

Abstract for Ottawa

Ella Chmielewska

Warsaw 'Afterimages and after...': Topographies of wartime destruction and loss

My paper is developed from the works of two figures of Polish avantgarde differently shaped by world wars, postwar conflicts and movements across national borders and languages: Mińsk-born artist/pedagogue/theorist Władysław Strzemiński (1893-1952) and Warsaw-born critic/translator/therapist Mariusz Tchorek (1939-2004). I focus on Strzemiński's series of 'war drawings' (1939-1945) and his posthumously published 1958 *Teoria widzenia* (Theory of Seeing) alongside Tchorek's 1966 Theory of Place and his 1993 essay on 'the body of the artist'. Working with his diasporic experience and memories of formative places, Tchorek opens out a way of considering loss of place and bearing, uprooting and concussive traumas of terror and border crossings as key concerns in Strzemiński's work.

Tchorek's deformed right hand carried his childhood memory of a detonator, one of 'the freshly abandoned ornaments of war' found in the fields near Warsaw. Strzemiński's work and his body held a memory of an injury in the trenches of the WWI Eastern Front – amputations of his left arm and right leg severing his military engineer career. Tchorek places the phantom pain and corporeal torment at the roots of Strzemiński's art, extending the concept of *afterimage*, the critical term in Theory of Seeing, beyond the visual *after-sight* into the bodily *after-sense*.

I consider the phantom pain of Strzemiński's injured left eye – his damaged stereoscopic vision persistently in search of depth – as key to his contour city- and seascapes produced in the 1930s. Reduced to simple pencil lines in 'war drawings', layered tracings and re-tracings render coinciding kinds of seeing: seeing of the observable world, seeing of seeing, and seeing of what is not seen. Taken as an archive, the drawings work as a kind of 'war primer', an amassed glossary of 'memory forms' recording spatiotemporal experiences of deportations, evictions, sights of seeing destruction, devastation, disintegration, desolation. The damaged eye shapes the contour lines of violence against homes and bodies, of concussive *somatosensory* memories of trauma into topographies of spatiotemporal experience of (war) injury and loss. Taken as a singular memory form, a drawing from the 1941 series *Wojna Domom* (War Against Homes), becomes an instrument of surveying Warsaw's topography of wartime damage and loss. Placed alongside the layered spatiotemporal mapping of Jan Gert Kocken's *Depictions of Warsaw 1939-1945*, it probes this complex cartographic archive for gaps, blind spots, places of absence, of seeing of what is not seen in the city that saw war and still retains the trauma of that seeing.

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place memory, wartime, spatiotemporal experience, 'memory forms', topography of loss.

Dr Ella Chmielewska is a Polish-Canadian scholar of visual culture and cultural theory. She teaches at the Edinburgh School of Architecture & Landscape Architecture (ESALA) at The Edinburgh University. She has published widely on urban iconosphere, semiotic landscapes, graffiti, photography, and urban commemorative practices. She is an alumna of McGill University and a recipient of scholarships from Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Fonds de recherche du Québec and the European Research Council. She held research fellowships at SUNY Stony Brook Philosophy Department, at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), Montréal and the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, Marburg. Her publications included 'Warsaw Afterimages: Of Walls and Memories' in Andrea Mubi Brighenti & Mattias Kärrholm, *Urban Walls: Political and Cultural Meanings of Vertical Structures and Surfaces* (London: Routledge, 2019) and 'Vectors of Looking: Reflections on the Luftwaffe's Aerial Survey of Warsaw, 1944' in Mark Dorrian & Frédéric Pousin, *Seeing from Above: The Aerial View in Visual Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013). She is currently working on study of Polish avantgarde and war, 'A body who sees: Władysław Strzemiński's 1958 *Teoria widzenia* (Theory of Seeing) as Rendering of (War) Loss.' 195