

Irena Alperyte¹
Vilnius Academy of Arts, Vilnius, Lithuania

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CULTURAL MEMORY: DOWNLOAD A NEW VERSION

To Tomas Dobrovolskis (1967-2015)

Introduction

While writing this paper, I am listening to the music recorded by Dmitry Hvorostovsky. The disc is all about the World War II, and today is May the 9th, 2015. The perception of the lyric images, conveyed poetically by this worldly-renowned baritone, tells me one simple truth – memory is never killed, even if you kill a human (Copyright: Wait for Me. Dmitry Hvorostovsky. Baritone. Constantine Orbelian. Conductor. 2015. DELOS Productions, Inc.).

The other narrative that is following me while writing this paper is the story of the mother of a composer killed on the Eve of Christmas 2014 in Vilnius, Lithuania, by a gang of bandits who were suspected to belong to an ultra-radical political wing. The composer was walking his dog and came by some night spot for a glass of beer. While telling the story of his son's death to TV, the mother of the composer lost her memory in front of the TV cameras. Amnesia – that was the medical diagnosis. The brain started erasing the files that were too painful. The pain was not left alone. It was shared:

I just got the news that Tomas Dobrovolskis of Vilnius, Lithuania has died. A very bright light in the world has just been extinguished. He performed at TEDxVilnius last year and was going to do a workshop at TEDxKids in Vilnius coming up. He was someone I connected with immediately. His impish smile and his many great stories made him a joy to be around. He was present. He was inspiring. He was inspire-able. He was so alive. Ap-

1 alperyte@gmail.com

parently he was walking his dog and was attacked by 6 men, beaten in the head and stabbed in the eye. After many surgeries and attempts to save his life, he has died. I am beyond sadness and I feel a deep rage over his loss. It is so easy to destroy. Creativity, growth, consciousness all take so much time. I'm riding waves of despair and sadness which then turn to rage and anger at the thugs who took him from us and then back to bent-over weeping. (The Internet post: "A Hero of Mine Has Just Died", January 6, 2015)

Paul Connerton writes: "Concerning social memory in particular, we may note that images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order. It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory." (Connerton 2003: 3)

Geert Hofstede defines culture as "collective programming of the mind". Nowadays, I envision an alternative direction of the paradigm: collective downloading of the new mind, meaning that everything that hinders our mental or emotional humanly software's work is being reloaded, in order to sanitize our mental computers. My concern is – to what extent can we reload our mental PCs?

The Case of the Green Bridge

The **Green Bridge** (Lithuanian: *Zaliasištiltas*) is a bridge over the Neris river. It is the oldest bridge in the city and connects the city centre with the other parts. The bridge was rebuilt in 1827–1829. A steel bridge was completed in 1894. It survived the World War I, but was blown up by the Wehrmacht in 1944. The present-day bridge was completed in 1952 and named after Soviet General Ivan Tcherniakhovski. After the Declaration of independence in 1990, the bridge regained its historical name – "Green".

The bridge features four sets of sculptures—prominent examples of Soviet realism. They all feature two people, representing social classes idealized by the Soviet authorities (soldiers, workers, farmers, students). As Rasa Balockaite notes², "Lithuania has in recent years witnessed heated debates and an extreme polarization of opinions regarding its Soviet heritage. At the epicenter of the debate are four group statues representing major social groups of the Soviet period – industrial workers, peasants, students and soldiers – which

2 <http://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debating-20th-century-history/lithuania/the-new-culture-wars-in-lithuania-trouble-with-soviet-heritage/#fn-text28>

were erected on the Green Bridge in Vilnius in 1952.” The situation has perplexed recently because “the material condition of the statues had deteriorated to such a degree that society faced a challenge – to remove or renovate? With the physical collapse of the statues imminent and under pressure to make a quick decision, the case has sparked a culture war in Lithuania, i.e. a radical realignment of opinions into two definable entities, a conflict that has lasted for the past five years without reconciliation.”³

What are the main topics of the Bridge? They are:

- **Guarding Peace** (*Taikossargyboje*) by BroniusPundzius;
- **Agriculture** (*Žemėsūkis*) by BernardasBučas and PetrasVaivada;
- **Youth of Education** (*Mokslojaunimas*) by JuozasMikėnas;
- **Industry and Construction** (*Pramonėirstatyba*) by BroniusVyšniauskas and NapoleonasPetruelis.



Picture 1. Guarding Peace (*Taikossargyboje*)
by BroniusPundzius

The year 1993 saw the demarche of the Soviet Army. Until now there have been the remnants of this army, and not all of them are so evident. For instance, in the prestigious district of Antakalnis (Antokol in Slavonic version) there is a huge red-brick block of flats with black holes instead of windows.

3 Ibid.

Only those who lived nearby can tell who used to be the hosts of the house. They were the Soviet officers who resided in Lithuania. And nowadays, there is no a single stakeholder in the city of Vilnius who would like to adopt the house, so it is decaying and becoming a real “l’Hermitage” for homeless people.

“The relative calm around the Green Bridge, interrupted occasionally by random acts of vandalism or artistic experiments, lasted until February 2010, when Moscow’s mayor Yuri Luzhkov promised funding for the refurbishment of the Green Bridge memorial in conjunction with the 65th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.⁴”, Balockaite says. Vilius Navickas, the mayor of Vilnius in 2010, only fed the society with promises. Nothing was done in relation to the Bridge, formerly named after Ivan Tcherniakhovski (this was for a long time the name of the Bridge after the Soviet general). By the way, the statue to the general Tcherniakhovski (1906-1945) stood at the square near the Lithuanian Government, where nowadays another monument – to Vincas Kudirka (1858-1899) – is erected. The City of Vilnius was liberated under the lead of general Tcherniakhovski, and he was buried in Vilnius. Wounded, he died in Vilnius.⁵ The Lithuanian Soviet Encyclopedia states “that the national hero, Vincas Kudirka, who is famous for creating Lithuanian national anthem, was expelled from the Seminary for “not having a calling”, disseminating the *Capital* by Marx and ties to the Proletarian party. It is difficult to argue to those people, who saw a statue to general Tcherniakhovski and now enjoy the statue to Vincas Kudirka, that Lithuanians should be rather proud for the sculptures of the Bridge, because back in 1952, they were created by Lithuanian sculptors, whereas the statue to Tcherniakhovski was a piece of the Soviet “export” from Russia.

In 2013, a debate about the future of the Soviet-era statues pitted Lithuanian patriots against those who view the statues as historically significant artifacts. The mayor of Vilnius in 2013 Arturas Zuokas, in August 2013 announced a \$200,000 plan to refurbish the statues without removing them from the bridge.

Today, there is a new disagreement on the fate of the sculptures on the Green Bridge in Vilnius. This has usually been referred to the new geopolitical cir-

4 <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vilniaus-konservatoriu-lyderiai-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturoms-saukiasi-stebukladariu-arba-vagiu.d?id=32548615#ixzz3M8s8zs68>.

5 Lietuvoskoji tarybinė enciklopedija. Tomas 2. “Mokslas”, 1977, pp. 484.

6 Lietuvoskoji tarybinė enciklopedija. Tomas 6. “Mokslas”, 1980, pp. 230.

cumstances that caused more active reflections on historical memory and it has been disputed about whether this cultural heritage is “ours” or “Russian”.

Diana Varnaitė, head of Cultural Heritage Department, says:

*Cultural Heritage Department under the Ministry of Culture raises a question: to be or not for these sculptures? Department's mission is to foster the Lithuanian heritage. I stand for the state authorities, am not a politician, I fulfill the will of citizens and seek for implementation of state laws. But as an ordinary citizen, I am also responsible for the Lithuanian policy, especially for the cultural heritage policy“.*⁷

So, being responsible for the policy, what should an officer do? Skaidra Tri-lupaityte, the art critic:

Memory and politics are not identical things. When the state officials are trying to put the historical memory on shelves, whereas the citizens are trying to heal their injuries, both sides are confronted by visual marks of the past and try to „de-activate” the wounds of the past.“

Rasa Balockaite explains:

*The Green Bridge statues constitute a particular type of heritage, dissonant heritage. This dissonant heritage is connected to human suffering and political oppression and thus might function as a trauma trigger for survivors or as a favorite gathering spot for adherents of a particular political regime. Typically, a dissonant heritage is subject to varying moral and ethical concerns, and the Green Bridge statues are no exception here.*⁸

Diana Varnaitė continues:

Our Constitution in Article 42 clearly defines the duty of the state to promote culture and take care of Lithuanian history, art and other cultural monuments and valuables, because this is a national pride. The cultural heritage of each nation's is its invaluable public good and for the Lithua-

7 D. Varnaitė. Žaliojo Tiltlo Skulptūros – Mūsų Paveldo Žalieji žmogeliukai, <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/print.php?id=66836678#ixzz3OCmKKJAY>. January 08, 2015

8 <http://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debating-20th-century-history/lithuania/the-new-culture-wars-in-lithuania-trouble-with-soviet-heritage/#fn-text28>

nian citizens, it serves as an act of sustainability of our statehood. The heritage cherished by us can only be moral.⁹

Rasa Balockaite adds:

*The traditionalists, however, focus on the hidden, indirect violence of totalitarianism. For them, the Green Bridge statues represent chief aspects of the hidden, indirect violence of totalitarianism – the totalitarian domination of the state over all spheres of human life, the individual's total dependency on the state, the politicized notion of labor as political mission and moral duty, the total subordination of human life to political ends and ideological purposes, the self – denial of personal feelings for the sake of self-preservation and the never-ending self-censorship in order to comply with political demands.*¹⁰

Diana Varnaite insists: „In my personal opinion, these signs of Soviet occupation of our homeland should not stay there. The Green Bridge sculptural ensemble to me is an immoral monument to the Soviet ideology, which has brought to us only evil, exile, and massacre“.¹¹

However, the totalitarian content of the statues more than a decade ago no more or less intensified emotions met on the requirements to overthrow ALL the idols, before a precedent occurred, when Bronius Vysniauskas' and Napoleonas Petrulis' sculptures 'Industry and Construction Workers' appeared as the cover picture for *the Journal* (design Akvile Anglickaite) of *the Lithuanian Gay League*. The media subsequently announced that the homosexual connotations of workers are breaching the human rights by this publishing. "Homosexual elements" were envisioned via the image of a pair of men. Furthermore, an appeal appeared which proposed to compensate the damage caused to the sculptor Vysniauskas. Art critic Elona Lubyte, a famous author of the book *Silent Modernism* (written on Soviet sculptures) is convinced that the sculptures should be kept where they are, regardless of the new public or political slogans, because – if you start destroying all that does not please us, we will find ourselves in the desert. Besides, the sculptural composition on the Green Bridge is rather unique even in the aesthetical sense, the critic says.

9 D. Varnaitė. Žaliojo Tilto Skulptūros – Mūsų Paveldo Žalieji žmogeliukai, <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/print.php?id=66836678#ixzz3OCmKKJAY>. January 08, 2015

10 <http://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debating-20th-century-history/lithuania/the-new-culture-wars-in-lithuania-trouble-with-soviet-heritage/#fn-text28>

11 D. Varnaitė. Žaliojo Tilto Skulptūros – Mūsų Paveldo Žalieji žmogeliukai, <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/print.php?id=66836678#ixzz3OCmKKJAY>. January 08, 2015

Back in 2010, the beginning of the debate which had started on historical memory, was reflected upon media reports as either technical (the sculptures are decaying) or political (it's not our heritage). Vilius Navickas is still remembered by his pompous promise: "We will repair the Green Bridge mummies by ourselves". The so-called political case now is drawing European attention by its sexual discourse. What else our political elite and the media will invent in order to avoid REAL decisions?

Meanwhile, the mayors in Vilnius have been changed twice, and today the question of the Green Bridge is still frozen. A new mayor cancelled the decision of his predecessor on reconstruction. In Kaunas, the similar symbols are destroyed on the Aleksotas Bridge.

Rasa Balockaite reminds us:

By late 2014, no consensus about the further fate of the Green Bridge statues had been achieved: In August, an online petition for the removal of the Soviet sculptures from the Green Bridge was launched; in early October, a series of protest meetings were held, with demands for the removal of the Green Bridge statues from the Cultural Heritage List; on 31 October, the City of Vilnius issued a new call for tenders for the restoration of the Soviet statues^[32]; two weeks later, the Minister of Culture, Sarunas Birutis, signed a law amending the criteria for cultural artifacts to be listed as heritage.

Today, in May 2015, the Bridge is again on the list of the heritage objects.

The conclusion that can be presumed is that the issue won't be solved until new interruption of media.

Are only media capable to move the stones in the Post-Soviet society?

Rasa Balockaite as a hypothetical answer to this discussion quotes R. Rorty:

The two groups, liberals and traditionalists, constitute autonomous moral universes, subject to different moral authorities, different self-sufficient arguments and different vocabularies. The liberals use words such as diversity, pluralism, acceptance, active remembrance, and non-hegemonic thinking; whereas the traditionalists' final vocabulary is based on concepts such as national independence, freedom struggles, occupation, trauma, victims, propaganda and ideology. These are final vocabularies, to use Richard Rorty's term; they are "final" in the sense that if doubt is cast

*on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he can go with language; beyond them there is only helpless passivity or a resort to force.*¹²

Skaidra Trilupaityte remembers transdisciplinary artist Gitenis Umbrasas, currently known as the author of blooming embankments of the river Neris, where the shores of the river confess their love to each other. The author of the “Miracle” tiles at the Cathedral Square, he has always been abundant of creative ideas on how to turn the industrial landscape into something imaginary and to help to hide the naive political content of the Green Bridge. Gediminas Urbonas in 1995 creates another artwork – installation “You come or go” (Ateiniarišeini“) – mirror cubes reflecting upon the sky instead of the heads of industrial and agricultural workers (group Agriculture by Bernardas Bučas and PetrasVaivada).



Picture 2. „Cancelled“ after the elections in 2015.

Milena Dragicevic Sestic¹³ envisions the following types of cities with regards to their identity:

- a. capital city (presence of national institutions, media, foreign representatives);

12 Richard Rorty, *Ironists and Metaphysicians*, in *The Fontana Postmodernism Reader*, edited by Walter Truett Anderson, London: Fontana Press, 1996, pp. 98.

13 *The creative city: crossing visions and new realities in the region*, Culturelink Joint Publication Series No 11, Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, 2007, pp. 42.

- b. administrative (regional) centers (according to the decentralization structure);
- c. university city (traditional: Krakow, Vilnius, or new one: Orleans, Novosibirsk);
- d. commercial city (Hanseatic cities like Hamburg, or fair/trade cities like Frankfurt);
- e. crossroad city (important for traffic of goods and passengers);
- f. industrial city (around a certain type of industrial production: Turin, Leeds);
- g. postindustrial city (industry in crisis – new service development: Gdansk);
- h. mining city (Roubaix, Labin, Majdanpek);
- i. tourist city (spa, holiday resort: Vrnjackabanja);
- j. sport resort city (Innsbruck);
- k. historical city (symbolically important as ex-capital etc.);
- l. cultural capital (national, outside of the capital) – art city (Krakow);
- m. sacral city (Lourdes, Santiago da Compostella, Echmiadzin);
- n. frontier/border city (Dimitrovgrad);
- o. multicultural city (the main “identity mark” is its multiculturalism: Leicester, Marseille);
- p. post-multicultural city – divided city (Mostar, Mitrovica);
- q. military city – with military port, caserns, etc. (Toulon);
- r. secret city (in Soviet Union, city of secret nuclear or military production) etc.

Why do we need to know all these categories? Why should we care? While talking about the Green Bridge, we managed to skip a very important aspect: the sculpture ensembles depend on the Vilnius city planners. Therefore, all this issue highly depends on the new city planners. The city planners today represent liberal philosophy, and if it is to believe the pre-election slogans: “egotism is good for us” – because if you are able to take care of yourself, you will be able to take care of the rest. It is a vulgar interpretation, but let us agree –the slogan was also not a masterpiece of subtlety.

Let us study with more precision what Milena Dragicevic Sestic¹⁴ points out:

14 Ibid, pp. 47.

There are at least six phases in the policy planning process, which, if neglected, make the use of culture in the process of urban regeneration or re-branding ineffective.

*In the first phase, the most important issue is to **raise public awareness** about the necessity of the new concept of cultural policy and strategic planning, but also to confirm the decision in the municipal council and then to create the organizational committee to finalize the project idea (timing, team selection, budget, etc.).*

*The main task of the second phase should be to **diagnose the cultural situation** within the municipality through empirical and desk research (information gathering), analysis of data and creation of development indicators, identification of the problems and potentials and final diagnosis of the situation.*

*In the third phase, the city authorities come up with a policy paper – **developmental chart** – developed through public debate, consultation, but also through joint identification of needs and challenges. Public debates should raise developmental issues (dilemmas) such as center-periphery, urban-rural, cultural-artistic; cultural-economic. At the same time, through public debates (participative policy-making: Graz, 1989) consensus should be reached about the creation of a policy platform with possible policy alternatives (development and analysis of options), defined policy priorities with desired/anticipated outcomes and selective basic strategies.*

*The final stage of this phase should be the **adoption of the policy paper** by the City Council.*

*The fourth phase – **elaboration of the strategic plan**– includes identification of key development strategies at the global level with precise timing; sectorial action plans; identification of key operators (with defined responsibilities); creation of a draft version of the strategic plan (communication to decision makers, media, wider public, etc.). This is followed by public debate after which the definitive text of the document is drawn up and finally, the strategic plan is adopted by the City Council.*

*In the fifth phase, **monitoring of implementation** should be established, with mid-process evaluation and public debate, so that all potential mistakes can be removed (revision).*

The sixth phase –evaluation of the first strategic period– is the beginning of the new planning cycle. The process is in fact starting all over again.

For the time being Vilnius City does not know what to do with their attitude.

Research and conclusion

When examining all the issues mentioned above, I initiated the dispute with my current students and distributed the questionnaire about the sculptures of the Green Bridge. I received 55 responses: 12 of them were from the Entrepreneurial basics for Artists in Vilnius Academy of Arts and the remaining 43 – first year students of Creative Industries class. The responses were definitely impressive. The students’ answers to the ten questions are given below.

1. In what century the Bridge that is now called “the Green Bridge” was built? (the answer is 1536)	Mid-20 th century; 19 th century; 18 th century; In the times of our grandparents; 1536
2. How many times was the bridge ruined?	Several times – by Tzarist rule; 1-2; 3; No idea; When it was wooden; and after some concert;
3. What sculptural groups are depicted on the Bridge?	Working people; industry; farming, workers; Workers (male couple); farmers (woman and man); War/mundane topics; Agriculture; Woman with hay; Two construction workers; Students;
4. For what reasons the Green Bridge sculptures are listed as heritage?	Reflect upon historical period; Because they were created by famous Soviet sculptor; It’s an artwork; decoration of the bridge; It has a history; Because it is an integral ensemble of socialist realism; Somehow related to history; It’s a part of our history; Because the Bridge is old; Created by famous sculptors and are of historical value; As they are remnants of the Soviet Past.

<p>5. How do you understand the notion that heritage should be <i>moral</i>?</p>	<p>No insult to any social group; To reflect authentic facts; To respond to the values of the lived epoch; I don't understand the question; Not insulting the society, not causing bad memories; Reflect upon societal norms; Morality is a subjective category</p>
<p>6. Vilnius people have been discussing for twenty years on the fate of the sculptures? What would you suggest?</p>	<p>Reconstruct or transform; No articulate idea; Restore and remain; Discuss; Create a new meaning to them which could neutralize the dark past; Remain where they are; Relocate to the park Vingis; If not ruin – to shut them down in cages, ironically; Restore; Interpret artistically; I am for referendum.</p>
<p>7. Other countries would probably conduct a referendum on this issue? What is it possible in Lithuanian circumstances?</p>	<p>Also conduct referendum; Lithuanian nation is weak in general and not having initiative. With this pace they will remain here at least 20 years even with referendum; Leave it for officials, experts; Experts opinion; Consolidate experts; Do similarly as other countries; No referendum – better experts; Referendum is too expensive; there are professionals – let them decide; Let Vilnius Municipality decide; Give them to experts.</p>
<p>8. Do you know examples of other countries of preserving objects with “complex” past?</p>	<p>Germany; Formerly occupied (Soviet) countries; Former authoritarian countries; Berlin Wall; Arc de Triumph in France (they were also witnesses to cruelty) Estonia, Germany, Poland; Russia, Byelorussia Hungary (Budapest) No idea (2); Estonia; Berlin Wall, Reichstag, Cerny artifacts in Prague; Belgrade (Serbia)</p>

9. What sculptural object is the most valuable for you in Vilnius?	Nothing in particular – missing; King Mindaugas, Vincas Kudirka PetrasCvirka, Maironis; Drama Theatre sculptures (S. Kuzma), the Embankment Arch (2); Vincas Kudirka; Green Bridge sculptures; Mindaugas Bridge, the Hill of Crosses; Fountains at Opera
10. Which object irritates you?	None; Vincas Kudirka (3) Lukiškės Square The Embankment Arch(3) Fountain at the Parliament; Green Bridge sculptures
11. Your age	18-23

I publicized the answers only of the students of the Academy of Arts, as they seemed more aware of what they were asked about, and were more mature.

What conclusion one can draw out of all that is said?

Having in mind Connerton's typology¹⁵ of forgetting, the types are as follows:

- repressive erasure;
- prescriptive forgetting;
- forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity;
- structural amnesia;
- forgetting as annulment;
- forgetting as planned obsolescence; and forgetting as humiliated silence.

To this preliminary taxonomy of forgetting, Milena Dragicevic Sestic adds two more types: 1) forgetting as shameful silence and 2) forgetting as confused silence showing its functions (*raison d'être*) (Dragičević Šešić and Stefanović 2014). I would add the type 10 – annihilation of personal research.

Remember my story in the beginning? The mother of the composer lost her memory in front of the TV cameras because of the temporary amnesia. Her

15 Paul Connerton. 2008. "Seven types of forgetting" in: *Memory Studies* 2008; 1; 59. Available at: <http://mss.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/1/1/59>

mental PC started erasing the files that were too painful. When she recovered (with the help of medicine, of course), she remembered everything, because it was HER STORY. In the language of IT programmers, she downloaded her personalized version.

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