# "STAGING ENCOUNTERS" THROUGH ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN URBAN CENTRAL EUROPE[1]

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*Abstract*: In this paper, we build on the ongoing disciplinary debate in cultural anthropology concerning changing understanding of contemporary ethnographic practice and consider our pedagogical work with students as a form of what Kim Fortun recently defined as "ethnographic experiment" for the contemporary. We describe our methodology in which we are inspired especially by the tradition of educational anthropology and participatory action research to create spaces of collaborative encounters that we call urban laboratories. We give examples of our ethnographic and pedagogical work with students that generate new ways of framing representations of the city's past contained through the process of neoliberal urban transformations.

*Key words*: ethnography, educational anthropology, participatory action research, pedagogy, memory, urban laboratory.

In this paper, we want to build on the ongoing disciplinary debate in cultural anthropology concerning changing understanding of contemporary ethnographic practice and consider our pedagogical work with students as a form of what Kim Fortun recently defined as "ethnographic experiment" for the contemporary. Temporarily framed by what she calls late industrialism, Fortun outlines a roadmap for designing a creative and transformative ethnography which is "able to bring forth a future anterior that is not calculable from what we now know ... producing something that didn't exist before" (Fortun 2012: 450). In designing such ethnography, Fortun outlines several steps that constitute this contemporary ethnographic process. She begins with the need to discern "discursive gaps and

risks" – understanding that everything we as ethnographers think or say is potentially overdetermined by "established systems of ideality". We are then to "loop" in order to not only describe but also respond to these discursive gaps that we come to see through a creative process – the design of an experimental ethnographic system, which should enable us to initiate new ways of thinking. The task of ethnography, according to Fortun, is to "stage encounters", which similarly to performance art, are to generate creative spaces of deliberation (ibid.: 453). The outcome of this process is an ethnography which is creative, polyvocal and engaged and counters the systems of late industrialism "that cultivate a will not to know, not to engage, not to experiment" (ibid.: 459).

In approaching ethnographic research as a design process, Fortun's approach resonates in recent ideas of George Marcus who has been searching for a new ethnographic pedagogy as a way of training anthropology graduate students in a format similar to that of architects and designers. Marcus terms this new ethnographic pedagogy a "design studio" to refer to the experimental and apprenticeship-like format of collaborative training, which he sees as more conducive to producing new ethnographic thinking and concepts (Rabinow et al. 2008: 81–85). The changing tectonics of the contemporary reflected in these methodological considerations have formed the backdrop of our own work at the nexus of anthropology and pedagogy which is the subject of this paper.

Since 2008, we have been engaged in designing a space of ethnographic and pedagogical experimentation that we call "urban laboratory" to explore the complex layers of history, memory and contemporary identity of a Central European city and its potential as an environment for critical and collaborative ethnographic learning. Our work is intimately tied to a specific urban site – the city of Wrocław located in the southwest of Poland, near the Czech and German borders. With 640,000 inhabitants, Wrocław is Poland's fourth largest city. But the Polish history of this historical metropolis is rather short, having begun only after the redrawing of the European map following the end of WWII when the Allies set Poland's the new border on the Oder and Niesse rivers. This official decision by the victors of WWII produced complex physical and cultural displacements ridden with human tragedies and suffering (Siebel-Achenbach 1994; Thum 2003). Polish cities abandoned in the east were settled by Russians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, while Poles inhabited cities and homes of Germans who were forced to resettle in post-War divided Germany. The undoubtedly painful consequences of these displacements of different nations and the ensuing economic, political and social challenges were contained by European nation-state building projects during the Cold War.

The process of resettlement of places and spaces destroyed by war and vacated by foreign peoples relied on the simultaneous forgetting of the past, rewriting of local histories and the construction of new narratives. Research shows, how much the

post-war identity building processes in cities such as Gdańsk (Danzig) and Wrocław (Breslau) relied on the culture of forgetting of their German histories (Mendel – Zbierzchowska 2010; Thum 2003; Davies – Moorhouse 2002). In Wrocław, the multiple levels of de-Germanization focused on both physical and symbolic removal of German history, including the renaming of streets, the destruction of German monuments and/or their replacement by Polish ones, the elimination of the German language from local school curriculum. Moreover, an intricate process of historical revisionism was launched by the Communist Polish government who sponsored the archeological and historical search on the formerly German territories for traces of early medieval Polish remains in order to demonstrate Polish historical primacy in these lands. This ideological project of Polonization allowed the Polish government to turn what was essentially a coerced colonization of foreign lands into a historically justified process of homecoming to help Poles make their home in these formerly German places.

This status quo was interrupted just before and after 1989, when we saw the emergence of interest in explorations of multilayered interpretations of the city's past manifested in publications, conferences, scholarly historical work, German nostalgia tourism, internet-based popular archives and also official initiatives such as the commissioning by the municipality of an official history of the city to be written by outsiders (Bińkowska 1993; Lose 1998; Zawada 1996; Davies – Moorhouse 2002). As a result, the city's previously silenced archive of cultural memory (Assmann 2005) began to emerge in this period of transformation as a palimpsest of cityscapes that seemed to invigorate new notions of collective identity informed by new pluralistic imaginaries of place. As we argued elsewhere, however, this acknowledgement of the past characteristic of the early period of transformation has since evolved into what we refer to as a new form of memory containment (Cervinkova – Golden 2014). In accordance with neoliberal urban governance strategies that rely on place marketing to succeed in global inter-city competition (Brenner – Theodore 2002; Harvey 2001), Wrocław's local administration developed a new heritage policy that relies on the marketing of the city as a "multicultural metropolis of the Polish borderlands" (Municipality of Wrocław 2010). Through the official slogan, *Wrocław – the Meeting Place*, that is to symbolize the city's openness to the outside, Wrocław has successfully attracted foreign investments and large international events as the drivers of the local economy (Cervinkova 2013). On the political and symbolic level, this strategy has also helped to promote Wrocław as a European-minded city to the international community and inscribe itself as an important urban hub to the European-wide integration processes (Cervinkova 2013; Thum 2005; Thum 2009).

Sociologists from the University of Wrocław demonstrate that this successful international marketing strategy has also "worked" on the inside, demonstrating that

while Wrocław continues to be ethnically and religiously homogeneous, Poles who live in the city consider it to be multicultural and look upon themselves and their community as more culturally open than the rest of Poland. The authors also point to a remarkable correspondence between the language used by respondents in revealing their ideas on the city's heritage and the marketing discourse of the municipality, leading them to the conclusion that multiculturalism functions as a form of a myth both on the inside and outside (Dolińska – Makaro 2013).

We argue that while this strategy is successful in terms of city marketing, it does not encompass serious consideration of the archives of cultural memory and is in fact, a form of memory containment. Our concern is reflected in Fortun's assessment of current historical conditions that "cultivate a will not to know, not to engage, not to experiment" and the need to develop productive ethnographic methodologies that counteract these reductive effects of late industrialism. Therefore, in our urban laboratory we aim to develop creative spaces that echo Fortun's call for contemporary ethnography to "stage encounters", which through collaborative processes produce something that did not exist before (Fortun 2012: 450).

In designing our urban laboratories, we attach great significance to using Wrocław's material culture to generate critical understanding of urban spaces and informed interpretations of local history, cultural identity and memory (Benjamin 2002; Hayden 1995). Educational anthropology and participatory action research (PAR) form the basis of our ethnographic and pedagogical approach in which we aim to inspire collaborative learning and action (Abu El-Haj 2009; Cammarota 2008; Cammarota – Fine 2008; Lipman 2005; Rubin – Hayes 2010). The tradition of participatory action research (PAR) refers to a variety of interdisciplinary approaches whose common denominator is a vision of research as something not reserved to members of the academic community, but a mechanism that is to serve academics and non-academics alike to gain knowledge about the conditions of the surrounding world and identify a path for empowerment and positive engagement. PAR is commonly used by sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and educators who work with groups as diverse as illiterate peasants in South America (Fals Borda 2006; Freire 1993), teachers in British schools (Elliott 1991) or youth in impoverished communities of the United States (Cammarota 2008; Cammarota – Fine 2008; Rubin – Hayes 2010). Building on the spiral of research phases of action (Lewin 1946), PAR begins with a collaborative reflection on the problem to be researched, collaborative planning and implementation of action, subsequent reflection and the planning of next action. This never ending spiraling of participatory action research is imbued with the search for and vision of knowledge about the surrounding world as the source of empowerment; PAR is a methodology whose primary goal is the working toward social change, social emancipation, liberation, and in the

context of educational action research that we practice – toward a transformational learning path (Carr – Kemmis 1986; McTaggart 1997). One of the most important inspirations of PAR for anthropological methodology is that both professional and amateur researchers are equal in the process of learning, theory is undivided from practice, research is inseparable from action, and the traditional divides between the object and subject of research and learning do not apply. Similar to Fortun's vision of ethnography of staging encounters, through our urban laboratories, we are using PAR as a methodological tool that helps us design pedagogical and ethnographic experiments that are deeply collaborative and engaged.

In addition and similarly to other educational anthropologists who use PAR in their work, we rely on the educational anthropology's concepts of cultural therapy (Spindler 1999), cultural production (Willis 1981; Levinson – Holland 1996) and cultural organizing (Cammarota 2008). *Cultural therapy*, introduced by the founder of American educational anthropology, George Spindler, refers to the process whereby anthropologists studying educational processes can help people uncover unconscious illusions of culture and generate more culturally sensitive and just educational practices through ethnographic research. *Cultural production*, on the other hand, draws on Paul Willis's concept, who sees it as the process whereby social actors (e.g. disadvantaged youth in schools) create their own cultural practices through which they respond to situations of systemic oppression, generating their own agency and subjectivity (Willis 1981). In addition, we also draw on the more recent work of the anthropologist Julio Cammarota, who builds on the concepts of cultural therapy, cultural production and Paulo Freire's notion of praxis to develop the notion of *cultural organizing*, which he defines as a pedagogy that "involves the formalization and organization of stakeholders' cultural agency through an ethnographic pedagogy" (Cammarota 2009: 48).

These traditions inform the process of collectively researching the contained archives of Wrocław's cultural memory. We undertake a program that echoes stages of Fortun's ethnographic experiment. We begin by selecting a theme or a geographic area, which becomes the center of our research. We study both primary data and official interpretations of our research theme/area. Our ethnographic materials range from taking a tour with an official city guide through interviewing historians specializing in selected periods in the city's development, local residents as well as activists and people involved in the shaping of policy in the city. We thus build on encounters with a triad of stakeholders – academics and experts, local authorities and active residents, who are tied to research area or theme. We also work with primary and secondary printed materials, photographs and films. In the process, we center on nurturing students' ethnographic sensibilities, especially their observation and critical interpretation skills, Harry Wolcott's "way of looking" and a "way of seeing" (Wolcott 2008). The work of our urban laboratories culminates in the collaborative

preparation of alternative representations of the city's heritage which take diverse forms of performative actions such as proposals for reevisioning city spaces or the production of alternative imaginaries of presenting the city's complex heritage in tourist materials. In the concluding section of our paper, we present examples of this ethnographic work.

One of the recurrent themes that we address in our work is the contained memory of Jewish culture and history in Wrocław. In the absence of vibrant Jewish life, and in the face of absolutely undeniable richness of decaying relics of a now gone past, the Jewish culture without the Jews in post-Holocaust Central Europe, too broad to grasp, is served in un-confusing bite-size pieces (Gruber 2002). In today's Wrocław, formerly a vibrant center of German-Jewish culture, the officially promoted token of the city's Jewish history is the recently restored Orthodox synagogue. Other, much more haunting relics that would tie Breslau's Jewish community to its key historical contributions to the city's social, cultural and economic life remain largely invisible. Often they are unmarked, such as the hundreds of Jewish-founded and funded public institutions and places, including parks, hospitals, banks, department stores or schools. In other cases, their meaning is neutralized by the aesthetics of their location. Such is the case of a small and effectively "hidden" monument to Breslau's reformed synagogue, once one of the largest modern synagogues in Germany, which was destroyed during Kristallnacht. Or their containment is achieved by both physical and symbolic mechanisms of concealment, such as the imposing but badly dilapidated Jewish cemetery near the city center, which had been successfully deprived of its potentially important role as a site of Jewish memory by being annexed by the Wrocław's City Museum and officially renamed the Museum of Cemetery Art. There is nothing that would mark the cemetery as an important site of memory to visit and even local taxi drivers, the experts of city landscape, rarely know how to get to it.

The research topic in our summer of 2012 program had nothing explicitly to do with Jewish culture. It dealt with the history of trade, business and commerce in the city's history. Together with a group of students from the United States, Ukraine and Poland, we spent a month in city spaces intensively collecting information that would allow us to understand how commerce has developed throughout the ages, in different socio-economic environments and how this history is represented in contemporary heritage policy. Some of the richest material we collected concerned the boom of mass shopping toward the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century embodied in Wrocław's department stores from this period. Most of the department stores, we discovered, were Jewish-German owned. Today, there is nothing publicly or officially available that would mark their connection to the history of Wrocław's Jewish community. The 2012 students decided to challenge

the way the history of the city is portrayed and noted the contribution of Breslau's Jewish community to the development of Wrocław's modern commerce. At conclusion of the 2012 urban laboratory, students staged a public presentation and a public tour, and prepared an Internet based tour guide that featured an alternative path through the city and its history, exploring how the Sachs, Schottlander and Wertheim families made major contributions toward the transformation of Breslau into a leading center of commerce and culture in Europe in the early 20th century. In their narrative, they incorporated the demise of Wrocław's Jewish community during the Holocaust and thus reclaimed this cultural memory, which is largely invisible in official representations of the city's history. What follows is an introduction to this tour guide – the cultural product of our ethnography:

> "We created this guide to offer urban explorers an alternative view of the city of Wrocław. We chose commerce as the theme of the guide because we believe that commerce is more than just a material or monetary exchange. It is a way to trace history, understand cultures and societies and ultimately tell the story of a place. Through our experiences, we have learned that places of trade illuminate the connection between seemingly unrelated narratives. The Holocaust is bound to the history of the Renoma department store and the story of Georg Wertheim – its Jewish owner. The birth of contemporary consumerism is embodied in the early rise of department stores. The replacement of open-air markets and small local businesses by alluring malls contributes to the fragmentation of human relationships and disappearance of local uniqueness. The history of commerce in Wrocław ultimately reveals the connections between changes in physical spaces and shifts in political and economic power."

In their performance and in the written guide, students call attention to the former Wertheim department store (currently called the Renoma), built in 1930 by Georg Wertheim, a Jewish businessman whose family was brought to demise by the Holocaust. After concluding their description of Wertheim department store they direct tourists to two nearby locations that seem unrelated to the story of commerce. The first is the empty space of the former reformed Synagogue destroyed during Krystallnacht. In the guides, students explain its importance for the large reformed Jewish community that lived in Breslau before WWII and to which the Wertheim family belonged. Then they direct tourists to visit the old Jewish Cemetery, a final resting place for many of the builders of Breslau's commerce.

In their final reflection papers, students explain their choice of these places by pointing to the importance of "hidden histories" for the understanding of the cultural identity of Wrocław. They speak about "history hidden in plain sight", of sites "bleeding with history just waiting to be learned about and shared" (Ann). They

point out how invisible the Jewish cemetery is to both tourists/outsiders and even to many locals:

> "To get to the Jewish Cemetery, we had to ride a tram all the way out of the heart of the city and walk down an unmarked path. There were no signs near the road. The first sign I saw was on the building outside of the cemetery gates. I realized that, had I been an ordinary tourist, I never would have found this place. From the visit to the cemetery, I learned so much about the history of Wrocław and the culture as well. Since it was all overgrown and unkempt, I found out that there were little to no Jewish families left in the area to tend the graves. Also, in studying the headstones more closely, I could see the bullet holes and other destruction that has not been covered up." (Ann)

The students were critical of the fact that this resting place of an important community of people that helped build the city has been bereft of meaning and marginalized as a neglected part of the City Museum:

> "I immediately found it interesting that the cemetery was referred to a museum of cemetery art, rather than a Jewish cemetery. I'm not sure if this was done to keep tourists away from the area or to deliberately hide the area from people. As we walked in, it was clear that the place was not kept up. Plants and bushes were overgrown all over the graves, with only small paths clear to walk down the rows. [This] seemed very disrespectful to me, just leaving the hundreds of graves here unkept and forgotten. Many were disintegrated, cracked, or too feint to read. It was a sad scene to think of these people as forgotten by the outside world." (Brian)

As educational anthropologists have pointed out, the ethnographic practice nurtures our critical ability to penetrate illusions consisting of omissions and erasures generated by culture (Spindler 1999). Through the ethnographic process, the students "look" and come to "see" the selective representation of the city's past, noting omissions that they challenge in their action work and their final cultural products. The students, by including the empty space of the former synagogue and the Jewish cemetery "must-see" stop in their guidebooks for future tourists, make the invisible visible and disrupt the containment of the official narrative.

Perhaps most importantly, however, students become involved in the crucial anthropological work of cultural critique, applying the lessons the critical observations across borders. To illustrate, I present a quote from an American student of Anthropology and African American history who in her final paper reflects on her ethnographic and educational experience in east-central Europe:

> "All of the knowledge that I had gained about the struggles and successes of African Americans made it a lot easier for me to understand the situation

of the Jewish population in Europe. While it is impossible to say that their situations were identical, there were many similarities... Something that really resonated with me while studying abroad was the focus on voids and how they relate to both groups of people. It is an entire entity in itself that was never proposed to me in such a direct way, yet in a sense I had always knew existed. The voids in Wrocław pertaining to the Jewish community such as the Museum of Cemetery Art, the destruction of countless Jewish Cemeteries, the lack of Jewish ownership in commerce, and the demolition of the Synagogue to name just a few are all evidence of what once the city was comprised of. These voids not only leave out a crucial part of Wrocław's history, but for all of Eastern Europe. I think that the lack of this knowledge, leads to an uninformed and misunderstood past...

Just as voids exist for the Jewish population in Europe, voids exist in the United States for African Americans as well. The obstacles that African Americans have faced and overcome throughout history are hardly memorialized or recognized at all. The history of these people, leaders, hardships, murders, slavery, triumph, migration, civil rights, Pan Africanism, etc. are barely taught in schools in any detail at all. In addition to these voids in text books, there are also physical voids that exist. These voids, however, I feel can be filled to a certain extent. For example, the way in which the Jewish Museum was envisioned and created in Berlin acts to restore and prevent information from being lost." (Rita)

Another example from our urban laboratory concerns a phenomenon that we call "the kidnapping of Wrocław's Dwarves" to refer to a process whereby an important symbol of anti-regime political activist movement from the 1980s has been kidnapped from its historical and symbolic context and commodified to serve the city's neoliberal development strategy.[2]

The history of Wrocław dwarves begins in the 1980s with the rise of the Orange Alternative, a popular and highly visible local protest movement against the totalitarian regime in Poland. The movement developed out of a student organization at the University of Wrocław started and led by an imaginative activist and art historian Waldemar "Major" Fydrych. During the Martial Law period in Poland (1981–1983), when movement and freedom of expression were highly controlled and restricted, oppositionists developed creative responses to get their anti-government messages out to the public at large and inspire action. Among other things, members created a series of stencils used to paint anti-regime graffiti on buildings, lampposts and other objects throughout Wrocław only to have these signs of protest covered over with paint by the militias. In response to these official moves, on the night of August

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[2] This section of our paper appeared in an article by Hana Cervinkova (2013).

30–31, 1982, Fydrych and his friend sprayed a white and orange colored figure of a dwarf over the layer of grey paint. With this move, Fydrych and his collaborator sparked the Orange Alternative's Revolution of Dwarves. Fydrych claimed that these actions, which were quickly noticed and replicated by others, were inspired by the principle of a triad of propositions: the protest sign as *thesis*, the paint smeared by the militia as *antithesis*, the painting of a dwarf as *synthesis*. As a result, in the 1980s Wrocław was filled with drawings of dwarves, which seemed to appear everywhere where the militia units had attempted to cover up anti-regime graffiti.

The Orange Alternative, one of the most visible and imaginative protest movements against the totalitarian regimes in east-central Europe, was a remarkable example of the power of popular laughter against oppressive power. Performance was key to Orange Alternative's oppositional activities. Sympathizers of the Orange Alternative ridiculed power that treated them with seriousness. As dwarves (drawn on walls or impersonated), they entered the streets and enabled regular people to join in protest. The dwarves of the Orange Alternative that helped bring down totality were people associating, talking and performing in public space. The dwarf was a venue for symbolic action that was social and associational in nature, a performative and symbolic means for creating free space for deliberative democratic action.

After 1989, Major Fydrych continued appearing occasionally in the public domain, and his actions were followed by the media. On June 1, 2001, the day of the anniversary of his 1988 mass march of the dwarves, he unveiled a sizeable bronze statue of a dwarf at a key intersection on Świdnicka Street in Wrocław, which is intended to serve as a reminder of the place where Fydrych launched many of his happenings in the city. It was approximately a year later that the Wrocław City Government initiated a strategy, in which dwarves began to figure at the forefront of the city's promotion. In Wrocław you can now buy dwarf-related publications and promotional products (such as cups, key chains, pens, t-shirts, books). Little bronze statuettes of dwarves have also mushroomed throughout the city. The official Plan of the City of Dwarves (Plan Miasta Krasnoludków) features the names and photographs of 79 of these bronze dwarf statuettes as well as their locations so that visitors can organize their city tour following a path of dwarves.

In the promotional materials, the dwarves, pictured with an orange hat, exhibit remarkable resemblance to those formerly painted on the city walls by Fydrych and his sympathizers. However, no reference or credit to the Orange Alternative movement or its leader are made. Apart from the monument unveiled in 2001, nothing exists in the material space of the city or the official and commercial representations of dwarves that makes reference to the Orange Alternative. Twenty-five years after the fall of Communism, the real-life delinking of the former from the latter is almost complete. The dwarves that once served as a refined means for deliberate and associational action on the part of citizens, and that helped lay the foundations for participative democracy have been stripped of their former power

as potent social and historical symbols to become gadgets and mascots that help sell the city on the global market.

Two years ago, a small group of students from Portugal and Romania in our semester-long Urban and Action Anthropology class designed as urban laboratories, turned their attention to assessing critically the dwarf epidemic in the city in their final projects. Like many visitors, they came across the bronze statuettes of dwarves upon arrival. Here is how a student from Portugal describes his discovery:

> "When I arrived at Wrocław I started, as everyone, to enjoy the city. The architecture is in my opinion the first thing that catches your attention, then I started to walk around the Market Square and all those beautiful and colorful buildings made me feel very peaceful ... the movement of the people, everything seemed to be perfectly chosen to be there. I was surprised when I saw on the ground a little metal toy. I didn't realize what it really was, but I remember that I didn't try to find a definition; I just enjoyed the idea and thought that they put it there to give a 'special touch' to the city. Then I started to see these little toys all around and it started to make me curious." (Helder Ferraz, Student of Educational Sciences, Portugal, December 2011)

Similarly, a Romanian student wrote her perspective on her first encounters with the dwarves:

> "When one first visits the city, it is impossible to miss the dwarfs *(sic)*. They are everywhere, posing in different roles adapted to the location: in front of a restaurant one would notice a chef gnome, in front of the bank a dwarf would withdraw money from a miniature ATM, on the street where the old prison of the city used to be, we can see an 'imprisoned gnome'. Of course, it is a great tourist attraction, coming to Wrocław and leaving without photographing yourself with the gnomes would be almost as pathetic as going to Paris without immortalizing yourself in front of the Eiffel Tower. Tourists hunt them in the city, children hug them (yes, I have witnessed that several times), the local businesses fight for having one in front of their shops, the touristic shops pack their shelves with key holders, cups, post cards, toys that all wear the 'gnomist trademark' of Wrocław. During our first days here, seeing the dwarfs displayed all around with great local pride, we legitimately asked ourselves: why dwarfs? We could not find any official information on their origins and even when we were asking students that actually live in Wrocław, no answer has been given to us. It seemed like there was no particular story behind these gnomes, they were simply random statues put here and there to add some fun to the

experience of walking in the streets." (Cecilia Laslo, Student of Marketing, Romania, June 2012)

In their reflection papers, Helder and Cecilia reveal just how successful the kidnapping of dwarves has been. Helder, upon his arrival, saw the city's ordered beauty – "everything seemed to be perfectly chosen to be there" including the little statuette of a dwarf upon which he stumbles and which he calls a "metal toy" and whose meaning he did not seek to know: "I just enjoyed the idea and thought that they put it there to give a special touch to the city." Cecilia who came to Wrocław from Romania speaks of the omnipresence of gnomes as tourist attractions, referring to the "gnomist trademark" of Wrocław. In their recollections, the students testify to finding no connection between contemporary dwarves as objects of city marketing and their historical legacy as the empowering symbols of the Orange Alternative: "[We] asked ourselves: why dwarfs? We could not find any official information on their origins and even when we were asking students that actually live in Wrocław, no answer has been given to us. It seemed like there was no particular story behind these gnomes, they were simply random statues put here and there to add some fun to the experience of walking in the streets."

In the course of collaboratively working in our urban laboratory, students determined to reclaim the memory of the Orange Alternative and re-link it to the dwarves that occupy Wrocław's space today:

> "If after only 30 years the memory of this event has faded and no official leaflet or brochures talks about this, what will happen 50 or 100 years later? We thought to ourselves: this is too new and too important to be ignored, especially since the current municipalities fervently use this symbol in their marketing strategy." (Cecilia)

In their final design projects, Herder, Cecilia and their Portuguese colleague Carmen prepared a proposal for a permanent installation for Wrocław's urban space, which they called "Performedge". The goal, we learned, was to rescue Wrocław's dwarves from their life as commodities. Performedge was defined by the students as an interactive exhibition and performance space dedicated to the Orange Alternative, "a cultural center remembering the past, enriching the future and happening in present times". As the location, they chose a neglected small building on the Oder River in the center of the city (literally a dwarf-sized structure built into the river embankment), which they aimed to transform "into a space of memory". They proposed painting the exterior of the house orange – the color of the Orange Alternative – "to be striking enough to catch the eye of the passersby". They designed the street-level floor of the house as a "remembrance space (oriented towards the past)" and the river-level floor as a space for "developing interactions within small communities nowadays (orientated towards the present and the future)". The street-level floor was to hold

a permanent "Orange Alternative exhibition", displaying "photos, short footages taken during those times, testimonials of participants ... anecdotes related to this happening, ... a military uniform as a memento about the initiator of this movement and his extravaganza – Mayor Friedrich (sic.)". They also planned to add "a lexicon and a map of the nowadays existing dwarfs". The river-level floor "would play the role of a performative room, an open space for the small community that dares to think alternatively in the current days. Basically a cafe (where the waiters would obviously be dresses as dwarfs) the space would also be hosting small exhibitions of local artists (painters, sculptors, craftsmen), workshops for children, dwarf parades." Students wanted to dedicate the cafe to Major Fydrych, whom they planned to invite to use the meeting space at his will. "The profit from the cafe would only be invested in the activities of an NGO that would run Performedge ... by placing the cafe on the river-level floor we want to make sure that everybody first passes through the exhibition room, without missing the historical dimension of this project." In addition, the students planned a range of activities, including a "performative network" in the city of Wrocław – linking Performedge with "other politically and socially engaged pubs, cafes and cultural institutions ... in order to promote each other's activities through leaflets and brochures, updating the customers with the latest events happening in these places". In their conclusion, the students reflect on the name of their project: "The name illustrates exactly what we would like to change in the Wrocławian society: we want to stimulate the locals to have more **PERFORM**ATIVITY, to start looking behind the evidence and to explore the recent history of the city where they live. '**EDGE**' stands for the physical location of the house (on the 'edge of the river'), but also for a more metaphoric element concerning an edgy (as in 'inquisitive') way of living."

As a result of our urban laboratory the students, empowered by the skills of ethnographic observation and critical action research, made the key connection of cultural critique between the historical knowledge and existing urban space and in their project decided to rescue the kidnapped dwarves of Wrocław and create an interactive living discussion and meeting space where dwarves could continue living their lives as animators of social action drawing on the powers of their historical legacy.

Our ongoing project of designing urban laboratories is an effort to grapple creatively with the anthropological dilemma that Tobias Rees in his conversations with Paul Rabinow, George Marcus and James Faubion identifies as a "profound mismatch between old concepts and new analytical requirements" (Rabinow et. al. 2008: 13). This gap is echoed in the paradox that "anthropologists are increasingly studying *timely* phenomena with tools developed to study *people out of time*", (ibid.) and it poses questions concerning the continued relevance of ethnographic inquiry in

late industrialism. In designing our urban laboratories as productive spaces for ethnographic and pedagogical experimentation with critical and public dimension, we are inspired by the experimental frameworks suggested by Kim Fortun and her concept of ethnographic practice as the staging of encounters and George Marcus's idea for the design studio as a pedagogical space for learning and teaching new ethnography. Through examples of our work with students produced in the context of these urban laboratories, we wanted to contribute to this debate with an example of how ethnography can be made timely and relevant through educational projects that respond to ongoing transformations in urban Central Europe.

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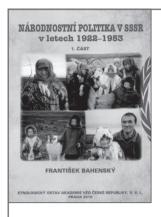Elliott, John: 1991 – *Action Research for Educational Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

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**Městský prostor jako laboratoř. Zkušenosti s etnografií v pedagogické praxi**

Tento článek je příspěvkem k debatě o změnách v současné etnografické praxi. Věnujeme se v něm pedagogické práci se studenty, kterou chápeme v kategoriích „etnografického experimentu" současnosti (Kim Fortun). Popisujeme metodologii, která je inspirována zejména tradicí antropologie ve vzdělávání a zúčastněného akčního výzkumu, jejímž prostřednictvím se snažíme vytvářet prostory pro kolaborativní setkání v rámci „městských laboratoří".



*František Bahenský*
**Národnostní politika v SSSR v letech 1922–1953. I. část**

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