

THE BODY AS A HISTORIOGRAPHIC WRITING TOOL IN ŽEMAT'S VIDEO WORK *IMAGINING THE ABSENCE* (2014)

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In many post-socialist societies, the artist as a historian has seemingly found a new historiographic writing tool: the body. Since the post-socialist transition, the body has increasingly gained significance as an important instrument for shaping contemporary video installations as 'mnemonic topographies'. The video piece *Imagining the Absence* (2014) by the Lithuanian artist group ŽemAt provides a rich example of the mnemonic and historiographic complexity of the 'textual nature' of performing bodies.

KEYWORDS: art of memory/ars memoriae, body, children of post-communism, historiography, Sajūdis.

The video piece *Imagining the Absence* (2014), a performative work by the artist group ŽemAt from Lithuania, deals with the transition period and was shown in Berlin in the autumn of 2014 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall¹. Instead of presenting concrete memories of daily Soviet life and its facets, the members of ŽemAt (Eglė Ambrasaitė, Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė, Noah Brehmer, Eglė Mikalajūnė, Domas Noreika, Aušra Vismantaitė)

rather experienced the years of the transition; they are observers of the shift from Soviet state communism to free market economy and democracy. Since the 2000s, scholars in the humanities and art historians have been talking about the 'return of memory' and 'the historiographic turn in art' as a reaction to the end of the Cold War after 1989/1991 and the amnesiac period of the 1990s.² Facing the growing conflictiveness

1 For information about the activities of ŽemAt (The Žeimiai Technical School of Aesthetic Thought and Anonymity), see: Neringa Černiauskaitė, *(In)Dependent Contemporary Art Histories*, Vilnius: Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists' Association, 2011. The exhibition was called *The Forgotten Pioneer Movement* and took place from 3 October till 29 November 2014 at District Berlin.

2 For a deeper understanding of this observation, see: Viktor Misiano, in: *Ostalgia*, Ed. Massimiliano Gioni et al., New York: New Museum, 2011, p. 74; Ekaterina Degot, in: *ibid.*, p. 52; Mark Godfrey, "The Artist as Historian", in: *October*, Vol. 120, 2007, p. 140–172; Naomi Hennig et al., *Spaceship Yugoslavia. The Suspension of Time*, Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 2011; Ana Bogdanović, 'Generation as a framework for historicizing the socialist experience in contemporary art', in: *The Forgotten Pioneer Movement—Guidebook*, Ed. Ulrike Gerhardt

of the discourse of 'the post-communist condition' and its intrinsic connection to a 'vertical art history' orchestrated by 'Western' art métropoles³, the artist group ŽemAt asks: 'What is the meaning of Perestroika today?'⁴

Glasnost and Perestroika created a new political atmosphere in Lithuania, which later on led to Sąjūdis, a heterogeneous national reform movement which was active from 1988 until the early 1990s, triggering a new societal discourse on previously repressed topics, such as Stalinism, environmentalism, nuclear energy (e.g., a protest against the Ignalina nuclear power plant), education principles and religion. Sąjūdis' goals were the struggle for Lithuanian independence, the restoration of the Lithuanian language as the official language and the rekindling of the national collective identity⁵. In the context of the ongoing neoliberalization

of the state and the rise of nationalism after Lithuania's independence in 1990, ŽemAt has decided to look back and reach out for different memories of the Sąjūdis movement and its legacy in general. In *Imagining the Absence*, a group of teachers in training, several acting students and the artists discuss the impact of the Lithuanian reform movement on the present day together with the theatre director Agnius Jankevičius and the teacher of literature Marius Mikalajūnas.

Displaying the intergenerational dialogue of various participants in group and workshop situations as well as constructing imaginary scenarios, ŽemAt's video work focuses on distinct 'generational units'⁶: the one of Marius Mikalajūnas born in the late 1960s, the one of Agnius Jankevičius born in 1979, and those of the participating students born between the early 1980s and the early 1990s. Throughout the video, these generational representatives gather together to memorize the 'matrix of ideas, emotions and symbols'⁷, which the Sąjūdis movement has left behind in the collective memory of Lithuanians. Thus, Sąjūdis' initial agenda, its goals and ideals are brought to the table, reevaluating the discourse of criticality and change from those days. The main plot of 'Imagining the

et al., Hamburg: Textem, 2014, p. 24–35; Ieva Astahovska et al., *Revisiting Footnotes. Footprints of the Recent Past in the Post-Socialist Region*, Riga: Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2015; Dieter Roelstraete, 'Field Notes', in: *The Way of the Shovel. On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art*, Ed. Dieter Roelstraete, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, p. 14–47; Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder, *Who if not we should at least try to imagine the future of all of this?*, Amsterdam: Artimo, 2004; Edit András, 'The Future is Behind Us: Flashbacks to the Socialist Past', in: *Transitland. Video Art from Central and Eastern Europe. 1989–2009*, Ed. Edit András, Budapest: Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009, p. 209–221; Boris Groys, 'Haunted by Communism', in: *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, Ed. Nikos Kotsopoulos, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010, p. 18–25; Zdenka Badovinac, Tamara Soban, *Prekinjene zgodovine/Interrupted Histories*, Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2006; Svetla Kazalarska, 'Contemporary Art as Ars Memoriae: Curatorial Strategies for Challenging the Post-Communist Condition', in: *Time, Memory, and Cultural Change*, [online], 2009, Vol. 25, [cited 2016-02-28], <http://www.iwm.at/publications/5-junior-visiting-fellows-conferences/vol-xxv/contemporary-art-as-ars-memoriae/>.

3 See: Piotr Piotrowski, 'Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avantgarde', in: *Europa! Europa?*, Ed. Sascha Bru et al., Berlin: Walther de Gruyter, 2009, p. 50.

4 See: 07:14 min. The video work is available online at: <https://vimeo.com/123673636>.

5 See: Rytis Bulota, 'The Impact of Language and Culture on Sąjūdis', in: *Regioninės studijos*, No. 2, 2006, p. 183–192; Algimantas P. Taškūnas, 'Sąjūdis: Born 20 Years Ago', in: *Lithuanian Papers* 22, 2008, p. 19–28.

6 My understanding of the term 'generation' is based on the approach by sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) who recommends not only to rely on a thirty-year interval, but also to detect 'generational units': 'These are characterized by the fact that they do not merely involve a loose participation by a number of individuals in a pattern of events shared by all alike though interpreted by the different individuals differently, but an identity of responses, a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences. Thus within any generation there can exist a number of differentiated, antagonistic generation-units.' Karl Mannheim (1927/28), 'The Problem of Generations', in: *Karl Mannheim. Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, Ed. Paul Kecskementi, London: Routledge, 1972 (1952), p. 306; See also: Ana Bogdanović, *op. cit.*, p. 24–35; Ulrike Gerhardt, Ana Bogdanović, 'New Perspectives on the Socialist Past: Notes on the Potential of Generational Experiences in Dialogue', in: *Art in the Periphery of the Center*, Ed. Christoph Behnke et al., Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015, p. 198–208.

7 Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania Awakening*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990, p. 15.

Absence' is defined by documented discussions about the times of Perestroika and Sājūdis, interrupted by intuitive scenes in which the discussants create surreal and psycho-dramatic situations referring to Sājūdis' historical features and the content of their arguments.

By choosing two significant scenes, I hope to give an insight into the ways the artist group ŽemAt uses the performing body as a historiographic writing tool for the times of transition. Assuming that artists who were mainly socialized after 1989/1991 rediscover the body for reacting to the post-socialist transformation, I would like to mention some other artists, artist groups and collectives from the former 'East' and 'West' besides ŽemAt who share this motif: CORO Collective (Eglė Budvytytė, Goda Budvytytė, Ieva Misevičiūtė) via voguing, Constructivist costumes and architecture, The Bureau of Melodramatic Research (Alina Popa, Irina Gheorghe) via masquerade, exaggeration as well as Romanian, Turkish and American melodramatic movies from the 1940s and 1950s, the films by the platform TkH (Walking Theory) (Ana Vujanović, Marta Popivoda, Bojana Cvejić, Bojan Djordjev, Siniša Ilić, Katarina Popović, Dragana Jovović, Jelena Knežević) through their analysis of socialist collectivism and forms of social drama, Xandra Popescu & Larisa Crunțeanu with the help of appropriating body language and societal trends, Alexandra Pirici via excursions into pop culture, performative embodiments and post-humanism, Sasha Pirogova in her study of events and movements and the architecture of Stalinist communal flats from the 1930s, Katarina Zdjelar with her linguistic experiments, etc. These positions exemplify the 'mnemonic power', which Svetla Kazalarska recognizes in visual artistic and curatorial projects from the 'post-Wall period'⁸, and lead to the question of how the body, the classical art of memory and unprocessed histories like the one of Sājūdis could be thought together.

8 Svetla Kazalarska, [online].

THE ART OF MEMORY

The origins of the art of memory go back to an Ancient Greek legend: the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos (circa 556 to 468 B.C.) visited a banquet given by a nobleman from Thessaly named Scopas. During the banquet, he received a message asking him to step outside where two young men were supposedly waiting for him; while he was looking for them outside, the roof of the hall fell in and killed all the other guests. Simonides was the only survivor and helped the relatives to identify their lost ones through his meticulous memory of the places where the guests had been sitting⁹. The art of memory, the mnemotechnics of places and images (*loci* and *imagines*) was practiced by ancient orators who created a 'mnemonic place system' in which images were localized in 'imaginative memory buildings'¹⁰. Therefore, one can imagine the process of mnemotechnics as a process of a literary *production of space*: on the one hand, we have memorizable *localizations* that are arranged in a certain architectural order, and, on the other, we find memorial *images* that get imaginatively localized at these certain places (which have been memorized earlier). These *localizations* are imaginative, just like the *images of memory*, which can relate to words or things, and can be described as referential models independent of mechanical representation—rather, they are bound to constant movement, repetition and sensation in space¹¹. Therefore, this referential

9 For Cicero (106 to 43 B.C.) in his *De Oratore*, and for Quintilian (circa 35 to 96 A.D.) in his *Institutio Oratoria*, this story proves that orderly arrangement is essential for the practice of memory.

10 Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, New York: Routledge, 1999 (1966), p. 2–3; the philosopher Eva Mayer explains these mnemonic localizations with the help of 'architectural thinking' taking shape from data, circumstances and memorized places, which get arranged analogously to an architectural structure. See: Eva Mayer, *Architexturen*, Basel: Stroemfeld, 1986, p. 75.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 88–89.

model can be characterized as memorative, ongoing, and spatial, as well as marked by differences and asynchronous temporalities.

Assuming that the process of historical writing has a strong relation to burial rites, philosopher Michel de Certeau proclaims that 'writing is a tomb', which lays the past to rest and creates a symbolic, architectural space for it. With the help of writing, the present liberates itself not only from the past, but also from the dead. Therefore, a historiography that establishes 'a tombeau for the dead' is related to a burial ceremony and the honouring of the dead, and thus is inseparable from an architectural place, a narrative, the process of mourning and a ceremonial reading of the prevailing contents of memory¹². If one reads video installations or audio-visual essays as virtual spaces, mnemonic architectures or topographies, one can envision these territories as mnemonic zones in which absent and thus potentially memorisable words, forms and things are stored. Today's art of memory transfers the 'absent' into the discourse through stratifying and shaping the audio-visual topographies of video installations as vivid, imaginary *images of memory* as well as *memory texts* that give indications of present perspectives.

In ŽemAt's video piece, the protagonists' bodies collaboratively write *memory texts* of the liberating times of Perestroika and Sąjūdis, when people in Lithuania started not only to unravel the history of the Soviet Gulag, but also to develop educational concepts for a reformed communist society. In 2008, twenty years after Sąjūdis was born, historian Algimantas P. Taškūnas stated that Sąjūdis as a public association was still active in Lithuania but had lost most of its influence, both nationally and internationally. Whilst the original Sąjūdis should be considered as being over, some activists formulated their need for a second democratic Sąjūdis, according to Taškūnas¹³.

In the case of ŽemAt's work, one cannot speak about an act of *staging memory*, but rather about a 'historiographic operation' or creation of a 'mnemonic topography'. From this perspective, the dusty narrative of Sąjūdis not only gets reintegrated into the structure of the historiographic text of the artwork, but also gives a new role to the displayed bodies. The architecture of the cinematographic space of *Imagining the Absence* includes former witnesses and activists from the times of Sąjūdis, such as the reformist educator and cultural historian Meilė Lukšienė (1913–2009) who formulated the concept of national school based on humanism, democracy and national identity. Lukšienė created the first independent Concept of Lithuanian Education that plays the central role in the 'Ta-Ta-To classroom'¹⁴ and the 'Autonomic virtue'¹⁵ scenes. In *Imagining the Absence*, one encounters Lukšienė's concept of education as well as other educational relics like objects, books, images, rituals, folk songs, manifestos and speeches from those days, and experiences the performers' cryptic, nameless bodies as writing tools of the history of the reform movement. While artists and cultural producers who were socialized during socialism tend to share a strong interest in the routines of everyday socialist life, archival footage and the strategy of reenactment, ŽemAt's collaborative video piece, for instance, constructs a dedicated mnemonic space (*loci memoriae*), a perceptive 'mnemonic topography', which sets the stage for a contemporary exhumation of the 28-year-old Sąjūdis' 'mummy'¹⁶, a symbol of the transition period.

12 Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 99–101.

13 Algimantas P. Taškūnas, *op. cit.*, p. 23–24.

14 04:25–04:41 min.

15 26:58–27:42 min.

16 Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė, a founding member of ŽemAt, calls Sąjūdis 'a dead monument or a mummy that everyone should be a priori thankful to'. Email interview with the author on 24 August 2015.

From the nineteen scenes of *Imagining the Absence*, I have chosen two: ‘What happened with Lithuania?’ and ‘The last pioneer’. They shed light on the aims of Sajūdis and the paradoxes of the post-socialist situation by means of exceptionally conceptualized *loci* and *imagines*. With these two examples, one can learn to understand the body as a historiographic writing tool that shapes the moving images of the video installation and acknowledges the activities of the reform movement.

SCENE I. ‘WHAT HAPPENED WITH LITHUANIA?’

In ‘What happened with Lithuania?’¹⁷, one of the first scenes, the teacher Marius Mikalajūnas speaks about his generation’s fundamental lack of knowledge about Soviet atrocities, a condition inherited from the previous ‘war generation’. Speaking from the position of someone born in the late 1960s, during the prime ministership of Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, Mikalajūnas stresses that it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s, i.e. during Perestroika and Sajūdis, that memories of Siberia and political oppression slowly entered the public debate. He explains:

Returning to Perestroika, there was a lot of idealism, as there were skeletons in the closet. There were a lot of sores. Just imagine: members of the resistance movement and exiles start talking (most people didn’t know what was going on here), coffins come back and everyone’s in horror asking “My God! What happened with Lithuania?” There has already been a generation that didn’t know anything about it. The way my generation was raised was that if you didn’t have relatives in exile, you didn’t know anything about it. For example, my

17 09:23-11:05 min.

grandmother used to say, “People were exiled to Siberia. Hell do I know why it happened.” That was all the information. And now suddenly all the sores opened and people were able to talk.

While Marius Mikalajūnas is talking, one simultaneously sees his conversation partners, the young students and members of ŽemAt, lying in the park motionlessly. Dressed in contemporary clothes, they are lying on the ground, on a stone or on the grass, in a park, a peaceful environment with flowers in their hair. Their staged postures can be described as relaxed, but also disturbingly inactive and quiet. A literal interpretation of this scene could be that the protagonists’ frozen bodies are spread around in the garden because they theatrically act out the semantic content of Mikalajūnas’s spoken words.

In this given scene, Mikalajūnas’s sentences address the core of the Lithuanian trauma: the fundamental speechlessness and lack of knowledge about Soviet atrocities that dominated the societal discourse until the beginning of Perestroika and Sajūdis. One of Sajūdis’ goals was ‘the revelation of the truth about the Stalinist years’, and in February 1989, the group announced that Lithuania was ‘forcibly annexed by the Soviet Union’¹⁸. During the subsequent call for independence, the members of society were able to collect the ‘disordered, severed limbs’ of Stalinism-like Simonides in the founding myth of mnemotechnics¹⁹. The bodies in ‘Imagining the Absence’ seemingly visualize a post-transitional stage, an undefined scenario after a catastrophe, processing the question of ‘What is the meaning of Perestroika today?’²⁰ The bodies’ intactness and the fantastic elements—the contemporary clothes and naive floral wreaths on the women’s heads—fill the mnemonic space. It is no

18 Algimantas P. Taškūnas, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

19 Renate Lachmann, ‘Counter-Memory and Phantasma,’ in: *Arcadia - International Journal for Literary Studies* 39, 2004, p. 294.

20 See: 07:14 min.



1. ŽemAt, *Imagining the Absence*, videostill
(‘What happened with Lithuania?’ scene), 10:24 min.

ŽemAt, *Imagining the Absence*, kadras iš videofilmo
(scena „Kas atsitiko su Lietuva?“), 10:24 min.



2. ŽemAt, *Imagining the Absence*, videostill
(‘What happened with Lithuania?’ scene), 10:41 min.

ŽemAt, *Imagining the Absence*, kadras iš videofilmo
(scena „Kas atsitiko su Lietuva?“), 10:41 min.

coincidence that the motionless bodies are staged in relaxed but nevertheless ambiguous positions, as if they had been killed unexpectedly, or as if they had been falling asleep abruptly. Their physical soundness conveys that they can be understood as resting or sleeping impersonations of a reformed communism.

But why does the body as a creator of *images of memory* have such a prominent role here? The loss of the Perestroikian ideas and the disbelief in a reformed communism has left open ‘sores’, how Mikalajūnas calls the residua of those days. What effect do those legacies have on the body? The ‘memory of the body’ is textual; according to de Certeau, there exists no law that would not be inscribed on the bodies. He writes about the ‘textual nature’ of the body: ‘From birth to mourning after death, law “takes hold of” bodies in order to make them text.’²¹

The text inscribed on the body can be understood through the societal processes of inscription that transform the body into a text; de Certeau claims that there would never be anything bodily which is not written, remade, cultured, or identified. For him, the body is part of a social symbolic code written by

a social system. By visualizing bodies lying around in an anonymous park, ŽemAt introduces several indexes for reading these heterochronous *images of memory*. The dramatic postures of the protagonists’ bodies evoke the associations of hunger, illness, abuse or torture, as well as sleep, loneliness, exhaustion and isolation—this is how the images engage in ‘making the body tell the code’, as de Certeau would call it²². The intactness of the bodies and the flowers in the women’s hair mark the fictional status of these mise-en-scènes; they set these images as symbolic spatializations of the past *and* the present. The scene encompasses several groups: first, the victims of the Gulag and the Stalinist era (Mikalajūnas’s ‘skeletons in the closet’); second, the ‘sleeping’ or narcotized former participants of Sąjūdis; and third, the grown-up children of the post-socialist transition who embrace the utmost passivity as an act of resistance and disappointment. Facing the post-socialist situation today, art historian Harry Weeks and many other theorists suggest examining the complex shift from ‘*Gemeinschaft* (Community)’ to ‘*Gesellschaft* (variously translated as Civil Society/Society)’²³. This difficult shift is the key to the analysis

²² *Ibid.*, p. 147–150.

²³ Harry Weeks, ‘After-War’: Kristina Norman and the Negotiation of Post-Communist Community’, in: *European Consortium*

²¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley / London: University of California Press, 1984, p. 139.



3. ŽemAt, *Imagining the Absence*, videostill ('What happened with Lithuania?' scene), 10:33 min.

ŽemAt, *Imagining the Absence*, kadras iš videofilmo (scena „Kas atsitiko su Lietuva?“), 10:33 min.

of the numb bodies in ŽemAt's video work: a key that lies in the past *and* in the situation of the present. Society has lost its fundamental ground, last but not least, because the utopian and reformist ideas of Sajūdis have left the memory of the people. From today's perspective, the loss of utopianism represents the central experience of the transition—from the relieving period of talking about Mikalajūnas's 'sores' to society's current struggles.

SCENE II. 'THE LAST PIONEER'

In the next chosen example, 'The last pioneer'²⁴, a young woman, dressed like a Soviet pioneer girl, declares: 'Until now everyone was lying, but now the truth will sound...' While uttering this sentence, she moves her eyes insecurely and anxiously from left to right before she starts staring at the ground, her mouth closed grimly. Her speech leaves many open questions: on the constative level, she announces 'the sound of truth' which can be related to the spirit of optimism during Sajūdis and the old pathos of the Soviet times,

for *Political Research*, [online], p. 2, [cited 2016-02-28], <http://ecpr.eu/filestore/paperproposal/5e4cb104-6302-4df9-8007-388817d839f2.pdf>

²⁴ 26:19-26:36 min.



4. ŽemAt, *Imagining the Absence*, videostill ('The last pioneer' scene), 26:32 min.

ŽemAt, *Imagining the Absence*, kadras iš videofilmo (scena „Paskutinė pionierė“), 26:32 min.

whilst on the performative level, she undeniably communicates the opposite: uncertainty and distress. Her remarkable body language with its frantic head and eye movements is that of a visible liar or someone who is forced to lie²⁵. In her performance, the performative and the constative dimensions are falling apart so that the audience oscillates between witnessing her lying or trying to keep her composure because of the not-yet known future. The most striking fact, though, is her age: she is at least ten years older than the appropriate age for a pioneer, which is between ten and fourteen years old. Why does this adult woman wear a pioneer uniform, a masquerade of communist children? Philosopher Boris Buden diagnoses the omnipresence of 'child metaphors' haunting the post-communist discourse: 'Thus, the child metaphors that are so typical of the jargon of the post-communist transition turn out to be a symptom of a new power relationship. They point clearly to a repressive incapacitation or putting

²⁵ Alexei Yurchak claims that during the socialist times one could observe a *performative shift*, which encompassed the fact that the constative dimension of discourses became increasingly unimportant, while the performative reproduction became the basic principle of the authoritative discourse. See: Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever Until It Was No More. The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 26.

under tutelage of the true subject of the “democratic turn” and to its retroactive desubjectivation.²⁶

This means that ‘the last pioneer’ also pronounces that the discursive and political incapacitation was performed during post-socialism. One cannot think about the impotence of ŽemAt’s ‘last pioneer’ without remembering Buden’s conclusion of the pervasive ‘education for stupidity’ and foolishness that characterizes the post-communist discourse²⁷. Against this background, the female performer has the physical appearance of a young woman, but an immature presence and status—because of her obvious, pioneer-related features (a red scarf, a white blouse, pigtails, etc.) and her naïve and decontextualised act of speaking. Embodying ‘the last pioneer’ caught between two systems and two temporalities, the Soviet system and the system of change and transformation (Sąjūdis), ‘she represents the last of her species; all the others have already left’, says art historian Eglė Mikalajūnė, a member of ŽemAt²⁸. Therefore, she represents ‘the last pioneer’, the last figure making an announcement in a reformist tone (‘now the truth will sound...’), visibly struggling to hold on to the old ideologemes of communist propaganda, and feeling the tremor of historical change.

Standing in a room that corresponds to the code of a school classroom with its neutral white walls and a printed portrait of Jonas Basanavičius (1851–1927), a proponent of the former Lithuanian National Revival, in the background, she is surrounded by two life-size white pedestals that she casts a glance at. This spatial and architectural intervention can be read as

an intimidating and revelatory architectural gesture, and as a commentary on her entrapment between infantilization and maturity, between the greens (the reformists) and the reds (the communists) as well as between two opposing systems, on the edge of the past and the not-yet-anticipatable future.

CONCLUSION

In the above-discussed scenes and beyond them, *Imagining the Absence* introduces various situations in which the performing bodies try to gain independence from the politicized body of the community. This can be read as a performative commentary on the underexplored autonomy of the individual in (post-) socialist societies. Philosopher Boyan Manchev states that the people of a communist state build a shaped body whose transcendent spirit is the communist party. He paraphrases that the communist party constitutes the people’s body, whereby the people’s body would merge with the state’s body²⁹. Thus, the actions of the students lying on the grass and the last pioneer acting out her insecurity can be interpreted as restaged calls for a systematic gain of independence from the politicized body of the community, or as an expression of the newly gained but doubtful autonomy of individuals in post-socialist societies. Consequently, each scene displays the challenges and pitfalls of a specific historical determination from the perspective of the performing bodies.

Both scenes, ‘What happened with Lithuania?’ and ‘The last pioneer’, renegotiate the achievements of Sąjūdis, asking whether the collectively desired autonomy of the Lithuanian nation has ended up in a nationalist, Roman Catholic and pagan ‘deep sleep’ at two *loci*: a park-like setting with a lawn, trees, large

26 Boris Buden, ‘Children of Postcommunism,’ in: *Research Platform for Contemporary Dance in the Eastern Belt of the European Union*, [online], 2014, p. 5, [cited 2016-02-28], <http://www.identitymove.eu/assets/pdf/boris%20buden.pdf>.

27 Boris Buden, ‘Children of Postcommunism,’ p. 7; See also: Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*, p. 45–49; Idem, *Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009, p. 48.

28 Interview with Eglė Mikalajūnė on 21 May 2015 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

29 Boyan Manchev, ‘Der totale Körper der Lust. Postkommunistische Gemeinschaft – Repräsentation und Exzess,’ in: *Zurück aus der Zukunft. Osteuropäische Kulturen im Zeitalter des Postkommunismus*, Ed. Boris Groys et al., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005, p. 103.

stones and paths, and a school-like building decorated with white walls and green stripes, typical wooden tables, lecterns and boards, as well as official state insignia like flags. Only the protagonists' unreckonable bodies animate these cinematographic scenarios of a 18th century classicist garden and a nostalgic museum filled with school-related paraphernalia.

To summarise, writing is the basic mnemonic activity, which means that installing a mnemonic trace at a certain place or tombeau is a 'historiographic operation' as outlined by De Certeau. *Imagining the Absence* can be read as a scriptural, 'historiographic operation', a contemporary form of mnemotechnics in visual arts, which locates the 'dead', the 'other', the 'past' and the 'absent'³⁰ in the mnemonic space of the video installation. Most scenes are related to the body: the speaking body, the narcotized body, the lying body, the authoritarian body, the foolish body and the body of a political community. The body can be considered as a 'textual momentum' that helps to create imaginary scenarios and counterfactual experiments on the mnemonic stage of the video screen. In *Imagining the Absence*, former political ideas are compressed into folkloristic, nationalistic and pagan scenarios enabling the excesses of hedonism, naiveté, tragedy and anger. In the scenes 'The last pioneer' and 'What happened with Lithuania?', the protagonists' anxious and frozen body language points to the ultimate unintelligibility of Sajūdis' concrete after-effects. The historical writing as a mnemonic and performative process produces an audio-visual topography, a delineated zone with its own signifiers, unquestionably saturated with sharp discursive references to the post-socialist transition period.

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30 Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. 100.

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INTERVIEWS

- Interview with Eglė Mikalajūnė, member of ŽemAt, on 21 May
2015 in Vilnius, Lithuania.
- Interview with Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė, founding member of ŽemAt,
on 24 August 2015 via email.

KŪNAS KAIP ISTORIOGRAFINIS RAŠYMO ĮRANKIS GRUPĖS „ŽemAt“ VAIZDO KŪRINYJE *IMAGINING THE ABSENCE* (2014)

Ulrike Gerhardt

SANTRAUKA

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: atminties menas / *ars memoriae*,
kūnas, postkomunizmo vaikai, istoriografija, Sąjūdis.

Nuo pat Sovietų Sąjungos griūties ir geležinės uždangos
kritimo menininkai reagavo į transformacijas ir dar
neparašytas postsocializmo istorijas. Atsižvelgdama į
sudėtingą santykį tarp socialistinės patirties ir jos analizės
šiuolaikiniame mene, meno istorikė Svetla Kazalarska
pristato vizualiuosius menus kaip mnemoninį žanrą, su-
sijusį su „atminties teatrais“, kuris leidžia mizanscenomis
projektuoti postsocialistinį perėjimą ir dabartį. Šiame
straipsnyje, fiksuojant mnemonines technikas, naudojamas
lietuvių menininkų grupės „ŽemAt“ iš Žeimių vaizdo
kūrinyje *Imagining the Absence* (2014), yra nagrinėjamas
protagonistų kūnų atvirumas prarastam ir nepažįstamam
praeities dalykų tekstualumui. Per klasikinio atminties
meno ir Michelio de Certeau „istoriografinės operacijos“
sampratos perspektyvą straipsnyje yra analizuojamas kūnas
kaip istoriografinis rašymo įrankis, vaizduotėje perkuriant
Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdį. Remiantis dviem svarbio-
mis videofilmo scenomis, yra aptariama, kaip kūnas rašo
„mnemonines topografijas“.