becomes obsessively dependent on the perceptions of others. In a hysterical type the ideal constructed by a society replaces an internal life goal, charisma[97]. Since one can never fully become a reflection of social expectations, this situation is impossible to maintain. Kępiński writes: 'a certain true part of him that does not fit into this idealised image is continuously rejected and repressed. A second, 'underground' identity is being formed, of which the man is frightened since he cannot control it.'[98]

Nails, the hysterical type, turns his language into a battlefield between these opposing forces, one continuously attempting to sabotage the other. In this quest for power, however, the roles are often reversed, and the virtuous version becomes no less monstrous than the rejected parts of the self that he tried to eradicate.

6.   The symptoms of hysteria

Since hysteria is experienced by those demonstrating the hysterical behaviour as much as their environment, the analysis of the condition's symptoms highlights the

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[97] Kępiński, p. 59-60; 'Zasadniczy cel życia, swoiste dla danego człowieka *charisma*, które powinno zajmować pierwsze miejsce w jego hierarchii wartości, zostaje zastąpione ideałem wytworzonym przez otoczenie, a więc nie własnym'.

[98] ibid, p. 60; 'Jakaś jego część prawdziwa, często tajemnicza, nie mieszcząc się w tym wyidealizowanym obrazie własnej osoby, jest wciąż spychana i tłumiona. Rodzi się jakby druga, "podziemna" osobowość, której człowiek taki sam się boi, gdyż nie ma nad nią władzy.

interpersonal dynamics. Hysteria, as defined by Kępiński, could be seen both as response to the world and demanding a response from that world. It cannot occur in solitude as the pain requires an audience to take its pathological form and resonate. In the following sections I briefly outline the types of behaviours that Kępiński distinguishes as typical of the hysterical condition, in order to examine their application in regard to Nails.

'*Bad theatre'*

The first and most striking feature of the condition is the so-called 'hysterical theatricality', which is also fundamental to the bad reputation that hysterics have gained in society. As Kępiński observes 'a hysteric does everything as though for a show, parades; everything in him is as though half pitch higher.'[99] The exaggerated, dramatic behaviour the psychiatrist compares to 'bad theatre' since an expression in hysteria always comes across as false[100].

Significantly, however, Kępiński speculates that this inauthenticity is felt not only by the hysterics' environment but also by those suffering hysteria. He points to the everyday experience in which 'the more people highlight the expression, the less they are

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[99] Kępiński, p. 57; '(...) histeryk robi wszystko jakby na pokaz; afiszuje się, wszystko u niego jest jakby o pół tonu wyżej'.

[100] Kępiński: 'It is basically bad theatre, because a good one stands on not perceiving the acting style, its expression is authentic, whereas in hysteria strikes most of all falsehood, artificiality and inauthenticity.';
'Jest to właściwie zły teatr, bo dobry polega na tym, że nie odczuwa się try aktora, że jego ekspresja jest autentyczna, a w histerii uderzają przede wszystkim fałsz, nieprawdziwość i nieautentyczność,' p. 57.

internally convinced about the validity of their claim'[101]. Kępiński argues that the link between expression and emotion has its limits and once this invisible mark has been crossed, the situation begins to function according to the principles of inverse proportion: 'the more a man screams, the less it hurts him'[102].

In the context of Masłowska's protagonist both the exaggeration of emotional states and the theatricality of their expression are intrinsic in his language. Nails's 'bad theatre' begins in the first few pages, immediately after learning that Magda has left him. After staring at Magda's hair, 'as if it were a wall, since it's not for me' (2)[103], 'fencing her off from me like brickwork, like concrete' (3)[104], Nails decides to sit with his face to the wall. A few pages later, when Magda's friend, the bartender Arleta, tells Nails that he is 'causing a circus' (7)[105], the man responds dramatically:

'Thank you very much, and here are the elephants that walked through me and trampled my heart, here are the fleas. Here are the trained dogs, since I was like the trained dogs that don't get anything in return but more whipcracks in the face and no "good boy" or fuck off. Here I am, a dog trained to drive a roofless car. I don't have a light. Because I'm burned to a crisp. And now I want to die.' (7)[106].

That tendency to deliver his emotions and beliefs a 'half-pitch higher' continues

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[101] ibid, p. 58; '(...) ludzie tym silniejszy nacisk kładą na ekspresję, im słabiej są wewnętrznie przekonani o słuszności swego stanowiska'.

[102] ibid; '(...) człowiek tym głośniej krzyczy, im mniej go boli'.

[103] 'Patrzę na jej włosy również jak w ścianę, gdyż nie są dla mnie.'. *Wojna...*, p. 6. 103

[104] 'Odgradzają ją ode mnie niczym mur, niczym beton.'. *Wojna...*, p. 6.

[105] '(...)że niby robię cyrk'. *Wojna...*, p. 9.

[106] 'Proszę bardzo, oto są słonie, co przeze mnie idąc, zniszczyły moje serce, oto są pchły. Oto są psy tresowane, gdyż byłem niczym psy tresowane, co nie dostają nic w zamian, tylko jeszcze liścia w twarz i ani dziękuję, ani spierdalaj. Oto jestem psem tresowanym, żebym prowadził samochód bez dachu. Ognia nie mam. Gdyż jestem wypalony. I chcę teraz umrzeć.'. *Wojna...*, p. 9.

throughout the novel. He confesses that 'my feelings are in shambles, I've been destroyed by her, my nerves and psyche are shot' (23)[107], since his post-breakup interactions with Magda bring Nails to 'the limit of what I can take, of shock and of something else I can't name' (30)[108]. However, considering the series of romantic encounters that take place shortly after Magda leaves him, Nails' despair seems to reflect the principle of inverse proportions referenced by Kępiński. It becomes clear that the "bad theatre" is not a result of Nails' recent heartbreak, but rather his ordinary manner of expression which concerns nearly every aspect of his everyday life, not just romance. Masłowska's protagonist describes his own room as 'utter Sodom and Gomorrah, sylph, malaria, the plague' (49)[109], and his state in the morning after a heavy night filled with various substances leads to a confession which seems to capture the essence of his hysterical expression: 'my each and every movement is almost fatal, and pain and suffering are my inseparable lover (...)' (44)[110].

Turbulence

Right besides theatricality, Kępiński places emotional turbulence of a hysteric,

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[107] '(...)moje uczucia runęły, moje nerwy runęły, jestem przez nią zniszczony, jestem psychicznie i nerwowo konający.'. *Wojna...*, p. 21.

[108] 'Ponieważ jestem na granicy wytrzymałości, szoku i czegoś jeszcze, co nie mogę nazwać.'. *Wojna...*, p. 26.

[109] 'Wracam do pokoju, gdzie jest istna sodomia, gomora, syf, malaria, umór'. *Wojna...*, p. 40.

[110] '(...) każdy mój najmniejszy ruch jest prawie, że śmiertelny, a ból i cierpienie są mym nieodłącznym kochankiem'. *Wojna...*, p. 37.

which he compares to 'a storm in a teacup'[111]. His or her responses are inadequate to the scale of events that caused them, abruptly switching from one extreme to the other: 'despair, cry turn into uncontrollable joy, love into hatred, delight into repulsion.'[112]. On the one hand Kępiński notes that the turbulence is closely linked to the tendency for exaggeration in hysteria, as discussed above. On the other hand, however, the psychiatrist notes that a possible cause could be emotional immaturity. He compares hysterics to children who 'easily move from one emotional state to the other and reach its extreme poles.' [113].

This description seems tailored for Masłowska's protagonist who frequently escalates between radically contrasting emotions not only within the same page, but often within a paragraph or even a sentence, for instance: 'So then I'm waiting and I'm calm, though it makes me want to blow the shit out of the hospital.' (16)[114]. Nails's explosive character constitutes a trademark among his peers. In the opening of the novel Nails recounts with typical indignation the reasons why Magda had first announced their break-up to everyone else but him: 'She was saying that I'm sort of the more explosive one, and that they had to prepare me for this fact. They're afraid that something might set off, because that sort of always happens. She said I should step out to get some air.' (2)[115].

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[111] ibid, p. 58; '"burza w szklance wody"'.

[112] ibid, p. 58; 'Rozpacz, płacz przechodzą łatwo w nieopanowaną radość, miłość w nienawiść, zachwyt w obrzydzenie itp'.

[113] ibid, p. 58.

[114] 'No więc czekam i jestem spokojny, chociaż nosi mnie, żeby rozpieprzyć ten szpital w drzazgę.'. *Wojna...*, p. 16.

[115] 'Mówiła, że ja to jestem raczej wybuchowy i że musieli mnie przygotować do tego faktu. Boją się, że coś mi odpierdoli, bo raczej tak zawsze było. Mówiła, żebym wyszedł poodychać.'. *Wojna...*, p. 5.

The reservations of his milieu seem firmly founded as we observe Nails rapidly changing reactions. He begins with just feeling 'sadder than ever' (2)[116] and staring longingly at Magda's 'impenetrable wall' (3)[117] of hair, to being 'still a bit resentful' (4)[118] and threatening 'I'll fuck up the whole bar' (4)[119]. His assessment of the situation undergoes parallel changes. Upon hearing the news, Nails expresses surprise mixed with regret '(...) we'd had it good'(1)[120], to later admitting 'things weren't always good, like I was saying' (5)[121]. Likewise, his approach to a potential reunion swings between the two extremes. As Nails fantasises of Magda coming back, he sees himself rejecting her at first: 'But I say no. No and no. I refuse. Even if she wanted to come here, I'd say: Don't come closer, don't touch me, you stink'[122] (3), but he soon radically changes his approach and falls into despair 'Did I do something wrong, that we wouldn't be able to start all over again? You always looked happy when I loved you, why don't you want me now all of a sudden, is it some whim, did I bore you?' (12)[123]. His feelings escalate between emotional agony, as he confesses 'I want to die' (7)[124], and violent dreams of vendetta - 'I want to kill her' (33)[125].

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[116] 'Tymczasem ja czuję tylko smutek bardziej niż cokolwiek.'. *Wojna*..., p. 5.
[117] 'nieprzepuszczalna ściana'. *Wojna*..., p. 6.
[118] 'nieco jeszcze obrażony'. *Wojna*..., p. 7.
[119] 'rozpierdolę cały bar'. *Wojna*..., p. 7.
[120] 'Chociaż było nam dobrze'. *Wojna*..., p. 5.
[121] 'Chociaż nie zawsze było dobrze'. *Wojna*..., p. 8.
[122] 'Ale mówię nie. Nie i nie. Nie zgadzam się. Gdyby nawet chciała tu przyjść, bym powiedział: nie zbliżaj się, nie dotykaj mnie, śmierdzisz.'. *Wojna*..., p. 7.
[123] 'Czy zrobiłem coś źle, Magda? - mówię do niej i zamykam zasuwkę. Czy zrobiłem coś źle, przecież mogliśmy jeszcze raz wszystko zacząć ponownie. Zawsze wyglądałaś na szczęśliwą, gdy cię kochałem, czemu teraz mnie raptem nie chcesz, czy to taki kaprys, czy znudziłem się ci?'. *Wojna*..., p. 13.
[124] 'I chcę teraz umrzeć'. *Wojna*..., p. 9.
[125] Chcę ją zabić'. *Wojna*..., p. 28.

As with the 'bad theatre' trait, Nails's turbulence is not restricted to his romantic relationships, but comes across in all his reactions to people and situations he encounters. When Magda suffers from a painful cramp and the two decide to go to the hospital, Nails attacks the taxi driver after the man asks whether something happened: 'I say, Is this an interview for the newspaper or is this a taxi, and is this a confession of sins and an absolution, are you driving us, because otherwise I'm getting out and Magda's coming with me, no fare and on top of that a rock through the windshield, and maybe he shouldn't show himself in town.' (14)[126]. Once they arrive in the hospital, Nails' rage is in turn directed toward the doctor: 'The orthopedist tells me to go out during the exam, which pisses the fuck out of me, she's my woman, right? I look him right in the very centre of his eye, right into the whites, which are pretty overrun with blood, so he'll know how it is and won't try anything, no orthopaedic tricks. Magda begs me with her eyes to be calm, so I calm down a bit.' (16)[127]. Blinded by his own emotional turmoil, Nails is unable to see straight: he believes to be looking 'in the very centre' of the doctor's eye, but instead of the colourful iris, he sees 'the whites, which are pretty overrun with blood'. His world is that of extremities, 'white and red,' unable to notice anything else. He is the definition of 'a storm in a teacup' as his responses are always inadequate to the scale of events taking place around him.

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[126] 'Czy to jest wywiad do gazety czy to jest taksówka i czy to jest spowiedź grzechów i rozgrzeszenie, czy nas wiezie, bo inaczej ja wysiadam i Magda również ze mną, zero kasy i jeszcze kamień na przednią szybę, i może się nie pokazywać w mieście.'. *Wojna...*, p. 15.

[127] 'Patrzę mu prosto w same centrum oczu, w same białka, które są dość naszłe od krwi, żeby wiedział, jak jest i niczego nie próbował, żadnych ortopedycznych sztuczek. Magda błaga mnie wzrokiem, żebym był spokojnym, więc się dość uspokajam.'. *Wojna...*, p. 16.

"How others see me?"

Kępiński emphasises that the question concerning public opinion is relevant to everyone and cannot be reduced to the hysterics alone. The problem begins, however, when the need for approval and recognition outshines all the other ones. Kępiński argues that for hysterics it is exactly around this question - 'how others see me' - that the 'life effort' is concentrated[128]. He elaborates that moving the desire for social acceptance to the forefront of one's value system harms self-identity. He distinguishes between granting the public opinion certain relevance, particularly in the formative phase of youth, and making it a priority in one's adult life, as happens in the case of hysteria. In this second instance 'one's individuality is denied', since an ideal constructed by the society replaces a personal life goal. Consequently, "a man does not have the courage to face the world as he is and as he really feels, but wants to appear as, in his opinion, the environment wants to see him.'[129].

In the context of Nails, the idealised part of himself that feels pressure to perform in front of others is linked to the position of power and control. This situation becomes most evident when a third party, the outsiders, enter the picture and engage with his interpersonal affairs. Suddenly Nails' romanticism and hurt feelings are replaced with

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[128] Kępiński, p. 59; '(...)"jak mnie widzą inni". Wokół tego pytania koncentruje się ich wysiłek życia, pytanie to zajmuje pierwsze miejsce w hierarchii wartości'.

[129] ibid, p. 60; 'Człowiek nie ma odwagi wystąpić wobec świata takim, jaki jest i jaki się czuje naprawdę, a chce wystąpić takim, jakim, jego zdaniem, pragnie go widzieć otoczenie'.

violence and cruelty, as though he needed to live up to his nickname - Nails, the Strongman. This is the case when Magda, high on speed, publicly humiliates him in front of two strangers who surprise them during their time together at the beach. Nails, sitting on the sand drawing with a stick 'different thoughts, these calculations' (21)[130], is introduced by Magda as her disabled brother, 'mental with Down's' (22)[131]. After an initial shock, Nails quickly collects himself and rises up to his nickname - Strongman: 'It's right now that I decide I will no longer feel this feeling that you stirred in me when I spotted you for the first time in Lolo's car. Right now I drop the stick, though a moment ago I used it to jot our plans for the future in the ground(...)' (24)[132]. Once Nails abandons his sentiments, he is ready to rescue his social status - by attacking Magda, the object of his affection: 'Now I come right up next to you, in one hand I take your hair, which I once loved so much, which now I don't feel anything toward. I wrap it around my fist.' (25)[133]. His violent gesture is a claim to ownership: 'Gentleman, here's the deal. This is my woman.' (25)[134]. The transition is swift, since until this point it was Nails who remained at Magda's mercy, begging her to give him another chance and fantasising about their future together. In the presence of strangers, however, he is quick to make up his mind 'Now I'm taking her back.' (25)[135]. And yet, the return of Magda is neither the final nor the most

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[130] 'Zaczynam nawet, co jest rzadkie, zapisywać te różne myśli, obliczenia na ziemi.'. *Wojna*..., p. 19.

[131] '(...) to jest właśnie ten mój upośledzony psychofizjologicznie brat.'. *Wojna*..., p. 20.

[132] 'Teraz właśnie decyduję, że nie będę dłużej czuł tego uczucia, które we mnie wzbudziłaś, gdy cię pierwszy raz ujrzałem w samochodzie Lola. Teraz właśnie upuszczam kijek, choć przed chwilą wypisałem nim na ziemi plany na przyszłość da nas'. *Wojna*..., p. 22.

[133] Teraz podchodzę obok ciebie blisko, biorę w jedną rękę twe włosy, które kiedyś tak kochałem, choć teraz nie czuję nic na ich temat. Owijam sobie wokół pięści.'. *Wojna*..., p. 22.

[134] ''(...)panowie, jest taka sprawa. To jest moja kobieta.'.*Wojna*..., p. 22.

[135] 'Ja ją teraz zabieram.'. *Wojna*..., p. 22.

important element of conflict resolution. At stake here is Nails' image in the men's eyes. Thus, once he re-establishes control over her, he addresses the strangers in a purposefully friendly, considerate manner: 'And for you, boys - respect from Nails, kind of you to bring her here, this slut who, for all her bullshit, is soon to get what's coming to her.' (25)[136]. Nails feels his victory is complete: 'I'm smiling on the inside. Because that really humiliated them, took them aback.' (25)[137]. He finally gets what he was after: 'Then they both abruptly fall silent and say: Respect.' (25)[138].

Nails' behaviour exceeds the common desire for respect and recognition as it dominates his hierarchy of values, becoming a fundamental drive. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, Kępiński's definition of hysteria takes into account that particularly in the formative phase of youth one's image holds great relevance. Hysteria, however, escalates this tendency, leading to a pathological construction of identity, in which a person reduces oneself to the image which, in her or his opinion, the world wants to see. During the confrontation discussed above Nails derives the greatest pride not simply from impressing the other men, but from maintaining the self-idealised persona of the 'Strongman'; one who crushes his own sentiments and feelings: 'This is my domain, my sadness under control.'(25)[139].

The impossibility of fully transforming the self into its social image results in a

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[136] 'A dla was, chłopaki - respekt od Silnego, miło, żeście ją tu sprowadzili, tę szmatę, która za swoje partactwa zaraz dostanie za swoje.'. *Wojna...*, p. 22-23.

[137] 'Uśmiecham się w duszy. Ponieważ to ich naprawdę upokorzyło, zaskoczyło.'.*Wojna...*, p. 23.

[138] 'Wtedy oni milczą równie raptownie i mówią obaj: respekt.'. *Wojna...*, p. 23.

[139] 'To moje opanowanie, ten mój opanowany smutek.'.*Wojna...*, p. 23.

personality split, in which one part is idealised and the other repressed, which in turn leads to dissociation from the self. Kępiński notices that hysterics are frequently unable to tell whether the emotions they experience are indeed their own, 'as though someone else would sit inside and stir'[140]. What comes across as hypocrisy is, according to Kępiński, an outcome of the clashing value systems that a hysteric is unable to reconcile.

This phenomenon is a heightened form of an inherently human condition that assumes a certain degree of contradiction within man's nature. Kępiński illustrates the difference in an hysterical type with a reference to dialectics. If the normal human perception of the world is based on the 'thesis - antithesis, synthesis' structure, then in hysteria the vision becomes one dimensional: 'a man tries not to see the other side of the coin'[141]. Kępiński uses the metaphor of a volcano to illustrate the threat under which hysterics live. Always facing the possibility that some suppressed, unknown parts of the self can emerge to the surface, a hysteric lives as though sitting on an active volcano. Indeed, the psychiatrist admits that both 'hysteria or milder manifestations of hysterical behaviour have something of volcanic eruption, something from the depths comes into the surface'[142].

The virtous Nails demonstrates himself through his self-claimed liberal views and deep concern for the social welfare, but the monstrous side contradicts this image with violence, insults and intolerance, that somewhat involuntarily re-emerge to the surface.

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[140] Kępiński, p. 59; 'jakby ktoś inny w nim siedział i nim kierował'.

[141] ibid, p. 61; 'Jednej strony medalu człowiek stara się nie widzieć'.

[142] ibid, p. 60; 'Zarówno objawy konwersji histerycznej, jak i manifestacje charakteru histerycznego mają w sobie coś z wulkanicznego wybuchu, coś z głębi wydobywa się na wierzch'.

The virtous Nails, when approached about the Polish-Russkies war responds nonchalantly: 'we're not very radical on that issue.' (15)[143]. But once Magda dares to disagree and proclaims to be against the Russkies, Nails instantly gets 'pissed off' (15)[144] and challenges her: 'And how do you know you're against them, exactly?' (15)[145]. Nails' proudly confesses that 'as far as expressing opinions is concerned I'm pretty much on the left.' But then he immedietley adds in the next sentence: 'I don't really agree with taxes, and I propose a government without taxes, where my parents won't tear their guts out so that all these smock-sporting princes will have their own apartments and telephone numbers at a time when things aren't like that.' (16)[146]. The series of self-perceived humiliations and disregard for his emotional needs push Andrzej Robakoski closer towards his shadow: 'Now there is no possibility of forgiveness, none, that Nails, a good soul, an altar boy who served at church during Mass, the very picture of gentleness, of a good heart. Dear beloved Nails, who does good deeds for others like it's no big deal.' (24)[147]. Although this declaration is linked to Nails' tendencies towards exaggeration and turbulence, as the novel unfolds the violent side of Nails, his 'underground personality' becomes more prominent. In the midst of his romantic encounters his philosophical side, until now seeming occupied with global concerns, produces a vile, aggressive reflection:

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[143] '(...) nie jesteśmy tak bardzo radykalni na tym tle'. *Wojna*..., p. 15.

[144] 'wkurwiam się'. *Wojna*..., p. 15.

[145] '(...) a skąd ty to wiesz, że ty jesteś akurat przeciwko?'. *Wojna*..., p. 15.

[146] 'Raczej się nie zgadzam na podatki i postuluję o państwo bez podatków, w którym moi rodzice nie będą sobie flaków wypruwać na to, żeby wszyscy ci fartuchowi książęta mieli własne mieszkanie i numer telefonu, podczas gdy jest inaczej.'. *Wojna*..., p. 16.

[147] 'Teraz już nie ma przebacz, nie ma, że Silny, dobra dusza, ministrant na kościele służący do mszy, sama łagodność, samo dobre serce. Dobry kochany Silny, co będzie spełniał za innych dobre uczynki, jak są na praktykach.'. *Wojna*..., p. 22.

'All women are a bunch of bitches. They don't leave on their own, they wait, lurking. Until I fly into a rage and blow up, and I have to kick them out, pull away from them like a fly from flypaper.' (100)[148].

'Brand new life'

As already noted, the aversion towards hysterical behaviour is shared not only by those observing it from the outside but also by the hysterics themselves. Kępiński notes that 'a hysteric often feels his own inauthenticity'[149] and thus demonstrates 'an eagerness for building a new life whilst erasing what happened in the past.'[150] Interestingly, this preference is often driven by longing for the part of one's self that is repressed as seemingly ill-fitted for the society. Thus, the desire for a 'brand new life' is born, since the man 'feels that the most vital part of his self that exists outside his idealised image is wasted, unused.'[151].

That 'wasted' part of Nails that seems ill-fitted to the image of a local 'Strongman' is his longing for love and affection. Despite appearances, Nails is highly sentimental and it is this side which seems to trigger his explosive behaviour, to govern his 'underground personality'. No matter how many times he repeats ''I, Nails, am telling you that it's over

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[148] 'Wszystkie kobiety to jedne i te same suki. Same nie wyjdą, czekają przyczajone. Aż się rozjuszę i wybuchnę, i muszę je wypychać, odganiać od nich jak lep na muchy'. *Wojna...*, p. 77.
[149] Kępiński, p. 58; 'sam histeryk nieraz odczuwa własną jakby nieprawdziwość'.
[150] ibid, p. 58; 'chęć zaczynania życia na nowo'.
[151] ibid, p. 61; ''(...) czuje, że najbardziej istotna część jego ja, znajdując się poza wyidealizowanym obrazem, marnuje się, jest niewykorzystana.'

between us' (29)[152] or 'Enough of you, Magda. It doesn't mean anything to me anymore' (35)[153], he continues falling into despair over not being able to reunite with her. His desire for a 'brand new life' escalates between life without Magda when he is a brute who rejects all his feelings, or - a more desirable option, somewhat 'a happy ending - them making up. In the latter case, Nails fantasises of a different, softer version of himself:

'And if things weren't so bad between us, various clashes, if she hadn't put up all that paranoia, those pretensions about everything and nothing, that grudge one has for another, it would be different. I'd take her and set her down on that little wall. I'd pull down her tights and put them back on again, so that they wouldn't be all twisted around like that, destroyed, I'd tuck up her dress and stretch it out, so that it wouldn't be so out of sorts. And if I had some tissues (...). I'd cleanse her face of that grease that's spreading like a landscape around her eyes.' (p.38)[154]

Despite the longing, Nails seems unable to make his fantasies come true, as these two opposing visions of the 'brand new life' - 'the end with Magda' versus ' reunion with Magda' - seem to cancel each other out and impede his movement towards any constructive action. Consequently, Nails remains in the same place, oscillating between the two, without ever making any progress.

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[152] '(...) to ja, Silny, mówię ci, że między nami koniec'. *Wojna*..., p. 26.

[153] 'Koniec z tobą, Magda. Już mnie nie stanowi'.*Wojna*..., p. 30.

[154] 'I gdyby nie było między nami tak źle, różne spięcia, gdyby nie powstała cała ta paranoja, te pretensje o wszystko i nic, ten żal jeden do drugiego, byłoby inaczej. Wziąłbym ją postawił na murku. Ściągnął jej rajtki i od nowa włożył, by nie były tak poprzekręcane, zniszczone, podwinąłbym jej kieckę i od nowa zaciągnął, by nie była tak nie w tym miejscu. A gdybym miał chusteczki (...). To bym jej wytarł twarz z tego smaru, co roztacza się, niczym krajobraz, wokół jej oczu.'. *Wojna*..., p. 32.

Wishful thinking

In the original text Kępiński uses the English phrase 'wishful thinking' to express the particularity of thought processes in a hysterical type. The world to a hysteric does not appear as it is but rather as he would like to see it, 'desires easily become reality'[155]. Kępiński explains that such an approach is typical during one's childhood in which the boundary between dream and reality is often blurred. The phase of adulthood, then, highlights the difference between potential and actual structures. A hysteric, however, refuses to see the distinction between his ideal and real self, "his consciousness is often too narrow to contain these two, often contradictory images of the world and himself.'[156]

Thus, Nails remains convinced that he possesses a unique insight into world affairs and a constructive vision for Poland: 'I remember my thought of a truly economic character that could save the country from the very annihilation I mentioned earlier, an annihilation prepared for the country by the fucking aristocrats, dressed in overcoats, in aprons.' (19)[157]. A humorous side of the 'wishful thinking' tendency in Masłowska's protagonist concerns his high alert and indignation to all types of hysterical, irrational behaviours in his milieu. Paradoxically, he continues to contrast them with his own attitude, which he firmly believes constitutes an example of sobriety and rational judgement: 'Though I myself postulate for nature unpolluted by American enterprise, her

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[155] ibid, p. 62; 'Pragnienia stają się łatwo rzeczywistością'.

[156] ibid, p. 63; '(...)świadomość jest jakby za ciasna, by zmieściły się w niej te dwa, nieraz przeciwstawne obrazy świata i własnej osoby'.

[157] 'Pamiętam moje myśli o charakterze prawdziwie ekonomicznym, które mogły uratować kraj przed właśnie zagladą, o której już zresztą napomniałem, przed zagładą, którą szykują na kraj skurwieni arystokraci ubrani w płaszczach, w fartuchach'. *Wojna...*, p.18.

speech sort of shocked me. They're like my thoughts, of an antiglobalistic character, but not quite entirely. More hysterical, without sobriety, without balance.' (60)[158].

7.   The voice of conformism or dissent?

After putting Nails on the couch to examine the nature of his hysterical tendencies, I will now briefly outline the critical readings of Masłowska's protagonist to allow a better grasp of Andrzej 'Nails' Robakoski. Who could be hiding behind this hysterical type? The answer is complex, and the issue of Nails' origin and symbolism accompanied nearly every attempt to analyse Masłowska's novel.

The mass-media conventional reading which sees Nails as representing a concrete subculture of the post-1989 'Generation Nothing', is in fact supported by a prominent literary scholar of the post-war generation, Jerzy Jarzębski, who emphasises the relationship between Nails and his mother, pointing to their inability to understand each other. To the critic, Masłowska's protagonist constitutes a representative of the younger generation, the 'king of the youth subculture described in the novel'[159]. Accordingly, the obscurities of his language are explained with references to a specific social group: 'the hellish language he speaks is his peer milieu, a sort of mixture of youth

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[158] 'Choć postuluję za niezanieczyszczeniem przyrody przez amerykańskie przedsiębiorstwo, jej mowa nieco mnie zszokowała. Są to jakby moje myśli o charakterze antyglobalistycznym, lecz niezupełnie do końca. Bardziej histeryczne, bez trzeźwości, bez równowagi.'. *Wojna...*, p. 48.
[159] Jarzębski, p. 26.

slang and the language of the media, contemporary politics, and even textbooks.'[160].

Jarzębski points to the problem of inter-generational communication - 'the breakdown of

consensus between old and young has a strong linguistic aspect, because it is language

that creates the new environment' - but he ignores the possibility that Masłowska's literary

language might in fact highlight a breakdown of a larger cultural code, not just the one

belonging to specific group. If Nails' stream of consciousness captures the sound of post-

1989 Polish culture rather than a singular subculture, then the gap between the old and

the young would not be a matter of common generational differences but a much broader

failure of the new, post-socialist world.

The leading critics of the new generation stressed exactly that aspect in their

interpretations of Andrzej Robakoski. Instead of the generational conflict, it was the

language of post-1989 Poland that caught Kinga Dunin's attention, and the system of

beliefs in the new democracy that Przemysław Czapliński analysed and censured.

Significantly, each of the critics saw in Masłowska's protagonist a reaffirmation of their

broader social diagnosis.

In her ambitious work *Reading Poland* Kinga Dunin suggests that 'Literature

becomes that thing, which we want to make of it. I attempt to make it into a stimulus for a

reflection over the contemporary Polish society'[161]. Thus, Dunin rejects the simplified

commercial slogan of Masłowska's debut as 'the first tracksuited slacker novel' and

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[160] ibid. p. 26.
[161] Dunin, *Czytając Polskę*..., book's cover; 'Literatura staje się tym, czym chcemy ją uczynić. Ja zamierzam uczynić z niej bodziec do refleksji nad współczesnym społeczeństwem polskim'.

instead proposes that 'one can read it as a novel about the system, as an allegory of contemporary Poland.'[162]. The system in the Polish text refers to the socio-political and cultural structures established after the fall of Communism in 1989. The language that constitutes the backbone of Masłowska's writing and stands at the centre of media and critical attention, according to Dunin 'creates a satirical picture of reality'[163]. It is a reality of clashing languages in post-1989 Poland and thus Dunin reads each of Nails' romantic partners - Magda, Angela, Natasha and Ala - as 'a satirical allegory of a discourse, in which we all live, sometimes retreating into the narrative of theoretical languages, and sometimes sliding into emotional and feminine languages of existence'[164]. The metaphor for this post-1989 world, Dunin argues, hides behind the original Polish title of Masłowska's novel, *The Polish-Russki War Under a White-And-Red Flag*. Dunin recalls that in colloquial Polish 'Russki', 'Russkies' scornfully designated the Communist system[165]. Thus, the 'Polish-Russki War' would stand for the contemporary Polish resentment towards its own past. This internal conflict, however, is doomed to take place 'under the white-and-red flag' - that is, under the pressure of having one's patriotism relentlessly questioned. This reinforcement of 'rightful anti-Russkies/anti-Communist declarations'[166], I view as yet another form of 'obligated memory', as analysed in Chapter

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[162] Dunin, p. 234; 'A przecież można ją także czytać jako powieść o systemie, jak alegorię współczesnej Polski'.

[163] ibid. p. 234; 'tworzy on satyryczny obraz rzeczywistości'.

[164] ibid, p. 236; 'Z pozostałymi bohaterkami powieści, jego kolejnymi partnerkami, wspólnie produkuje symboliczne uniwersum, które jestem gotowa potraktować jako satyryczną alegorię dyskursu, w jakim wszyscy żyjemy, niekiedy uciekając się do narracji w postaci języków teoretycznych, a niekiedy osuwając się w emocjonalne i kobiece języki egzystencji'.

[165] ibid, p. 237; 'To, co dla jednych było dawnym systemem, komunizmem, ostatecznie komuną, w języku najbardziej powszechnym sprowadzało się do pogardliwego określenia: Ruscy, Rusek'.

[166] ibid; 'zmuszani do słusznych antyruskich/antykomunistycznych deklaracji'.

1. To recall Paul Ricoeur's definition: 'The extent to which the proclamation of the duty of memory remains captive to the symptom of obsession makes it waver continually between use and abuse.'[167] Of crucial importance here is the distinction between 'manipulated' and 'obligated' memory, as they often assume similar forms and might be easily confused. Ricoeur stresses, however, that obligated memory is more subtle - instead of 'the ideological relation of the discourse of power' it is 'an appeal to conscience that proclaims itself to be speaking for the victims' demand for justice'[168]. Thus, it would be the pressure of the 'white-red flag' - the symbol of Polish independence - that does not allow the 'Polish- Russkies War' - the internal conflict between the democratic present and the communist past - fully resound and find its own voice. As Dunin puts it: 'the construction of collective identity continuously around the same axis, which is the 'Polish-Russkies war under the white and red flag', hinders the appearance of new languages.'[169].

Nails' 'jabber' is seen as a form of protest against the hostility of languages that try to dominate him - he does not accept any of them as they all equally fail to explain the surrounding reality. The critic remarks that Masłowska's debut raises a crucial question - not why the new reality brought about changes, which is trivial, but 'why these changes have taken away our voice.'[170] The ending of the novel, in which Nails is revealed to be

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[167] Paul Ricoeur, p. 90.
[168] ibid
[169] Dunin, p. 237; 'Konstruowanie zbiorowej tożsamości wciąż wokół osi, którą stanowi "wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną" utrudnia pojawienie się innych języków'.
[170] Dunin, p. 238; ''Niebanalne jednak wydaje się pytanie, czemu wpływy te odebrały nam mowę i zdolność myślenia?'.

only a literary construct, Dunin chooses to read as more than just a postmodern trick - she asks whether the same cannot be said about the entirety of contemporary Polish culture[171].

Yet, the language of Nails for other critics represents the voice of conformism rather than dissent. In Przemysław Czapliński's reading of the novel Nails is the 'everyman': 'emphasising the mediocrity of Nails, I try to situate him back in the limits of normality. I do not think it convincing to treat this protagonist as a representative of margins'[172]. The literary world of *White and Red* is yet another evidence of Poland ready 'for exchange' - outdated, ignorant and hostile towards anything that threatens its status quo. The symbolic Nails malignantly spoils the idealistic picture that the critic has painted in one of the first surveys on new literature *Ślady przełomu. O prozie polskiej 1976-1996* [*The Traces of a Breakthrough. On Polish Prose of 1976-1996*, 1997] that outlined the hopes and possibilities for 'the new' Poland. Czapliński, who throughout the last two decades has not only become the major authority on Polish contemporary literature but also a symbol of post-1989 criticism, pronounced enthusiastically in 1997 that 'We are the witnesses and the participants of a literary breakthrough.'[173]. A decade later, the critic claimed that Nails, read as an 'everyman' of the new reality, demonstrates the complete

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[171] ibid., p. 235; 'Może jednak ten fragment odnosi się do całego tekstu kultury?'.

[172] Przemysław Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany...,* p. 268,f.73; 'Podkreślając przeciętność Silnego, staram się umiejscowić go na powrót w obrębie normalności. Nie wydaje mi się przekonujące traktowanie tej postaci jako przedstawiciela marginesu'.

[173] Przemysław Czapliński, *Ślady przełomu. O prozie polskie 1976-1996.* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997), p. 5. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Jesteśmy świadkami i uczestnikami przełomu literackiego.'

failure of all the post-1989 hopes for socio-cultural transformation. The old canon has persevered, Czapliński argues, and it is the canon of aggression, hostility and power: 'in which inheritance of the Polish collective identity is linked with the inheritance of the others'[174]. The difference, however, is that the new system affiliated Nails with the culture of the free world that now 'allows him to construct the inferiors'[175]. Since in Czapliński's reading Nails constitutes a representative of broader cultural trends, Masłowska's protagonist in fact demands a definition that goes beyond a particular subculture. Thus, Czapliński states clearly: 'the protagonist of Masłowska's novel went to schools. He is not a chav'[176] but rather, 'he represents the majority: Polish, male and heterosexual'[177] . In the eyes of Kinga Dunin, Nails' rejection of all the languages that surround him constituted a sign of revolt, whereas Czapliński instead accuses him of compromising all these languages, in which we would like to critically speak about reality: 'he fragments world-views and returns under the cover of an aggressive cliché'[178]. Czapliński lists an impressive number of ideological, political and cultural paradoxes that Nails embodies, concluding that the inconsistency of these views is irrelevant to him, since it is not coherency he seeks but 'supremacy over the world'[179]. Although Czapliński, just as Jerzy Jarzębski, equates Nails with the age group of the novel's author - that is those born in

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[174] Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany*..., p. 269; 'Silny należy więc do tego kanonu, w którym dziedziczenie polskiej tożsamości zbiorowej jest związane z dziedziczeniem obcych'.

[175] ibid, p. 267; 'Kultura świata wolnego, którą wyniósł ze szkoły i nabył w domu, którą zaczerpnął z lektur i filmów, ma mu teraz pomóc w skonstruowaniu ludzi gorszych'.

[176] ibid, p. 268; 'Powtórzmy raz jeszcze: bohater powieści Masłowskiej chodził do szkół. Nie jest dresiarzem'.

[177] ibid, p. 269; 'Reprezentuje większość: polską, męską i heteroseksualną'.

[178] ibid, p. 270; 'kawałkuje światopoglądy i zwraca pod postacią agresywnego frazesu'.

[179] ibid; 'On szuka przewagi nad światem'.

the 1980s - he does not contrast their language and values with the older generations. On the contrary, to Czapliński it is in Nails that the infamous old canon finds a perfect continuity. The critic notes that Nails' exposure to the western, liberal values, together with an open access to information, does not stop him from marginalising and brutalising the Others, since he comes from a culture that builds its strength at the cost of the Others' weakness. Each of 'the Others', as the critic explains, 'represents one human parameter - ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation - in this way helping to define one's affinity to this, what's superior.'[180] Czapliński continues: 'Nails belongs to this canon, in which inheriting Polish collective identity is linked with inheriting 'Others'.'[181]. As such, Masłowska's protagonist demonstrates the failure of cultural transformation, 'an end to educational illusions'[182].

The two leading critics of contemporary literature provide contrasting interpretations of one of the most debated - and by now iconic - works of post-1989 Polish literature. I would suggest, however, that this difference has emotive rather than critical triggers. Dunin and Czapliński share the same observation in regard to *White and Red* - both critics stress the failure of post-1989 culture to develop its own voice. However, to Dunin the defeat has an inclusive character - it involves the entirety of Polish contemporary discourse. Czapliński, on the other hand, argues that the much awaited breakthrough turned into a breakdown due to the resilience of the old canon of patriarchal

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[180] ibid, p. 269; 'Każdy z nich reprezentuje jeden parametr ludzkości - etniczność, płeć, orientacja seksualna - pomagając w ten sposób w określeniu swojej przynależności do tego, co lepsze'.
[181] ibid, p. 269; 'Silny należy więc do tego kanonu, w którym dziedziczenie polskiej tożsamości zbiorowej jest związane z dziedziczeniem obcych'.
[182] ibid, p. 271; 'Właśnie dlatego Silny to kres edukacyjnych złudzeń późnej nowoczesności w Polsce'.

values. To Dunin Nails' jabber is an indirect refusal to speak in the language of existing discourses that attack him, trying to reinforce their vision of the world. To Czapliński, the linguistic inconsistency is an indication of Nails' conformism, as he is willing to reach for whichever point of view grants him with supremacy in a given situation.

Yet, these two opposing interpretations are not necessarily exclusive, if examined through the framework of Kępiński's theory on value systems and human interactions. As discussed earlier, Kępiński emphasises our tendency to immobilise an otherwise dynamic nature of a person. Our assessments aim at rigidity, but people are constantly in motion: 'the same person could be once pretty, and once ugly, depending on the state of his or her emotions and how the other looks at them; once clever, and once stupid, depending on the degree of difficulty in a situation that he or she found themselves; once good and once evil, etc.'[183]. In the light of this observation, I read Nails' language as at once a voice of dissent, just as Dunin demonstrated in her reading of Masłowska's novel, and a voice of patriarchy and conformism, as Czapliński lamented. It represents a cultural failure of finding one's own voice in the new reality, and in turn a failure to change the deeply rooted patriarchal values. Nails at times objects, trying to defend himself against the homogeneous visions of the world that various discourses - political, national, academic or sentimental - attempt to impose upon him, but he also attacks in the manner that he has been culturally encoded for, one that seeks dominance and supremacy over the weaker other.

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[183] Kępiński, 'Pojęcie psychopatii a system wartości,' p. 7.

The paradox of Nails' predicament, however, is such that he exists in the world where he is the 'weaker other'. He remains at the service of the language that he operates with, a collage of the various discourses from which he borrows, in an attempt to fight them off. Since Nails cannot control the phrases, views and information that randomly come out of him, it becomes debatable whether he uses the language or it is the language that uses him. But his are the emotions born out of the struggle to navigate the world and communicate his internal reality in a language that is not his own. Nails saturates the language of hysteria – the result of this process – with his anger and pain.

Thus, I suggest that even though it is not Nails who is diagnosed with hysteria, he becomes both a recipient and a participant of a cultural hysteria that he finds himself a part of through the language. The cultural hysteria that my thesis explores is a collective phenomenon of groups whose cultural fixed points have been destabilised, disconnecting the present from its past. The pain of steering through a world infected with cultural hysteria, however, becomes an individual ordeal.

Kępiński's work, again, provides a crucial insight into the reasons behind the collapse of the new value system - in this regard the liberal, western one introduced after the the fall of Communism in 1989 – which did not, as Czapliński enthusiastically prophesied in 1997, bring about a cultural breakthrough but rather a return to the old, nationalistic canon. The psychiatrist stresses the relevance of time - that complex dynamic between the past, the present and the future - for the value systems we adapt in different historical contexts. Kępiński writes: 'the value systems linked with tradition, and thus with the past, generally are more solidified in the psyche of their followers than the

revolutionary system, only that they already function beyond the threshold of consciousness, that is why an intentional and sudden writing off the tradition is proportional to its unconscious functioning.'[184] The paradox of this mechanism is that 'the more one wants to wipe off the past, the stronger is commonly its power (often unconscious)'[185].

The idiosyncrasy of Nails' language is based on the continuous struggle between the traditional and the revolutionary value systems. The failure to find balance, or as Dunin puts it, to find his 'own voice', causes an outburst of panic, hysteria. This, in turn, triggers the pretense of greatness and a blurry sense of entitlement. As Kępiński explains, 'a hysteric does not feel confident about his own hierarchy of values, since somewhere deep inside hides a contrary system, that is why the person desperately seeks an approval of one's environment.'[186]. Nails' insecurity translates into a need for validation and he retreats to the inherent linguistic strategies of power to gain control over the situation. Maria Janion argues that Masłowska 'recreated-created' the language of aggression, turning it into '*basic Polish*'[187], which becomes a battlefield for the '*Polish-Russkie war*'[188]. Janion praises the writing in *White and Red*, 'the narcotic trans of chatter, consisting of language blends from television series, Big Brother, school, institutions, brings out what occurs in the heads of Polish men and women.'[189]. This language not only captures, but

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[184] ibid, p. 37.
[185] ibid, p. 38.
[186] Kępiński, 'Typ histeryczny', p. 69.
[187] ibid.
[188] ibid.
[189] Janion, p. 242; 'narkotyczny trans gadania, złożony ze zbitek języków telewizji, seriali, Big Brothera, szkoły urzędu, oddaje to, co dzieje się w głowach Polaków i Polek'.

in fact establishes Polish contemporary identity of a very particular kind - 'grotesque, predominantly contradictory, where opposed phenomena (for instance anarchism and capitalism) fuse (to a certain degree)'[190]. Janion stresses that the 'Russkies' are also an embodiment of inferiority, a crucial factor, on which Polish xenophobic identity is based. That sense of one's 'secondary character' towards the West - as Janion puts it - is projected onto the 'Russkies', 'who are even more secondary and inferior than we are'[191].

Significantly, such bi-fold nature is fundamental in hysteria, a condition that both causes and results in suffering. Hysterical behaviour not only generates suffering in others but experiences his own actions as hurtful. Thus, Nails' aggression towards the 'Russkies' is also a form of self-harm. His hatred towards 'the Other' is a hatred towards himself.

8.   'Poland is an ugly girl'[192]: Hysteria and Self-Loathing

Masłowska's second novel *Paw królowej* [Queen's Spew, 2005], not only further develops the language of hysteria, but also powerfully demonstrates how it is precisely the language that can both cause and signify suffering. Although *Queen's Spew* neither

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[190] ibid; 'strumień języka, przeważnie bełkotu, ustanawiający współczesną tożsamość polską, groteskową, zazwyczaj sprzeczną, gdzie stapiają się (do pewnego stopnia) pewne zjawiska (np. anarchizm z kapitalizmem'.
[191] ibid; 'Ruski są jeszcze wtórniejsi i jeszcze gorsi od nas'.
[192] Dorota Masłowska, 'Polska to brzydka dziewczyna'. Interview by Justyna Soboloweska, *Dziennik*, 21 March 2009. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

obtained the sensational aura nor the cult status of Masłowska's debut, it earned instead wide critical acclaim, including one of the most prestigious awards for Polish literature, The Nike Literary Award 2005. Whilst the bestseller *White and Red* was turned into a cinematic hit in 2009[193], Queen's Spew has been time and time again adapted for the stage in some of the most prestigious Polish theatres[194].

In many ways *Queen's Spew* could be seen as a counterpart to *White and Red*, clarifying and elaborating on certain issues that the first novel seemed to leave open to interpretation. For one, the novel plays a trick on those who wanted to see *White and Red* as a 'chav's novel'[195], representing the world of a certain 'subculture'[196] or simply a marginal phenomenon, closing Nails in a box labelled 'not us'.

In *Queen's Spew*, Masłowska moves the action from provinces to the very centre of Poland, the capital Warsaw. More so, the writer sets the action amongst the new cultural 'elites' of post-1989 Poland, such as the rock star Stanisław Retro and his spouse, a 'neo-linguist' poet Anna Przesik. Already the title indicates Masłowska's unflattering portrayal of the new privileged class of Polish society. 'Queen' is a self-mocking reference to the alias that Masłowska's has gained in the literary circles after her spectacular debut, whereas 'spew'[197] alludes to the writer's reaction to the world of Warsaw's society.

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[193] *Wojna polsko-ruska*, dir. Xavery Żuławski, 2009.

[194] Teatr Wytwórnia (dir. Jacek Papis, Warsaw 2006), Teatr Ludowy (dir. Krzysztof Jaworski, Kraków, 2006), Stary Teatr (dir. Paweł Świątek, Kraów, 2012).

[195] Wojciech Browarny, 'Nie ma silnych'. *Odra.* 11 (2002); Wojciech Staszewski, 'Masłoska rządzi'. *Gazeta Wyborcza.* 219 (2002).

[196] See Jarzębski, 'The Conflict of Generations in Contemporary Polish Prose'.

[197] The Polish word used in the title - 'peacock' is a slang term for 'vomit'.

But the move from 'the outside' - provinces, to 'the inside' - the capital, carries also a more metaphorical dimension. Whereas in *White and Red* the language of hysteria, formulated as Nails' internal monologue demonstrated his hostility towards the surroundings, *Queen's Spew* turns the edge of Masłowska's writing towards the self, revealing more explicitly profound self-hatred. Written in the form of a hip-hop song it is the external perspective of the narrator, MC Doris, which captures the characters.

As in *White and Red* where Nails encounters his creator, here the author's alter ego, DJ MC Doris, cycles around Warsaw, terrified, as 'she would like to forget in what sort of horrible country, strangely called Poland, she lives, where in a way still some war outside the chronology continues to endure'[198]. *Queen's Spew* discloses another facet of this internal 'war', tormenting post-1989 Polish society. This time, instead of the much feared and loathed inferior Russkies, we find the equally threatening and repulsive Polish 'selves' that seem painfully unfitting for the worldly roles that the characters have invented for themselves.

9. Fear and Loathing in Warsaw

The language in *Queen's Spew*, one could argue, becomes even more brutal than in *White and Red*. Taking the form of a hip hop song, Masłowska's second novel

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[198] Dorota Masłowska, *Paw królowej*. (Lampa i Iskra Boża, Warszawa 2005). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.; '(...)chciałaby zapomnieć w jakim kraju żyje strasznym o dziwnej nazwie Polska, w którym jakby jeszcze trwała ciągle jakaś spoza numeracji wojna'.

introduces itself as a 'story about love'[199]. The narrator proclaims: 'Hey people, listen to this story, make it louder, because this is a story about love, like blood in a clenched fist I carry it to you'[200]. In the context of language of hysteria, which characterises itself with theatricality and urges to impress while at the same time suspicious of a possible threat, it comes as no surprise that the response from an anonymous listener is both indignant and absurd: 'Love? I have done it for four years already and you do not have to ask me, I have done it in everything, in mouth, in arse, in armpit, in ear, in eye, in pussy.' [201].

Despite the lack of encouragement from their audience, the narrator continues her story about Patrycja Pitz, 'an ugly girl, who had a body of a dog and a face of a pig' [202]. Since Patrycja's physical appearance plays a key role in the aesthetic world portrayed in the novel, the scale of its monstrosity is further explained: 'nobody is beautiful, but saint Pitz Patrycja is a Holy Ghost, has altars in my head, on which she stands by Jesus with a bag over her face.'[203]. Ever since childhood people would avoid Patrycja as otherwise they risked having nightmares, 'dream about ugly Pitz, who plays her face in the bed and says: now you have it'[204]. And yet, when her 'longed-for love, great but how short'[205] finally enters her life, Patrycja swiftly and nonchalantly rejects the proposal. Her response has

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[199] *Paw królowej*, p. 8; 'to jest piosenka o miłości'.

[200] ibid; 'Hej ludzie, posłuchajcie tej historii, zróbcie ją sobie głośniej, bo to historia o miłości, jak krew ją do was w zaciśniętej pięści niosę'.

[201] ibid; 'Miłość? Robię to już od czterech lat i nie musisz mnie pytać, robiłam to we wszystko, w usta, w dupę, w pachę, w ucho, oko, w cipę.

[202] ibid, p. 5; 'miała ciało psa i twarz świni'.

[203] ibid; 'Nikt nie jest piękny ale święta Pitz Patriszia jest Duchem Świętym, ma w mej głowie ołtarze, na których stoi koło Jezusa z zasłoniętą workiem twarzą'.

[204] ibid, p. 6; 'złe sny śni się jej brzydka Pitz, jak wkłada jej do łóżka swoją twarz i mówi: teraz to ty ją masz'.

[205] ibid, p. 9; 'a to przyszła do niej upragniona miłość, wielka choć jakże krótka'.

a convoluted structure and contains short phrases that logically clash with each other but emotionally aim to give an impression of superiority: 'thanks for the compliments, but not with me, generally fuck off, you think that what you imagine, nice to meet you but what do you have to offer me, I know you love me, I don't go into it, but this love is unfortunately your big mistake and I am really sorry, don't call, don't beg, don't ask'[206].

This unexpected claim to power by an otherwise unwanted and bullied woman encourages her to take it a step further. For a moment Patrycja believes that she is someone else, and from that fleeting position of superiority rejects and insults not only the man, but also herself: 'but there is somewhere apparently such one slut, she is called Pitz Patrycja and she is almost as terribly ugly as you, maybe you can call her and ask, because not me'[207]. After that shameful betrayal Patrycja runs away 'so that he does not recognise that she is Patrycja.'[208]. However, once she returns home 'from these words that were spoken it took long to wash her body, because she just discovered that she terribly stank of something, something terrible, about which even the ads are silent, something repulsive, about which the glossy magazines don't write, reek that soaked in everything, her own self, her own self, Pitz Patrycja.'[209].

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[206] ibid, p. 10; '(...) dzięki za komplementy, ale to nie ze mną, w ogóle spierdalaj, myślisz że co ty sobie wyobrażasz, miło cię poznać ale co ty masz mi sobą do zaoferowania, wiem, że mnie kochasz, nie wnikam, ale ta miłość to niestety twoja wielka pomyłka i bardzo mi przykro, nie dzwoń, nie proś, nie pytaj.'.

[207] ibid, p. 11; '(...)chociaż gdzieś jest podobno taka jedna dziwka, nazywa się Pitz Patrycja i jest tak strasznie prawie jak ty brzydka, że może do niej zadzwoń i się zapytaj, bo ja nie'.

[208] ibid; 'Aby jej nie rozpoznał, że Patrycja to ona'.

[209] ibid; 'z tych słów, które padły myła długo ciało, bo właśnie odkryła, że strasznie od niej czymś jechało, czymś strasznym, o czym przemilczają nawet reklamy czymś wstrętnym, o czym nie piszą o tym kolorowe pisma, smrodem którym przesiąkło już wszystko, nią samą, nią samą, Patrycją'.

The feelings of self-loathing and shame about one's true identity are shared by the other characters inhabiting the world of *Queen's Spew*. When we meet Patrycja's next love, the rock star Stanisław Retro, the man plays video games and mourns his own circumstances: 'he wept loudly while looking in the mirror, this is him, Stanisław, this good blonde Swede, why in Poland not in Sweden was he born,'[210] since he was 'almost certain that he was a spiritual Swede or at least a Scandinavian, Islander or Norwegian'[211] and hence wondered 'why he woke up not in Bullerbyn but in this pigsty?'[212] Stanisław decides that it must be the fault of his ex-partner, Ewa, who poisons him with her whining, lamenting: 'my grandfather was a lord and I can't even afford an exfoliating masque'[213], 'my grandfather was a lord and you brought me in the noose of poverty'[214].

Paradoxically, Nails' pride of being the local 'Strongman' who reigns over his surroundings is now replaced with equally passionate shame from the *Queen's Spew*'s characters who wish they could be anyone but themselves and come from anywhere but Poland. In both cases, however, the complex emotions result in a tension between the idealised and the real value systems. A value system within each person is never coherent, Kępiński stresses, but rather splits into the ideal - "this is how I would like to be" and the real - "this is how I really am"[215]. Although the two do not weigh identically on the

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[210] ibid, p. 15; '(...) płakał głośno widząc się w lustrze, to on Stanisław ten do- bry blondyn uczciwy Szwed, dlaczego w Polsce nie w Szwecji urodził się'.

[211] ibid; '(...) był już prawie pewien, był duchowym Szwedem albo chociażby Skandynawem, Islandem albo Norwegiem'.

[212] ibid, p. 16; '(...)dlaczego nie obudził się dziś w Bullerbyn tylko w takim chlewie?'.

[213] ibid; '(...)mój dziadek był hrabią, a ja nie mam na złuszczanie exfoliating maseczkę'.

[214] ibid, p. 17; 'mój dziadek był hrabią a ty mnie sprowadziłeś w matnię nędzy'.

[215] Kępiński, 'Pojęcie psychopatii a system wartości', p. 20; '"takim bym chciał być"', '"takim jestem naprawdę"'.

decision making process - the real one will always have a greater impact - they interact with each other, allowing a person to make choices according to their aspirations and ideals over biological urges. What happens in the language of hysteria, however, is a reversal of this order of relevance. "This is how I would like to be" becomes a cornerstone of communication, whereas "this is how I really am" is not only rejected, but violently attacked and resented. The ideal becomes the only self-perceived reality, while the undefeatable presence of the real is met with hatred.

10. The Language of Hysteria: Progression

In *Queen's Spew*, the price for replacing the real self with the perceived ideal is high: loss of one's agency and humanity. Katarzyna Nadana aptly observes that the internal language of the characters 'turns out to be an entanglement of phrases borrowed from a variety of language games that they participate in.'[216] Nadana sees the characters inhabiting the world of *Queen's Spew* as 'caricatures' of subjectivity[217], since 'a subject is someone who is conscious of their own utterances'[218]. In *Queen's Spew*, however, Masłowska reverses the roles: it is 'the language that speaks through the characters'[219].

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[216] Katarzyna Nadana, 'Jak być królową?' [How to be a queen]. Teksty drugie 4. (2006), pp. 110-115 (p. 111). All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; 'Ich język wewnętrzny okazuje się plątaniną fraz zapożyczonych z rozmaitych gier językowych, w których uczestniczą.

[217] ibid; ' Postacie te są karykaturami tradycyjnie rozumianej podmiotowości'

[218] ibid; '(...)podmiot to ktoś świadomy sensu własnych wypowiedzi'

[219] ibid; 'Postacie Masłowskiej są z gruntu „papierowe", bo sprowadzone do języka, który – jak w teoriach poststrukturalistycznych – po prostu „nimi gada"'.

Nadana praises the linguistic mastery in Masłowska's second novel, viewing its form as a demonstration of autonomy and power. The ability to reduce her characters to the language that speaks through them proves that the writer remains in charge, despite relentless attempts of various discourses to either claim her or to take her down.

While seconding Nadana's view that the language of the novel subjugates its characters, I argue that the decreasing agency of Masłowska's character is less related to her personal choices as an author, and more to the escalating reign of cultural hysteria. It is the prevalent condition of the world that Masłowska's literary language so poignantly captures. And in *Queen's Spew* the language of hysteria harvests its first crop.

Why do the characters let the language to take over and replace their identity? In hope for that language to transform them, to make them into someone, anyone, just as long as they get to escape who they really are. Just like Stanisław Retro imagines that the meaningless lyrics of his songs would have sounded better and smarter if they only were sang in English.[220]

12. 'Where from this passion for such negative troubles in Dorota Masłowska'[221]? Critique

Despite *Queen's Spew* winning Nike Literary Award, some critics argued that as

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[220] Dorota Masłowska, *Paw królowej*. (Warszawa, Noir Sur Blanc 2017), p. 77. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; 'Już po angielsku lepiej tą piosenkę nagrać mogli, to by brzmiala chociaż mądrzej'.

[221] ibid, p. 30; 'skąd ta namiętność do takich negatywnych kłopotów w Dorocie Masłowskiej'.

Masłowska's writing progresses, her literary world is flattening and the topics she explores are of little significance. Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez laments that 'While her first novel was audacious and uncompromising, one cannot help but feel that the project aimed at increasing freedom has in fact restricted it.'[222] The critic attributes this change to Masłowska's creative choices, particularly the writer's much debated refusal to take sides or declare belonging to any of the existing socio-cultural fractions: 'Her belief that autonomy and involvement are separate resulted in her withdrawal to the singular world of literary freedom'[223].

While Snochowska-Gonzalez does not analyse specifically *Queen's Spew*, but Masłowska's role as a writer and intellectual, it is precisely the second novel that confronts various critical expectations. *Queen's Spew* could in fact be read as manifestation of Masłowska's rebellion against mass media and establishment that have tried to claim her after the spectacular success of *White and Red*. The novel not only introduces the character of MC Doris - the writer's alter ego - in the very first pages, but continues to reference both her personal and professional life throughout the novel.

In *Queen's Spew* MC Doris cycles around Warsaw, she lives in the 'bad neighbourhood' Praga[224] and has a little child. It is MC Doris's motherhood that gives her critics hope that she might be finished as a writer: 'Calm down then, put away these forks,

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[222] Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, 'From Rejection to Praise of Irony. Dorota Masłowska in Her Search of 'We''. *SLH* 5 (2016), pp. 1-50 (p. 47).
[223] ibid
[224] *Paw królowej*, p. 29. 'Jedzie MC Doris trawiona przez gorycz: po to się przeprowadzałaś na tę Pragę, żeby składac spojrzeń obojetnych kwiaty na te żalosne oltarze, patologii ruchome krajobrazy'

these knives, Doris will never again write another book'[225]. It is imagined that now that

she has become a mother, 'Doris likes house plants, stirring in the pots, boiling all sorts

of water'[226], and while a famous Polish male author gives a reading, she is 'at home, at

home'[227]. It is for the better, according to the collective, since there has never been any

merit in her writing: 'this is not a prose, here are multiple ugly and vulgar words, which

position Poland in unfavourable light in the West'[228].

MC Doris is charged with overtly critical and judgemental view of the world, in

which she finds herself living. In a particularly comical passage Masłowska mocks her

alleged arrogance that makes the writer equate herself with God: 'Because you would

have certainly imagined a better world, no one doubts it, but poor God didn't manage as

splendidly. You would have arranged it better, no one doubts it, but why do you upset a

person older than you, tell us MC Doris, he really did not want to create so foolishly'[229].

The detested writer's prolonged creative hiatus escalates her critics' audacity. The

initial hope that Doris will never write another book turns into an attempt to question the

status of her former work: 'Hey people, put away these knives, she has never written a

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[225] ibid, p. 102; 'Więc spokojnie, odłóżcie te widelce, te noże, Doris już nigdy nie napisze żadnej książki, p. 102.

[226] ibid, p. 102; 'Doris lubi teraz kwiaty doniczkowe, w garkach pogrzebać sobie, pogotować różną taką wodę, tluste bity pokręcić na kurkach od kuchenki gazowej, czy warto marnowac kij dobry na takę osobę?' (102).

[227] ibid, p. 117; 'Kuczok Wijciech na odczycie w Kiełbasie Śląskiej, a ona w domu, w domu'.

[228] 'ibid, pp. 100-101; To wcale nie jest żadna proza, tu są liczne brzydkie i wulgarne słowa, które w niekorzystnym świetle ustawiają Polskę na Zachodzie.'

[229] 'Bo ty byś na pewno dużo lepszy świat umiała wymyśleś, nikt w to nie wątpi, ale biednemu Bogu tak świetnie nie wyszło. Ty byś to lepiej urzadzić mogła, nikt w to nie wątpi, ale czemu sprawiasz osobie od siebie starszej przykrości, powiedz nam MC Doris,on naprawdę nie chciał tak glupio stworzyć.' (p.41).

book, calm down'[230]. And yet, the rumours that she might be nevertless working again, reinstigate the attacks: 'Hey people, there are some troubles, she is again writing something apparently, oh God, it needs to be prevented, we don't want it, we will not allow it, we will not be fooled again'[231]. Thus, *Queen's Spew* ends with a dramatic call to arms: 'Fire, gentlemen!'[232].

Significantly, Masłowska's second novel, rooted in her local milieu, provoked comparative studies. Nadana sees the similiarites between Masłowska and the Austrian playwright and novelist, the Noble Prize Winner Elfriede Jelinek. What the two authors share is their conception of the language: 'Comparison between Masłowska and Jelinek are inescapable. Both authors operate speech in a similar way'[233]. Nadana sees the literary parallel in how language is used to disempower the character - the molecules of language are broken into linguistic atoms, and put back together in depersonalized, passive forms[234].

While Nadana concentrates of the formal aspects of Masłowska's novel, Ewa Łukaszyk sees *Queens Spew* as en example of a postcolonial work. She places the work next to *Um rio chamado tempo* by a Mozambique writer Mia Couto and *Le pain des corbeaux* by Moroccan author Lhoussain Azergui. Łukaszyk argues that the common

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[230] 'Hej ludzie, odółżcie te noże, ona nie napisała nigdy żadnej książki, spokojnie', p. 117.

[231] 'Hej ludzie, są jakieś kłopoty, ona coś tam pisze znowu podobno, o Boże, trzeba temu zapobiec, my nie chcemy, nie pozwolimy, nie damy się nabrać znowu(130)

[232] 'Ognia, panowie!' 131.

[233] Nadana, p. 110; 'Porównanie Masłowskiej z Jelinek nasuwa się nieodparcie. Obie autorki w podobny sposób operują mową'.

[234] ibid; 'Masłowska, podobnie trochę jak Jelinek, często rozbija język na cząstki elementarne, a następnie składa je według pewnych szablonów pozwalających osiągnąć efekt odpodmiotowienia.'

ground between these three works could be found in 'the emergence of an intelligentsia that uses literacy and writing as an instrument to deconstruct the post-colonial concept of nation and to operate a trans-colonial renegotiation of identity.'[235] Masłowska's novel, the author argues, 'may be read as a popular voice rising against the dominating social group, the so-called ethos intelligentsia ("inteligencja etosowa"), which pretends to guide the nation through the torment of its historical destiny, incarnating resistance against a mythologized enemy: the Russians.'[236]

While I second the comparisons between Masłowska's and Jelinek, as both authors possess an extraordinary feeling of the spoken language and are intransigent in their exposure of pretence and stereotypes governing societies, the postcolonial reading of *Queen's Spew* appears less convincing. In the world of Masłowska's novel, contradictory to Łukaszyk's argument, there are no well-established social classes. Instead, there are aspirations, and those are egalitarian, as every character wishes they were someone else than who they are. Their characters is thus also governed by the very same principle - externally it assumes the position of superiority, while internally discloses insecurity and complexes.

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[235] Ewa Łukaszyk, 'Written Exercises: Ancestral Magic and Emergent Intellectuals in Mia Couto, Lhoussain Azerguiand Dorota Masłowska'. *Colloquia Humanistica* 5.(2016), pp. 127- 140 (p. 127).
[236] ibid, p. 130.

Conclusion

In an interview Masłowska remarked that 'Poland is an ugly girl in the phase of puberty, who cannot accept herself, she would like to get a plastic surgery of her entire person and to transplant everything'[237]. The writer further elaborated that people are not 'made in factory' as 'Polish' or 'French' but rather emerge from particular pasts, from histories of places where they come from[238]. Kępiński provides a number of examples to demonstrate how environment and historical context of an individual can alter or distort the hierarchy of values and impact one's decisions. One such instance is an 'emotional complex' that becomes 'an obstacle that intervenes every time in the process of decision.'[239]. It could be a deeply rooted feeling of fear or hatred that 'comes first in one's hierarchy of values, and influences each decision making process, particularly those concerning emotional connections with our environment.'[240]. The other would be the double impact of the socio-cultural layer of a value system, which Kępiński sees as a final 'packaging' of any decision one makes. The socio-cultural hierarchy of values is more collective, 'looks ahead into the future'[241] since it is based on 'models'[242], 'an imaginary

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[237] Masłowska, 'Polska to brzydka dziewczyna'; 'Polska jest brzydką dziewczyną w okresie pokwitania, która nie może siebie zaakceptować, chciałaby iść na operację plastyczną całej osoby i dokonać przeszczepu wszystkiego'.

[238] ibid; 'ludzie nie pochodzą "z fabryki", dostając tylko nalepkę "Polak", "Francuz", "katolik", "buddysta", że to wszystko jest głęboko w tej ziemi, sprzężone z tym miejscem przez wieki'.

[239] Kępiński, 'Pojęcie psychopatii a system wartości', p. 32; 'Kompleks emocjonalny byłby taką przeszkodą, która interweniuje w każdorazowym procesie decyzji'.

[240] ibid, p. 33; 'To "zapiekłe" uczucie,kompleks itp. plasuje się na naczelnym miejscu w hierarchii wartości i wpływa na proces każdej decyzji, zwłaszcza dotyczącej związków uczuciowych z naszym otoczeniem'.

[241] ibid, p. 39; '(...) wybiega się w przyszłość'.

[242] ibid, p. 39; 'wzory społeczno-kulturowe są modelami, do których staramy się dostosować'.

picture of the world'[243]. As one can never fully detach themselves from their environment, when a personal decision is in conflict with the surroundings, it either gets "packaged" - as to fit in with the collective values - or amended.

The distortion in the dynamics between the ideal and the real hierarchy of values is linked directly to the perception of time and, in the case of Poland, to the abuses of the processes of remembering and forgetting. The abuses refer to all the instances of instrumentalized usage of memory, in which the selection of the past is either imposed or silenced to serve the interests of the present. As suggested in Chapter 1 of the thesis, the history of memory in Polish culture could be read through different instances of such memory abuses at a given historical period, which I proposed to mark in reference to Ricoeur's typology of blocked memory, manipulated memory and obligated memory[244]. The cumulative history of repetitively misused remembrance, I then argue, undermines the status of shared figures of memory, while at the same time disrupting the generational passage of memory. The lack of fixed points in the past and the present affects the ability to distinguish between achievements and aspirations, facts and myths, the real and the ideal. Such is the condition of cultural hysteria, which I suggest dominates the literary world of Masłowska's writing. Thus, Masłowska's characters remain in a metaphorically confined space, unable to trust either themselves or their surroundings.

In this chapter I proposed that such understood hysteria offers a new insight into

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[243] ibid, p. 42; 'hierarchia wartości opiera się na przyszłości, na wyimaginowanym obrazie świata'.
[244] See See Paul Ricoeur. 'The Exercise of Memory: Uses and Abuses'. *Memory, History, Forgetting.* Trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, London : University of Chicago Press , 2004), pp. 56-92.

the language that creates Masłowska's protagonist, Nails. Aside from studying 'the language of hysteria' that I suggested characterizes Nails' speech, the chapter applied hysteria to his individual actions and behaviours, exploring the link between the broken language and emotions which the linguistic injury creates. And yet, despite the chapter's focus on the individual character, I suggest that Nails' language of hysteria could be read as the product of a wider, collective phenomenon: cultural hysteria, studied in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. If we apply the hysterical typology to the collective experience, as suggested by Kępiński, who observed that hysteria dominates certain epochs and cultures and that 'among the European nations Poles are counted as hysterics'[245] then the feeling of claustrophobia that dominates Masłowska's literary world, would be a direct result of the particular historical context, which I defined in terms of history of memory abuses.

Kępiński noted that the dominance of hysterical behaviours within a certain group or culture emerges from particular external circumstances - the obvious one would be cataclysms and plaques, but also historical turmoil like wars and revolutions. The combined history of memory abuses alongside the change of political systems after the fall of Communism resulted in post-1989 Polish culture being unable to look either to the past or to the future. Such feelings of seclusion and suffocation produce a permanent state of underlying anxiety:

'Sometimes one wants to run away from the past, begin life afresh (such feelings are frequent among the hysterics); sometimes the past time is weighed with a strong sense of guilt, the evil

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[245] Kępiński, 'Typ histeryczny,' p. 80; '(...) wśród narodów europejskich Polacy są zaliczani do histeryków'.

that has grown cannot be undone; sometimes the past time is a failure, whose shadow falls onto the future. Our past gives shape to our future. (...) Although due to the falsifications of memory and other types of its distortions (somewhat typical in hysteria) such effect can be partially accomplished, always a larger part of the weight of the past remains and there is no way to free oneself from it.'[246]

The 'falsifications of memory and other types of its distortions' lead to yet another dualism. On the one hand, there is the hysterical longing of the new democracy to run away from one's past, cutting it off with the 'thick-line policy'. On the other, the abuses to the processes of remembering and forgetting continue to turn memory into 'a project', now in its third stage of 'obligated memory' that demands a tribute on behalf of the past. Since nothing from the past connects to the isolated present and the uncertain future, the obligated memory preserves everything and then randomly select those pieces of information which seem to fit the idealised 'imaginary picture of the world'. As a result, 'mass memory' is formed, which will now be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

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[246] Kępiński, *Lęk*, p. 20; 'Niekiedy chce się uciec od swej przeszłości, zacząć życie na nowo (przeżycia tego typu są dość częste u histeryków); niekiedy znów czas przeszły jest obarczony silnym poczuciem winy, nie można już odczynić zła, które w nim narosło; niekiedy znów czas przeszły jest klęską, której cień pada również na przyszłość. (...) Wprawdzie dzięki zafałszowaniom pamięci i jej różnego rodzaju zaburzeniom (dość typowym w histerii) można częściowo efekt ten osiągnąć, zawsze jednak większa część bagażu przeszłości pozostaje i nie ma sposobu uwolnienia się od niej'.

Chapter 5

Mass Memory:

Masłowska's Drama

1. Memory and isolation: Introduction

Dorota Masłowska's fourth fictional text, the critically acclaimed drama *No Matter How Hard We Tried* [Między nami dobrze jest, 2008][1], briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, marks a breakthrough in the writer's body of work. After a mixed reception of her debut play *A Couple of Poor Polish-Speaking Romanians* [Dwoje biednych Rumunów mówiących po polsku, 2006] that continued the theme of exploring the maladies and monstrosities of the post-1989 Poland, Masłowska wrote her next drama in an attempt to - as she confessed in an interview - 'for the first time say something potentially good.'[2]. *No Matter How Hard We Tried*, commissioned by two collaborating theatres - the Polish TR Warszawa Theatre and the German Schaubuehne am Lehniner Platz - is, according to Masłowska, her 'affirmation of being a Pole and of the Polishness that, these days, is

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[1] Dorota Masłowska, *Między nami dobrze jest.* (Warszawa: Lampa i Iska Boża, 2008). All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
[2] Dorota Masłowska, 'Polska to brzydka dziewczyna' [Poland is an ugly girl]. Interview by Justyna Soboloweska, *Dziennik*, 21 March 2009. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; (...)wydaje mi się, że tutaj po raz pierwszy mówię coś potencjalnie dobrego.'

totally ridiculed, dirtied and treated as a flow, a slap in the face from fate, at least among my generation.'[3]. The original Polish title of the drama - *Everything's All Right between Us* - is taken from a song by a punk band Siekiera under the same title, which describes a collective rape and ends with the lines 'Everything's all right between us/to attack, to kill, to eat!"[4]. The title then not only contains highly ironic undertones, but encodes the main theme of the play, that is the savagery of human relationships in contemporary Poland. Masłowska's play, however, constitutes a literary attempt to bridge the gaps between different generations and social groups by pointing at a shared experience as having the potential to reclaim the past and bind the otherwise estranged group.

It is a move of a very particular kind, however, as rather than going back in time, the play incorporates the past into the present - the Second World War pops up in daily conversations, knocks on the apartment's door, and then literally explodes in the play's finale. Yet there is nothing haunting about this unusual visit. In the world of the play, the Second World War is incorporated in the daily reality in a fashion characteristic of hysteria: everyone warns each other of its coming, senses its presence, but no one knows what it really stands for. The Second World War then at first seems to assume the function of an ambiguous, approaching threat, akin to the Polish-Russian war from Masłowska's debut *White and Red* (Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną, 2002). However its factual character produces a distinct effect. In *No Matter How Hard We Tried* the tragic historical

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[3] 'Polska to brzydka dziewczyna'; 'Odwrotnie, jest tu moja afirmacja bycia Polką i polskości, totalnie dzisiaj wyszydzonej, zmieszanej z błotem i traktowanej jako skazę, jako policzek wymierzony przez los, przynajmniej w moim pokoleniu.'
[4] Siekiera, 'Między nami dobrze jest'. Lyrics by Tomasz Adamski. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated ; Między nami dobrze jest/do ataku, zabić, zjeść!'

event gains an enigmatic, mythological status not only because the characters are unable to tell what it is, or because of its relevance, but mainly because they fail to distinguish whether it has already happened or is about to happen. They lose not only their knowledge about the past, but also an understanding of what the past is. The omnipresence of the Second World War in the characters' speeches is just a facade of familiarity, behind which hides a world that does not know where it comes from.

In the interview quoted at the beginning of the Chapter, Masłowska explained that her attempt 'to show time not as a line, but a point'[5] was inspired by the situation of contemporary children, who experience the past through mass media: 'Images overlap, time becomes a place, a multimedia museum, in which everything can be watched, smelled, and in which one can participate.'[6]. Yet, this change - from a chronological to a spatial understanding of time - is provoked not only by the possibilities that have opened to experience what was, but also those that have closed. *No Matter How Hard We Tried* begins with the character of the Gloomy Old Biddy in a Wheelchair ('Osowiała Staruszka na Wózku Inwalidzkim, 4) - the Grandma - recounting her personal memories of the Second World War: 'I remember the day when the war broke out' ('Ech, pamiętam dzień, w którym wybuchła wojna', 6), to which the Little Metal Girl ('Mała Metalowa Dziewczynka, 4) - her granddaughter and flatmate - responds: 'What broke out?' ('Co wybuchło?', 6). This half-ignorant, half-dismissive reaction straight away signals that the Grandmother has not been and will not be listened to. In Masłowska's play the past is to be experienced

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[5] ibid; 'I właśnie w tej sztuce próbowałam pokazać czas nie jako linię, ale jako punkt.'
[6] ibid; Obrazy się nakładają, czas zaczyna być wręcz miejscem, multimedialnym muzeum, gdzie wszystko można obejrzeć, powąchać i w czym można uczestniczyć'.

because it can no longer be meaningfully talked about.

Thus, the writer's solution is to introduce the past into the oblivious present. This encounter takes place in a one bedroom apartment occupied by a 'multigenerational family' ('wielokopoleniowa familia', 31). This family is exclusively female and consists of three women from different generations: the Gloomy Old Biddy in a Wheelchair – the grandmother, Halina – the mother, and the Little Metal Girl – the daughter. The apartment is also frequented by yet another female, the neighbour Bożena, commonly referred to as 'a fat swine' ('gruba świnia' pp. 25, 26, 27). The women are described 'as though passengers of a sinking ship' ('*są w nim jam pasażerki tonącego statku*', 6), while their apartment gives 'an impression of being built on a fracturing ground or being bulldozed by a bulldozer' ('*Wnętrze sprawia cały czas wrażenie zbudowanego na pękającej ziemi albo spychanego spycharką*', 5). The unstable status of their home reflects their own existence, which is both questionable and superfluous, within the contemporary world. The action of the play reflects the lives of its characters: they are confined to the one room apartment, with nowhere to go and nothing to do. The main issues of the play concerns the clash between the Gloomy Old Biddy's continuous account of 'the day when the war broke out' ('dzień, w którym wybuchła wojna,' 6) that bounces off the mundane, daily chatter of her daughter Halina and granddaughter, the Little Metal Girl.

This chapter proposes that the Second World War introduced into this uprooted world of floating is intended to function as a 'prosthetic memory', a new form of cultural

memory conceptualised by Alison Landsberg[7]. Landsberg argues that modernity and the emergence of mass media created a fissure for experience, in which 'a person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live.'[8]. Prosthetic memory is a result of this process, powerful enough 'to shape that person's subjectivity and politics.'[9].

In Masłowska's drama, however, what succeeds as a dramatic technique on the stage, at the same time fails as a prosthesis of memory, placed to restore a sense of community. The characters' estrangement results not from 'the lack of platform, on which it all could meet'[10] but rather from an intentional rejection of such a platform, caused by what appears as unwillingness, but is in fact an inability to communicate with one another, caused by pathological structures which select information.

My argument in this Chapter is that both the possibility and the need to introduce the Second World War as a prosthetic memory reveals a radical transformation within the existing structures of remembering. Instead of cultural memory - notably defined by Jan Assmann as 'a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of the society'[11] and contrasted by Marianne Hirsch with Anglo-American meaning that 'refers to the social memory of a specific group or

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[7] Alison Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
[8] ibid, p. 2.
[9] ibid
[10] 'Polska to brzydka dziewczyna'.
[11] Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity'. *New German Critique* 65 (1995), pp. 125-133 (p. 126).

subculture'[12] - the characters in Masłowska's play operate with 'mass memory', a term I propose for a new form of remembering, developed in response to cultural hysteria.

Mass memory, a term coined to reflect both the computing term of mass storage as well as Hannah Arendt's concept of 'masses,' can emerge only if the information that the subject receives does not correspond with either their experiences or a set of symbols that they recognise - such information gets stored, but not processed. It is information *about* the past, but without an emotional link *to* it. This understanding of mass memory - a mass of stored information disconnected from both the past and the present, which is activated at random, mindlessly - I claim describes the new form of memory that equips the generation who has not experienced historical tragedies but finds itself a part of cultural hysteria. Mass memory, disconnected from anything that has happened, happens or will happen, is then radically distinct from 'postmemory', a concept introduced by Marianne Hirsch that stresses the 'living connection' and 'guardianship' as essential components of 'the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.'[13]. Drawing on Hirsch's work, this Chapter examines how a history of memory abuses and the suffering of hysteria have affected such relationships in the post-1989 Poland of Masłowska's drama, obstructing the intergenerational transmission of the experiences of pain.

My analysis of *No Matter How Hard We Tried* and the concept of mass memory

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[12] Marianne Hirsch, 'Postmemory', *Poetics Today* 29 (2008), pp. 103-128. (p. 110f).
[13] Hirsch, p. 103.

references Antoni Kępiński's theory of information metabolism, which the psychiatrist developed across the body of his work[14]. Kępiński examines social interactions regarding how humans select and exchange information, emphasising the vital role of emotions and the hierarchy of values that govern our choices. One of the theory's key elements focuses on the role of symbols. When symbols remain fixed amidst changing circumstances, they can bring people together, defeating 'tragic solitude'[15]. A necessary requirement for a symbol to maintain its function, however, is a connection with the living, since 'information cannot exist without beings that are capable of sending it and receiving.'[16]. Thus, Kępiński stresses that 'a symbol that no longer represents anyone and is not understood by anyone, stops being a symbol; it becomes an empty sign'[17]. Precisely such situation, I propose, takes place in the literary world of Dorota Masłowska's writing, where the former symbols have lost their connection with the present, and the new ones lack a point of reference in the past that would allow them to be recognised and claimed. Thus, they float as 'empty signs', failing at both functions: informing and bringing people together.

Contrary to the writer's intention, who stressed in the interview the national and the constructive dimension of her drama, I then propose that *No Matter How Hard We Tried* is Masłowska's most universal and at the same time most frightening work. Universal, as

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[14] Antoni Kępiński, *Psychopatie* (1977), *Lęk* (1977), *Rytm życia* (1978), *Melancholia* (1979).

[15] Antoni Kępiński, *Lęk*. (Warszawa: Państwowy Zakład Wydawniczy, 1977). All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; 'Metabolizm informacyjny wprowadza nas w świat symboli, świat bez określonych granic czasowych i przestrzennych,gdyż symbol na ogół nie zmienia swojego znaczenia mimo zmiany konkretnej sytuacji, świat wspólny dla innych żywych istot, nie ma tu już tragicznej samotności, gdyż symbole-znaki łączą się ze sobą (...)', p. 48.

[16] ibid, p.49; '(...) informacja nie może bowiem istnieć bez istot zdolnych do jej odbierania i wysyłania'.

[17] ibid; 'Symbol, który już nikogo nie reprezentuje i do nikogo nie trafia, przestaje być symbolem; staje się pustym znakiem (...)'.

it reveals and masterfully examines how the change in one's emotional approach to the surroundings determines the exchange of information. Unrecognised suffering, like hysteria, disables interactions within the social frameworks and leads to devaluation of shared symbols, destroying the sense of community.

The drama also constitutes Masłowska's most frightening work, as it captures how a lack of connection with the present can cut the link with the past, resulting in a paralysing isolation. In light of Arendt's distinction between isolation and loneliness, I read the numbness and stagnation of Masłowska's characters as existing not only because 'there is nobody who will act with me'[18], but also because there is nobody *I* will act with. As one of the play's protagonists, a journalist Monika, symbolically explains her lack of belly button: 'I owe a lot to not existing and not being, on the one hand I am a nobody but on the other, for instance, I am not a Pole' (''wiele zawdzięczam nieistnieniu i niebyciu, z jednej strong nie jstem nikim, ale z drugiej na przykład nie jestem Polką', 65). The loneliness resulting from this self-imposed isolation is a 'lesser evil', preferred over affiliation with the members of the group that one disdains. Thus, the characters in *No Matter How Hard We Tried* are deserted, but do not *feel* deserted. Masłowska chooses to save them and their world with fiction, but without this imposed dystopian element it becomes hard to imagine their redemption.

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[18] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (London; [printed in U.S.A.] : George Allen & Unwin, 1958), p. 474.

2. Mass memory

To return to Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology of memory, discussed in the opening of Chapter 1, it is centred around the two fundamental questions: "Of what are there memories?" and "Whose memory is it?"[19]. In his classification Ricoeur follows the Greeks, who distinguished between the passive *mnḗmē*, 'memory as appearing', and intentional *anamnesis*, 'memory as an object of search ordinarily named recall'[20]. At the same time the split allows one to discern the passage from "What?" to "Who?", that is 'from memories to reflective memory, passing by way of recollection.'[21].

This transit never successfully takes place in the case of mass memory, the concept that describes a radical transformation that occurs within the structures of remembering against the suffering of hysteria and devaluation of shared symbols. The mistrust towards both, the self and the surroundings, embodied in hysteria and discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, halts memory at its passive stage of *mnḗmē*, 'memory as appearing', and disables it from turning into *anamnesis*, 'memory as an object of search'. Every memory that either passively emerges in one's mind or that the surroundings attempt to transfer, is instantly questioned. Yet, the response cannot be assessed on any basis other than emotional preference, as there are no 'social frameworks'[22] or cultural 'fixed points'[23] that could be certain. The 'social frameworks of memory', which Maurice Halbwachs

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[19] Paul Ricoeur. 'On Memory and Recollection' in *Memory, History, Forgetting,* trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, London : University of Chicago Press , 2004), pp. 56-91 (p. 3).
[20] ibid, p. 4.
[21] ibid.
[22] See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
[23] See Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity'.

famously used to define various groups to which a person belongs, are necessary for the act of remembering to take place, since it is through communication with the other members that we compose our own memories. Participation in collective memory proceeds and preconditions the individual: 'it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection'[24]. Yet, it is precisely the failure to both belong to a group and communicate with one's surroundings, that characterises the suffering of hysteria. In hysteria, one is not a part of a group but performs in front of it; rather than points of reference then, social groups are treated as an audience. Halbwachs emphasises that individual memories constantly require the social frameworks that would validate them, and the case of hysteria appears no different. Yet, the hysterical tendency to exaggerate and obscure one's own experiences results in the opposite effect: the individual memories, already doubted within the hysteric, meet with a lack of support and understanding from one's environment. The repetitive nature of this process further isolates the sufferer not only from the past, but also from the present; it magnifies their estrangement not only within their surroundings, but also within themselves.

Fixed points, on the other hand, refer to the realm of objectified culture. Jan Assmann in his attempt to explore the form of memory that goes beyond the everyday communication and 'temporal horizons'[25] pointed out that such cultural formations require constant elements that could bind them together despite the passing of time. These

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[24] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 38.
[25] Assmann, p. 128.

elements are described as 'fixed points', which are 'fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formations (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)'[26]. Cultural memories no longer depend solely on being communicated within a group but on the intentional repetition of those aspects of the past that the community identifies with. The circulation of such memories is facilitated by cultural artefacts and institutions. As suggested in Chapter 1, however, the history of memory abuses – that is the prolonged period in which memory is used instrumentally – undermines the continuity of both the artefacts and the institutions. Chapter 1 applies Ricoeur's typology of memory abuses – blocked memory, manipulated memory and obligated memory – to mark the chronology of memory/history development. This account, I propose, constitutes what I refer to as 'the history of memory abuses', in an attempt to emphasise the impact of historical and political conditions that injure the natural processes of remembering and forgetting. Cultural memory that develops in the context of remembering that transforms it into a project 'You shall not forget'[27] assumes a responsive rather than formative character. Once the situation to which it responds alters, the continuity is broken. Thus, the cultural formations and practices developed in relation to a particular abuse - as in the case of wounded memory in nineteenth-century Poland and manipulated memory in the Polish People's Republic - first lose their urgency, and later their meaning. As Kępiński points out: 'A symbol deprived of material grounds, that is something that it symbolises, deprived of support in the

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[26] Assmann, p. 129.
[27] Paul Ricoeur. 'The Exercise of Memory: Uses and Abuses' in *Memory, History, Forgetting,* trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, London : University of Chicago Press , 2004), p. 87.

external world, stops being a symbol, it becomes an illusion, a phantom, a dream'[28] .

Thus, my argument is that this double collapse of cultural memory - in both its social and objectified dimension - creates an incubator for mass memory, a form of remembering defined by its uprootedness. Mass memory is a memory of floating: deprived of any points of reference - be it 'social frameworks' or 'fixed points' - it suffers from the disconnection between the 'What?' and the 'Who?' of remembering. In communities where mass memory replaces cultural memory, the fragments of the past that involuntarily resurface in the present are not recognised, while the active search for specific memories is equally futile - memories stored but not processed fail to inform the present. Such memories are disconnected from both the events they refer to and the people who perform the remembering. Thus, it becomes impossible to answer either of Ricoeur's fundamental questions: 'of what are there memories' and 'whose memory is it'.

Mass memory is then a memory of isolation. It is characterised by a non-communal approach to the past which occurs in the particular conditions that combine availability of data with a simultaneous lack of emotional link to the material stored. The disregard towards a shared past, however, is a direct result of one's isolated present: in mass memory it is precisely the detachment from the groups and social structures within which one exists that undermines the relevance of a common past. A person who does not care where she or he is, remains equally oblivious to where she or he comes from. As such,

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[28] Kępiński, *Lęk*; 'Symbol pozbawiony podłoża materialnego, tj. tego, czego jest symbolem, pozbawiony oparcia w świecie zewnętrznym, przestaje być symbolem, staje się złudą, majakiem, sennym marzeniem', p. 45.

mass memory is also a memory of the masses, understood here in Hannah Arendt's terms as applying to 'people who either because of sheer numbers, or indifference, or a combination of both, cannot be integrated into any organization based on common interest (...)'[29].

The term 'mass memory' was used by Dorota Masłowska herself in reference to the protagonist of *White and Red* [Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną, 2002). The writer explicitly contested the popular belief that the novel constitutes a sociological study of a certain subculture of 'track-suited' youth. Instead, Masłowska stressed that a 'track- suit' refers to a state of mind rather than fashion and she described the novel's protagonist, Andrzej 'Nails' Robakoski, as 'a receptor of media noise equipped in mass memory - he watches TV, listens to radio, some concepts settle in him, he learns certain phrases - and all of it comes out of him in the least expected moments, deformed, warped, grotesque.'[30].

On the one hand, Masłowska's definition recognises the essential role of mass media in the emergence of mass memory, as it is the media that feed and shape the new form remembering. On the other hand, the usage of the term 'equipped' in relation to her protagonist, suggests a robotic dimension of how mass memory is acquired and how it develops.

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[29] Arendt, p. 311.
[30] Dorota Masłowska, 'Wojna!' [War!], interview by Piotr Czerski, Ha!Art 11-12 (2002), 113-115, (p. 114); 'Robakoski wyłapuje z otoczenia fragmenty przekazu, jest wyposażonym w pamięć masową odbiornikiem szumu medialnego - ogląda telewizję, słucha radia, osiadają w nim jakieś pojęcia, uczy się pewnych zwrotów - i to wszystko wylatuje z niego w najmniej oczekiwanych momentach, wykrzywione, wypaczone, karykaturalne'.

In computing the term 'mass memory' colloquially refers to the mass storage of large amounts of data. The computing definition, however, distinguishes mass storage from the main memory based on the way that information is stored: 'mass storage devices retain data even when the computer is turned off' whereas memory 'refers to temporary storage area within computer'[31]. This distinction suggests that the mere existence of information is not enough for the storage to function as memory. Instead, memory requires a certain state of activity that carries a potential of accessing the storage. The automatic, uniformed notion of mass storage that carries no traits of individuality, relates to Hannah Arendt's of 'the psychology of a European mass man'[32]. Arendt observes: 'Selflessness in the sense that oneself does not matter, the feeling of being expendable, was no longer the expression of individual idealism but a mass phenomenon.'[33]. I propose then that the notion of mass memory in reference to Masłowska's writing merges the two computing concepts of 'mass storage' and 'main memory' together with Hannah Arendt's study of the psychology of isolated masses. On the one hand, her characters have turned into mass storage of large amounts of data that they passively absorb and archive precisely because they judge themselves 'in terms of individual failure or the world in terms of specific injustice'[34]. On the other hand, however, a sudden impulse can set them off and activate the storage, turning it into memory, but one that is 'deformed, warped, grotesque'[35] - mass memory.

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[31] A definition provided by *webopedia*: http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/M/mass_storage.html. Web. 10 November 2016.
[32] Arendt, p. 315.
[33] ibid
[34] ibid
[35] Masłowska, 'Wojna!' [War!], p. 114; 'wykrzywione, wypaczone, karykaturalne'.

While the form of Masłowska's *White and Red* - a novel written as a peculiar stream of consciousness - exposes the inner mechanisms behind passively accumulating disconnected information that never settles but floats, I maintain that it is the writer's fourth work, the drama *No Matter How Hard We Tried*, that most strikingly captures the phenomenon of mass memory. Already the introductory stage directions of Masłowska's drama disclose the premise of mass memory: the women are said to 'hang' ('*zawieszone*', 6) The emphasis is on the permanent state of suspension, which consumes every aspect of their behaviour: 'they are hanging between panic and boredom, mindless activity and mindless stagnation, claustrophobia and fear of space' ('*zawieszone pomiędzy paniką a nudą, bezmyślną aktywnością a bezmyślną stagnacją, klaustrofobią a lękiem przestrzeni*', 6). The repetition of the term 'mindless' ('*bezmyślną*', 6) seems to be intended not as an insult, but rather to stress its determining influence on the entirety of their actions. Both conditions - that of activity and that of stagnation - are considered 'mindless', because they are driven neither *by* nor *towards* anything concrete. A parallel mechanism could be found within the structures of mass memory. The Greeks' distinction referenced by Ricoeur that was introduced in the beginning of this section, distinguishes between the passive appearance of memories, that is the instances of involuntary 'flashes' of the past that unexpectedly resurface in one's mind (*mnḗmē)*, and the active search of particular memories that help to recall the past (*anamnesis)*. In the case of mass memory, however, both the passive appearance of memories and the active search of them remains entirely *mindless*, that is disconnected from anything behind and ahead of the present.

In the instances that memories unintentionally appear or are randomly recalled, it becomes impossible to decipher 'Of what are there memories' and 'Whose memory is it'[36]. I argue that the dramatic form of *No Matter How Hard We Tried* allows one to confront multiple 'receptors of media noise, equipped in mass memory'[37] and further explore group dynamics, revealing the havoc that mass memory wreaks in the socio- cultural structures, isolating the characters in equal measure from themselves, their present surroundings and their past.

3. Unguarded past: postmemory versus mass memory

In the recent developments of Memory Studies, one of the most influential concepts was that of 'postmemory' introduced by Marianne Hirsch to describe 'the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right'[38]. Hirsch, drawing on the earlier studies on one's relation to parental past, emphasises its distinctiveness from the experience of the first-hand witnesses or participants. Derived from someone else's memory, postmemory, Hirsch argues, is a thoroughly autonomous experience.

The fundamental features of postmemory - its emotional trigger and ethical agenda - straight away demonstrate that the new form of memory that Hirsch proposes is not only

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[36] Ricoeur, p. 3.
[37] Masłowska, 'Wojna!' [War!], p. 114; 'odbiornikiem szumu medialnego'.
[38] Hirsch, p. 103.

different, but in fact opposite to the notion of mass memory. Postmemory emerges from the phenomenon of the "living connection" with the non-lived experiences of one's parents and results in an ethical attitude of "'guardianship" of a traumatic personal and generational past'[39]. Mass memory, on the contrary, develops due to a lack of emotional links to generational memories. Thus, mass memory not only produces no 'sense of ownership and protectiveness' but in fact undermines both the facts and their relevance for the present. If what happened before is perceived as having no emotional impact on what is happening now, then sheltering any particular narrative of the past is perceived as senseless. While postmemory occupies itself with the question of 'How can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them?'[40], mass memory asks no questions. Due to its disconnected processes of reflection and recollection, it is unable to either retrieve or recount any past stories. Mass memory is therefore the antithesis of postmemory, as it sprouts from what postmemory strives to prevent - a disregard for parental memories that results in abandonment of the generational past.

And yet, both mass memory and postmemory originate from the same structural premise, that is a belief that the past sufferings imprint themselves on the next generation so deeply, as to transform that generation's own processes of remembering. Distinct models of suffering, however, result in distinct forms of memory: whilst postmemory

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[39] ibid, p. 104.
[40] ibid, p. 104.

constitutes a response to trauma, mass memory is a product of hysteria. To understand how this split in the models of suffering profoundly alters the structures of remembering, it is helpful to recall the discussion on the differences between pathos, trauma and hysteria in Chapter 2. My argument is that the second generation in fact becomes a symbolic audience to the parental suffering, and thus its reactions to the past correspond with the emotional responses that a given type of suffering evokes.

Pathos, defined in Aristotelean terms as physical suffering, communicates not the actuality, but the potentiality of approaching catastrophe. Such catastrophe, however, must be of a tangible nature so that the audience can comprehend the scale of possible danger and empathise with the sufferer. The secret ingredient of Aristotelean pathos that evokes both pity and compassion is maintaining that state of potentiality but not letting it materialise - the threat of having one's good fortune threatened by "incurable suffering"[41] is more relatable than being touched by it. An echo of this dramatic strategy - to allow the audience to first imagine the feeling of having one's entire life endangered and then to suddenly relieve this fear by closely avoiding the suffering - resonates within the structures of cultural memory, since it shapes one's understanding of what is worth preserving. When confronted with pathos, the audience becomes aware of the possibility that one's status could change, the fragility of human life and the fickleness of fortune. At the same time, the cathartic finale, in which the sufferer avoids the disaster, creates appreciation of one's current situation. This model of suffering, prominent in Western culture for thousands of years, impacted the structures of memory, which were

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[41] Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 182.

concentrated around solidifying the accomplishments of civilisation. It is of little surprise then, that the function of cultural memory is defined as 'the "survival of the type" in the sense of a cultural pseudo- species'[42], a role based on the implicit premise that the distinctness and unity of that 'cultural pseudo-species' is, as such, always potentially endangered.

The experience of trauma then constitutes a rupture of civilisation. On the one hand, it questions the capacity of cultural memory to perform its function as 'the survival of the type' in the face of "incurable suffering". On the other hand, it undermines the relevance of such a function in the first place, since it fails to prevent the finality of misfortune. The challenge of cultural memory confronted with trauma is not only whether it can maintain cultural continuity, but also whether such continuity still carries any significance in the face of the traumatic experiences. Thus, to be an audience to the suffering of trauma is to undergo a severe transformation of how and what to remember. Hirsch writes that postmemory indeed 'breaks through and complicates the line the Assmanns draw connecting individual to family, to social group, to institutionalized historical archive. That archive, in the case of traumatic interruption, exile, and diaspora, has lost its direct link to the past, has forfeited the embodied connections that forge community and society.'[43]. The outcome of this process of altering one's memory structures, I maintain, reflects the emotional response that the suffering of hysteria evokes in the spectators. Since trauma refers to the suffering after the unimaginable misfortune

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[42] Assmann, p. 126.
[43] Hirsch, p. 111.

212

already took place, one cannot - and should not - try comprehending the pain of having life's order irreversibly destroyed. Hirsch writes that to grow up as a witness to such suffering 'is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension.'[44]. Postmemory combines reverence towards the parental past with a relevance that this past continues to have for the present of the second generation, and it is precisely this combination that gives it an ethical direction of 'guardianship'. At the same time, postmemory struggles with the contradiction inherited in having 'the living connection' with somebody else's experience characterised as being 'unimaginable'. Thus, the response to trauma is at the same time guarded *and* emotionally charged.

The response to the suffering of hysteria, on the other hand, is that of detachment. Hysteria, like pathos, operates with the vision of approaching catastrophe, but, unlike pathos, fails to communicate what the potential threat would entail. Instead of feelings of pity and compassion that hysterics desperately crave, it provokes distaste and annoyance.

To be an audience to the parental suffering of hysteria is to watch a display of torment without ever learning the cause of suffering. It is to learn mistrust of facts and information, as neither guarantees a coherent image of the world. The performance of hysteria exhausts its audience and it is precisely out of exhaustion from the extremity of emotions, that do not match the experience, that mass memory is born.

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[44] ibid, p. 107.

In Masłowska's play such dynamics are most distinctly captured in the scene that combines two interweaving monologues – one comes from the Radio and the other is delivered by the Little Metal Girl. The anonymous radio speaker, recounting an absurd, farcical 'history' of Poland, which begins at the times when 'everyone in the world was Polish' ('wszyscy ludzie na świecie byli Polakami', 70) and ends by describing relentless foreign attacks that conspired to crush the former great empire ('Byliśmy wielkim mocarstwem', 70), gives an exemplary performance of hysteria. But the more the Radio laments its tragic fate, the more severe the Little Metal Girl's responses are. It is not the accuracy of information that she questions, however, but their assessment. To every crime against Poland that the Radio lists, the Little Metal Girl has the same set of responses: 'exactly', 'very well' and 'amen to that' ('No właśnie', 'no i dobrze'/'no i słusznie', święta racja', pp. 72-73). She dismisses the relevance of the alleged 'history', and firmly rejects the exaggerated emotions that hysteria projects. Mass memory discredits social frameworks of memory as reliable source and undermines the relevance of cultural formations. It proclaims the relativity of facts and concepts while at the same time being incapable of operating them. These changes within its structures of remembering result from a pathological selection of information that one sends and receives. Mass memory discredits social frameworks of memory as reliable source and undermines the relevance of cultural formations. It proclaims the relativity of facts and concepts while at the same time being incapable of operating them.

The difference between postmemory and mass memory consists also of a distinct perception of time and one's place within it. Postmemory intentionally places itself in the

'aftermath', as Hirsch writes: 'We certainly are, still, in the era of "posts," which continue to proliferate: "post-secular," "post-human," "postcolony," "post-white." Postmemory shares the layering of these other "posts" and their belatedness, aligning itself with the practice of citation and mediation that characterise them, marking a particular end-of-century/turn-of century moment of looking backward rather than ahead and of defining the present in relation to a troubled past rather than initiating new paradigms.'[45]. Mass memory, on the other hand, abandons time divisions; the boundaries between the past, present and future are diluted. To place oneself in the 'post' to past events implies the significance of that experience to which the 'post' refers. Mass memory recognises no such chronologies or hierarchies. Since the status of what happened is uncertain, it also becomes irrelevant.

4. 'Sentenced to each other's company'

In *No Matter How Hard We Tried* the emergence of mass memory takes place within a very specific setting: 'a claustrophobically poky room appears small, but exactly here a multigenerational family jointly sleeps, eats, excretes, does not sleep, turns from side to side, vomits and gets diarrhoea, does not live and dies, without even having to look for each other, on the contrary: over and over finding each other here.' ('to klaustrofobicznie ciasne pomieszczenie sprawia wrażenie niedużego, a to właśnie w nim wielopokoleniowa familia wspólnie śpi, je,wydala, żyje, nie śpi, przewraca się z boku na

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[45] Hirsch, p. 106.

bok, wymiotuje i dostaje sraczki, nie żyje i umiera, nie musząc się pray gym w nim w ogóle szukać, a wręcz przeciwnie: ciągle i ciągle się w nim znajdując', 31). The size of the apartment is vital, resonating with Masłowska's earlier theme of claustrophobia. Not only can the characters not escape their present conditions, but they are unable to run away from each other. Whilst in Masłowska's previous works the state of confinement referred to situations in which both the past and the future were closed, in *No Matter How Hard We Tried* the women are additionally locked up *together*; 'sentenced to each other's company' ('*skazanych na swoje towarzystwo*', 6). However, even though the apartment binds them together, and in the tiny space the family members are doomed to 'over and over find each other' ('ciągle i ciągle się w nim znajdując', 31), the women put tireless efforts to undermine any ties that could link them to one another.

This sabotage of their interrelations demonstrates itself through disintegrated communication: each of them speaks, but not *to* or *with* each other. Their three separate monologues interlace rather than interact, constructing a memory plait, in which every strand clashes with the others. For the first time in Masłowska's writing the language is differentiated and varies depending on who speaks: the Gloomy Old Biddy uses the literary, sophisticated sentences of the pre-war Polish, Halina blurts out short, plain questions and commands with peremptory undertones, while the Little Metal Girl absorbs all types the language, twisting and discarding phrases at random. Despite such radically different styles of articulations, the women are tied up together with an all-consuming void. The introductory stage directions, besides revealing the inner structures of mass memory, capture the essence of the characters' present condition. It is founded on a

permanent state of suspension, since the women, 'with ambiguity characteristic of people

sentenced to each other's company, as to whether they are more chasing or running away

from each other, or exhausted with both, remain still' ('z charakterystyczną dla osób

skazanych na swoje towarzystwo niejasnością, czy bardziej gonią się, czy przed sobą

uciekają, czy zmęczone jednym i drugim trwają bez ruchu', 6). Within this situation of

overbearing confinement, I propose that the failure to meaningfully share and exchange

information comes from an unwillingness to relate to one another, which, at the same

time, masks their loneliness and hurt. The deliberate mental withdrawal functions as a

form of denial, constituting at once an act of dissent and a defence strategy against their

fate. Through rejection of each other's symbols, the women deny their kinship, since it is

the symbols that 'create as though a common language, whose community of course is

most distinct in the same family circle'[46]. Yet, just as a symbol that fails to carry information

is degraded to an empty sign, a family without a common language becomes an assembly

of strangers. Such disintegration of a family unit, however, is precisely the implicit aim of

the play's characters, and one that finally resounds towards the end, when the Little Metal

Girl desperately proclaims: 'I have decided long ago that I am not a Pole, but a European,

and I learned Polish language from the tapes left behind by a Polish cleaner' ('Ja już

dawno zdecydowałam, że nie jestem żadną Polką tylko Europejką, a polskiego

nauczyłam się z płyt i kaset, które zostały mi po polskiej sprzątaczce', 74). The girl then

further denies her family, declaring 'this is not my mother ('To właśnie nie jest moja

mama', 74) and 'this is not my grandma' ('A to właśnie nie jest moja babcia', 74). Instead,

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[46] Kępiński, *Lęk*, p. 47; 'Tworzą jakby wspólny język, którego wspólnota jest oczywiście najwyraźniejsza w tym samym kręgu rodzinnym (...)'.

she introduces Halina as 'a private sales assistant from Tesco' ('nasza prywatna sprzedawczyni z Tesco', 74) and Gloomy Old Biddy as 'our cleaner' ('nasza sprzątaczka', 75).

To proclaim 'I have nothing in common with these people' allows the Little Metal Girl to also maintain the illusion 'I am not a part of this world'. Thus, the lack of communication becomes a form of protest against the misery of one's surroundings. Kępiński observed that 'thanks to symbols, we enter circles of community, beginning from the community of generational family'[47], but the characters in *No Matter How Hard We Tried*, 'sentenced to each other's company', desperately seek ways to break out of this familial circle. Since the three women cannot run away from each other, their free will demonstrates itself through a refusal to participate in the life of a group that they did not choose. To sabotage the symbols is to fight for one's distinctiveness, no matter how illusory. Kępiński observes that to interact with others implies partially submitting to their rules, thus 'just as a person isolates herself or himself from the information exchange with the surroundings, her or his control over 'personal projects' increases'[48].

Finally, the self-imposed isolation shelters them from the world of the unknown, which hides beneath the others' symbols. These symbols - sent but not received - carry information about memories that exceed the others' personal experience. To open and read them is to expand one's horizons, but the women remain suspended between

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[47] ibid; 'Dzięki symbolom wchodzimy w różne kręgi wspólnoty, zacząwszy od wspólnoty rodziny generacyjnej (...)'.
[48] Antoni Kępiński, *Melancholia*. (Warszawa : Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, 1979), p. 178; 'W miarę jak człowiek izoluje się od wymiany sygnalizacyjnej z otoczeniem, zwiększa się jego władza nad "swoimi dziełami"'. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

'claustrophobia and fear of open spaces' ('klaustrofobią a lękiem przestrzeni', 6). While reading a symbol might help to defeat claustrophobia, it would also escalate the 'fear of open spaces'. The only solution, then, is lack of action, and the women choose to remain numb. At the same time, however, the mere presence of unread symbols leads to anxiety, like that caused by the symbols indicating 'approaching danger'[49] (56). This is particularly visible in Halina's indignation at her daughter whenever the latter uses terms obtained from internet, like 'postmodernism' (17) or misspelled, mispronounced and misunderstood term 'lisbian' ('lizbijka', 68). At hearing the unknown words, Halina solemnly reprimands her daughter: 'What are you talking about?' ('Co ty znów wygadujesz?',17, 24, 68) and 'What are these words?' ('Co to za słowa?', 10, 17, 68). Yet, Halina is not the only one who develops strategies to disarm the unknown symbols. The Gloomy Old Biddy locks herself in the past, while the Little Metal Girl relentlessly apes her Grandmother and Halina, warping their words and lacing them with new, satirical meaning.

There is, however, another powerful method to disarm an unknown symbol, and each of the three women applies it in her own way: that is, by denying such symbol its meaning and thus turning it into an empty sign. Kępiński observed that symbols function on the basis of their relevance to our situation: 'the main channel of communication with the surrounding world is the system of symbols; what matters not, what is not a symbol,

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[49] Kępiński, *Lęk*, p. 56.

is not let into the system. We can only recognise this which matters to us.'[50]. What matters

to a person depends on one's hierarchies of values. The theory of information metabolism

conceptualised by Kępiński holds that there are two phases, each driven by a distinct

value system, in which we make a decision as to how to communicate with our

surroundings. The first one determines the emotional approach to the environment and

happens outside one's consciousness; it depends not on what we want, but on how we

feel. Here the hierarchy of values is simple: 'The world has a positive or a negative value.

In the first case it attracts us and becomes a source of pleasure, in the second it repels

us, becoming a source of unpleasantness.'[51]. This emotional, spontaneous assessment

of one's surroundings dictates whether a person will try to come closer or distance herself

or himself from their surroundings. In the second phase a person acts intentionally,

selecting the outgoing and incoming information according to the plan they have for

themselves. This phase is much more complex, as it combines one's needs and

aspirations with the reactions she or he receives from the surroundings.

What then matters to the Gloomy Old Biddy, Halina and the Little Metal Girl? The

one-bedroom apartment contains three distinct concerns: there is 'the Little Metal Girl's

lack of room', the Gloomy Old Biddy's 'lack of calm' and Halina's 'anxiety' ('brak pokoju

Małej Metalowej dziewczynki, brak świętego spokoju osowiałej inwalidki i niepokój Haliny

(51 l.) mieścił się dokładnie w tym samym jednym pokoju', 32). Each unfilled need or

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[50] ibid; 'Ze światem otaczającym głównym kanałem komunikacji jest system symboli; to co nie ma znaczenia, co nie jest symbolem, nie trafia do ustroju. Możemy poznawać to tylko, co ma dla nas jakieś znaczenie.' p. 56.

[51] Antoni Kępiński, *Psychopatie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), p. 52. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Świat ma wartość dodatnią lub ujemną. W pierwszym przypadku przyciąga on i jest źródłem przyjemności, w drugim odpycha, jest źródłem przykrości'.

worry shapes a separate value system that disconnects the women from each other, resulting in days spent on passing 'each other the sign of the lack of peace' ('gdzie jak dzień długi przekazują sobie brak pokoju', 32).

The Gloomy Old Biddy The Old Biddy's alias - 'Gloomy' - appears highly apt and indicative of the woman's condition, since, as Kępiński observes, 'a distinctive feature of depression is reduction of information metabolism with the surroundings to its minimum (...) and decreased changeability, stagnation, halting in one point of 'space-time''[52]. For the Gloomy Old Biddy who moves on a wheelchair, the external world is reduced to the one bedroom apartment and holds little promise of pleasure. As a result, her negative feelings towards her environment lock her up in the first phase of information metabolism, preventing her from entering the second phase which develops through interactions with others. Her refusal to interact with her surroundings, which are assessed as negative, results in the Gloomy Old Biddy becoming a one-way channel of information about the past that accepts no incoming data about the present.

It is the Gloomy Old Biddy's withdrawal, I propose, that opens up a fissure for the emergence of mass memory. Her stories are not listened to and her experiences ignored, because she gives an account of the past, but is unable to connect it with the present. The dismissal of her testimony illustrates that it is not the availability of information about the past that forms remembering, but rather an emotional trigger that provokes a person

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[52] Kępiński, *Melancholia*, p. 185; 'Charakterystyczną cechą depresji jest zredukowanie do minimum metabolizmu informacyjnego z otoczeniem (ucieczka w przysłowiową "mysią dziurę") oraz zmniejszenie zmienności, stagnacja, zatrzymanie się w jednym punkcie "czasoprzestrzeni"'.

to select one memory over the other. The Gloomy Old Biddy keeps the past unchanged as a safety net that allows her to escape the overbearing present conditions. In keeping it fixed, however, she isolates the past from the present. She does not preserve the past, she hijacks it.

Halina, the '*animal laboran*'

While the defence mechanism of the Gloomy Old Biddy consists of locking herself in the past, Halina - contrary to her mother - does not have a past she could escape to. Although the play makes no mention of her memories, the historical context of the post-1989 Poland makes it safe to assume that her youth was spent in Communist Poland.

In the contemporary world, however, the woman exists only in the present tense - without a past and without a future. Thus, she protects herself from the hostility of her environment by developing a system of dull, futile tasks, which she performs ceaselessly. The robotic nature of not only her actions, but also her existence is emphasised at the beginning of the play, which provides a following description: 'Halina performs with impassiveness of an automated draft animal automatic chores' (6). Akin to the iteration of the 'mindless activity and mindless stagnation' discussed earlier, which referred to the complete lack of direction in the women's behaviour, the double use of the term 'automatic' highlights the mechanical aspect of Halina's life as central to her character. Her identity complements a rubbish bin, where she not only throws the family's waste, but most importantly 'shops' for herself. One of Halina's most precious findings is a used magazine 'NOT FOR YOU' ('NIE DLA CIEBIE', 28) that explodes with descriptions of

things she will never have and life that she will never lead. With a strong political reference to consumerism society, resonating with Masłowska's essay 'Trained to Eat' ('Przyszkoleni do jedzenia, 2002), Halina's character is built of waste, superfluousness and absence. She works in a supermarket, from where she also collects expired food that she brings home as a trophy. Halina is a manifestation of what Arendt describes as '*animal laborans*', whose 'all human activities have been transformed into laboring'[53]. Kępiński stresses that it is the complicated socioeconomic conditions that 'force a person to assume a consumerist instead of creative approach' which in result leads to 'a decrease of expansion of life', causing depression[54]. Deprived of that 'most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world'[55], Halina copes with her isolation by desperately holding onto illusions of control. These are maintained by the predictability of her existence and dedication to her tedious routine, but also by nipping in the bud any possibility of information exchange within her family.

The Little Metal Girl

Despite suffering from the 'lack of room', to which she is constantly dismissed, the Little Metal Girl demonstrates the highest activity and willingness of interactions with the other family members. At first, her emotional response to the world is not that of negativity,

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[53] Arendt, p. 475.
[54] Kępiński, *Melancholia*, p. 159; 'Przykładem zewnątrzpochodnego "zagęszczenia" może być współczesna cywilizacja, która przez skomplikowanie się stosunków ekonomiczno-społecznych utrudnia człowiekowi realizację planów i zmusza go do przyjęcia postawy konsumpcyjnej zamiast twórczej; w swoim otoczeniu czuje się on tak, jak gdyby poruszał się w smole, każdy ruch napotyka opór. Tego typu środowisko wywołuje kurczenie się ekspansji życiowej. Stąd bierze się smutek naszej epoki.'.
[55] Arendt, p. 475.

but rather curiosity. Jumping around the Gloomy Old Biddy and Halina, however, she receives two distinct types of emotional rejection. The grandmother recounts her stories, but does not share them. No matter what happens, the Gloomy Old Biddy returns to that day when the war broke out. The mother, on the other hand, can only share with her daughter the experience of absence, knowledge of the things she does not and cannot have. The Little Metal Girl's 'lack of room' obtains then metaphorical meanings, as there is no space designed for her in the world of adults. At the same time, modernity gives the girl access to mass media that grant her experience that does not require her leaving the confined space of the one bedroom apartment. Unseen to the others, the Little Metal Girl is like a sponge that absorbs not only information, but also the clash between them, and gradually undergoes a metamorphosis culminating in her monologue where she proclaims her resentment towards the world where she grew up and longing for a different, non- Polish identity.

5. The House of Women

The multigenerational 'house of women' that Masłowska's drama introduces, has not been the first one in Polish dramaturgy. On March 21st, 1930, in the Polish Theatre premiered Zofia Nałkowska's debut drama *The House of Women* [Dom Kobiet, 1930][56]. The pre-war, multigenerational household of eight females in many ways resembles a

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[56] Zofia Nałkowska, *Dom kobiet*. In *Pisma wybrane* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1956). All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

time capsule: the characters seem as though frozen in their present, entirely consumed by reminiscing about the men from their past and the role they had in the women's lives. Akin to Masłowska's strategy of placing in the centre of the events the Second World War but not having it materialise until the play's finale, Nałkowska's *The House of Women* is about men who never appear on stage. In both cases, these otherwise invisible central characters remind us of their presence with exactly the same action - the only male in *The House of Women*, and the Second World War in *No Matter How Hard We Tried* repetitively knock on the houses' door. The past lets itself be known in both dramas, but it meets a radically different response.

At first glance, the plays seem to examine the same phenomenon, astutely grasped by a critic writing on *The House of Women*: '(...) Nałkowska tackled the relativity not of what is, but the relativity of what was. In a word, the past is subjected to transformation under the influence of the present and vice versa: the past facts, having been apparently established once and for all, require constant revisions, haunting and impacting the present'[57]. What constitutes an inherent element of Nałkowska's drama, however, is something that needs to be externally imposed on Masłowska's characters through a 'utopian element'[58], that is the presence of the Second World War that in the end explodes on the stage. The difference between these two strategies of demonstrating the relativity of the past - internal in *The House of Women* emerging from the change in

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[57] Janusz Majcherek, 'Przypisy do domu kobiet'. *www.e-teatr.pl*. Teatr Polski, Warszawa, 1990. Web. 10 December 2016.
[58] Grzegosz Niziołek, 'Ressentiment as experiment: Polish Theatre and Drama after 1989'. *Polish literature in transformation*. Ed. by Ursula Phillips with the assistance of Knut Andreas Grimstad and Kris Van Heuckelom. (London: University College London, 2013), pp. 225 - 240 (p. 235).

one's perceptions of what was, and external in *No Matter How Hard We Tried*, introduced through altering the past experience of the characters - points to, I posit, the memory losing its collective dimension. In Nałkowska's play the change in perceptions can occur internally because it is socially mediated. The past is negotiated and revised through a continual exchange of information with one's surroundings. As such, the play reflects the philosophy of its times, captured by Nałkowska's contemporary, the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in his foundational work *On Collective Memory* (1925). Since, as Halbwachs argues, memory is by its nature socially mediated through 'social frameworks of memory' - the sociologist's term for social groups to which one belongs, discussed in more detailed in the earlier section of this chapter - it is possible to use other people's memories not only to remember what happened to us, but also to construct our own memories on the basis of other people's experiences. Consequently, memory is never fixed: rather, present values and claims determine how we negotiate the memory of the past. Halbwachs argues that 'in reality the past does not recur as such, that everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present'[59].

Nearly a century later, however, the present fails to reconstruct the past, since the disintegration of social frameworks deprives individual memory of the necessary points of reference. Thus, Masłowska's drama applies 'shock therapy' to remind us of the currency of the past and its direct impact on the present. In *No Matter How Hard We Tried*, the family we follow has, in fact, never been formed as we learn in the play's finale

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[59] Halbwachs, pp. 39-40.

that reveals both the fictionality and the conditionality of its existence. The character of Man, a film director, recounts the end of his story, in which the bombing of the city finds both the Gloomy Old Biddy and the Little Metal Girl buried together in the rubble. After the Little Metal Girl desperately cries 'Grandma! Grandma! Come on, grandma, get up!' ('Babciu! Babciu! Niechże babcia wstaje!', 85), she realises 'that not only her beloved grandma died in the bombing, but even her mother for this reason probably has never been born, so not only is she an orphan, but also she herself does not even exist' ('że nie dość, że jej ukochana babcia zginęła w bombardowaniu, to jeszcze jej matka z tego względu też prawdpodobnie się nigdy nie urodziła, więc nie dość, że jest sierotą, to jeszcze sama nawet też nie istnieje', 85). The choice of such a drastic method to demonstrate that the past is not something that happened, but something that communities share as it equally involves and impacts all members, is dictated by the oblivion with which her characters co-exist.

In Nałkowska's *House of Women*, on the other hand, the past is the direction to which everyone turns, be it for comfort or out of regret. While in Masłowska's 'house of women' memory has lost all its value, to Nałkowska's characters it stands for everything that truly matters. Yet, since both plays tackle 'the relativity of what was', each has a different challenge: *No Matter How Hard We Tried* sets itself to a task of demonstrating the relevance of what happened before we were born, whereas *The House of Women* pokes the bubble of memories that the women have created, letting us watch it burst. In comparing the two dramas, however, it should be noted that each targets a distinct sphere of memory: *The House of Women* is viewed as 'a drama about the theory of cognition',

'extracting a psychological mechanism, which governs life'[60], whereas 'the political significance' of Masłowska's play has been attributed to 'its attempt to extract disparate realms of subconscious social communication from beneath hegemony of nationalist ideologies and their summary political applications'.[61]. And yet, in *No Matter How Hard We Tried* the break of this so-called 'subconscious social communication' originates exactly within a multigenerational family of females, like the one in *The House of Women*. And it is the comparison between familial interrelations in the two plays, I propose, that discloses the crucial differences within the structures of remembering that characterise the literary worlds of each text.

The centre of remembering in both households concentrates, traditionally, around the elderly family member, the grandmother. Both Nałkowska's Celina and Masłowska's Gloomy Old Biddy are introduced in a conventional manner, having to struggle with movement, as the former requires a walking stick and the latter a wheelchair. Both seem to be living in the past more than they do in the present. Here, however, the similarities between the two women end. Celina, charged with 'always remember(ing) the business of the dead as though they were still alive', humorously notes: 'Because it is true, they are still somewhat alive - and they even change a little - those, who once died' ('Bo to prawda, że oni jeszcze jakoś żyją - i nawet się trochę zmieniają - ci, co dawniej umarli', 640). One would look in vain for an equally interactive and self-reflexive response from the Gloomy Old Biddy. While Celina withdraws to her memories only in solitude and in

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[60] Majcherek, 'Przypisy do Domu Kobiet'.
[61] Niziołek, p. 237.

the company of others quickly redirects her attention to current happenings, the Gloomy Old Biddy never stops reminiscing about the old days, over and over re-telling the story of the past as though it was happening now, in front of her eyes. In *No Matter How Hard We Tried* there are no interactions, but interruptions, which force the Gloomy Old Biddy to pause her monologue, but never to alter its direction. An initial impression suggests that no one understands the grandmother's account of the past, but it is important to emphasise that the grandmother never puts any effort to make herself understood. Her oblivion towards the present matches her family's disregard for the past.

The Gloomy Old Biddy, despite her age, resembles more one of the young women in Nałkowska's drama who commit themselves to immobilising the past and then locking themselves in it as though in a fortress. The old sage Celina, on the contrary, fulfils her function as the eldest in the clan by passing the knowledge about the past - not about how the past *was*, but about how the past *works*. She reminds the others that the changeability of the past refers not only our personal memories, but to the very concept of facts. Celina's initial enigmatic remark that 'one cannot live through memories', but instead it is the memories that 'live through us', grows throughout the play into a philosophical stand. The lesson she gives her granddaughter Joanna is one that should be shared with Masłowska's Gloomy Old Biddy: 'each thing, each fact is constantly becoming different than it is, constantly different than it is - you understand? And first it becomes different on the way from a human to a human. And then it becomes different in ourselves.' ('Ze każda rzecz, każdy fakt robi się wciąż inny niż jest, wciąż inny niż jest - rozumiesz? I naprzód robi się inny na drodze od człowieka do człowieka. A później robi

się inny już w nas samych.', 670).

Nałkowska's *The House of Women* then reveals a philosophy that reflects the governing principle of Kępiński's study of human interactions that are constantly in flux. The past then changes in accordance with the human dynamics, which are always shaped and coloured by our emotions. Kępiński stressed that the negative feelings, such as 'hatred, jealousy, sense of guilt or sense of wrong' impact and weaken the exchange of information as everything 'that goes inside and outside the person is detained and distorted by the surged feelings of negative character'[62]. In Masłowska's drama, I propose, information is continuously sent without ever being received; it circulates, but fails to connect. It is the emotional aspect of information exchange, I further argue, that affects the characters' process of decision making and determines how they interact with their surroundings. The double-edged thorn of their suffering, discussed in Chapter 2, makes them sound as unintelligible to the world as the world is to them. Thus, it is not the lack of a platform to meet, as the author stated in the interview, but rather a pathology within their structures of information exchange, caused by emotional suffering, that closes them off from the others, and in consequence also from the past. Without a link to each other, the characters fail to navigate the present and thus become defeated by the relativity of things, despite the limitless availability of sources. It is then not the annihilation of the past that leads to destruction of communities, but rather the estrangement within

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[62] Kępiński, *Melancholia*, pp. 185-186; 'Z codziennego doświadczenia wiadomo też, jak "złe" uczucia zalegają, jak trudno wyzbyć się nienawiści, zazdrości, poczucia krzywdy, winy itp. Tkwią one w człowieku i osłabiają jego zdolności integracyjne. Traci on przyjemność płynącą z porządkowania, gdyż wszystko, co do niego wchodzi i z niego wychodzi, zostaje przetrzymane i wykrzywione przez skłębione uczucia o znaku negatywnym'.

groups that sees the past falling apart.

6. Collapse of Cultural Memory

The persistent refusal to recognise each other's symbols and validate mutual affinity prepares the ground for an epic collapse of cultural memory - both in the realm of social memory and objectified culture. The resulting spectacle of confusion, absurdity and conflicting value systems constitutes, however, only an interface in the post-1989 negotiations with the past. It is at the end of the play that mass memory emerges fully formed and ready to proclaim its reign in the chilling monologue delivered by the Little Metal Girl.

Yet, before the disintegration of memory reaches its climax, Masłowska offers a hilarious and at the same time terrifying display of the women's (mis)understanding of both the present and the past. The play contrasts a teenager with access to the internet and a linguistic skill to mock and twist any piece of information that floats around, with an *animal laborans* whose fundamental experience is that of absence, and an elderly depressed woman who never ceases to recount the story of her old days. Since each of them rejects the others as her social frameworks of memory, they are stranded to navigate alone through the world of foreign concepts, non-lived experiences and contradictory data. The facts are confused, omitted and distorted: the suspicion that the grandmother 'reaps off' cult TV shows on war ('zżyna z *Czterech pancernych i psa* i *Allo Allo*, 16) is excused with the era of postmodernism ('W końcu jest postmodernism', 16);

'a Dutch philosopher who opposed Cartesian dualism' is called 'Skleroza' - Polish for

sclerosis ('jestem znanym filozofem niderlandzkim, tym, no jak mu tam, no ten co

przeciwstawił się dualizmowi kartezjańskiemu...No SKLEROZA', 17); and a woman who

undergoes abortion is described as a 'lisbian' ('lizbijka, 68). Masłowska confounds the

languages of the characters to the extent that it becomes clear that they not only fail to

communicate with the others but they also do not understand their own words. The Little

Metal Girl keeps using terms which shock her mother, but when asked 'What are you

talking about, what are these words?' ('Co ty znów wygadujesz? Co to za słowa?', 17,

68), she simply answers: 'I don't know either, just got them from the internet' ('Też nie

znam, ściągnęłam z internetu', 17, 68).

The play, however, does not leave much hope that there is someone else that

would know what these words, or any other words suddenly available through all the

different media platforms, mean. As new characters - from TV presenters to fictional

characters to filmmakers - start to gradually invade the space of the one bedroom

apartment, they bring with them their own disconnected monologues. Now the stakes shift

from intergenerational miscommunication to a broader cultural collapse, which refers to

the realm of objectified culture, that grand archive 'responsible for all knowledge that

directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of the society'[63]. It is no

longer just the Gloomy Old Biddy, Halina, Bożena and the Little Metal Girl who are unable

to grasp the concepts transferred to them through mass media, but it becomes evident

that the information sent is itself erroneous. A film director, anonymously called 'Man',

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[63] Assmann, p. 126.

describes one of his characters as acting 'melanckolically' ('melankolijnie', 43), while another is giving birth 'to her husband and children' ('rodzi męża i dzieci', 64). The director explains his concept of having in the film 'one faggot, whom everyone in our Polish backwardness treats intolerantly, while he is a normal man, only groomed and not tolerated' ('Wszędzie kręci się jeden pedał, którego wszyscy w tym polskim ciemnogrodzie traktują nietolerancyjnie, podczas gdy on na końcu okazuje się normalnym mężczyzną, tylko po prostu zadbanym i nietolerowanym', 44). The Actor, asked in an interview to reveal the secret behind his great looks, responds: 'Everyday I drink a litre of real regular liquid water, I eat fruits and vegetables made of natural fruits and vegetables' ('Codziennie wypijam litr prawdziwej regularnej wody płynnej, jem też owoce i warzywa z naturalnych owoców i warzyw', 45). When a few questions later the Actor blurts out a baffling confession how his cocaine addiction ruined his family and his finances, the TV Presenter calmly responds: 'As a child you were apparently of a short stature and with time it has changed, the older you were' ('Jako dziecko podobno był pan niewielkiego wzrostu i to się z wiekiem zmieniło, im bardziej pan był starszy', 47). A character of Edyta, a random viewer of the film about the miserable and pathological life in the Polish provinces, suffers an emotional breakdown after the screening, as she suddenly feels 'gratitude towards God that others have it worse, and life is after all so real!' ('teraz poczułam wdzięczność do Boga, że inni mają jednak gorzej, a życie jest jednak take prawdziwe!', 54). Moved, she decides to do some good in the world, and ends up organising the rubbish in her handbag (56). This farcical portrayal of the pseudo-intellectual elites discloses the lack of cultural continuity and thus inapplicability of the

notion of 'fixed points' as 'fateful events of the past'[64], since nothing in the world of the play - either in the realm of social or cultural practices - is fixed, fateful or even merely reliable. There is, however, another aspect of this collateral damage - it is not only the Second World War that rages in Masłowska's drama, but also a plain human folly. As Hannah Arendt astutely points out, the notion of '*common* sense' assumes the necessity of our contact with others, 'without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense data which in themselves are unreliable and treacherous.'[65]. Without communication with other humans we might risk falling into madness, yet it is the preferred option among the characters in *No Matter How Hard I Tried*, who would rather 'not exist and not be' than be Poles. Monika, the woman without the belly button, candidly summarises that one shared sentiment: 'What could I do, willy-nilly I learned Polish and I speak it now entirely without an accent, however the meaning of certain sesquipedalian words until now I cannot remember, what does not stop me from saying them' ('Cóż mogłam zrobić, chcąc nie chcąc nauczyłam się polskiego i mówię teraz całkowicie bez akcentu, a jednak znaczenia niektórych wielosylabowych słów do teraz nie mogę zapamiętać, co nie przeszkadza mi ich wypowiadać', 66).

7. Germans Who Yodel: the Undeciphered Past

The confusion of concepts floating around in the present goes hand in hand with

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[64] Assmann, p. 128.
[65] Arendt, pp. 475-476.

the characters' grasp of historical knowledge - the repetitive use of the terms 'war' and 'Germans' discloses that nobody but the grandmother has a clear idea of what these two could stand for. When the Gloomy Old Biddy shares her memory of the beginning of the war: 'And then the Germans entered Warsaw' ('Aż do Warszawy wkroczyli Niemcy', 11), the Little Metal Girl responds: 'Germans, Germans, I have heard something about some Germans...' ('Niemcy Niemcy, coś słyszałam o jakichś Niemcach...', 11). Half way into the play, the Gloomy Old Biddy still recounts the day when the war broke out: 'And then the Germans stepped into Warsaw' ('Aż do Warszawy wkroczyli Niemcy', 35), while the Little Metal Girl, suddenly puzzled by seemingly familiar concepts, interrupts: 'Germans, I know, those who yodel!' ('Niemcy wiem, to ci co tak jodłują!', 35). The lucky guess is instantly rebuked by Halina, who offers yet another definition, based on her own experience filtered through what matters most to her, her individual value system: 'Germans are those who live in RFG and don't wash their shopping bags but throw them away, and the pots after kefir not even at all, how curious' ('Niemcy to ci, co mieszkają w RFN-ie i nie myją siatek tylko wyrzucają, a kubków po kefirze to już w ogóle, no ciekawe', 35). Towards the end of the play the Gloomy Old Biddy persistently insists 'I remember the day, when the war broke out' ('Ja pamiętam dzień, w którym wybuchła wojna', 75), to which the Little Metal Girl, similarly tenacious in her ignorance, cluelessly responds: 'Price war?' ('Wojna cenowa?', 76).

This absurd game of confusion about historical facts, terms and general concepts illustrates what happens to the declarative memory, responsible for our knowledge of past events, once we lose the points of reference of social framework. Endel Tulving famously

divided declarative memory into semantic and episodic categories (Tulving 1972). The former refers to broad knowledge about the world and is based on general concepts, while the latter registers personal memories. Tulving writes that semantic memory 'enables individuals to represent and mentally operate on situations, objects, and relations in the world that are not present to the senses'[66], but the women struggle with processing information that is not drawn from personal experience. Analogously to Arendt's emphasis on the collective nature of '*common* sense', semantic memory relies on *common* knowledge, one that is *shared* with others. Thus, by rejecting a collective as a framework within which concepts and memories are evaluated, the women are doomed to awkwardly filter all the available information through their own episodic memory. This, however, is extremely limited. Masłowska emphasises both the uneventful life that the women have and the brutal clash between their personal memories and an available spectrum of experiences in a consumerist society by introducing a repetitive negation to their everyday language. The grandmother is asked whether she 'has already not eaten the dinner' ('Babcia już nie jadła obiadu?', 14) or 'has already not been anywhere today' (A czy babcia już dzisiaj nigdzie nie była?, 16), the Little Metal Girl is repetitively sent to her 'lack of room' ('Marsz do swojego braku pokoju', 24, 31), while Halina boasts that 'in the lack of future they are supposed to, however, promote me' ('W braku przyszłości mają mnie jednak awansować', 29). Episodic memory, as Tulving points out, 'enables people to remember past events in which he or she participated'[67], but since the women's life is

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[66] Endel Tulving, 'What is Episodic Memory?. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. 2.3 (1993), pp. 67-70 (p. 67).
[67] ibid, p. 69.

entirely uneventful, they reminisce activities that they never had a chance to be a part of. Halina, her friend Bożena and the Little Metal Girl sit in a closed space of the one-bedroom apartment and talk about the walks they have not taken, holidays they have not been on and places they have never seen.

The failure of the women's limited episodic memory in deciphering foreign concepts resounds powerfully in the scene when Halina and her neighbour Bożena compete in their disappointment with the countries which they have never visited. Bożena recalls the times when she hasn't been to France and declares: 'I will never, ever, set my foot there again' ('Pamiętasz jak nie byłam we Francji i moja noga nigdy już tam nie postanie?', 34). She complains about the food and mocks the rumours about the grandeur of the Eiffel Tower, which in a newspaper appears in fact very small, 'smaller than my finger' ('Monumentalny zarys tej znanej wieży Eiffli, która że niby taka wysoka, taka niby wysoka, a na zdjęciu w gazecie o może taka, mniejsza od mojego placa', 35). Halina instantly outshines her friend with the memories of not being to Italy, supporting her displeasure with the country with the list of foods whose names in the Polish language are associate with the words 'Italy' or 'Rome' ('Do jedzenia mic specjalnego. Włoszczyzna, orzechy, kapusta włoska, pieczeń rzymska, ta ich pizza to mrożona z promocji z Tesco', 35). An epitome of their condition is a copy of the previous year's magazine 'NOT FOR YOU' ('NIE DLA CIEBIE', 13), found in the recycling bin, 'for free, so I say: I'll buy it, why not, I can afford it' ('Za darmo, więc mówię: a kupię, a co, a stać mnie', 13).

The declarative memory, as the name implies, consists of information that a person

can *declare* as adequately describing the state of affairs in the world. A parallel function carries out information exchange which aims at obtaining truthful description of one's surroundings. Kępiński stresses that this is a necessary requirement for the survival of one's life and species[68]. The tragedy of the characters in *No Matter How Hard I Tried* constitutes the contradiction between the information about the world that they receive from the internet, TV, the magazine 'NOT FOR YOU' and even from their family member, the living witness of the Second World War, as none of it matches their personal experience of their own lives. Thus, I suggest that their episodic and semantic memory clash dramatically, resulting in no knowledge that the women could declare.

This clash, however, is caused not by the mere difference between general concepts and their personal experience, but by mistrust towards semantic memory as a credible source of information about the world. Tulving stresses that the 'relation between episodic and semantic memory is hierarchical: Episodic memory has evolved out of, but many of its operations have remained dependent on, semantic memory.'[69]. But the women in Masłowska's play reverse this hierarchy, giving the priority to their inferior function – episodic memory. Subsequently, they are unable to process information since 'semantic memory can operate (store and retrieve information) independently of episodic memory, but not vice versa.'[70]. The rejection of collective framework then has grave consequences: it takes away one's ability to know anything about the world. The

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[68] Kępiński, *Melancholia*, p. 186; 'W wymianie informacyjnej ustroju z jego środowiskiem tkwi ukryte założenie, że obraz świata tworzący się z tej wymiany informacji jest prawdziwy. Inaczej metabolizm informacyjny nie spełniałby swej roli przygotowania ustroju do wejścia w metabolizm energetyczny i spełnienia praw zachowania życia własnego i gatunku'.
[69] Tulving, p. 68.
[70] ibid

individual experience, regardless of how rich or limited it is, floats in chaos without the point of reference that semantic memory provides.

8. The River Vistula, a Slurry: the loss of *lieux de mémoire*

The Gloomy Old Biddy is the only one in the house who possesses abundant personal experience of the historical past. Her episodic memory from the war-time period, however, constitutes an exclusive source of her knowledge of the world and thus becomes entirely self-referential. While the Gloomy Old Biddy continues living in the past, the material reality to which the concepts she knows and operates with refer, has undergone a drastic transformation. Her memories of swimming in the Vistula river shock the Little Metal Girl, who calls the river a 'slurry' ('gnojówka', 8) and recalls an impressive number of diseases that she gets from stepping into its polluted waters. The grandmother, however, ignores the girl's objections, and continues as though uninterrupted, now moving to the stories of fishing ('Płotki łowiliśmy, drobne, dzikie, tak się targały raptusy', p. 8). The Little Metal Girl connects for a second with the notion of 'fishing', but to her the activity corresponds to memories of catching 'rotten condoms' ('zgniłe condomy', p. 8).

The seemingly neutral concept - the river Vistula by which their shared hometown, Warsaw, is located - instead of acting as a symbol, able to connect them and bridge generational differences, causes even greater confusion. The Gloomy Old Biddy's idyllic memory of clear water reflecting the sun is contrasted with the Little Metal Girl's experience of Vistula: that of a polluted, liquid manure with traces of oil and condoms.

Thus, the contemporary state of the river Vistula not only does not facilitate generational passage of memory, but in fact contradicts the validity of the old symbol. The gap between the grandmother's and granddaughter's experiences is too wide; the stories about the past do not assist in a better understanding of the present, but add up to an even greater confusion.

The socio-political changes that took place after the 'day when the war broke out', which the Gloomy Old Biddy never ceases to recount, made the past inaccessible. Thus, the old symbols recalled by the grandmother appear now as phantoms of her imagination with no material reality to back them up.

In the reality that Masłowska's play examines, the characters' isolation is ultimate and there is not a spatial or linguistic dimension from which all the residual sense has not vaporised. A powerful example that the drama employs is the notion of 'bread' ('chleb'), which has a symbolic dimension within the Polish language. Masłowska, contrasting the personal memories of the Gloomy Old Biddy and the Little Metal Girl associated with the concept of 'bread', draws attention to the phenomenon of how seemingly the same term can signal a contradictory experience, and thus its usage contributes to the sense of confusion and estrangement. In the Polish tradition bread has constituted a sacrum, something to be respected and never thrown away, while at the same time symbolising the most basic human need. The Gloomy Old Biddy repetitively recalls the symbolic function of bread alone as being everything one required to be satisfied: 'a piece of bread in the hand and let's go'('kawałek chleba w rękę i dalejże', 8, 18). But the Little Metal Girl appears perplexed, asking: 'And what is 'bread'?' ('A co to jest 'chleba'?', 8) before then

sharing her own experience: 'Forget the bread grandma, particularly white wheat - it fattens' ('Niech babcia zapomni o chlebie, zwłaszcza biały pszenny - tuczy', 18-19).

The direct confrontation between the experiences of the Gloomy Old Biddy and the Little Metal Girl is triggered by the presence of the third party, the voice in the radio, which reminisces about an old Polish custom of welcoming strangers with bread ('gościnnie witany chlebem', 70). The Little Metal Girl, 'as though jealous' of the radio's limelight ('*jakby była zazdrosna, że coś wygryzło ją z fonosfery*', 71), tries to relate her own episodic memory with the information that she has just heard: 'Bread, bread, I have heard something about some breadbin' ('Chleba, chleba, coś słyszałam o jakimś chlebaku', 71). The Gloomy Old Biddy, however, unexpectedly corrects her granddaughter: 'Bread' ('Chlebie', 71), which provokes the Little Metal Girl to discharge that impoverished personal experience she has acquired: 'Whether bread, or breadbin, I don't really know, what it is, but if it is this white sprinkling stones from Tesco, then it must absolutely be said that one can splendidly write with them on the asphalt' ('Czy chlebie, czy chlebaku, ja tam nie wiem, co to jest, ale jeśli to te białe sypiące się kamory z Tesco, to trzeba im koniecznie było powiedzieć, że można nimi świetnie rysować po asfalcie', 71).

Yet, it is also the notion of 'bread' that the play uses in its finale to signify that the shared experience carries a potential to restore the sense of community and bring back 'the residual sense' to seemingly outdated concepts and symbols. When the war explodes on the stage, the Gloomy Old Biddy and the Little Metal Girl jointly scrabble through ruins in search of something to eat. At first it is only the grandmother who cries out in despair

'Bread!' ('Chleba!', 81), an idea to which her granddaughter still holds some reservations, begging for 'one made of wholemeal flour, not the radioactive stones' ('Tylko zaklinam z pełnoziarnistej mąki, nie the radioaktywne kamory', 81). Yet, a few pages later the cry is repeated by the Little Metal Girl who screams 'Bread!' ('Chleba!', 86) right before dying of starvation. Masłowska, however, does not end the play on the sentimental note. Instead, she instantly counterbalances it with a competing theme of the play, namely unwillingness to perceive others as members of the same social group, refusal to communicate. Yet, without allowing other people to act as our points of reference, we are forever doomed to distort any information we receive. The character of Man, one who invents and directs the story we watch, remains entirely unmoved by the story as he filters the scene through his own, episodic memory, his own negative personal experience: "Go forth, you slob, I don't have any bread. Bread, bread, and if I give her bread, she will buy vodka and drugs.' ('A idźdże, brudasie, nie mam żadnego chleba. Chleba, chleba, a jak jej dam chleba, to kupi wódkę i narkotyki', 86).

9. The Strife: Language of Hysteria Versus Mass Memory

The two final scenes, in which the play brings together the otherwise estranged Gloomy Old Biddy and Little Metal Girl did not make the cut for the acclaimed cinematic production of the play, Grzegosz Jarzyna's *No Matter How Hard We Tried* (2014). Jarzyna, who four years earlier directed the theatrical version of the play for TR Warszawa Theatre, ends his film after the Little Metal Girl's unforeseen, emotionally charged

monologue, in which she denies her family and rejects her national identity, repetitively exclaiming: 'And everything's all right between us. And everything's all right between us! We are no Poles, but normal people!' ('I między nami dobrze jest. I między nami dobrze jest! Nie jesteśmy żadnymi Polakami, tylko normalnymi ludźmi!'). The very last words that resound from the screen declare learning Polish language 'from CDs and tapes' ('a polskiego nauczyliśmy się z płyt i kaset!', 75).

In Masłowska's play the Little Metal Girl is brought to the edge of despair by the anonymous voice from the Radio, to which Jarzyna gives a face of a populist politician that gazes over Warsaw from the monumental posters hanged at the city's buildings. Yet, it is Masłowska's faceless and anonymous Radio, speaking for the collective 'we' - a strategy that relies solely on the power of language - that most chillingly reveals the comeback of hysteria. It is a return of the repressed, kept in the play under the surface of indifference and oblivion. The language of hysteria in *No Matter How Hard I Tried* does not belong to any of the women exclusively, nor to the show-business people, like it belonged to Andrzej 'Nails' Robakoski, but each of the characters carries an element of it. Every now and then these elements of hysteria break through to temporarily possess one of the characters: there is the self-hatred of Halina, the bad theatre of Edyta's emotional breakdown, the turbulence of the Actor, the dualism of the Man, the 'brand new life' of Monika and finally the all-encompassing obscurity of information. These singular articulations of mental suffering merge together in a cacophony, which resonates the familiar sound of cultural hysteria.

Yet, it is a hysteria already hardened after its suffering has gone unrecognised. It

no longer asks 'How do others see me?' since there are no 'others' worthy to be seen by, to perform for. But just as isolation prepares the ground for terror, as Arendt famously argued, the characters' sabotage of human interrelations and their denial of mutual affinity, makes space for the collective voice of the radio, which seemingly emerges out of nowhere and imperceptibly takes over.

It is the language of hysteria that calls no longer for recognition - it calls for arms, demanding to restore its mythological power. The anonymous voice of the radio speaker suggests a promise to overcome individual isolation by pointing not to the others, but to the listeners' ideal selves. It aims not for unity, but triumph. This transformation of the language of hysteria, which has shifted from a plea to be acknowledged to a desire to impose its narrative, speculates about the dangers of leaving the cultural hysteria unheard.

It begins peacefully, with the preposterous, extreme incarnation of 'pseudologia phantastica' of the old glory, 'when the world was still ruled by divine law, all the people in the world were Poles' ('gdy świat rządził się jeszcze prawem boskim, wszyscy ludzie na świecie byli Polakami', 70). In that golden age of Polish culture, when the nation reigned over the worlds and discovered new lands, there was 'a famous Polish explorer Krzysztof Kolumb, who was rechristened as Christopher, or Chris or Isaak' ('znany polski odkrywca Krzysztof Kolumb, którego potem oczywiście przechrzczono na Christophera czy innego Chrisa czy Isaaka', 70). But as the peaceful imagery vanishes, the radio assumes a darker tone, describing the end of the heavenly era: 'First they took away from us America, Africa, Asia and Australia. The Polish flags were being destroyed, and

stripes, stars and other ornamental zigzags were painted over' ('Najpierw odebrano nam Amerykę, Afrykę, Azję i Australię. Niszczono polskie flag i domalowywano na nich inne paski, gwiazdki i esy-floresy', 71). The ludicrous account of Poland's rise and fall is contrasted with the Little Metal Girl's unexpected voice of dissent - she welcomes the disasters, she cheers them: 'There you are, and very well, amen to that' ('No właśnie, no i dobrze, święta racja', 72). As the story of hysteria unfolds, recounting the tragic destruction of Poland, it is contrasted with the creed of mass memory, articulated through the girl.

Yet, Masłowska deliberately complicates the strife between the language of hysteria and mass memory. After the farcical account of Poland's rise and fall, the voice in the radio moves onto the real historical tragedy of the nation, one that has been creeping behind the characters throughout the play - the Second World War. But the Little Girl has had enough. The background sound of the one bedroom apartment has been the story of 'the day when the German came to Warsaw'. Thus, when the radio begins describing the invasion and destruction of Poland which 'not a moment longer is Poland, Warsaw is not a capital, but a hole in the ground full of rubble' ('Polska ani chwili dłużej nie jest już Polską, Warszawa nie jest jej stolicą tylko dziurą w ziemi pełną gruzu', 72), the Little Metal Girl cries out in despair: 'Amen to that, a hole! Boarded up! I hate this city!' ('Święta racja, dziura! Zabita dechami. Nienawidzę tego miasta!', 73). The performance of hysteria has exhausted its audience - the Little Metal Girl - who no longer curiously tries to examine the recounted events and compare them with her own strikingly different experience of the world. Instead, she cuts herself off from the past altogether, declaring

245

'I am also not a Pole' ('ja też nie jestem żadnym Polakiem', 73).

In the characteristic fashion of mass memory both discrediting the social frameworks and questioning the relevance of cultural memory, the Little Metal Girl hypothetically asks: 'Why would one be a Pole?' ('Po co być jakimś Polakiem?', 73). The high-strung description of suffering fails miserably to evoke compassion, resulting not only in emotional indifference but also exasperation. When the radio's account of the wartime destruction is suddenly interrupted by the Gloomy Old Biddy's heartbreaking memory: 'Poland, the lovely land, I remember how your beauty was dying' ('Polsko, kraino prześliczna, pamiętam jam umierało twe piękno', 73), the Little Metal Girl snaps: 'Dying, dying, so let it take aspirin ('Umierało, umierało,to niech sobie wzięło apap!', 73). The girl then breaks into a resentful monologue, in which she over and over exclaims 'We are not Poles, we are Europeans, normal people!' (Nie jesteśmy żadnymi Polakami, tylko Europejczykami, normalnymi ludźmi', 74).

After the desperate renunciation of the Little Metal Girl's cultural memory and national identity, the radio loses its signal. Instead of the speaker's voice there are hums and scrunches. The Little Metal Girl tries to fix it and suddenly big-beat music breaks out. What follows is a gibberish speech, in an obscure form of a song or poem: 'A horse that rode horses/manufacturally closed door/blood flowing in blood/blood flowing in blood' ('Koń który jeździł konno/fabrycznie zamknięte drzwi/krew płynąca we krwi/krew płynąca we krwi', 75). The strife between the language of hysteria and mass memory is lost on both fronts: each succumbs to its own madness.

10. The Little Metal Girl and her Failed Prosthesis: Conclusion

In the interview quoted at the beginning of the Chapter, Masłowska confesses that she used to be a bit like the Little Metal Girl, mocking the tradition, and 'now I am punished, as I realise that in those old forms was some kind of care for beauty, nurturing it.'[71]. Her drama then could be seen as an attempt of redress, in which the past is revived and relived, taking again centre stage to repair the crumbling present.

In Masłowska's first critical essay, 'Trained to Eat' (2002), discussed in more detailed in Chapter 3, the writer critically speaks of the prosthesis of consumerism, which does not facilitate activity, but merely fills the void. Masłowska's prosthesis of the shared past, by contrast, is intended as an implant for the lack of a shared platform. It is, however, still placed into a 'bare gum' of mass memory, one that neither regards nor recognises the past. While in 2002 the writer declared that 'nothing will ever grow'[72] of that bare gum of post-1989 Polish culture, in her 2008 drama there is a wish, if not a hope, that re-experiencing the collective past could restore a sense of community.

Such a constructive approach required Masłowska to bend the boundary of realism, of what is and what is not possible. The play's finale 'change(s) the course of

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[71] Polska to brzydka dziewczyna'; Myślę, że byłam trochę taką metalową wnuczką. I teraz mam karę, bo dostrzegam, że w tamtych starych formach było jakieś staranie o piękno, pielęgnowanie go'.

[72] Dorota Masłowska, 'Przyszkoleni do jedzenia' [Trained to Eat]. *Gazeta Wyborcza* (233), 5 October 2002, p. 13, para. 5. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; ''W bezbronnie nagie dziąsło, z którego albo w którymś momencie coś bezpowrotnie wypadło, albo w którym od początku nie było zawiązków niczego i z którego nic już nie wyrośnie'.

history by putting things in the conditional mode, i.e. by creating alternative versions of history within a fictional framework.'[73]. This 'utopian motif'[74], powerful as it is on the stage where 'the howl of sirens, the rattle of automobiles and the echoes of dropping bombs ring out'[75], remains a fantasy, an externally imposed resolution, which does not and cannot emerge from within the characters and the world they inhibit.

In an article on the annihilation of the Native American civilisations, the author observed that epidemics with extremely high mortality rate do not 'just kill people' but destroy societies, since 'the survivors are deprived of vital human connection to their past; they are robbed of their stories, their music and dance; their spiritual practises and beliefs.'[76]. Prolonged cultural hysteria might not kill people, but I maintain it has equally deadly consequences for the groups of people it infects. An inability to communicate one's experience with their surroundings, characteristic of hysteria, leads to isolation. It is through interactions that take place within the social frameworks, however, that collective memory is formed. Thus, cutting the emotional link with their surroundings in the present subsequently destroys one's link with the past. This injury leads in turn to devaluation of shared symbols which, as poignantly captured in Masłowska's play, undermine the group's cultural continuity and eradicate any sense of belonging.

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[73] Niziołek, p. 235.
[74] ibid
[75] ibid, p. 236.
[76] Douglas Preston, 'An Ancient City Emerges in a Remote Rain Forest,' *New Yorker*, 1 January 2017. Web. 1 January 2017.

Conclusion

'A flat in a collective grave, sorry, that's our history'[1]

Such is the paradox that while looking at the past, we learn most about the present, and while studying the present, we most clearly get to see its past. Dorota Masłowska's writing, although an imaginary feast, remains deeply rooted in the sounds of post-1989 Poland; 'the new world'. These sounds are masterfully assembled together to create Masłowska's signature language - the language of hysteria. It is a language of pain that does not know where its suffering comes from - all it knows is that it suffers. But Masłowska's writing does not try to diagnose the problem. The uniqueness and urgency of her work is in retreating from the narrative-driven literature that attempts to describe the world around and instead letting the language of her work take the limelight.

At the very beginning of her career, the writer sceptically assessed the creative prospects of her generation: 'If we build something new, then from rubbish, shards, plastic, because on that we have bred.'[2] In the image-driven, photoshopped reality of the twenty first century, words, sounds and phrases indeed often resemble pieces of rubbish, thrown carelessly on the streets. Masłowska has collected those linguistic shards and put together to create a symbolic 'monster' - the language of her fiction is

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[1] Dorota Masłowska, *Inni ludzie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 2018), p. 89. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Mieszkanie w zbiorowym grobie, sorry, taką mamy historię'.
[2] Dorota Masłowska, 'Przyszkoleni do jedzenia' [Trained to Eat]. *Gazeta Wyborcza* (233), 5 October 2002, p. 13. All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; 'Jeśli zbudujemy coś nowego, to ze śmieci, odłamków, plastiku, bo na tym zostaliśmy wyhodowani,' para. 22.

both alive and terrifying, powerful and vile.

As the language of hysteria flounces around Masłowska's various works, it readily attributes the blame for its agony to everything and everyone that it crashes into: history, geography, the whole spectrum of 'others'. But the desperate struggle to find the source of this torment reveals a deeply troubled relationship between the language of hysteria and its origins. The factual chaos expressed by Masłowska's characters exposes a systematic damage to collective remembrance - the data about the world has no credible points of reference to validate their accuracy; not in the hostile environment of the present, and not in the indecipherable past.

But any information remains useless as long as it is unverifiable. And so the language of hysteria develops a filter - its own volatile emotions. As a result, it accepts only this version of the past which authorises its claims to the present. And yet, such subjective method necessarily makes for a scaffolding instead of a foundation. The world estranged from its past is a world estranged from itself; its mistrust towards the others reflects the mistrust towards the self. Despite the attempts to appear powerful, the language of hysteria is not a language of supremacy, but of defeat, insecurity and pain.

From Nails to the Little Metal Girl

It was the language in Masłowska's writing that first attracted the greatest attention and it is the language that has remained her literary trademark, becoming a common thread in the otherwise highly diverse body of work. This language of hysteria, my thesis suggests, is the sound of cultural hysteria that defines Masłowska's literary world.

And yet, even though cultural hysteria resonates in each of the writer's works, it assumes distinct manifestations, depending on the character it torments and the conditions that Masłowska's characters find themselves struggling against.

The differences in the types of hysteria found in Masłowska's writing appear most striking when comparing the protagonist of the debut novel *White and Red*, Nails, and the Little Metal Girl from the drama *No Matter How Hard We Tried*. The six years between the publication of these two works sees Masłowska creating two main characters which could not be more different on the surface. The distinction begins with their names: Nails is the 'Strongman', while the Little Metal Girl is defined as a 'little girl'. But these labels are nothing more than façades, as successful at first in concealing their repressed selves, as they are in contrasting them with the characters' repressed, underground personalities.

Nails' desire to be perceived as powerful is a reflection of the value system that governs the world he lives in. Thus, Nails' hysteria manifests itself through relentless displays of dominance that aim at confirming his status as superior to his surroundings. At the same time, Nails remains continuously suspicious of his milieu; it is their undeserved offenses and inadequate responses that he blames for his own outbursts of rage and aggression. But the true war that Nails' fights is against his own sense of inferiority, which he self-defines as any form of weakness, that is both having feelings and letting them control his actions. Too shameful to be admitted as his own, Nails externalises that part of himself that he cannot control, turning these parts into mythological 'Russkies' or 'women', both conspiring to destroy him. He defends his ideal self of the 'Strongman' by trying to subjugate 'the Others', but he is predestined

to fail as the only true 'Other' he battles against is himself. Nails' language of hysteria is then both the language of violence and of pain, as it mirrors his internal damage, which hurts others in order to express his own suffering.

But while Nails' defence is an offence, the Little Metal Girl at first chooses a more passive approach. Her reactions to the world of devalued symbols and floating signs, which together create an informational cacophony, appear more evolved than Nails' violent hysteria. She skilfully operates with mass memory, which I suggest constitutes a docile response to the emotionally overwhelming demands of cultural hysteria. The Little Metal Girl has given up the struggle; she doesn't fight any wars, but lets the omnipresent war knock on her door. But the Little Metal Girl is only outwardly free from the hold of hysteria; in fact she, too, remains trapped in the ideal self that she constructed. Just as Nails wishes to be strong, the Little Metal Girl wants to remain 'little', and uninvolved in the heavy burden of the past that the adults around her carry.

Mass memory then is a passive aggressive strategy that the Little Metal Girl develops in order to stay uninvolved and unaffected by the cultural hysteria in the world of adults. And yet, her indifference proves to be as much a self-delusion as Nails' ideal 'strongman'. The Little Metal Girl might no longer need to take part in a 'Polish-Russkies' war, but she fights a different battle now: against the legacy of sacrifice that the world of adults has left for her.

At first, she tries to battle on her own terms and develops mass memory as a linguistic device, which lets her take in information without having to process it or respond. But just as Nails is a product of the 'old canon', programmed to respond with

the aggression that he was encoded for, the Little Metal Girl, rebelling against the language hysteria, mirrors its very own structures. When the caricatured legacy of sacrifice resounds from the radio, imposing its ludicrous version of the past, the Little Metal Girl abandons her former detachment and responds with an emotionally charged cry: 'We are not Poles, we are Europeans, normal people!'[3] The 'abnormal people', Poles in Masłowska's play, are burdened with intrusive collective identity, one that is not only rooted in the tragic past, but demands relentless remembering.

The structure of hysteria, as defined by Kępiński and applied throughout my thesis, pushes the hysteric to abandon her or his true nature and replace it with the ideal self that they imagine the world wants to see. That world and its alleged expectations then constitute the hysteric's only point of reference. The world to which Nails and the Little Metal Girl aspire has changed. In *White and Red* the value system still merits power and strength, while in *No Matter How Hard We Tried* the aim is no longer to dominate one's surroundings, but to completely remove oneself from them. But the Little Metal Girl's wish 'to be normal' shares the same motif with Nails' quest to be powerful: neither of them wants to give in to pain. The pain, however, seems to be intrinsic in their nature. In order to avoid suffering, they need to run away from themselves, to try to become someone else. Both Nails and the Little Metal Girl are rebels; each tries to break out from the narratives imposed upon them. They are unruly, and yet they are also trapped.

Notably, the existence of these two linguistic rebels is speculative; at the end

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[3] Dorota Masłowska, *Między nami dobrze jest.* (Warszawa: Lampa i Iska Boża, 2008), p. 74. All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; (Nie jesteśmy żadnymi Polakami, tylko Europejczykami, normalnymi ludźmi'.

of *White and Red* Andrzej 'Nails' Robakoski encounters his creator, the writer Masłoska, while the Little Metal Girl learns that she was never actually born as her grandmother died in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising during the Second World War. It is as if Masłowska drew both of her characters with a literary pencil, rubbing them out of her pages towards the end of each work. This speculative existence, I suggest, poignantly captures the greatest threat of cultural hysteria: trading the self for the ideal that one believes the world wants to see results in a life that never fully comes to be.

Dorota Masłowska, the 'new writer'

In the post-1989 quest for a literary work that would meaningfully engage with the new socio-political reality, the critic Jerzy Jarzębski coined a template for such a work: 'a novel, rather lengthy, realistic, with a dose of grotesque, which would illustrate the Great Transformation from multiple sides, and at the same time with somewhat ironic distance, revealing in an equal measure the complexity and deficiency of the reality, as the author's persona and his problems'[4].

The works of Dorota Masłowska might appear to strikingly contrast Jarzębski's literary fantasy. For one, her texts are characterised by their brevity and boundless imagination. Contrary to the early beliefs, Masłowska's writing is distinctly non-realist. Although the grotesque and irony are omnipresent in all her works, Masłowska does not create any distance between herself and the literary world she constructs. On the contrary, not only does the writer's alter ego live among her characters and interacts

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[4] Jerzy Jarzębski, *Apetyt na Przemianę. Notatki o prozie współczesnej* (Kraków : Znak, 1997) p. 21. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

with them, but Masłowska herself emphasises personal roots of her iconic language: 'In our consciousness we have a tattooed quiz show, commercial, computer game. I know this because as an eight-year-old I knew all the copies of all the commercials, which I recited with television, driving my parents mad. I don't believe I have fully forgotten them.'[5]

Masłowska's uncompromising stand on the intimate, troubled relationship she maintains with her literary language could in fact be seen as one of the main sources of its power. The writer inhabits that uncomfortable 'no man's land,' which neither allows her to identify with the world she constructs nor fully dismiss it. And while Masłowska's characters navigate the world equipped with only one filter - their emotional complexes and hurts - the writer has her sense of rhythm and imagination to rely on.

In the beginning of her writing career, Masłowska claimed the scraps of culture, and throughout the years she has remained faithful to that heritage. It is Masłowska's writing then that succeeded at fulfilling the last of the critic's demands: 'revealing in the same measure the complexity and deficiency of the reality, as the author's persona and his problems'[6]. Unexpectedly, it is precisely such an unlikely candidate as Dorota Masłowska and her inventive, ingenious writing that most acutely illustrated the paradoxes of transformation, which proved neither as great nor as transformative as the cultural criticism of the 1990s would have hoped. Thus, it might not have deserved,

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[5] Masłowska, 'Przyszkoleni do jedzenia', para 16; 'W naszej świadomości wytatuowany jest teleturniej, reklama, gra komputerowa. Wiem to, bo jako ośmiolatka znałam na pamięć teksty wszystkich reklam, które recytowałam z telewizorem, doprowadzając rodziców do szału. Nie wierzę, że do końca je zapomniałam.'
[6] Jarzębski, p. 21.

nor even needed, that 'grand narrative' that the critics longed for. Maybe more relevant for the post-1989 Polish culture was simply to hear itself played back.

'Other people'

My thesis intentionally focused on Masłowska's essays, fiction and drama from the period 2002-2009, in an attempt to examine the progression of the writer's literary constructions of memory, history and suffering in her body of work.

No Matter How Hard We Tried (2008) marked an end to this literary project. The following years saw Masłowska involved in multiple creative projects, including a new novel *Kochanie, zabiłam nasze koty* [Honey, I Killed Our Cats, 2012), a music album *Społeczeństwo jest niemiłe* [The Society Is Mean, 2014], a children's book *Jak zostałam wiedźmą.* [How Have I Become a Witch, 2014] and *Więcej niż możesz zjeść. Felietony parakulinarne* [More Than You Can Eat. Paraculinary Column, 2015]. None of the new projects repeated the critical or commercial success of Masłowska's previous works, or gained equivalent cultural resonance. The creative retreat indicated exhaustion with the themes explored in her earlier writing and led some critics to speculate that Masłowska's fondness of artistic and intellectual autonomy might have become self-defeating: 'one cannot help but feel that the project aimed at increasing freedom has in fact restricted it'[7].

In 2018, however, the writer published much anticipated fourth novel, tellingly entitled *Inni ludzie* (Other people, 2018). The book heralded a return of the 'old Masłowska', with her signature language once again coming into the limelight. Just

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[7] Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, 'From Rejection to Praise of Irony. Dorota Masłowska in Her Search of 'We''. *SLH* 5 (2016), pp. 1-50 (p. 47).

like Masłowska's second novel *Paw Królowej* [Queen's Spew, 2006] and second drama *Między nami dobrze jest* [No Matter How Hard We Tried, 2008], the action of *Inni ludzie* is once again set in contemporary Warsaw, this time almost entirely covered in smog. The deliberately trivial plot stretches over two days and a morning, and functions as nothing more than a device to explore the escalating savagery of human relations.

Masłowska's new novel at once touches upon all the notions explored in the earlier works and brings them together: claustrophobia, alienation, void. The language of hysteria is at its peak, while the only underlying denominator between estranged inhabitants of that hostile world is a rapidly accelerating antagonism towards one's compatriots. 'Poles' are the villains in Masłowska's new work who 'drag you down'[8]. 'Poles' must be avoided while travelling abroad[9] or considering emigration[10]. Who are those that try to escape 'Poles', Poland and 'Polishness'? - the better, 'other people'.

And yet, the decade in between the period that this thesis examines and the release of Masłowska's fourth novel, resulted in a seemingly subtle, but fundamental change. Mass memory - the form of remembering that emerged in the time of transformation - is approaching its expiry date.

In 2008, the drama *No Matter How Hard We Tried* presented a literary attempt to defeat that floating collective remembrance by reclaiming the past as a potential

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[8] Masłowska, *Inni ludzie*, p. 65; 'I tego nienawidził w tym kraju, że nawet jak sam żyjesz jakoś, na poziomie pewnym, to i tak ciągną cię w dół te wszystkie Polaki prosto z pola pastewne'.
[9] ibid, p. 131; 'I moja rada: brać wyjazdy dla Niemców, oni mają większe standary, wymagania i takie destynacje, żeby nie z Polakami'.
[10] ibid, p. 26; 'Australia? Nie, tam za dużo Polaków'.

platform for a shared experience. *Other People*, however, discloses a world, in which remembering has taken a different turn. Historical events are not just commemorated, they are tattooed on the characters' skin: there is the 'Little Freedom Fighter' from the Warsaw Uprising on the protagonists arm[11], or the Polish remote military victories: the Battle of Grunwald of 1410 and Battle of Vienna of 1683[12], found on the bodies of Poles holidaying abroad. These history-referencing tattoos are like tribal symbols in preparation for war. In Masłowska newest work, the past has lost all its potential to be shared; now it is to be fought over. The only remaining function of collective memory then is not that of a bridge, but a brick that one can throw at another.

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[11] ibid p. 16; 'duży tatuaż z Małym Powstańcem na żylastej ręce'.
[12] ibid; 'na plecach Grunwald, na ręce bitwa pod Grunwaldem'.

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