Popular Literature, the City and the Memory of Vanished Others in Poland and Ukraine: The Cases of Marek Krajewski and Iurii Vynnychuk

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A comparative analysis is made of the evocation of urban memory in the work of the Polish author of detective fiction Marek Krajewski and the leading Ukrainian writer of postmodernist fiction and popular historical publications Iurii Vynnychuk. The cities that form the focus of the work of these writers, Wroclaw for Krajewski and L’viv for Vynnychuk, both experienced massive population shifts after World War II, meaning that the post-war populations had little or no memory of the pre-war cities. The legacy of this disjunction can be felt to this day. This study demonstrates how both writers re-create a sense of memory through a number of similar memory strategies and concludes that the recreation of memory in these writers’ work can be understood as what Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory, yet that this is postmemory removed from the traumatic context of Hirsch’s original concept. It is also argued that these writers demonstrate that an effective ‘cultural memory’ can be produced in a situation when ‘communicative memory’ is lacking, through an imaginative and accessible representation of the ostensibly inaccessible past. This is achieved through the utilization of mass cultural forms, which some theorists of urban memory see as conducive only to forgetting.

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To say that memory and place, and in particular memory and the city, are closely linked is to say nothing new. Freud for one flirts with the comparison of the individual memory to the archaeological layers of Rome; though he remains unconvinced that the analogy works completely, his idea nevertheless raises the questions of the persistence of the past in both the urban fabric and the individual psyche, and is often cited by theorists of the city and memory.1 Walter Benjamin’s interweaving of urban
space and memory, and his reflections on how walking the city streets can produce vivid encounters with the past, are also influential.\(^2\) While these latter two authors examine the relationship between individual memory and the city, others see a powerful connection between the city and cultural memory. Pierre Nora’s idea of the *lieux de mémoire* looms in every discussion of cultural memory, and is most often associated with architectural memorial sites, though its original scope is far wider. Some contemporary scholars of the city and memory, such as Paul Connerton and Svetlana Boym, refer back to a tradition that predates all of these, to the classical art of memory that was based on topography. As Connerton states: ‘that memory is dependent on topography is an ancient insight’.\(^3\) Contemporary theorists of architecture and town planning are also attuned to this relationship, as exemplified by M. Christine Boyer’s influential *The City of Collective Memory*, which sees contemporary societies’ relationship with their pasts as inherently linked to their urban spaces.\(^4\)

The city’s propensity to facilitate memory is, however, accompanied by an opposing anxiety over forgetting. Modernity, according to Paul Connerton, ‘has a particular problem with forgetting’,\(^5\) and this problem is caused in part by the nature of the modern city: by its speed and size, consumerism, the transitory nature of its built environment and its inimicality to the pedestrian.\(^6\) This results in the cult of memorialization and proliferation of monuments that is manifested in that same city space.\(^7\) For Boyer, the processes of imposing memory on the city produce confusion, an unintegrated chaos of competing memories that has more to do with political contingency and consumerist pleasure than with a meaningful mnemonic connection to place.\(^8\)

The presence of multiple memory narratives in the city space that Boyer identifies is often examined by urban scholars using the concept of the palimpsest — the city as a network of overlapping texts. According to Andreas Huyssen, the urban space works in many ways like a literary text, and the memories it embodies and elides can be read in the same multi-layered, intertextual way.\(^9\) Michael Sheringham takes this idea further, comparing the city not only to a multilayered text but to an entire archive, emphasizing the ‘interplay of a variety of archival strata including networks of literary and cultural allusion’.\(^10\) In other words, texts about the city are an inherent part of city palimpsests, of the urban memory-archive.

Urban texts, of course, vary widely, and are represented in both ‘high’ and ‘low’ genres. Without doubt, some of the most insightful and important writing on cities has come in the form of poetry and artistic prose. However, in order to describe the actual interrelations between people and cities, and the mnemonic dynamics involved in these interrelations, it is perhaps more instructive to examine authors who are widely read by the inhabitants of the cities they describe. The very fact of an author’s popularity, while not immediately indicative of originality or great art, undeniably points to the fact that she or he is answering a need among her or his readers. The role of popular, mass culture in urban memory dynamics, however, is an ambiguous one: Connerton and Boyer, for example, see the transformation of memory into a product for consumption as negative and conducive to forgetting.

Both of the writers discussed in this paper, Marek Krajewski and Iurii Vynnychuk, express their fascination with their cities’ pasts through popular literary genres, the former in detective fiction, the latter in popular historical publications. Both enjoy
considerable success in their home cities. The commodification of the past found in the works of Krajewski and Vynnychuk — which, while they represent valuable works of literature in their own right, are clearly meant to sell — does not, I would argue, imply cynicism towards or disregard for the relationship between city and memory; in fact, both writers use popular idioms to provide a route by which their audiences can access and imagine the complex and difficult memories inscribed in their cities.

Iurii Vynnychuk and Marek Krajewski come from different generations and work in different genres. Vynnychuk was born in 1952, and is known as a writer of fiction, a journalist, blogger, translator, publisher and one-time cabaret performer. One thing that unites all of his activities is its highly local nature: whether in theatre, prose or journalism, Vynnychuk is preoccupied with the region of Galicia and its capital, L’viv. His varied output means that as a writer he is difficult to pin down: he is the author of experimental, postmodern prose, such as his epic, magical realist satire of L’viv’s history, *Mal’va Landa* (2003), and has been translated into several foreign languages, yet he is best known at home for his popular publications on local history and culture, such as *Taiemnytsi l’vis’koi kavy* (The Secrets of L’viv Coffee, 2001), *Knaipy L’vova* (The Bars of L’viv, 2000) and *Lehendy L’vova* (Legends of L’viv, 1999/2003). He has also edited a series of pocket-sized books, ‘Iurii Vynnychuk presents’, in which he revives lost classics of popular L’viv and Galician literature from the early 20th century, with an emphasis on ghost stories and detective fiction. The success of Vynnychuk’s popular historical publications owes much to a growing appetite for nostalgic kitsch among L’viv’s present day inhabitants and visitors to the city, as evidence not only in popular historical publications, but in historical festivals, a plethora of nostalgically themed cafes, historical guided tours and so on.

A similar phenomenon can be found in Wrocław, for whose inhabitants the pre-war German past of their city has evolved from being a strict taboo in the communist era, to the object of nostalgic fascination and a feature of local identity. Marek Krajewski, born a generation after Vynnychuk, in 1966, enthusiastically addresses this growing interest. Krajewski’s series of retro detective novels set in pre-war Breslau has made him one of Poland’s most popular authors. He is more unambiguously a writer of popular literature than Vynnychuk: his literary output is limited to detective fiction, and his popularity and status in Poland are comparable to those of celebrity writers of detective fiction such as Stieg Larsson, Henning Mankell or Ian Rankin. Krajewski has written 6 novels in the Breslau series, though more recent work has in fact turned to pre-war L’viv, Polish Lwów. Some of his work also has a more contemporary setting.

The contrast between the two writers is clear: Vynnychuk is a central figure in contemporary Ukrainian literature and culture whose activities span the late Soviet and post-independence periods; Krajewski is a respected crime writer, and very much a product of post-communist (consumerist) Poland. Vynnychuk’s prose is fairly widely read, but remains rather the territory of the western Ukrainian intelligentsia, and while his popular publications are successful in his native region, they do not compare with the massive commercial success that Krajewski enjoys in Poland, and indeed beyond. The respective statuses of the two writers also speak of a deeper difference in the literary genres in which they operate. Vynnychuk’s output is varied, crossing back and forth between ‘high’ and ‘low’ genres, and his use of the genre that
is the focus of this article — that of collections of historical anecdotes couched in attractive, illustrated publications — is to a certain degree a self-consciously ironic gesture. By contrast, Krajewski tends to play straight with his chosen genre.

So why compare writers dealing in such different genres? Popular history texts and detective fiction are very different in terms of their structure, conventions, and, it is probably safe to say, audiences. In the cases in point, however, these differences are less important. True, each author clearly strives to produce texts that would closely conform to and make the best use of the conventions of his chosen genre. Yet more important for the authors are the operations their texts perform on the cultural memory of the inhabitants of their cities. In both cases, the popularity of the texts depends less on their generic specificities as it does on their spatiotemporal localization. Thus Krajewski’s popularity is only in part due to his skill as a detective writer, and is arguably more dependent on the appetite among contemporary Poles for stories about the past of the places they inhabit. Testimony to this is the far greater success of Krajewski’s historical detective novels than of his works set in the present: when the crucial element of Breslau is removed, his work falls back into the rank and file of detective fiction. Vynnychuk’s case is similar, since it is not simply the fact of choosing the genre of popular historical literature that has made him popular, but the highly local nature of his works, hence the fact that their popularity is relatively confined to his native city and region. Thus, from the point of view of reception, the two writers’ works fulfill a very similar function: Krajewski and Vynnychuk both use accessible, popular genres in order to facilitate the sense of mnemonic attachment to place that their readers demand.

It is interesting to note here that Krajewski’s depictions of Breslau are more universally popular in Poland than Vynnychuk’s depictions of L’viv are in Ukraine. The reasons for this are probably a more advanced and unified book market in Poland and the predominance of Russian language popular literature in most parts of Ukraine and subsequent lack of access or exposure to Ukrainian language products. While some may argue that Ukraine’s supposed (and largely politically manufactured) east-west split means that those in the east, south or even centre do not identify with L’viv nostalgia, I think the example of Krajewski demonstrates that it is perfectly possible for readers with no connection to a place to be willing to consume nostalgic products connected to that place. This is only confirmed by the popularity of L’viv’s nostalgic cafes among tourists from Kyiv or other parts of Ukraine (to say nothing of Russia).

Despite their differences in genre, style, and in their respective places in their national literatures, the two writers have much in common, and there is much to compare between them. It is perhaps no coincidence that on the last page of Krajewski’s recent L’viv novel, Głowa Minotaura (Head of the Minotaur, 2009), one of those among the list of acknowledgements is one Iurii Vynnychuk, one of several ‘friendly L’vivians who are fascinated by their city’s history’.\(^{14}\) Krajewski and Vynnychuk are indeed united by their personal fascination for their cities, but also, crucially, by the relationship between the cultures they represent and the cities they inhabit: in both cases, the cities only began to completely ‘belong’ to those cultures after World War II.

While Ukrainians have a connection to L’viv that stretches back to the 13th century, the city only really became completely Ukrainian after it was incorporated into
the new Soviet Ukrainian Republic after the Second World War, as Ukrainians from
the surrounding region and other parts of Ukraine replaced the Poles and Jews who
had been either deported after the war or murdered during it. Ukrainians made up
around a fifth of the city’s population in the inter-war period, while after the war
they constituted ninety per cent. This relative mono-ethnicity was something new for
the city. During the Habsburg and Polish eras, L’viv was multi-ethnic, and its urban
palimpsest is still today one that is written by many hands, in many languages: by
Ukrainians, Poles, Austrians, Jews, as well as by Armenians and other smaller
minorities. Its post-war layer, meanwhile, was shaped by the Soviet influence. The
Ukrainian contribution is significant, but it is only one strand from many memories
contained in the city’s urban fabric. Only a relatively small proportion of L’viv’s
current inhabitants would be able to trace personal or family memories back beyond
generation or two in the city itself. L’viv thus provides a challenge to its contem-
porary Ukrainian inhabitants. It is this challenge that preoccupies Iurii Vynnychuk.

The situation with Wrocław is similar, although again, not entirely analogous.
While Poland lost Lwów and its eastern borderlands, it gained new territory to the
west, which included the German city of Breslau. Breslau became Wrocław, and, like
L’viv, underwent a massive population shift. It went from being almost entirely
German to almost entirely Polish within the space of a few years following the end
of the war. Unlike in the case of L’viv’s Ukrainians, there was no significant Polish
presence in the city before the war, although, as with L’viv’s Ukrainians, Poles could
lay a claim to the city’s more ancient history: from the tenth to the thirteenth centu-
ries it was part of the Kingdom of Poland. The city that the new Polish population
inherited was overwhelmingly the product of German culture. As was the case in
many other former German cities and towns, the new Polish population had to deal
with an urban legacy that did not belong to their own archive of cultural memory.
A significant number of the post war inhabitants of Wrocław came in fact from
Poland’s lost eastern territories, and some, including much of the city’s new intel-
lectual elite, from Lwów itself. There was little to draw on in the existing cityscape
that would anchor a sense of identity for Poles, and the new inhabitants (and
authorities) set about inscribing Polish memories into the cityscape by installing their
own monuments, some transported wholesale from Lwów, such as the Panorama
Raclawicka, commemorating Kościuszko’s famous victory over the Russians in 1794,
or the monument to the writer Aleksander Fredro. Recent times, however, have
seen a growing interest in the German past. It is in this context that Krajewski’s
meticulously researched novels about Breslau have found such resonance.

Thus, the important similarity between Vynnychuk and Krajewski lies in the fact
that they both represent the literature of a community that resides in a city that is not
entirely its own, because its past is dominated by absent others. Both are faced with
an urban archive that is written largely in foreign languages. Sheringham states that
‘the archive, despite its plenitude and profusion, invokes what is missing rather than
what is present’. Sheringham has in mind the past city that has vanished, its frag-
mented traces indicating the lack of its whole. For Krajewski and Vynnychuk this
statement becomes more urgent, since the ‘missing’ is not just the material city of the
past, but entire peoples, and entire cultures, forcibly and violently erased from the
cityscape. The basic strategy through which Krajewski and Vynnychuk approach
their cities is the same: both attempt to instill a sense of cultural memory of the pre-war cities in a reading public that, to a large extent, does not possess such a memory. They do this through a number of similar tactics.

The first common tactic is the deployment of topographical exactness. This is most pronounced in Krajewski. His first novel, *Śmierć w Breslau* (Death in Breslau, 1999), features a footnote each time a street, building or other topographical feature is mentioned, with its present-day, Polish equivalent indicated. In later novels this is replaced by a glossary. Footnotes and glossaries might, we may imagine, be a nuisance to the reader, and we might expect the author to keep them to a minimum: for Krajewski’s purposes, however, they are in fact important tools in the construction of the desired memory effect. He ensures to inform the reader at every opportunity where the action is taking place, and what routes the protagonists take through the city, such as in the following passage from *Death in Breslau*:

Travelling via Agnesstrasse(1), they arrived at the Police Headquarters, where they picked up Ehlerz and Smolorz. Mock and Anwaldt turned into Schweidnitzer Strasse, and then onto Zwinger Platz,(2) and after passing the coffee factory and the Merchants Union came out onto the busy Schuhbrücke.(3) They passed by the Petersdorff(4) and Barasch Brothers’(5) department stores, the latter crowned by its glass globe, and then the Paleontology Museum and the old Police HQ. They arrived at the Odra by St Matthew’s Gymnasium then turned right and found themselves on Cathedral Island. They passed by the medieval cathedral and the red building of the Georgianum College, and found themselves on Adalbertstrasse.(6) A moment later they were met by the bowing waiter of the restaurant ‘Lessing’s’.

1. Łękowa.
2. Plac Teatralny.
3. Sadowska.
4. ‘Kameleon’ Department Store.
5. ‘Feniks’ Department Store.
6. Wyszyńskiweg.16

The use of footnotes and glossaries indicates, first of all, that Krajewski’s intended audience is one that knows the city, so will be able to — in fact, will feel compelled to — cross reference the locations. The novels thus serve as an exercise in the classical art of memory through reference to topography: Krajewski’s readers associate the German place-names with their Polish equivalents, thus associating the ‘ideas’ of German Breslau with the topographical loci of contemporary Wrocław. Through this the contemporary Polish reader commits the German city to memory.

Vynnychuk follows a similar tactic. His publications on L’viv cafes and bars function by mapping particular locations throughout the city. Some of these cafes still exist, but if they do not it is possible to locate them with the help of Vynnychuk’s descriptions:

The famous Monopol café was housed in a building belonging to Prince Poniatowski (8 Marii’ska Square) from 1902 to 1912, in place of which the Sprecher tenement was later built, and which is today the House of Books.18

The cafes and bars are not just located: Vynnychuk is careful to attach vivid memories to them. These may take the form of stories about famous people, or of some
strange or comic anecdote associated with the place. In *The Secrets of L'viv Coffee*, for example, Vynnychuk quotes secondary literature at length to give details of exactly which Ukrainian writers of the early 20th century frequented which café, and what their impressions of the places were. A similar approach can be seen in *Legends of L'viv* where each short ‘legend’ is given a precise location, such as in these opening lines:

Once a couple of musicians were walking along Zamarstynivs’ka Street when they were overtaken by several richly decorated carriages.

In the year 1751, at Kastelivka, which got its name from the architect Antonio Castelli, a strange thing happened.

In the 19th century in the Stryiskyi Park there was an old abandoned cemetery.

Just as in Krajewski, the narratives set in the past are precisely topographically marked in present-day places familiar to the intended reader, thus allowing that reader access to place-based memories that may be unavailable to them through the communicative memory of community or family.

The second similarity between the two writers is the reliance on the sensory nature of place. Paul Connerton emphasizes the role of the senses in fostering a connection with place that is grounded in memory, stating that ‘[a] sense of place depends upon a complex interplay of visual, auditory and olfactory memories’. The depravation of the senses that is, for Connerton, evident in certain 19th-century spatial practices, contributes to the modern crisis of forgetting. Both Krajewski and Vynnychuk perform a sensory reconstruction of their respective cities in order to vividly and convincingly instill their cities with memory.

In Krajewski’s novels smell and taste play a significant role in evoking the period in question: scenes of (often excessive) eating and drinking are frequent, featuring specifically named local dishes or specific brands of alcoholic drinks or cigarettes. These details allow the reader to enter into the memory of the city by tasting and smelling it. In turn, Vynnychuk’s *Secrets of L’viv Coffee* is built around the evocation of the taste of the coffee served in L’viv’s legendary coffee houses, or even of coffee manufactured in L’viv itself. The book features recipes for coffee from L’viv and various other towns in Galicia, which inspire the reader to experiment and experience the genuine taste of those vanished places. *The Pubs of L’viv* starts with a bold statement defining the city by its alcoholic drinks:

‘L’viv likes to drink, knows how to drink and has plenty to drink’, L’vivians used to say with pride. For our city was famous for the best beer in Poland from the brewery on Kleparivs’ka Street, for Baczewski’s luxurious vodka, and for its pubs — a highly idiosyncratic phenomenon and, in the opinion of those around at the time, unequalled in the world.

Taste and smell are accompanied by an attention to visual aids in both authors. Images are a central part of Vynnychuk’s popular publications, and take the form of old postcards, illustrations, advertisements and newspaper clippings, many of which are in Polish or German, as well as new photographs specifically posed to appear old. Krajewski’s novels, meanwhile, do not include images in the body of the text, but each one features a grainy black and white shot of old Breslau on the cover. While
these may not be specifically chosen by the author, their use coheres with his attitude to his city’s past: in an interview Krajewski stated that he was inspired to start writing about the German city because he ‘wanted to step into an old photograph’ of Breslau.\textsuperscript{25} The descriptions of the city in Krajewski’s work are not only precise in their topography, but also in their evocation of the appearance of buildings, of the city’s inhabitants (he pays particular attention to accurate reconstructions of period dress) and other details of the urban landscape. These descriptions thus function very much like actual snapshots of Breslau’s streets.

In a similar way, sound is also important to both writers. Both reinforce their portraits of past cities through reference to street sounds and music. A central motif in Krajewski’s \textit{Widma w mieście Breslau} (Phantoms in Breslau, 2005), for example, is the sound of the hurdy-gurdy, and an invented urban-folk song with the detective as its hero.\textsuperscript{26} Krajewski is also fond of having characters whistle or hum tunes from obscure operettas that would have been popular at the time. Vynnychuk’s \textit{Secrets of L’viv Coffee} opens with the lyrics of a song about L’viv coffee, sung in retro-style by popular local singer Viktor Morozov, but with lyrics by Vynnychuk himself, which would appeal immediately to the L’viv reader who will, in all likelihood, know the song. Songs of L’viv’s urban folklore also appear in \textit{Legends of L’viv}, where Vynnychuk reproduces songs popular with the loveable rogues of both Ukrainian and Polish L’viv legend, the ‘batiary’.\textsuperscript{27}

Finally, the cities in each author’s work are very tactile. Both Krajewski’s and Vynnychuk’s characters are engaged in a very physical relationship with their city, which often manifests itself through their participation in urban sexuality: in Krajewski’s novels prostitutes are a constant feature, while Vynnychuk’s \textit{Divy noči} (1992), set in the L’viv underworld of the late Soviet period, also revolves around a group of prostitutes. The erotic is muted in his popular history publications, though even here it appears, such as in the descriptions of which cafes were frequented by prostitutes in \textit{Secrets of L’viv Coffee}.\textsuperscript{28} Urban tactility is far more direct in Krajewski: physical contact with the city, its buildings and pavements is common, particularly in the frequent scenes of violence. Indeed, the main character, detective Mock, is frequently injured by broken glass, burning buildings and other such hazards. In \textit{Festung Breslau} (Fortress Breslau, 2006), set during the final days of the siege of Breslau near the end of the Second World War, Krajewski repeatedly emphasizes the dust and dirt of the crumbling city that constantly coats his detective’s elegant suits. This alarming tactility evokes both a reconstruction of memory for Krajewski’s readers and a sense of the traumatic destruction of the city, together with the community that inhabited it.

Both Vynnychuk and Krajewski thus invest their cities with memory through an intensive literary ‘inhabiting’ of urban space, through guiding their readers around its topography, and engulfing them in its sensory reconstruction. These tactics echo Paul Connerton’s idea that the inhabited, experienced city ‘locus’ is far more resonant for memory than any monument or memorial deliberately created to cultivate memory.\textsuperscript{29} The reason for this is that we do not engage with the locus as an object that demands our comprehension and interpretation (as we do with a monument); we experience it ‘inattentively’, take it for granted, and thus the memories engendered by this space are more easily internalized.\textsuperscript{30} Thus Connerton sees the ideal city locus as being one
whose 'rhetoric', i.e. the encoded space that it consists of, is not simply 'known about' but is directly and instinctively 'known'. Krajewski and Vynnychuk do their best to render their respective cities 'known' to their audiences through reproducing the sensory and topographical knowledge that constitute the experience of inhabiting place.

This process of facilitating memory represents something of a paradox, of course, since these are cities that are defined by discontinuity with the past and lack of memory among their post-war communities. Connerton states that one of the key features of the art of memory is 'that it depends on a stable system of places'. When this is removed, forgetting ensues. Connerton compares the relationship of the subject to the locus to that of the subject to its own body, and likewise the experience of disjunction between the subject and the locus to a disjunction between the subject and the body, as though after amputation. Connerton assumes that traumatic alienation from the city would destroy memory. Not 'knowing' the rhetoric of the city means not being able to 'live' it, and thus not being able to 'appropriate' it. The trauma of deportation and resettlement, of the loss of a familiar locus and the adaptation to a new, unfamiliar one, which characterizes the experiences of large parts of the post-war populations of Wrocław and L'viv, must surely represent such a process of alienation. Indeed, Connerton identifies 'economic migrants and political refugees' as two of the main, large groups of people who have been the subject of the forgetting he describes: '[a]ll these people would have had, to some degree, to forget the places from which they came', he states.

The anxiety over forgetting a vanished home in the face of a new, unknown city is a repeated theme in the works of contemporary Polish authors, such as in Paweł Huelle's stories of childhood in post-war Gdańsk in Weiser Dawidek (translated as Who is David Weiser?, 1987) and Opowiadania na czas przeprowadzki (translated as Moving House and Other Stories, 1991), Stefan Chwin's reflections on the German past of the same city in Hanneman (translated as Death in Danzig, 1995), Adam Zagajewski's famous essay 'Dwa miasta' (Two Cities, 1991), Olga Tokarczuk's weaving of narratives about post-German Lower Silesia in her Dom dzienny, dom nocny (House of Day, House of Night, 1998) or, more recently, Andrzej Bart's exploration of the disturbing past of the Łódź ghetto in Fabryka mucholapek (The Flypaper Factory, 2009), to give just a few examples. The emphasis in these works on forgetting the place of origin and the struggle to inhabit the new city that is full of the ghosts of others would seem to confirm Connerton's thesis. Yet what Connerton does not address is the possibility of the revival of memory in an unfamiliar locus: Krajewski and Vynnychuk show that unknown or partially unknown cities can be made known, that memory can be recovered, or recreated, even if it belongs to others and is inscribed in foreign languages. Both authors produce the effect of memory on the reader who, in most likelihood, will have little communicative memory of the city beyond the generation immediately preceding them. Thus, in contrast to Connerton's idea, memory manages to arise from a distinctly unstable system of places.

In this sense, the city does not function in the typical way that spaces are assumed to function in relation to memory, providing an 'organic' setting for communicative and cultural memory. Rather, the city functions as a medium for what Marianne Hirsch calls 'postmemory'. Hirsch uses the term in relation to the Holocaust, to
describe the inherited traumatic memory of the generation whose parents and grandparents lived through the Nazi genocide: they have no direct memory of the trauma, or of life before the trauma, but the sheer power of their forebears’ memory of catastrophe and loss, carried through stories, objects and photographs, means that it is internalized by them as though it were their own.\textsuperscript{34} For Hirsch, ‘postmemory’s connection to the past is not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation’.\textsuperscript{35} It is interesting in this regard that, while Connerton compares the loss of the memory-locus to amputation, Hirsch mentions the term ‘prosthetic memory’ as analogous to postmemory:\textsuperscript{36} just as artificial limbs can be used to rebuild a body, so created memories can be embraced by those with no ‘organic’ attachment to them. In Hirsch’s concept this also extends to places, which are often the subject of stories and photographs, as exemplified in her own ‘postmemory’ of a city she could not actually remember: her parents’ hometown, Czernowitz, now Chernivtsi, in western Ukraine.

Of all the vehicles of postmemory in Hirsch’s theory, photographs are perhaps the most important: photographs of the trauma itself or of life before the trauma enter into the collective consciousness as though they are actual memories shared by each member of the collective. Photographs are, according to Hirsch, particularly effective in this regard as they ‘offer an access to the event itself’,\textsuperscript{37} they ‘enable us, in the present, not only to see and touch that past but also to try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic “take”’.\textsuperscript{38} Photographs are also, in their fragmentary nature as split seconds, small parts of the past, ‘open to narrative elaboration and embroidery and to symbolization’.\textsuperscript{39} Hirsch’s ideas show the adroitness of the use of photographs by the two authors discussed, particularly by Vynnychuk. I would suggest, however, that an even clearer connection here lies in the way in which the city itself functions in a way analogous to the photograph as a medium of postmemory. As Benjamin describes in his discussion of his memories of Berlin, the city facilitates an almost physical encounter with the past — as Hirsch puts it, touching the past in the present. In addition, the nature of the contemporary cityscape — its palimpsestic, fragmentary nature — also makes it ‘open to narrative elaboration, embroidery, symbolization’.

The memories being evoked here are not, especially in Krajewski’s case, though to a large extent also in Vynnychuk’s, those of a previous generation to which the authors or their audiences are directly connected by communicative memory. So can this be described as postmemory? Partly in Vynnychuk’s case and entirely in Krajewski’s, these are the memories of others: of German Breslau and Polish-Jewish Lwów/Lemberg/Lemberik. Yet the fact that postmemory is carried by media such as photographs means it is open to whoever encounters those media, whether they have family or group connection to these memories or not. Indeed, in Hirsch’s own definition, postmemory is also available to those not directly related to those whose experience forms the base memory, what she calls ‘affiliative’ postmemory, and our very experiences of viewing family photographs, no matter what our background, means that when we see photographs of those who died in the Holocaust, we can share the (post)memory of the tragedy.\textsuperscript{40} This is not the recovery of memory as such, but the recovery and appropriation of a past that we have no way of remembering, yet to which we can gain access through imaginative investment, and which takes on in our consciousness the status and characteristics of memory.\textsuperscript{41}
An important difference from Hirsch’s discussion, however, is the activation of the postmemory mechanism through the medium of popular, entertainment literature, and thus in a non-trauma context. Hirsch’s idea is rooted firmly in the trauma of the Holocaust, the scale and power of which is such that it remains vividly present across generations. In both Krajewski’s and Vynnychuk’s work the re-presented memories gain their power not through trauma, but through the vivid mode of popular cultural forms. Vynnychuk utilizes the forms of nostalgic consumerism — the guidebook, the coffee-table book — to create a vision of the past that is very much a product of the present moment, in which the transitory consumerist culture that Connerton laments is dominant. Vynnychuk shows that the rise of consumer culture does not have to produce forgetting, but can in fact facilitate a new form of cultural memory that is not about countering anxiety over forgetting, or fighting battles over the past, but it is about enjoying the consumption of the past as a product. In order to make this past enjoyable, it must also be made non-confrontational, and thus Vynnychuk presents his readers with a vision of the city’s past that envelops all its memory communities. True, his work foregrounds the Ukrainian thread of L’viv’s past, but the others are never neglected: instead all of the threads are woven together into one colourful tapestry that both entertains and informs. The end result, of course, passes over the disturbing aspects of L’viv’s multi-cultural past — the histories of oppression, armed conflicts, pogroms and deportations — aspects that the city’s current inhabitants often prefer to forget. Vynnychuk’s work addresses a need among those inhabitants for a connection to a past that is only partially known precisely because of the reluctance to face up to its traumatic aspects. While Vynnychuk could be accused of only telling part of the story, one could also see his strategy as opening a door for L’viv’s inhabitants to begin to engage with the multi-ethnic past of their city in a non-confrontational setting. Perhaps, in this setting, the present community can begin to internalize the memory of the lost communities that Vynnychuk evokes, and thus begin to mourn the passing of these communities, and, through this circuitous route, begin to work through the more traumatic elements of the past.

The negotiation between nostalgia and trauma that is implicit in Vynnychuk’s work is more explicit in Krajewski’s novels, which are far from straightforward nostalgia. If anything, the memories he invokes are disturbing and uncanny. Where Vynnychuk aims in his popular publications to make the Ukrainian reader feel more at home in L’viv, Krajewski seems to aim for a feeling of unhomeliness. In the light of this, we can return to Connerton’s idea of ‘knowing’ and ‘living’ the urban artifact: Krajewski’s work certainly reproduces knowledge about the city, as discussed above, yet it is not clear whether this constitutes a straightforward appropriation of the city for the Polish reader. The disturbing, frightening, emphatically un-Polish city that we find on the pages of Krajewski’s novels may be made ‘known’ to Poles, but they are not made to feel welcome there. Instead, Krajewski’s city confronts the reader with the alarming memories of others, and thus with the alarming absence of those others. If we extend Connerton’s analogy in a way perhaps befitting the genre of Krajewski’s work, the author does not return the familiarity of the body to the Polish subject, but allows that subject to take possession of a body that is not its own, thus producing the uncanny sensation of reviving and possessing a corpse. While frightening, this of course relies on a sense of a safe distance in order to be effective and, ultimately,
pleasurable. Krajewski’s work thus functions along the defining principles of its genre, the crime thriller or horror story: it confronts the reader with something uncanny that is nevertheless safely contained in a familiar, generic cultural form that the reader knows does not have to be taken seriously. Krajewski’s fiction allows the contemporary Wrocławian reader to come back from the nightmarish vision of the past with a new knowledge of what memories lie buried in the stones around her, but safe in the knowledge that the dark elements of those memories are firmly divided off from her by temporal distance. Thus, while Krajewski certainly aims to disturb his readers, the effect is ultimately the same as that achieved by Vynnychuk: the truly disturbing nature of the past is neutralized by the popular form in which it is presented, allowing a ‘safe’, non-confrontational access to that past.

It is hardly surprising that, in both cases, the traumatic lurks beneath the surface. In Eastern Europe, the history of violence and displacement of the twentieth century means that the traumatic disjunction from both place and the past is often acutely and dramatically experienced. Any analysis of urban memory in this region must take account of this disjunction, and forego any assumptions of continuity and familiarity, and confront precisely what happens to memory in unstable systems of places. In facing this instability and discontinuity, Krajewski and Vynnychuk deploy similar tactics, actively attempting to rebuild a city of memory for their audiences. They show that problematic urban memory is not exclusively the territory of poets and writers of high-brow prose, whose depictions often rely on melancholy, the exploration of trauma, or reflections on the irreversible loss of the past, but can be approached with great effect using entertaining, popular genres. Despite the reservations of some theorists, Krajewski and Vynnychuk demonstrate that mass, consumer culture and the popular genres that it involves can facilitate a constructive/constructed urban memory that can in turn foster a sense of connection with place. In the cases of L’viv and Wrocław, whose communities often struggle to come to terms with their urban memoriescapes, the creation of such a connection is badly needed.

Perhaps most striking in the work of both these writers, however, is the fact that they prove that a constructive, captivating memory narrative can be recovered/recreated in ostensibly strange urban loci. They show that the memory of absent others can be appropriated and internalized. Where this memory is ‘artificial’ or ‘prosthetic’, as both writers show, it does no harm to admit, reflect on and even enjoy this fact. This reconstructed urban memory functions on principles of postmemory, thanks in no small measure to the immediacy of the popular idioms adopted by the writers, which, through provoking imaginative investment, ease access to the past, allowing the reader to touch it in the present. The crucial difference for Krajewski and Vynnychuk is that this does not necessarily have to involve trauma and guilt. This may leave the authors open to criticism for neglecting or trivializing the more troubling elements of the past. Yet it could also be argued that this entertaining, pleasurable postmemory creates a point of access to these pasts for those inhabitants who may not otherwise have the interest, the inclination or the opportunity to engage with them: it is difficult, after all, to persuade people to engage with a past that is framed exclusively in terms of trauma, violence and guilt. The urban memory provided by Vynnychuk and Krajewski provides a counterweight to those discourses of the past that in their fierce pursuit of historical truth often merely push memories further back into denial and forgetting. Instead, this popular urban memory
attracts the reader towards the past. Readers of Vynnychuk’s popular works may be led to his more subversive, challenging work on L’viv’s history, or to the work of his contemporaries on the same topic, while Krajewski’s readers may well venture into the rich body of contemporary Polish literature on ‘post-German’ places. The postmemory of pleasure that is found in the work of these two authors could thus potentially lead to an engagement not only with the pleasure, but also, in time, with the complexity and pain of urban pasts.

Notes


6 Connerton, How Modernity Forgets, p. 5.


11 Vynnychuk was an important figure in non-official intellectual circles in L’viv in the late Soviet period. In 2012, he once again took on the role of oppositionist when he was visited by the police to answer charges of distributing ‘pornography’. He had written and publicly performed poems with obscene content that were critical of President Yanukovych’s government. He responded by organizing public readings of the same poems in the centre of L’viv.

12 L’viv’s nostalgic café culture has attracted much attention in recent years due to the controversial nature of some of some of the establishments. While some hark back to the Habsburg period in a largely unproblematic way, one popular bar/restaurant on the city’s main square, named Kryiwka (Hideout), is themed in honour of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War in its fight against the Soviets, and was implicated in ethnic violence against Poles and Jews, but is seen by many Ukrainian nationalists as a heroic organisation. Another restaurant, Pid zolotoiu rozoiu (Under the Golden Rose), in the city’s former Jewish quarter, has caused some offence with what some see as perpetuation of Jewish stereotypes, such as the opportunity to haggle over the price of your meal.


18 Vynnychuk, Knaipy L’vova (L’viv: Spolom, 2000), p. 56.


21 Vynnychuk, Lebendy... , p. 199.

22 Vynnychuk, Lebendy... , p. 32.


24 Vynnychuk, Knaipy L’vova, p. 8.


27 Vynnychuk, Lebendy... , pp. 298–301. Viktor Morozov has recorded two albums of songs in the style of ‘bat’ music. The songs are a mixture of covers of genuine songs from interwar Lwów, with texts translated into Ukrainian, and new songs
written in the same style. Vynnychuk wrote some of the lyrics and did some of the translations for these albums. A ‘Batiar Day’ festival is now celebrated annually in L’viv.

28 Vynnychuk, Taiemnytsi... , p. 108.
29 Connerton, How Modernity Forgets, p. 34.
30 Connerton, How Modernity Forgets, p. 32.
31 Connerton, How Modernity Forgets, p. 5.
33 Emphasis in the original.
41 Hirsch, Family Frames, p. 20.
42 This is an explicit theme in Vynnychuk’s postmodern fiction and journalistic work, such as the novel Mal’va Landa (2003), which directly challenge, satirise and subvert Ukrainian nationalist views of the past.

Notes on contributor

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