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DO COMMUNISTIC MEMORIALS WANT TO LIVE FOREVER? MEMORIAL'S PARKS IN COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Annotation. *With the fall of the communist regime, the largest wave of iconoclasm since the French Revolution has begun in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Thousands of statues of communist leaders and heroes were spectacularly destroyed; however, not all of them shared the same fate. Some monuments were directed to specially organized monuments parks and museums. The article examines reasons behind the birth of new institutions after 1989, their functions and methods of displaying communist monuments, and thus, constructing narratives about the past. Problems of memory and the policy of memory implemented thanks to this kind of theme parks, were also discussed.*

Key words: iconoclasm, communism, memory, monuments parks, a policy of memory, monument.

The question asked in the title is a direct reference to W. J. T. Mitchell's book *What do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* [1]. By asking subversively what pictures want from people, the author analyzes every day practice undertaken by man in the world brimful with pictures. At the same time, he wonders whether pictures truly have a great power of seducing and captivating or whether they are absolutely powerless and objectified, and various human actions toward pictures reflect fears and desires of man. Mitchell uses two terms which do not have their equivalents in Polish – *image* and *picture*: „(...) image describes what immaterially circulates in the sphere of perception and appears in its material form only as pictures” [1, c.22]. Taking this into consideration, memorials should be included into the second category. Getting back to the question in the title, it is worth considering whether the memorials created during communism want anything from contemporary recipients or would they like to live eternally even for the price of their own downfall and oppression?

The year 1989 is regarded as a symbolic date of the downfall of communism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Although in the social imagination, the downfall of the totalitarian regime is often brought down to few pictures of the Berlin Wall demolition, but in fact that process lasted much longer. According to D. Gamboni, it is 9th November 1989 that in the countries of former socialist camp, the greatest since the French Revolution wave of iconoclasm symbolically started in Europe [2, c.52]. Spectacular destruction of communistic memorials took on an unprecedented scale. Without these huge blocks, there was nothing left in the space, or at least not much, therefore, people started to talk about “lands empty pedestals”. The number of various actions, of which direct victims were stone monuments, was a reflection of the scale of the commemorating action put into practice after the 2nd World War. Memorials, which for decades had the most representative locations, where the most important galas took place and which were treated as tourist attractions and printed on millions of postcards on the spur of the moment became soiled, broken or taken into unknown places. While for years the monuments were allowed to crave for adoration, respect and attention, the sudden depriving them of all of it in connection with condemnation, demotion and often physical annihilation would not possibly meet their “permission”.

Guardians of these marble representations did not risk taking up a physical fight to protect the bronze heroes, and words of condemnation spoken by them

were disappearing amidst the turmoil of enthusiastic crowds, which were taking part in public executions of these inanimate criminals' copies. The monuments could not protect themselves because, although not dumb, they speak silently. Over the decades they were doing it, among others, through triggering fear in people, the fear that in 1989 was finally overcome.

Nations of Central and Eastern Europe faced a serious dilemma expressed in the sentence screamed by the singer W. Biermann right after the fall of the Berlin Wall: “What to do with the legacy left by tyranny?”. And although the question should have been interpreted widely, within it there was an afterthought on what to do with objects of former glory with thousands of monuments, which were still occupying public squares in places where capitalism was slowly crawling in and democracy was being created.

A new phenomenon, which in a kind response to the above-mentioned dilemmas appeared in the early 1990s was the fact of founding parks of monuments. It should be immediately pointed out that this kind of resolutions was never a common occurrence and in practice only a small part of monuments were preserved in this way. The vast majority of the monuments were destroyed, moved to commentaries or used for building new memorials. The fact that some of the objects were preserved and exposed in a completely different circumstances than primarily, could have had – what I will try to show – more in common with people's desires and fears than with the compelling power of the gigantic sculptures.

Examples of separated theme parks can be nowadays found in Lithuania, Hungary, Bulgaria. Communistic monuments were exposed in Poland as parts of museums. Even Russia took care of its own collection of monuments.

In Poland, the most popular one in this regard is Muzeum Zamoyskich in Kozłówka. In 1994, the Gallery of the Art of Socialist Realism was created as a part of it. In its northern annex, one can find the dismantled Lenin's monument exposed outdoors. It is a complement to a collection of 1600 sculptures, posters and graphics [3].

Dismantled communist monuments and their parts were gathered also in the PRL Museum in Ruda Śląska. The institution began its activities on 4th June 2010. As a part of the museum, the Monuments Park has been organised outdoors, wherein were exposed the bust of General K. Świerczewski, parts of the monuments in honour of those Fallen in Service and Defence of the People's Poland, the sculpture of Polish

and Soviet soldiers. Not many of the monuments were moved to museums with their pedestals, that is why often particular elements of the monumental constructions would stand next to each other directly on the ground or on short stone blocks. The whole space is surrounded by a wall made of red bricks, which is the common background for figures crowded inside its borders [4].

In 1998, in Uniejowice Michał Sabadach organized the only private Museum of the Soviet Army in the country (in time it also became a museum dedicated to the Polish People's Army). A bust of Świerczewski and a three meters high bust of K. Rokossowski, are standing in Sabadach's garden. On 9th May 2000, the anniversary celebrated in the past by the whole Eastern block as the Victory Day, Sabadach along with many invited guests organized a ceremonious re-exposure of the bust of "the marshal of two nations". Every year on the anniversary of former communist holidays, Polish and Soviet veterans come to the museum to recall nostalgically the past, feast and put flowers under the monuments of Rokossowski and Świerczewski [5, c.379-385; 6].

In Lithuania, tens of communist monuments were exposed in Grūtas Park near Druskienniki. The theme park in Dzūkijiski National Park was founded in 1999 by a Lithuanian businessman Viliūmas Malinauskas. On the area of around 20 ha, apart from monumental sculptures placed along a 2 kilometres route, additional tourist attractions were organized. As the whole terrain is surrounded by a moat, a barbed wire and watchtowers and a big train engine with a carriage, recalling of mass exportation of people to Siberia is placed at the entrance to the park, the park is unofficially called the "Lithuanian Gulag". Tens of monuments deprived of their pedestals are crowded at the background of trees and wooden buildings. Malinauskas, who got support of contemporary Lithuanian authorities to organize a monuments park, resigned from exposing many objects given to him and he chose only those, which were in the best technical condition. Even before the official opening of the exhibition in 2001, many politicians and a number of associations protested against the idea, as they did not want to let the museum to be founded as, in their opinion, it was meant to honour the memory of the Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic.

A Monuments Park – Szaborpark functions on the suburbs of Budapest as a part of the so-called Memorial Park. It was organized in 1993, according to a project of a Hungarian architect Ákos Előd. 42 monuments from all over Budapest were erected between 1945 and 1989, including sculptures of Marks, Lenin and famous boots of Stalin, a remnant after the fall of the dictator's monument in 1956, were gathered in the uncovered museum. The sculpture of the Soviet "liberator" with a gun and a flag decorated with a hammer and sickle in the past was a part of a six-meter-high monument built in gratitude to the Red Army on the Gellért Hill in the centre of Budapest. At the beginning of 1990s the monument was transformed into the Monument of Freedom. Only the central figure of a woman was left in the original site, and sculptures of Soviet soldiers were moved into the Park. Communist figures were placed in the pre-determined architectural order and put on pedestals made of red

brick. In the creator's intention, red bricks were meant to refer to communist scenery and to be a metaphorical introduction to the nature of dictatorship. The whole of the park, which was designed for tourist, artistic and educational purpose, was divided into two parts called: "The Sentence about Tyranny" and "The Witness Square" (trapezoidal). From the very beginning the Memorial Park was not conceived as a memorial park of communism but as a memorial park of the fall of communistic dictatorship. Előd stated many times that communistic monuments are part of Hungarian history. He claimed that democracy, unlike dictatorship, which always tries to destroy memory of the past, is the only system which can accept the past seeing its dark sides and include it into a constructive building of the present and the future. The architect emphasized many times that one of the biggest challenges with designing the Park was not to turn objects of communistic propaganda, which, in fact, the dismantled monuments were, into tools of anti-propaganda. It would have been, according to him, nothing more than continuation of dictatorship in mental sphere [9].

In September 2011, the Socialist Art Museum was opened in Sofia at the initiative of national authorities. It consists of a Park of Sculptures, located outdoors, which contains over seventy exhibits. It is the most representative part of the Museum organized within the National Art Gallery framework. All figures are placed on stone pedestals and put along pavement paths. During the opening of the Museum, Bulgarian Minister of Culture said: "It was high time to put that era where it belongs – in a museum" [10].

Interestingly the Monument Park called the Muzeon Park of Arts also functions close to Kremlin. It is under the care of Tretyakov Gallery and Central House of Artists. The park was created at the initiative of local Moscow authorities in 1992. It was divided into several thematic sections, consisting a total number of more than 700 sculptures. Nevertheless, the most important and most famous part of the park was established unofficially already in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was then that communistic monuments were knocked down from their pedestals, dragged to the park and left there. During subsequent years, the overthrown monuments were in the minority and have lost their distinct character because of adding new sculptures and growing flora [11].

There is no doubt that as monuments parks were built in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of totalitarianism, they are on the one hand the product of democratization, often also a free-market economy. On the other hand, they are a testimony of socio-political changes that have occurred in these countries. Very often, the establishment of such institutions can be explained by relating to their functions, including: artistic, tourist, educational one. The latter function is closely linked to political processes and the reconstruction the memory of the past in the present.

Regardless of the entity that initiates and sponsors the establishment of a park, commercial and tourist aspect of such projects is always an important motivation. A private owner of the Monument Park in Lithuania, who has decided to fully finance the investment, loudly spoke at the opening of the facility that he expects around 2.5 million visitors a year. Long

before the official opening, the state authorities of Bulgaria promoted the project of the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia as the largest future tourist attraction of the capital. Globalization and mcdonaldization made the monuments exposures in monuments parks just one of many attractions offered to tourists. Common shops and restaurants are sometimes alternated with more sophisticated ideas, such as for instance a zoo in the Grūtas Park. These additional elements undoubtedly affect the perception of the communist era monuments, and experience and behaviour of visitors. A long-term functioning of this type of institutions confirmed a great interest of tourists from the West in a totalitarian legacy. Perhaps, this is related to the global trend in development of the so-called *dark tourism* [12, c.199].

Undoubtedly, an important justification for organizing theme parks is the educational function they are supposed to fulfil. Exhibits of communist monuments or any other type of socialist realist art, are certainly informative. Giant sculptures can be a warning against the degeneration of totalitarianism and against making socio-political experiments that could lead to the return of undemocratic regimes in the future [3]. Direct contact with monumental sculptures provide new generations a unique experience, associated to recognition of the scale of projects undertaken by totalitarian authorities. Monuments as carriers of historical memory are also tangible evidence confirming the complicated history of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and reminding of the struggle for democracy that many nations had to fight.

The educational and informative function is always associated with the construction of certain narratives about the past in the present. The discourse about the past does not depend solely on the contents of past events, but also on the current and changing contexts. The memory of an individual is not linked solely to personal experiences. It is continuously constructed and transformed by cultural narratives, which are built on the basis of a number of individual and partial memories of many different people. This causes that the memory of the past understood as a product of discourses, becomes a subject of manipulation and control. The fight is usually not about events, but about their interpretation. That is why institutions that have the power to produce and distribute meanings can be extremely dangerous, both in the present and in the future [13, c.14-31]. Different interpretations of the past are usually in conflict with each other. For this reason it is incredibly important who is talking about the past, and, in this case, who makes decisions about creating memory parks and who finances them.

The founding of parks is often accompanied by numerous controversies. It is less dangerous to the national community if museums are founded by private individuals. Such places are not funded with public money, and usually they are not backed-up by the authority of the state. Their owners, through specific arrangements of exposition, construct private narratives of the past that should not be considered either as official or universally applicable by the visitors. The fact that this kind of institutions exist in the public space is a proof of the existence of different communities of memory. This does not mean that there is no manipulation of the memory of the past within the

course of the operation of private institutions. Such places can, for example, support, and even awaken nostalgia for communism. Much louder disputes arise, however, in situations where memory parks are organized at the initiative of the government. It is not only about investing taxpayers' money. Representatives of every government want to achieve certain goals and it would be naive to think that this particular kind of projects is totally selfless. Opponents of the memorial parks often question whether the creation of such institutions is not a "redemption" of the criminal regime, a kind of "perpetuating" the legacy of communism and rewriting of the history. This kind of arguments were introduced, for example, at the opening of the Grūtas Park. Sometimes, an additional justification is the fact that among organizers of such museums are people connected in the past to communist authorities.

Meanwhile, we must not forget that the people directly affected by the totalitarian regime are still alive and also participate in the creation of narratives about the past. For them leaving and exposing memorials of criminals may result not only with recalling painful memories, but also with the fear that one day the statues will come back into favours. Many doubts coexist with the anxiety about what version of the past will be transmitted, and thus, remembered by future generations that never experienced communism. Completely different context, in which objects are viewed in the parks may create a false impression that the terror and fear, which the monuments symbolize, was at best marginal.

A common complaint is the lack of alternative representation of the past. T. Snyder said that we live in the age of memory and not history, and the biggest threat to the cultures of memory is replacing historical inquisitiveness with explanations, which are the easiest to communicate publicly. In the name of commemoration we often tend to ignore facts. Too often we focus on contemporary emotions [14, c 77, 82, 87]. Eleőd stated that creation of this institution was a proof of acceptance of the difficult and complicated history by Hungarians, and an attempt to build the present and the future based on the all past experiences. The statement made by the Bulgarian Minister of Culture, in which he said that the era of communism was finally locked where it should, that is in the museum, had an opposite connotation. Rashidov's statement confirms, however, the inability to deal with the legacy of totalitarianism. This problem concerns not only Bulgaria, but also many nations of Central and Eastern Europe. Many current rulers, often actively fighting the communist system in the past, would like to close past in the museum, and make it arranged, and therefore, fully controlled, operating on the margins of social life exposure.

Pushing and locking the memory of communism in the safe, pop-cultural framework does not seem unconnected to locations chosen for parks of the memory of communism. Museums are located away from the city centres, on the outskirts of cities, and if they are located somewhere closer, it is often difficult to find them.

A separate issue concerns the method of displaying monuments of communism in parks. Monuments are rarely transferred to the parks as a whole. Usually only

sculptures, or selected parts of the gigantic performances – heads, hands or busts are presented. They are set on new pedestals or directly on the ground. They are no longer surrounded by vast squares, flagpoles and buildings of state authorities, but simple walls and rustling trees. Loneliness of large Lenins are slightly softened by smaller communist comrades. Short inscriptions next to the monuments are often limited to the author's name, the title and the date of origin. Descriptions of stories of the monuments and the importance they played for decades are nowhere to be found. Whereas, it is extremely important in the context of a proper understanding of the past. Lack of adequate information, sometimes in connection with further ridiculing or deformation of monuments (Moscow), may create the false impression that these objects have never been honoured or respected. Doubts also arise in relation to the composition of exposures and juxtaposing monuments created in different decades of communism which were originally occupying different spaces. Often, it is not entirely clear on what basis the sculptures' selection was made.

This raises a question of why some communist monuments collapsed with a rumble to the ground at the beginning of the 1990s, while others survived without major detriments, or have even been renovated and exposed afterwards? Can they really crave to continue their existence regardless of being demoted, sometimes ridiculed and certainly "enslaved"? Perhaps the hardness of stone and bronze allows the emotionless existence in any conditions and patient waiting for next, inevitable changes. Or maybe they do not want anything because they are unable to want anything. They only exist; people change and freely dispose monuments' destiny, according to their own interests. Every new generation treats them differently, and thus, through its approach to the representation of the communist era, reveals its own fears and needs. Many of those who have been wronged by a totalitarian regime opposed to moving monuments to parks instead of their demolition or removal, arguing that it does not allow for the real confrontation with the object. In fact, however, the need for the spectacular destruction and deformation of the monuments was not directed against objectified copies of enemies, but against those who were honoured through these copies, against values and ideas they believed in and put into practice, and finally, against those who initiated construction of these places. Representatives of the generation, for which communism is just a history, photograph themselves kissing Stalins' bronze heads. It is not known how much mockery, enchantment and ordinary unconsciousness is in all this.

Conclusions

Д. Чарнецкая

ЖЕЛАЮТ ЛИ КОММУНИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ПАМЯТНИКИ ЖИТЬ ВЕЧНО? МЕМОРИАЛЬНЫЕ КОМПЛЕКСЫ В СРЕДНЕ-ВОСТОЧНОЙ ЕВРОПЕ
Статья исследует причины появления новых институтов после 1989 г., их функции и способы экспонирования памятников коммунизму, тем самым создание повествования о прошедшем. Затронута также тема памяти и политики памяти, осуществляемой благодаря существованию такого рода тематическим комплексам.

Ключевые слова: иконоборчество, коммунизм, память, мемориальный комплекс, политика памяти, памятник.

Д. Чарнецка.

ЧИ ПРАГНУТЬ КОММУНІСТИЧНІ ПАМ'ЯТНИКИ ЖИТИ ВІЧНО? МЕМОРИАЛЬНІ КОМПЛЕКСИ В СЕРЕДНЬО-СХІДНІЙ ЄВРОПІ
У статті досліджуються причини появи нових інститутів після 1989 року, їх функції та способи експонування пам'ятників комунізму, тим самим створення оповідання про минуле. Також розглядається тема пам'яті і політики пам'яті, що здійснюється завдяки існуванню таких меморіальних комплексів.

Ключові слова: іконоборство, комунізм, пам'ять, меморіальний комплекс, політика пам'яті, пам'ятник.

Recent events in Ukraine are the latest evidence that the monuments, regardless of time and place, evoke radically different emotions in people. Monuments parks can be considered as one of many attempts to deal with the legacy of the infamous past. However, while the removal of monuments of criminals from central locations seems reasonable, their storage, moving or transformation will not make much sense in the future without the knowledge and awareness based on historical facts. Monuments parks considered as tourist attractions too often oscillate around emotions and, in fact, instead of a specific knowledge they provide a pleasant experience of the past, which cannot be tailored to the needs of ruling politicians and consumers of the 21st century and closed in a museum.

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