

INTRODUCTION

This special issue of “Studia Rossica Posnaniensia” concentrates on urban experiences of conflict and pinpoints the role of Eastern European cities as sites of power and powerlessness, as spaces where pain is inflicted, contemplated, embodied, expressed or (re)negotiated. The authors situate their analyses in a variety of geographical and temporal contexts and use a range of methodologies, seeking connections between different disciplines, such as literary studies, film studies, linguistics, gender studies, urban studies, memory studies, anthropology, and urban psychology, to name just a few. The issue also offers perspectives on the city space as a battlefield for one’s dignity, rights and identity; it explores the link between the aesthetic and the political, thereby inevitably referring us to Susan Sontag and Nicole Stéphane’s powerful documentary *Waiting for Godot... in Sarajevo* (*En attendant Godot... à Sarajevo*, 1993, France), filmed in the Bosnian capital during the prolonged siege that the city endured between 5 April 1992 and 29 February 1996. Today the film brings to mind the narratives of urbicide and genocide that we are witnessing in Ukrainian cities, and makes us reflect on the new language of conflict present in the visual images and metaphors of contemporary documentary and feature films created by Ukrainian women directors, such as Maryna Er Gorbach, Alina Gorlova, Kateryna Gornostai, Masha Kondakova, Alisa Kovalenko, Iryna Tsilyk and Natalya Vorozhbyt, among others. Many of their films portray people, civilians and soldiers, and especially women, living and fighting in the towns and villages on the frontlines in the Donetsk region of Eastern Ukraine.

Donetsk is a focal point of interest for two of the authors whose work is included in this issue. Anna Antonova’s article analyses Daisy Gibbons’s 2021 translation of Tamara Duda’s novel *Daughter* (*Dotsya*, 2019), a fictionalized retelling of Russia’s 2014 occupation of Donetsk, examining the techniques employed and the choices made by the translator in order to reconstruct the complex interplay of Eastern and Western Ukrainian identities and to convey the internal tensions – fueled by Russian propaganda – that exist in the fragmented city, which is unequivocally presented as a victim of urbicide. Eleonora Shestakova examines

the history of the different names by which this industrial city has been known, demonstrating that they reflect the transformations of imperial politics: Yuzovka – Stalino – Donetsk. In her informative study, the author traces the relationship between Donetsk’s metatext and the city’s changing character, imposed by Soviet ideology.

The focus on Ukrainian culture continues in Kristina Vorontsova’s article, which provides an analysis of Boris Khersonsky’s book of poetry *Family archive* (*Semejnyj arhiv*, 2006). The work of this acclaimed Russian-speaking Ukrainian poet from Odesa tells the tragic history of the 20th century through the author’s family history. Vorontsova examines Khersonsky’s representation of the historical and geographical region of Galicia, associated with Eastern European Jewish heritage and the tragedy of the Holocaust, placing a special accent on Polish cities and towns, prompting the reader to reconstruct the image of Poland with all the connotations and cultural myths evoked by multicultural experience. Emily Julia Roche also considers Jewish experience, presenting the history of Jewish-Polish architects from 1937 to 1945 to demonstrate how architectural networks reacted to the onset of the German occupation in 1939, the changing conditions of the Second World War, and genocide. Drawing on archival documents, the article shows that interpersonal relationships and wartime networks were of great consequence in determining the wartime fates of Jewish architects and in shaping the post-1945 structure of the architectural profession.

The year 1945 is one of the timeframes of the novel which constitutes the focus of attention in Svetlana Pavlenko’s article, namely *Shadows of the Teutons* (*Teni tevtonov*, 2021), by the contemporary Russian writer Aleksei Ivanov. Pavlenko examines the means used to create the urban spaces depicted in the novel and their transformation as a result of armed conflicts, focusing on the urban landscapes of Baltiysk (Pillau) and Malbork (Marienburg). Her analysis explores somatopoetics and thanatopoetics, the auditory and olfactory dimensions of everyday wartime experiences, memoryscapes, Teutonic castles and underground settings.

The significance of memoryscape is also discussed in the articles by Kiun Hwang and Daria Khrushcheva, who both explore the role of memorial plaques in shaping collective memory and historical narratives in Russian cities. Highlighting how these plaques create a sense of historicity, Hwang outlines the controversies surrounding the selection of individuals to be remembered and the aesthetic concerns associated with their design, linking the project with the phenomenon of resistance and the contested nature of public space. Khrushcheva’s analysis interprets the plaques as an attempt to change the perception of certain historical events and an important communicative strategy for different groups of Russian society, enabling the boycotting of imposed narratives of historical and political events. The politics of memory also concerns Anya Free, whose article provides

insight into the role of museums in the Soviet cities of Moscow, Kyiv and Minsk as important propaganda tools during the Second World War. Her article focuses on two types of war-themed projects: trophy exhibitions and the exhibitions and museums that focused on building the historical narratives of the war. She also examines regional differences in the narration of the war, which can be observed in the representation of the Holocaust in the museums of Kyiv and Minsk, as well as the local histories of particular museums after the end of the war.

Three authors – Anna Troitskaya, Jolanta Brzykcy and Andrzej Polak – focus on the problem of representations of St. Petersburg. Troitskaya adopts the methodology of New Local History, in which contemporary urban space is explored with the aim of rediscovering the historical potential of the city. She analyses new approaches to understanding urban space and new memory practices, offering alternative interpretations of the past. Brzykcy offers a reading of Vladislav Khodasevich's poem *Petersburg (Peterburg, 1925)*, examining the image of the city from several perspectives: cultural, biographical, intertextual and metatextual. Polak, in turn, analyses Andrei Bely's novel *Petersburg (Peterburg, 1913)* through the lens of post-colonial theory. He perceives in the text the clash of two hostile narratives – eastern and western – which he suggests is the result of an impulse towards self-colonization, or internal colonization.

Two articles – those by Audinga Peluritytė-Tikuišienė and Walentyna Krupowies – focus on the image of Vilnius in Lithuanian prose. Peluritytė-Tikuišienė chooses texts by two modern writers, Antanas Ramonas (1947–1993) and Ričardas Gavelis (1950–2002), to show how they create contrasting pictures of the same mythical city – divine and demonic, hopeful and hopeless. They serve as a model of the dominant viewpoints on the world, history and the human being as expressed in modern Lithuanian literature. Krupowies examines four novels by three different authors, published between 1989 and 2011: *A Lithuanian in Vilnius (Lietuvis Vilniuje)* by Herkus Kunčius, *Vilnius poker (Vilniaus Pokeris)* by Ričardas Gavelis, and *The park of forgotten Jews (Park zabytykh evreev)* and *Dream about the vanished Jerusalem (Son ob ischeznuvshem Ierusalime)*, both by Grigory Kanovich, a Lithuanian-Jewish author who writes in Russian. Krupowies demonstrates that in all these works the dominant image of Vilnius depicts the city as a conglomeration of multiple cultural traditions.

Anna Seidel's article turns our attention to literary works by women authors, examining the staging and coding of femininity in texts focused on cities during wartime by Lidiya Ginzburg, Anna Świrszczyńska, Zlata Filipović and Yevgenia Belorusets. Drawing on Judith Butler's reading of Luce Irigaray and Henri Lefebvre's *The production of space*, Seidel argues that these women-authored texts challenge conventional war narratives, demonstrating how they stage their female authorship as an appeal against phallogocentric linguistic, spatial and narrative

structures and articulate the precarity of the feminine within the cities during war. Estera Głuszko-Boczoń identifies the experience of the city, depicted as a space of threat, violence, repression and death, as one of the recurring motifs in Herta Müller's work. Discussing selected works by the Nobel Prize laureate, in which the aesthetics of ugliness acquires an important meaning, the author proves that the cities are models of all cities under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu; places of depravity and terror, they became the embodiment of the experience of the whole community of 'the Strangers' in Romania. The closing article, by Claudia Fiorito, offers a comparative analysis of the representation of the relationship between the inhabitants of the city of Pryp'iat'/Pripyat and their homeland in television series and films made in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia between the early 1990s and 2021, as well as in the Anglo-American television series *Chernobyl* (HBO, Sky Atlantic 2019). Themes considered include the development of romantic narratives within the contaminated zone, which often bring the protagonists into conflict with the authorities, the visual representation of radiation, and the depiction of the local institutions' response to the disaster.

We hope that the broad range of fascinating topics explored in this special issue will prove intellectually stimulating and that it will serve as inspiration for future studies on Eastern European urban narratives of conflict.

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