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Gdańsk palimpsest. On obscuring and retrieving traces of memory

Introduction

The image of Gdańsk built on the myth of colourful relations with others, with strangers, where, side by side, like a family, there lived the Kashubians, the Germans, the Dutch, the Polish and the Jews is becoming more and more often a subject of a public discourse connected with collective memory, the latter being a continuous story consisting in the selection of people and events, judging and linking them to contemporary narrative. Collective memory as a set of representations of the past shared by members of a given urban community has very important social functions: identity building, legitimization and conflict causing (see: Halbwachs 1950; Olick 1999). In Gdańsk, depending on a social, economic and political situation, there appeared various narratives defining the collective memory and identity of the city. Representations of the past were accompanied by myth-creating constructions, the so-called “sacred stories”, representations of the reality whose main aim was to relieve the fear of the unknown and the incomprehensible, to “domesticate” the reality. Mythologizing the story of the past constitutes an important part of collective identity. According to Jan Assmann (2008), the self-image created by a given community is a representation that lasts for as long as individuals and groups consider it to be their own.

The article deals with the problems of collective identity resulting from over one thousand year history of the city on the Motława river and the role of historical policy of the local authorities regarding the material cultural heritage of many nations and cultures. In our opinion, the palimpsestic (*palimpsestueuse*) character of the city plays a significant role in the discourse about the past of Gdańsk. We use that notion after Philippe Lejeune to emphasise the complexity of the process

of accumulating, obscuring, deciphering and “domesticating” the subsequent layers and activities leading to the creation of new spaces and new *urban myths*. We do not, however, support retaining the past in the spirit of respecting tradition in a non-reflective way. In sociology, the subjective approach is one of the ways of understanding tradition, strictly related to heritage (Szacki 2011).

In this perspective, fundamental is the question about the attitude of the inheriting to what is inherited. Tradition and heritage are significantly, dynamically interdependent. Such an approach allows for combining various dimensions of memory and history, which are not synonymous. Memory undergoes constant evolution, becomes dormant or gets manipulated. And history as an intellectual representation of the past poses problems and breeds questions. In this short paper, we are interested in particular in the issues that refer to “substitute” identity, often limited to updating selected, easy, frequently superficial hallmarks proving the presence of the Others.

Let us remind the reader that apart from the privileged Lutherans, disliked Catholics, Polish gentry, shabby rafters, hardly tolerated Jews, the history of Gdańsk also saw Mennonites and Dutch Anabaptists (Kizik 2003). The ongoing research on the origin of the citizens of Gdańsk gives a relatively thorough coverage of the period of 1637–1709, studied in more detail. It was then that the new names of the immigrants from Silesia, Saxony, Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein, the Netherlands, as well as from England, France, Scotland, Bohemia and even Portugal appeared in municipal records. The biggest number of newcomers, however, came from the neighbouring lands, that is from Royal Prussia and Gdańsk Pomerania.

During the period under discussion, Gdańsk was a living urban organism that could resemble a melting pot of nations, with a dominant type of citizen of Gdańsk, aware of his unique identity. In the case of historic Gdańsk, we surely have to do with that model of multi-culture. Varieties of German were the dominant language for most part of the Gdańsk history. Wide civilization contacts with the whole of the known world, resulting from economic relations, were the factor modifying the primary North German patterns. Artists and craftsmen, whose craftsmanship brought patterns from other parts of Europe to the existing heritage, significantly affected the spatial and architectural shape of the city. It referred equally to the migrants of Polish background and the ones from the West. Traces of heritage of various cultures and nations can be found all over the city of Gdańsk.

Postwar discourse on the identity of Gdańsk

A significant part of the historic centre of Gdańsk was destroyed in the spring of 1945. The damage is estimated at 90% of the buildings (Stankiewicz and Szer-

mer 1959; Hewelt 1988). The city centre was damaged as a result of bomb attacks and battles in March 1945 (Hajduk 1999; Gruszkowski 1999).

Almost complete damage of the most important part of Gdańsk, its historic areas, was preceded by guidelines and orders of the highest state and military authorities of both powers that had been on friendly terms till 1941, that is Russia and Germany. [...] Belorussian Front was ordered to break the front and conquer Gdańsk Pomerania, which was accompanied by calls to, e.g. "finish off with the Fascist beast in its lair". (Gruszkowski 2012, 10)

The wonderful Renaissance buildings became ruins in 1945. The cityscape of unique values was almost totally damaged. There were debates whether it was worthwhile to rebuild the city.

The meeting of the Society of Friends of Science and Art (25th of July 1947) unanimously accepted a postulate to rebuild Gdańsk in the form as faithful to the original as possible (Wnuk 1952). During another meeting of the same people (19th of February 1948) the chief historic preservation officer Jan Zachwatowicz announced that the reconstruction of the Main Town had been decided on. A concept of rebuilding one of the quarters of the grandest part of historic Gdańsk had been developed by the end of that year.

The tendency to preserve the material heritage and the one to erase any traces of the past competed with each other in the postwar Gdańsk. The image of the city in the eyes of the Polish people coming there since April 1945 is very important. Many of them perceived Gdańsk as a German city, which was fairly justified. Despite the recently popularized myth of a multicultural metropolis, already since the 14th century Gdańsk had been a city of quite homogeneous, German-language culture, Protestant since Reformation, with constant presence of Polish minority.

The ruined city centre required fundamental decisions not only on the form of the new building development but also on the location of the future city centre. The discussion on the urban-planning future of the city revealed the differences in perceiving the city by the Polish people (Szczepański 2008). Some architects, journalists and politicians proposed building the new city centre in another place, west or north of the historic centre of Gdańsk, leaving the ruins as they were (Wnuk 1952). They wanted to look for Polish features not in the past but in modernity. An architect Mieczysław Janowski represented such an attitude. He thought that, in the name of modernity, historic Gdańsk should not be rebuilt at all (Friedrich 1999).

The alleged German character of the city was another argument for non-redevelopment of historic buildings. In 1945, a columnist Edmund Osmańczyk wrote:

I may be a barbarian, but when prof. Jan Kilariski, a distinguished historian of Polishness of Gdańsk says it is impossible to reconstruct Marienkirche, I feel a bitter joy. As all the backstreets of the old Gdańsk have already been burnt and ruined, all of the city centre, as the granaries — Gdańsk cranes — have been flooded with ruins after bomb attacks, as everything

that was filled with Teutonic power at the mouth of the Vistula river has disappeared, we are not going to rebuild it, nor will cry over the rubble. (Osmańczyk 1945: 7).

The use of the German name for St. Mary's Church (*Marienkirche*) to emphasize its foreignness is significant here. Janowski and Osmańczyk wrote from the perspective of Warsaw. In Gdańsk, among the Polish people who had been in the city for a few months, a different opinion prevailed. In February 1946, in the document issued by the Municipal National Council in Gdańsk, the same Gothic building whose damage Osmańczyk so much enjoyed was presented as: "An old Temple of St. Mary's in Gdańsk, the oldest document of Polishness and power of Poland [...] called Maritime Cathedral by Polish commoners..." (Szczepański 2009, 51).

The Polish past of the city was promoted in newspapers and magazines, in radio broadcasts, in books and guidebooks. They reminded of the political history of the city which during most of its one thousand years of existence belonged to Poland, which had been the biggest city, port and fortress of the Republic of Poland before partitions. The actual activities undertaken in the historic centre of the city in the immediate postwar period resulted mainly from the opinion about the value of the historic sites and buildings of Gdańsk as an evidence of Polish culture: "Redevelopment of Gdańsk, the city full of mementoes from when it belonged to Poland will be long and hard. The Polish state will gradually rebuild historic buildings damaged during the war, the old Royal Granary, beautiful old churches, Art Court and the Crane on the Motława river" (Leontiewa et al. 1947, 61).

The most important reasons for adopting — after long-lasting discussions and hesitations — an approach to reconstruction of the Main Town resulted from recognizing the city centre as a unique building development structure in terms of its architectural-urban-planning and cultural aspects. The Main Town had architectural assets of great value. Burghers houses from various epochs, of various forms of gables and decorations constituted a unique set of elements making up a compositionally consistent whole. Replacing it with a modern building development would mean changing the urban-planning system which would damage its most treasured assets.

A complex process indicating cultural transmission understood as acquiring knowledge of or an emphatic reaction to multicultural narratives started. Collective memory remaining in relation with time, space and history played an important role in this process. Thanks to inspiring research of a French historian Pierre Nora on "places of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) we are much more aware of the perception of Gdańsk going far beyond the geographic and historical dimension (Nora 1996).

Collective memory is not a mechanical ability to register the observed phenomena, but consists in continuous reconstruction of the past by the remembering subject who is a member of a social group that provides him a spatial and ideological framework. "A view from the inside" (feeling, sentiment, mythol-

ogy, ideology) sends us to a certain climate (cultural, aesthetic, social, political). Collective frameworks of memory include everything that is experienced. Let us repeat after Maurice Halbwachs (2008) that personal thought/memory is what follows the inclination of collective thought. It is a kind of a group spirit that consists of interaction and inter-subjectivity, and a new quality different from the elements that produce it.

A given community each time speaks out itself, determines its territory and confirms its existence. It provides building material for constructing identity. The environment of collective memory is influenced by globalization factors (development of new communication and information technologies). According to Jan Assmann (2008), communication and cultural memory are its frameworks. The first one is shaped by joint fate and goes away as the generations pass away. Cultural memory as a reflexive memory, in its broadest sense, includes both biographic memory and social and collective memory (more: Ricoeur 2006; Hałas 2012; Saryusz-Wolska 2009). Historical culture, that is social memory of the past and all its traces existing today are included in cultural memory. In the development of Gdańsk historical culture, there are no significant answers to the questions on how this past permeates to the present and what direction it forces upon the future. How do individuals and social groups communicate with the past? It is, in a sense, about metahistory, which is interested mainly not in the historical material as such, but in its narrative construction.

The power of identity of each city is measured by learning the compositional preferences of the past epochs, points recorded in the local tradition, events stored in the memory of subsequent communities, groups and individuals, and places preserved by custom. Mechanical use of guidelines for the development of a city without an attempt to understand “old and contemporary measures of identity” deprives subsequent generations of lasting foundations for contemporary understanding of identity. Such an approach, by the way, present also in many international documents (inter alia UNESCO Venice Charter of 1966), does not take off responsibility for agreeing on the value of a given place. The heirs of a cultural heritage must understand this. It is thus important to identify the evidence of the beginning of the city, which not always can be seen, and is sometimes problematic, when the culture of the Strangers, the elements co-creating identity have to be taken into consideration. Because continuity of a city is of greater significance than a selective assessment and reconstruction of individual elements of its tissue. Hence probably the great concern about restoring Gdańsk space in a material form — as a result of the activities of many investors, co-authors, most often — representatives of the elite of the residents of the city.

From that point of view, important seems the question about the role of the memory of the past in Gdańsk culture of the present. “How” does one remember? And “what” does one remember? What is the significance of the history of the past (*res gestae*) and of the way of presenting it (*historia rerum gestarum*), and

what has survived as its substrate in that process? It is not that all the content of communication memory goes to cultural memory — it is only selected symbolic figures, which in the case of a city with a one thousand year history take an active part in constructing collective identity.

That question is inseparable from constructing identity, in its normative and descriptive aspect. One can see in it both continuation, difference, conformism and protest, but also dissimilarity and similarity (more: Bokszański 2006). Abundant literature of the subject shows ambiguity and problematization of the notion of “identity” itself. The identity boom, which has been present in social sciences for a few decades, is also reflected in the discourses and narratives devoted to Gdańsk. Their mainstream shows a growing interest in the role of culture and communication in social life, which is not easy, given the selective and quite superficial treatment of the identity “policy”.

Many identities accumulated in Gdańsk due to its rich history and the fact that it was a place of adjusting traditions of various nations and cultures. As mentioned at the very beginning of the text, the city was inhabited by immigrants from various parts of Prussia, Poland, Germany, Scandinavia and the Netherlands. In the early modern era, from the 16th to the 18th century, Gdańsk was one of the leading European metropolises. It was the biggest city east of Cologne and north of Prague. Its history combined various characters: Polish and German, Kashubian, Hanseatic and European. The city’s past, deeply rooted in both Polish and German symbolic space, means not only the material heritage but also — in the modern era — grounds for disputes in national historiographies (Polish and German) about cultural belonging. The public space hosted people speaking different languages and followers of different religions (at least three big ones: Lutherans, Calvinists and Catholics).

The question of the identity of contemporary Gdańsk, especially at the time of globalization and problematization of the notion itself in public life today requires a broader and discontinuous view. However, the harder urban societies try to find their identities outside the logic of a historic and uncontrolled power of flows, the more they need their own local codes, allowing them to read the basic structure of the dominating values. What emerges from various analyses and observations is a similar picture of a transformed space.

Getting accustomed to the unwanted heritage

One of the main theses about Gdańsk says that in its history it was a German city. Supporters of this myth would say that “there had been a city” and in it “German spirit/full of energy, a brave, hesty chap”¹, since German merchants started

¹ Free translation of the unofficial anthem of the Free City of Gdańsk *Für Danzig*.

to settle at the mouth of the Vistula river. Moreover, as can be seen in the analyses of Polish historians, Gdańsk was dominated by the Germans, and consequently, by German laws, constitution and customs. The attitude to the German heritage has for centuries given rise to emotions and is problematic. After the partitions of Poland and Napoleonic wars, Gdańsk weakening elites began to mythologize the past of the city, looking for the Gdańsk character in it. The works of the artists who pictured patrician houses and the pictures of Gdańsk backstreets had a significant impact on building the myth of “the golden age”. This aspect will keep appearing in subsequent years and in the history of Gdańsk.

In 1949 the First Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party Witold Konopka said: “we will build Gdańsk more beautiful than it was before” (Chrzanowski 1996, 316). Still in 1962 in the introduction to “The History of Polish Art” it was written: “The architecture and, in general, the art of Pomerania, initiated and supported by the Teutonic state, of course does not belong to the history of Polish culture; we are not very keen on it, as something foreign and hostile to us with its atmosphere” (Dobrowolski and Tatarkiewicz 1962, 10). This opinion, however, did not have a decisive impact on the activities of the authorities, architects and historic preservation officers. Reconstruction of the Main Town became a fact in the period of 1949–1960.

Architectural forms from pre-partitions Gdańsk, which belonged to Poland at that time, were used during the reconstruction. The turn of the 19th century as the latest point of reference in reconstruction was justified politically, but it was also consistent with the generally prevailing in the mid-20th century opinions on the value of the architecture of various epochs. Nicolaus Pevsner, one of the most influential historians and critics of architecture of the previous century, wrote in 1943: “How can it be that the 19th century (...) remained smugly satisfied with the imitation of the past?” (Pevsner 1943: 196–197).

Gdańsk's city centre saw the demolition of houses from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, whose technical condition allowed for reconstruction, but which were “improper” both due to their origin and their architectural form. Grand houses opposite the railway station were demolished. Some parts of the partly damaged department store of the Freymann brothers was also demolished because it was thought of as harmful to the architectural image of the Main Town.

Removing the objects from previous decades was not consistent. It was decided not to demolish the buildings whose function was more strictly connected with Nazi Gdańsk than department stores or a theatre. The building of Deutsche Arbeitsfront at Okopowa street, built in 1936, the Gdańsk NSDAP building “Danziger Vorposten” at Elżbietańska street, built in 1938, and the youth shelter in Biskupia Górka, referring to the architecture of a Teutonic castle from the period of 1939–1940, survived.

It is not clear why those buildings were not demolished. Maybe their aesthetic image, a combination of tradition and modernity, in the 1940s and the 1950s

was more in line with the opinions of Polish architects and historic preservation officers than the 19th-century historicism of the Wilhelm's times. The good condition of the buildings, not more than two decades old, can be another explanation. Getting rid of big, comfortable objects in a ruined city would be an absurd decision from an economic point of view.

The most obvious traces of the foreign past of the city, that is, for example, German inscriptions, were removed quite consistently. Similarly, some of the monuments (the monument commemorating soldiers of the 4. East Prussian Regiment of Grenadiersfallen in the French-Prussian war was demolished in 1969), commemorative plaques (the plaque commemorating the director of natural history museum, Hugo Conwentz, disappeared from the Green Gate in 1955). Removing the traces of the German past in the grand hall on the first floor of the Old Town City Hall cost a lot of effort. The names of a few tens of the cities of the northern part were covered with wooden boards, although the coats of arms over the names were left intact.

In the mid 1970s, the authorities planned a systematic removal of German inscriptions from historic buildings. The instruction of the Regional Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party was, through the voivod, forwarded to the regional historic preservation officer Tadeusz Chrzanowski, who refused to obey the order. He supported his decision with, *inter alia*, the argument that the Germans in the Nazi times left a lot of Polish traces in historic buildings, for example, more than a dozen were left on the Old Town City Hall alone (Chrzanowski 1996). The orders and discussions on removing the inscriptions did not come in writing, they were oral. The inscriptions were not an exception. The sensitive issues of demolishing historic buildings and sites due to the political reasons also in other cases were dealt with by the authorities without revealing them in writing, or by giving orders with the clause "strictly confidential" (Szczepański 2009). Therefore some of the objects disappeared and some survived, for example, the plaque commemorating Johannes Hevelius in the hall of the Old Town City Hall.

The inscriptions were not effectively removed from the buildings that were not considered to be historic, apart from the strict city centre. The names of shops and their owners can be seen under the peeling layers of paint even today. The mail boxes on the door of the flats in Orunia, Biskupia Górka or Wrzeszcz and Oliwa still bear an inscription "Briefkasten", in the bathrooms there remained toilet cistern porcelain handles with the names of their Gdańsk manufacturers from a hundred years ago.

After the Second World War, Catholics took over Protestant churches which were in majority in Gdańsk. They thought it was an act of historical justice. The decorations of Protestant churches were replaced by those more suited to the Catholic customs. The organized action of liquidation of unused cemeteries included subsequent decisions on closing them (Rozmarynowska 2011; Szczepański and

Samól 2011). The grave plaques with German inscriptions gradually disappeared, replaced by new Polish plaques.

The birth of myths

A special attitude to the past connected with the presence of representatives of nations other than German and Polish played a significant role in the process of getting accustomed to the image of old Gdańsk and negating its German character. But the myth of the past multicultural Gdańsk failed to mention that those other nations were not highly represented.

From among foreigners, the artists and engineers that arrived on the Baltic in the 16th and 17th centuries from Flanders and the Netherlands had the biggest influence on the image of Gdańsk. They created the majority of paintings, sculptures, architecture and art of the fortification at the peak of the economic and political power of the city, though a bigger group consisted of the local people and those from German speaking countries². For example, it seems that the German colonists who brought the tradition of the Medieval terraces from Lübeck and Hamburg, where it did not continue past the Middle Ages, influenced the appearance of front terraces in Gdańsk. The tradition revived in Gdańsk and took beautiful forms decorated with Italian Renaissance patterns transformed by Dutch artists (the decorations referred to the allegoric and mythological themes) (see: Dymnicka 2013).

The very few English, French or Scandinavians did not have a visible impact on the city. Two Protestant churches, English and French, built in the 18th century in Holy Spirit street were the architectural representation of their presence. Until the end of the 18th century, the authorities of Gdańsk, enjoying fairly big autonomy within the Republic of Poland, tried not to allow culturally and religiously foreign groups of people to settle in Gdańsk. The Jews for a long time did not have the right to have a permanent residence in the city. The same was true about the Mennonites, inhabiting the neighbouring villages, and the Catholic immigrants from Scotland. It was only after the second partition of Poland in 1792, when Gdańsk found itself within the borders of the Kingdom of Prussia, that those restrictions were lifted, but minorities were never numerous there. In 1923 the Jewish population constituted only 3.3% of the residents of Gdańsk (Danziger Statistisches Taschenbuch 1934), that is not much in comparison to the cities of central or southern Poland, such as Cracow (ca. 25%) or Warsaw (ca. 30%).

² In the 16th and 17th c. the feeling of national identity was very different from today's, the language did not constitute it in an unambiguous way. Many citizens of Gdańsk used Lower German (Plattdeutsch) language, which is so similar to Dutch that a resident of Gdańsk could communicate more easily in his native language with people coming from Amsterdam than with those from Dresden or Munich.

Polish architectural historiography of Gdańsk until the end of the 1980s eagerly presented the artists coming from the Netherlands and having Dutch names, such as van Obberghen or van den Block. The attention of researchers studying the Gdańsk architecture at the time of its glory in the 16th and 17th centuries focused also on a builder Hans Strakowski and his descendants. Strakowski used the name Hans and probably did not speak Polish, but could be used to build the legend of a Polish architect reaching the peak of his career in Gdańsk. Gdańsk produced the monographs of van Obberghen and the Strakowski family, but of no other architect (Stankiewicz 1955; Habela 1974). The only architect honoured with a name of a street in the postwar Gdańsk is Jan (Hans) Strakowski.

The very few traces of the presence of the English, the Scots and the French in Gdańsk were not commemorated in any way. They were not even remembered. A researcher of the history of Gdańsk architecture still in 2004 neglected the existence of an Anglican church in Gdańsk saying: “Unfortunately, no iconographic information remained of that object”, despite the existence of such information (Groth-Kubicka 2004, 163). The name of a grand Renaissance building of the English House (Englisches Haus) in Chlebnicka street, translated from German, has survived. The names of the old districts of Old Scotland (Altschottland) and New Scotland (Neuschottland), having their historical justification connected with immigrants from the 16th and 17th centuries are also used nowadays.

The biggest Gdańsk synagogue was damaged by the Nazis in May 1939. Other sacred objects in the city centre were burnt in 1945. The only trace of the Jewish presence in Gdańsk is a synagogue in Wrzeszcz, built in 1927, and transformed during the war into a carpenter’s workshop, used by the Jewish community in the period of 1945–1951, and then a building of a music school (Abramowicz 2011). Two cemeteries have also survived. One, built in the 17th century, cemetery in Chełm and a cemetery in Wrzeszcz, operating since the 18th century. The first one was operational until 1956. Then it was devastated, mainly in the 1970s, during the construction of a residential development. The Jewish cemetery in Wrzeszcz was officially closed in 1946 and since then has been gradually damaged, probably by stone workers looking for the material for grave plaques.

There Was a City of Gdańsk — Memory Boom

After the fall of Communism the history of the city became an important plane for a multi-layer system of various identities. On the one hand, ready old traditions were revived and gradually a foreign-own set of Gdańsk things, symbols and myths was built in response to new challenges connected with market economy. On the other hand, connections with the German cultural heritage, whose the citizens of Gdańsk were depositories, were sought. The status of a depository was not comfortable in the sense that it supported the impression of temporari-

ness. It was thus important to gradually become “spiritual successors”. The desire to incorporate the survived remnants of other/foreign identities for the fear that they might get blurred and disappear, or because of a direct demand for a heritage, was accompanied by attempts to recover its forgotten layers, as evidenced, for example, by the success of the picture album *There Was a City of Gdańsk* (Tusk et al. 1996). The citizens of Gdańsk were enchanted with the charm of old photographs, although there was also extensive criticism for building a sentimental image of the city’s pre-war past. “There were faces of people, their clothes, façades, but culture and everyday life remained in a shadow. It was the material plane — furniture, crockery and houses, left in the city by some people, and found there by some others, that combined those totally different micro-worlds” (Loew 2012, 406). By 2004, four other such books had been published, originally not planned books with photographs of Gdańsk and its vicinities — *Old Sopot*, the series *There Was a City of Gdańsk. Districts*, including *Wrzeszcz, Oliwa, Brzeźno, Nowy Port* and also *There Was a city of Gdańsk 1945*. The first *There Was a City of Gdańsk* quarterly magazine, later entitled *30 Days* was published in July 1997. The content of the first issue is very characteristic. Apart from the photographs from before 1939, it also contained texts on the history of the city, newspaper advertisements of the time of the Free City, mainly in German, but also in Polish and Hebrew. The proportions between the advertisements in different languages approximately reflected the real proportions in the press of the interwar Gdańsk, in which German information was in the majority. The authors of *There Was a City of Gdańsk* discarded the previous practice of presenting in the historical publications about Gdańsk mainly illustrations showing the Polish-German conflict. They focused on everyday life of the residents of the city, creating an idyllic picture emerging from carefully composed, sometimes posed, old photographs.

Things contain a certain continuum which enables creating a new identity. Quasi-archaeological method (findings, interpretations) simulates the existence of cultural continuity. It was created on the ruins of old tales about Polishness.

The 1970s saw a change in the attitude towards the history of the 19th- and that of the beginning of the 20th-century Gdańsk, especially towards material traces of the past. At that time historians of architecture, historic preservation officers and some architects started to recognize the value of Gdańsk architecture from the period whose traces were earlier to be removed from the memory of the residents of the city and its space. A book published still in 1969 contains an opinion of distinguished Gdańsk historians of architecture: “In 1896 a particularly ugly in terms of architecture building of a market hall was opened ...” (Massalski and Stankiewicz 1969, 206). Three years later, the attitude to 19th-century architecture changed to a more favourable one — the complex of buildings of the former headquarters of a Prussian garrison from 1898–1901, of a slightly similar style to the market hall mentioned above, was registered in the registry of historic monuments of the Gdańsk region. Such an early recognition of headquarters as a his-

toric monument may be connected with its function during the interwar period, when it housed the offices of the High Commissioner of the League of Nations. The function of the commissioner was connected with political establishment of the Free City of Gdańsk as a structure not fully sovereign, in which the League of Nations and Poland had special powers. The then partial subordination of the Free City to Poland was important in the historical narrative in the Peoples' Republic of Poland. In subsequent years, also other objects and building complexes from the turn of the 20th century found their place in the registry of historic monuments, e.g. the main railway station from 1893–1903 and Gdańsk University of Technology (1900–1904). Preservation works on German stone grave plaques that had been put on the floors in churches also started in the 1980s. Johannes Hevelius's plate, restored in 1986 was the first of them. In 1983, *The Tin Drum* by Günter Grass had its first edition in Polish.

After 1945, when the works to protect the most important Gdańsk historic monuments and buildings started, also the most visible traces of the German character of the city began to be removed. For example, the horse statue of Emperor Wilhelm I standing in front of the Highland Gate and the obelisk in Wood Market, commemorating the soldiers from Gdańsk and its vicinities who died in the wars of the Kingdom of Prussia in the 19th century were removed from the pedestals. The monuments commemorating the soldiers fallen in 19th-century wars and the First World War were removed from Uphagen's Park in Wrzeszcz, and the monument of the 33rd Regiment of Fusiliers — from the bank of the Old Motława river. The plate from the monument in Okopowa street was hacked off. Also the plaques commemorating the citizens of Gdańsk not connected with army and wars — Arthur Schopenhauer and a writer Johannes — disappeared. Some of the monuments survived. It might have been due to the intervention of the Director of the Municipal Library Marian Pelczar that in 1947 the monument of the 4th East Prussian Regiment of Grenadiers from Wałowy square, with the names of the soldiers fallen in eight battles of the French-Prussian war in 1870–71, was not removed. Pelczar supported his intervention with an argument that the monument was of a Polish character because most of the names on there were Polish (Pelczar 1947).

At the same time the old symbols of power were replaced by new ones. Already in April 1945, in Aleja Zwycięstwa, a Soviet tank (of American manufacture), damaged in the same place a few weeks before, became one of them. Liquidation or devastation of over 30 Evangelic, Catholic, Jewish and secular cemeteries in 1946 was yet another manifestation of a hostile attitude to Strangers. Some cemeteries suffered already during the war. They had traces of bombings and shootings. Some of those cultural areas were so degraded that it was impossible to identify them (some of the cemeteries were changed into unofficial landfills or pastures). It was not unusual that fences, benches and grave plaques got stolen (Grabowski 2011). The authorities planned exhumation in all the liquidated cemeteries, but it

was not completed. Some big cemeteries were to continue their function. Polish people started to be buried there. In the Polish/Gdańsk historical discourse at the time of the Peoples' Republic of Poland, the events or figures from the pre-war past were interpreted according to the ideological demand for pro-Soviet information and educational policy. Many historical events were deliberately omitted or forced out of historical memory.

The history of Gdańsk, as Peter Loew writes, was presented as a

history of thrifty burgher merchants, reliable Prussians, robust Germans, gentle Slavs, humiliated but finally victorious Poles. The past and the future provide mono- and multicultural tales, are a treasure trove of history of culture and politics. Each epoch, each dominating social group had an interest of its own to write anew "the Gdańsk book" in such a way that it implied that it was this and not another epoch or group that created a logical target point in the long line of the city development. (2014: 11–12)

After 1945, the community of the city, being formed as a result of complicated migration processes, was symbolically cut off from its own past, from individual trajectories and the places that it settled down in. "New" citizens of Gdańsk were coming to the city from the East, from the Vilnius area, from Galicia and other parts of Poland. The lives of Poles from different parts of the country started to interweave again. At the beginning, identity was based on the material culture left there by some people and found by some others, or — which is important — being rebuilt. Before 1945, in the historic central area there were 5.5 buildings (mainly multi-family houses), most of which could surely be treated as historic monuments. After 1947 the ideological dispute — tradition or modernity — was seemingly interrupted. And although a decision on the preservation of the area of the Main Town together with the Granary Island was taken, at the same time attempts were made to put together the vision of a historic city with modernistic postulates. There was a kind of a fusion of history with modernism by spreading inter-houses building developments, by widening backyards, green areas management and improving the quality of life in the area of municipal infrastructure. The chief preservation officer Jan Zachwatowicz made the following significant statement: "It is, of course, becoming necessary to adapt old cities to the modern needs. In Gdańsk, this postulate is absolutely feasible. [...] The great work of harmonizing the old Gdańsk with the modern needs has to be accomplished" (*Dziennik Bałtycki* newspaper 1948).

After 1990, more attempts at restoring the memory of the former residents of the city were made. Complex preservation works on the grave plates in St. John's Church started in 1996 (Szczepański 2012).

In 2002, next to the Corpus Christ Church, there was established the Cemetery of the Non-Existent Cemeteries, that is a lapidarium, in which fragments collected from other cemeteries were brought and arranged in a new way. This initiative, undertaken in good faith to commemorate the former residents of Gdańsk, was implemented without any knowledge of the culture of the for-

mer residents of the city. Fragments of matzevas from the Jewish cemetery in Wrzeszcz were placed in the lapidarium, which caused protests of the Jewish community (Trzciński 2003). No attempts at identifying the people who had been buried under the plates placed there were made. The remains of the grave-stones were treated as abstract traces of the past, not connected with concrete individuals. In 2006 a lapidarium also appeared in the area of old cemeteries in Great Avenue, in the vicinity of the Gdańsk University of Technology complex of buildings. Municipal institutions placed stones with inscriptions informing about the old necropolises in Polish and German. Works to explain and present the preserved elements of the old necropolises were conducted at St. Barbara's cemetery in Siedlce, St. Joseph's and St. Barbara's cemeteries on the Gipsy Mountain (Rozmarynowska 2011).

In 2004, the plate of mayor Daniel Gralath was placed again on the stone in Great Avenue. It was a copy of the plate removed at the time of the Peoples' Republic of Poland and was in two languages: Polish and German. The plate commemorating the scouts murdered during the Second World War was replaced by a new monument located nearer the historic city centre.

A decade later, Gdańsk University of Technology celebrated 110th anniversary of its establishment. The University authorities were of the opinion that it was a continuator of *Königliche Preussische Technische Hochschule*, established in 1904. However, the material heritage of the German speaking Gdańsk from before the Second World War had not always enjoyed recognition and respect. Since the 1990s, in the media there started to appear information on using some of the grave plates to, inter alia, build the so-called stairs of disgrace (leading to the hill at Jaśkowa Dolina street), on which the residents of Gdańsk walked still in 2014. The remains of the inscription "Kleinhammer" were replaced with a Polish translation during the redevelopment of the park in Wrzeszcz.

The historical 19th- and 20th- century architectural monuments are quite another matter. Many of them are not legally protected. Out of a few hundred of the multi-family buildings in Wrzeszcz, only one has been entered into the registry of historic monuments. After 1990, many industrial objects were demolished, which included some of the shipyard buildings (Szlaga 2013), a warehouse that had been part of a military establishment from the beginning of the 20th century. The old horse tram terminal in Oliwa, provisions military warehouse on the Motława river, the remains of the railway station on the Granary Island and the railway gate signal tower in Wrzeszcz might be in danger of demolition. The former Jewish residents of Gdańsk have been almost forgotten in the city space. There appeared a monument of *Kindertransports* in front of the railway station, one of the Jewish cemeteries has been taken care of, but the traces of the Great Synagogue have not been exposed, or even have been obscured by the building of the Shakespearian theatre erected nearby. The Jewish cemetery in Wrzeszcz has never undergone any preservation works.

* * *

To conclude, we would like to stress that as the Second World War ended, the monistic model of collective memory and the accompanying policy of the municipal authorities was undergoing continuous changes. At that time, Gdańsk was still perceived by the newly arrived residents of the city as a space with no cultural meanings. "Deserted city with still warm sheets of its German residents" (Bağlajewski 1997), with furniture, strange inscriptions in shop windows, was filled with form but without any content that would go with it.

The period of the Communist rule and forced industrialization and urbanization for many years has directed the efforts of society to fighting for new steel mills, ports, shipyards and bedroom settlements of no distinguishing features. Identity was imposed with a kind of concept of a new collective "socialist identity". One must be aware that although the epoch of Communist totalitarian rule allowed us to concentrate resources on the great undertaking of rebuilding the over forty hectare old town complex, that great effort, not to be underestimated, only restored the material space of the historical city centre. Though filled with people, the finished form remained incomplete because it was not filled with social content. Due to this superficiality and "external character" the residents of Gdańsk hardly identified with such a vision of the city. Their feeling of identity was weak, occasional, fragmented, "blurred" (Baranowski and Dymnicka 2005).

The restoration of the ruined city centre was to seal the myth of great Gdańsk. At the beginning, it was accompanied by a de-Germanization policy. Later, attempts at revival and reading anew the myth of Gdańsk character consisted in getting accustomed to the unwanted and foreign heritage, in looking for new ways for the city development. However, it was still the selective use of the traces of foreign cultures, without being aware of the fact that they had their owners and that they were produced socially. The citizens of Gdańsk thus face yet another important challenge consisting in reflexive recognition of the entire heritage of the past, consisting of the undoubtedly wide range of past events, personalities, memories, mythologies, literary works of art, physical relics and places which can be symbolic, because such heritage constitutes an integral part of collective identity. In the axiological perspective, it includes the products of human imagination much broader than historic monuments. It can become a nobody's and forgotten asset, as well as somebody's heritage. The equivalence of the notions of assets of culture and heritage of culture is, however, an unachievable ideal (Tomaszewski 2012), which means "treating as one's own heritage also such assets that in the sense of inter-generation and inter-ethnic transmission do not necessarily belong to us. They are, however, an object of our care of the material traces left by 'not our' ancestors" (Kowalski 2013, 36). Following this idea, taking responsibility for not their own heritage is a challenge for the present residents of Gdańsk.

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Gdańsk palimpsest. On obscuring and retrieving traces of memory

Summary

The article deals with the problems of collective identity resulting from over one thousand year history of the city on the Motława river and the role of historical policy of the local authorities regarding the material cultural heritage of many nations and cultures. In our opinion, the palimpsestic (*palimpsestueuse*) character of the city plays a significant role in the discourse about the past of Gdańsk. We use that notion after Philippe Lejeune to emphasize the complexity of the process of accumulating, obscuring, deciphering and “domesticating” the subsequent layers and activities leading to the creation of new spaces and new *urban myths*.